

CHANDIGARH[®]
BIRD CLUB

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Whispering Wings[®]

NEWSLETTER



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From the Editor



RIMA DHILLON
PRESIDENT, CHANDIGARH BIRD CLUB

**“In nature all things are connected
A Bird in flight is both a miracle and a messenger”.
J.J. Audobon**

The almost prophetic words of Mr. John J. Audubon, an eminent Ornithologist of 18th Century N. America resonate deeply today.

Today we are faced with a truth that we are often reluctant to acknowledge with all its implications: consequences of our actions on nature. Words like Pollution, Habitat Loss, Eco-friendly are tossed around in social gatherings. But how much are we truly doing to prevent the catastrophic outcome of human behaviour towards the environment.

Nature's fury manifests itself every year in mudslides, landslides and flash floods as we ravage the mountains to construct ill-planned highways linking places of pilgrimage.. The tunnel vision of commercialism obstructs the bigger picture - a pilgrimage is not only about visiting a temple (there are plenty of temples in our neighbourhood) but to enjoy and cherish nature's bounties that the Almighty has surrounded us with.

Numerous conferences and panel discussions on climate change, wetland conservation, afforestation, preserving our waterbodies, rising temperature of the ocean and melting glaciers abound. As birders, we witness firsthand the destruction wrought by 'development' for infrastructure, agricultural expansion and industrialization - summed up in one grim phrase - Habitat Loss. This directly translates into declining populations of birds, animals and insects.

Nature is finely balanced and interconnected - any misstep could bring it crashing down irretrievably.

Recently the birding community saw a flurry of 'twitching' as a number of Pelagic birds unexpectedly descended in Mumbai and surrounding areas.

Birders from across the country flocked to tick the 'lifers' virtually in their backyard.. Though an exciting miracle for the birders a sobering reality: these birds are losing their way and turning up in unlikely places as messengers of global warming.

Secretary's Report



SARBJEET KAUR
SECRETARY

After the hot months of May and June, the arrival of rains brings a much-needed relief for both vegetation and wildlife. This season, avid birders eagerly set out to spot birds migrating from the southern regions to the northern plains and lower Shivalik ranges. Among the summer migrants, the Indian Pitta, Golden Oriole, and the Jacobin Cuckoo — often regarded as the harbinger of monsoons — are the most sought-after species.. Their presence signifies the onset of the rainy season, adding to the vibrancy of the natural surroundings.

The August 2024 CBC meeting was graciously hosted at Rima's house. On the 18th of August, members embarked on a field trip to Jawaharpur, Dera Bassi. The highlight of the day was spotting the Bristled Grassbird and Red Avadavat, both remarkable finds.. Unfortunately, their natural tall grass habitat is rapidly disappearing as more land is reclaimed for agriculture, leaving little room for these summer visitors.

On the 31st of August, CBC members participated in a trekking event organised by the Haryana Tourism Department in the Morni Hills to celebrate Haryana Tourism Day.. It was a wonderful opportunity to connect with nature while exploring the region's rich biodiversity.

Additionally, a group of six CBC birders embarked on an international birding tour to Kenya. Their journey was a resounding success, with sightings of over three hundred bird species, a truly memorable experience for all involved.

Birding is more than just a hobby; it is a form of meditation and a great healer for those who practice it.



Jawaharpur Fieldtrip

FIELDTRIP FOR THE MONTH OF AUGUST 2024

Location: Jawaharpur (Dera Bassi)

Habitat: grassland with a little marshy area formed by drain carrying effluent water. Agricultural fields surround the grassland

Date: 18th August 2024

Time: 6:30 am -10:30 am

Weather: Overcast sky. It was hot and humid followed by a heavy downpour at around 9:30 am.

Birders: Rima Dhillon, Sarbjeet Kaur, Lalit Bansal, Subhash Sapru, Aprajita Mohan, Sumeet, Samrath Singh, Sofia Dahiya, Shilpi, Simmi and Aryaman.

During this season Jawaharpur is a birding hotspot for Chandigarh birders for grassland birds and passage migrants. It is a little patch of grassland habitat among agricultural fields. A drain carrying effluent water has resulted in a marshy area along the narrow metalled road. During the monsoon season the typha and other grasses are lush green with white plumes and a host of wild yellow sunflowers are in full bloom attracting both birds and butterflies.

Inspite of heavy rain being forecast a good number of enthusiastic birders turned up.

On this trip the main target was to record the continued presence of Bristled Grassbird in this location. Over the past five years the bird club has been recording the presence of this bird at this location for breeding. Being shy skulkers Bristled Grassbirds are extremely vocal during the breeding season. The loud cheerful song of the male as it sallies up into the sky is the only time the bird makes its presence known. Once the female starts to nest it is impossible to see the birds. It is, therefore, a very short window of time to spot them. It was heartening to see atleast two pairs preparing to nest.

Streaked Weavers, Black-throated Weavers, Prinias and Munias are some of the other species that suffer the same fate of losing their breeding habitat.

However we continue to bird here for as long as it is able to exist.

The rainclouds that had been threatening all morning finally brought the fieldtrip to an end.



Red Avadavat
Amandava amandava



Zitting Cisticola
Cisticola juncidis

Checklist :

- 1 Zitting Cisticola** *Cisticola juncidis*
- 2 Plain Prinia** *Prinia inorata*
- 3 Ashy Prinia** *Prinia socialis*
- 4 Yellow-bellied Prinia** *Prinia flaviventris*
- 5 Red Avadavat** *Amandava amandava*
- 6 Tri-coloured Munia** *Lonchura malacca*
- 7 Scaly-breasted Munia** *Lonchura punctulate*
- 8 Indian Silverbill** *Euodice malabarica*
- 9 Grey Francolin** *Ortigornis pondicerianus*
- 10 Red-wattled Lapwing** *Vanellus indicus*
- 11 Black-winged Stilt** *Himantopus himantopus*
- 12 Grey Heron** *Ardea cinerea*
- 13 Purple Heron** *Ardea purpurea*
- 14 Cattle Egret** *Bubulcus ibis*
- 15 White-throated Kingfisher** *Halcyon smyrnensis*
- 16 Spotted Dove** *Spilopelia chinensis*
- 17 Eurasian Collared Dove** *Streptopelia decaocta*
- 18 Feral Pigeon** *Columba livia*(domestica)
- 19 Greater Coucal** *Centropus chinensis*
- 20 Long-tailed Shrike** *Lanius Schach*
- 21 Bay-backed Shrike** *Lanius vittatus*
- 22 Rose-ringed Parakeet** *Psittacula krameria*
- 23 House Crow** *Corvus splendens*
- 24 Wire-tailed Swallow** *Hirundo smithii*
- 25 Grey-headed Swampphen** *Porphyrio poliocephalus*
- 26 Common Moorhen** *Gallinula chloropus*
- 27 Knob-billed Duck** *Sarkidiornis sylvicola*
- 28 Lesser Whistling Teal** *Dendrocygna javanica*
- 29 Indian Spot-billed Duck** *Anas poecilorhyncha*
- 30 Indian Pond Heron** *Ardeola grayii*
- 31 Bristled Grassbird** *Chaetornis striata*
- 32 Baya Weaver** *Ploceus phillippinus*
- 33 Streaked Weaver** *Ploceus manyar*
- 34 Black-breasted Weaver** *Ploceus benghalensis*
- 35 Indian Pied Starling** *Graupica contra*
- 36 Jungle Babbler** *Turdoides striata*
- 37 Lesser Whitethroat** *Sylvia curraca*
- 38 Red-vented Bulbul** *Pycnonotus cafer*

Peer Muchhalla Fieldtrip

FIELDTRIP FOR THE MONTH OF SEPTEMBER 2024

Location: Peer Muchhalla

Habitat: forest, riverbanks, Typha and other grasses, acacia trees and thorny bushes.

Date: 22nd September 2024

6:30 am to 10:00 am

Weather – bright sunshine, humid and hot

Birders – Rima Dhillon, Sarbjeet Kaur, Subhash Sapru, Lalit Mohan Bansal, Sofia.



BIRDERS OF CHANDIGARH BIRD CLUB

Peer Muchhalla is an area close to home but under visited by the members of CBC. The Nature Park has in the past given sightings of rarities such as Mottled Wood Owl, Peregrine Falcons and altitudinal migrants like Rosefinches and Minivets besides Nightjars and Scops Owls, etc.

The Nature Park is squeezed between Sector 21 of Panchkula and the River Ghaggar.. Unfortunately the approach road is through the garbage dump and the gate is totally obscured by overgrown weeds and undergrowth. Inside the condition wasn't much better as the footpath circling around within the park was barely visible, the little gazebos dotting the park were now in disrepair. The forest is laying its claim to it!

The saddest part, however, is that a highway is being constructed which has gone right through the park cutting it into two halves. It is to be hoped that the authorities concerned will make arrangements for the locals using the park for morning walks and exercise to cross over between the two sections safely.

Walking though the park we encountered total silence broken occasionally by the mournful call of a peafowl or the screech of a Black Drongo. Feeling a bit disappointed we walked through the park and came out onto the area under construction. A wide path has been cleared for making the road and a bridge has been partly constructed over the Ghaggar connecting the two banks. We made our way to the grassy edge of the river bank in the hope of seeing some waders and bush birds. The Baya Weavers were busy tearing the grass into strips suitable for weaving their nests. A large flock of about 33 birds, both male and female were seen perching on the typha grass.

In spite of somewhat of a slow start the checklist became quite substantiated with some interesting sightings: Rosefinches, Hepatic Grey-bellied Cuckoo, a female Indian Paradise Flycatcher and Ashy-crowned Sparrow Larks.

By 9:00 am it had become too hot for both the birds and the birders .

Checklist :

- 1 Black Drongo** *Dicrurus macrocercus*
- 2 Indian Peafowl** *Pavo cristatus*
- 3 Jungle Babblers** *Turdoides striata*
- 4 Common Myna** *Acridotheres tristis*
- 5 Laughing Dove** *Spilopelia senegalensis*
- 6 Lesser Whitethroat** *Sylvia curruca*
- 7 Baya Weavers** *Ploceus philippinus*
- 8 Red Avadavat** *Amandava amandava*
- 9 Grey-bellied Cuckoo** (Hepatic morph) *Cacomantis passerinus*
- 10 Feral Pigeons** *Columba livia domestica*
- 11 House Crow** *Corvus splendens*
- 12 Pond Heron** *Ardeola grayii*
- 13 Cattle Egret** *Bubulcus ibis*
- 14 Purple Heron** *Ardea purpurea*
- 15 Purple Sunbird** *Cynnirus asiaticus*
- 16 Indian Green Bee-eater** *Merops orientalis*
- 17 Grey Francolin** *Francolinus pondicerianus*
- 18 Siberian Stonechat** *Saxicola maurus*
- 19 Pied Bushchat** *Saxicola caprata*
- 20 Plain Prinia** *Prinia inorata*
- 21 Ashy Prinia** *Prinia socialis*
- 22 Indian Robin** *Saxicoloides fulicatus*
- 23 Long-tailed Shrike** *Lanius schach*
- 24 Common Rosefinch** *Carpodacus erythrinus*
- 25 Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark** *Eremopterix griseus*
- 26 Eurasian Hoopoe** *Upupa epops*
- 27 Common Greenshank** *Tringa nebularia*
- 28 Common Snipe** *Gallinago gallinago*
- 29 Green Sandpiper** *Tringa ochropus*
- 30 Black Kite** *Milvus migrans*
- 31 Red-wattled Lapwing** *Vanellus indicus*
- 32 Black-winged Stilt** *Himantopus himantopus*
- 33 Shikra** *Accipiter badius*
- 34 Red-vented Bulbul** *Pycnonotus cafer*
- 35 Himalayan Bulbul** *Pycnonotus leucogenys*
- 36 Scaly-breasted Munia** *Lonchura punctulata*



GREY-BELLIED CUCKOO (HEPATIC)

Cacomantis passerinus



SIBERIAN STONECHAT

Saxicola maurus



ASIAN GREEN BEE-EATER

Merops orientalis

Pics Credit: RIMA DHILLON

Importance of Moss ...

BY GURJEET VIRK

The Fascinating World of Mosses

Mosses are among the first plants to take over the earth. Mosses generally grow in a damp environment and do not need much sunlight. These plants are extremely sensitive to the outside environment. 2,300 Moss species are found in India, out of which 339 are found in Uttarakhand.

These are tiny, non-vascular wonders, thriving on our planet from millions of years. These small, soft, and lush green plants have adapted to survive in diverse environments, from tropical forests to arctic tundras. Mosses belong to the taxonomic division Bryophyta, comprising over 12,000 species.



White-browed Shrike babbler *Pteruthius flaviscapis*

They are small, multicellular plants that lack true roots, stems, and leaves. Instead, they have:

1. Tiny leaves: Simple, single-layered leaves that absorb water and nutrients.
2. Rhizoids: Thread-like structures that anchor the plant to its substrate.
3. Capsules: Spore-producing structures that facilitate reproduction.

Some popular types of mosses include:

1. Sphagnum moss: Acid-loving, peat-forming mosses.
2. Hypnum moss: Common, carpet-forming mosses.
3. Polytrichum moss: Tall, hair-like mosses.
4. Bryum moss: Small, delicate mosses.

Benefits of Mosses:

Mosses absorb pollutants, heavy metals, and particulate matter. They stabilize soil by preventing erosion. Retain moisture, reducing water loss. Create beautiful Habitat by providing shelter for birds, small animals and insects. Some mosses even have antibacterial, antiviral, and anti-inflammatory properties.

Uses of Mosses:

1. Ornamental purposes: Moss gardens, terrariums, and decorative arrangements.
2. Insulation: Mosses can be used as natural insulation materials.
3. Packaging: Mosses replace synthetic materials in packaging.
4. Scientific research: Mosses aid in studies on ecology, climate change, and pollution.



Blue Whistling Thrush *Myophonus caeruleus*

Nainital Moss Garden



Nainital Moss Garden was built near Khurptal, Nainital under the CAMPA scheme in 2020. This is the country's first moss garden spread over 10 hectares, with an interpretation centre. This consists of 30 representative moss species, and other bryophyte species, including two species listed in IUCN Red List (*Hyophila involute* and *Brachythecium buchananii*) and a moss trail nearly 1.25 km long. The state forest department had approved research projects to study moss species, considering the most significant indicator of ecosystem fluctuations as they are more sensitive towards habitat and climate changes.

Moss Garden is just like a grass garden consisting of grass. This has mosses instead of grass. The mosses are squishy and can compress without facing any damages. These gardens can thus be easily walked on without being damaged and also do not require annual replacement.

Moss plants are fascinating, versatile, and beneficial organisms that deserve appreciation and care. By understanding their unique characteristics and uses, we can harness their potential to create sustainable, eco-friendly solutions.

Whether you're an avid gardener, researcher, or simply a nature enthusiast / wildlife photographer, the world of moss plants is sure to captivate and inspire.



Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*



European Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*



Rufous-bellied Woodpecker *Dendrocopos hyperythrus*

CLICKED BY:- GURJEET VIRK



Pitfalls While Shooting...

BY: SUBHASH SAPRU

Lets avoid pitfalls while shooting

“Oh! I missed a nice shot, my camera refused to focus”, “The light changed suddenly and got all settings disturbed”, “Oh Shit! had the shutter release button been pressed a fraction of a second earlier, I would have got an award-winning photo.” At times while we are busy making photos of birds in company of fellow photographers, we hear such annoying murmurs that suddenly distract our attention and we may have distressing thoughts “ I may not be in a similar situation”.

Let's delve on some of such pitfalls and understand how to save our day.

Sudden change of light- Some experienced photographers prefer to set ISO on auto with its minimum and maximum limits depending on their expected requirement in a given situation. They understand that either the natural light may suddenly change or the subject would abruptly move in shade or harsh light. Therefore, auto ISO comes to their rescue. A similar situation may hardly leave time to readjust ISO by scrolling the camera menu. These days we see some cameras equipped with an ISO button close to shutter release button at top of camera body to let user adjust ISO without waste of time. It is there where it should be. This facility especially helps those who do not like to set ISO on auto. Do it as the situation demands.

Camera does not focus- This is a very annoying situation. There can be several reasons that make one to struggle to achieve perfect focus. It may be due to some shooting conditions, which can be easily handled if you have carefully read your camera manual. If the camera hunts for focus, back and front and is unsuccessful in achieving it, generally it means either the camera lacks contrast or you are trying to focus in low light.

One must understand that both DSLR and Mirrorless cameras being different in technology, they differ in focus system. It's therefore, necessary to understand our gear. Not only the camera, but also lenses. For instance, we must know the minimum focus distance of our lenses. How contrast detection and phase detection work in a camera.

Front focus or back focus- Most of the DSLR users often experience that while auto-focusing, instead of focusing on the subject, the camera either focuses on the background or foreground. This situation calls for calibration of camera lens and these days some cameras have built-in system for calibration of lenses. One can find this provision by scrolling down the camera menu to look for AF fine-tune feature. Contrary to the DSLRs the problem is rare with mirrorless cameras because these cameras focus on image sensor itself. Another reason for impaired ability of camera to focus precisely can be due to dirty contact points. Therefore, make it a habit to periodically clean your equipment.

Yet another reason for struggle with focusing can be wrong selection of AF mode. The focus mode as well as area mode work differently. One must know where to use AF-C or Continuous Servo AF focus mode and which AF area mode is to be chosen. Remember, the central AF point gives the sharpest images. Good that if your equipment has the ability to over-ride autofocus with manual focus.

Missing first frames – Take offs by birds are always exciting. Some of the new generation cameras are now equipped with Pre-Release Capture system. We can get images before we fully press the shutter release button. To begin with, first set pre-release burst in camera, if it's equipped with this facility. With the half-press of shutter release button, or the AF-ON button if we have set back button focus, one second of images will be recorded before actually release of the shutter.

The behaviour of birds being unpredictable, we should keep a close watch on the bird and try to anticipate its behaviour and flight. At times it may appear that the bird is about to take off, but actually it won't. Any repetition of the shooting process can result in accumulation of several images which would need adequate storage space in memory card.

Flying bird gets lost behind branches- Its very disappointing for a bird photographer when a flying bird which is being chased to get its clear shot, suddenly disappears behind branches of a tree. The moment it again appears, we once again aim our camera to make an image, but that moment is too short to be recorded.

The solution to such a peculiar situation lies within the camera, if equipped with facility of focus tracking with lock-on. This provision allows us to select the length of time the camera will ignore an intruding object that blocks our subject. If this function is enabled, the camera locks on to the subject and provides a variable time-out period for the lock-on functionality. This time-out can be adjusted in camera according to the delay time period as one may prefer. Practice and practice.

Do your homework- There are some other pitfalls which can be easily avoided by simply doing our homework. For instance, before moving out with a camera, ensure that its battery is fully charged and data card has adequate storage space. Prefer to keep at least a spare battery. Don't forget to give a fresh look to the camera settings.

Patience and Practice- These two are the key factors that matter a lot in bird photography. It's a common saying that the lost image is always the best image. Some photographers who find focal length of their lens inadequate in a given situation, try to be close to the subject ignoring that the bird may not like their presence and would fly away. A keen birder knows that like human beings, the birds also prefer to be within their own comfort zone. Our patience in their territory will reveal that some of them not only look inquisitive, but actually approaching us provided we give them the opportunity.



Birding Trip to Chail with Non-Birders (My Family)

By: Sarbjeet Kaur

Chail, a picturesque hill station located at 2200 meters above sea level in Himachal Pradesh, is nestled in the Shivalik range and offers a serene environment, majestic views, and rich historical significance.

During my recent trip from August 22nd to 24th, 2024 I had the opportunity to experience the area's stunning natural beauty, which was enhanced by the monsoon season. The hills were cloaked in lush green vegetation, with shrubs, creepers, and undergrowth creating a verdant paradise. This setting was perfect for both tourists and birders alike. Despite the thick foliage, misty and cloudy weather, and the fact that many birds were perched high in trees, I still managed to observe a variety of avian species.

Day 1: Arrival and Early Sightings:

We reached Chail in the evening, and upon arrival at Vue Magique Resort, I was immediately greeted by a wildlife spectacle.



Short toed Snake Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*

A Short-toed Snake Eagle was hovering over the resort for nearly half an hour, giving me ample time to capture some excellent shots.

This encounter set the tone for the rest of the trip, reaffirming that Chail was indeed a birdwatcher's haven. Early the next morning, I noticed Nutcrackers visiting the walnut tree in the resort premises. These visits were brief and primarily in the early hours.



Spotted Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes*

Down on the lawn, A Blue Whistling Thrush hopped about, its melodious whistle echoing in the tranquil hills. A Black Francolin could be heard calling incessantly from a pine tree near the resort. I attempted to capture a photo, but as soon as I approached, the elusive bird flew away. Meanwhile, European Turtle Doves were busy collecting nesting material. This bird was a common sight throughout the trip, often perched on wires or along paths. Perched high atop a Deodar tree, a pair of Large-billed Crows seemed to be surveying the surrounding area, adding a touch of majesty to the landscape.

Day 2: Exploring with my daughter:

On the second day, I ventured out with my daughter to explore a nearby kutchra road leading to small villages, maize fields, and apple orchards. Clouds hung low over the hills and trees, reducing visibility and making birdwatching somewhat difficult.



White throated Laughingthrush *Garrulax albogularis*

However, a flock of White-throated Laughingthrushes noisily hopping from branch to branch offered some lively moments. Near a small pond by an apple orchard, a lone Green Sandpiper was enjoying the stillness of the water, while a Eurasian Hoopoe preened itself on a nearby fencing pole.



Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

I observed a female Grey-winged Blackbird collecting bright red berries from a shrub locally known as Kafal. A pair of Grey Bushchats were perched on fencing wire, and a Green-backed Tit was calling from atop another pole. As a birder it was a challenge finding a balance between birdwatching and family activities. Non-birders are more inclined towards relaxation and sightseeing.

So, after this birding excursion, we took some time to explore the cultural side of Chail. We visited a Gurudwara, built in 1907 by Maharaja Bhupinder Singh of Patiala, followed by a trip to the Kali Mata Mandir. We then enjoyed a delicious vegetarian lunch at Soni Dhaba, a popular spot known for its authentic vegetarian cuisine.

Day 3: Final Birding Session:

On the final day, I hired a car from the resort to explore the surrounding areas more extensively, as it was not feasible for me to trek long distances. Early in the morning, I spotted a Great Barbet foraging in the walnut tree on the resort premises. Known for its melodious call, the bird moved quietly through the deodar cedar. We headed back to the track which I had explored the previous day. Although the weather remained cloudy, with occasional rain, I managed to observe some bird activity.



Black-headed Jay *Garrulus lanceolatus*

A group of Black-headed Jays hopped on the branches of an oak tree, busily feeding their young. The highlight of the day, however, was a pair of Himalayan Shrike Babblers — though fidgety, they made for an exciting sighting. Although the monsoon weather made birdwatching challenging, the trip to Chail was rewarding. The thick vegetation and cloud cover made it difficult to spot birds at times, but the overall serenity and the moments of bird activity — particularly the Short-toed Snake Eagle, Nutcrackers, and Black-headed Jays — made the effort worthwhile.



Himalayan Black-lored Tit *Machlolophus xanthogenys*

For birders, Chail offers great potential, particularly in the winter when the grass dries up and birds are easier to spot. While traveling with non-birders can be a challenge, Chail provides enough diversity in activities — cultural sights good food, and scenic beauty — to keep everyone happy.

Bird in Focus

Bristled Grassbird

Schoenicola striatus

By: Rima Dhillon



Bristled Grassbird (*Schoenicola striatus*)

Bristled Grassbird also called Bristled Grass Warbler, is a bird of the grasslands. A medium sized brownish coloured insectivorous bird it gets its name from the row of five stiff bristles along the bare skin in front of its eyes. While it forages and nests among the grasses, these bristles shield the eyes like a sun visor and protect them against injury.

Bristled Grassbird is distributed throughout the northern countries of the Indian Subcontinent - India, Bangladesh, Nepal and Pakistan.

It is found both in the dry as well as wet grassland. Close to home Bristled Grassbirds have been seen over the past few years in the grassland area in Jawaharpur near Dera Bassi, Punjab and along Sarsa Nadi in Baddi, Himachal Pradesh. In the past, In 2006, Bristled Grassbird was photographed by Mr. Narbir Kahlon (VP Chandigarh Bird Club) in patches of tall grasses that used to be found in Sukhna Lake. Unfortunately in the many desilting programmes carried out in the lake over the past several years these little oasis of habitat have totally disappeared. Following this the birds have probably moved further into the Sukhna sanctuary. No recent records have surfaced from here. One reason could be that the sanctuary is closed to visitors during the monsoons which is the breeding season of this bird. Since it is most visible during this season therefore no new sighting has been reported.



© Rima Dhillon

Bristled Grassbird (*Schoenicola striatus*)

Bristled Grassbird breeds on the riverine plains along the south of the Himalayas. Post breeding they may be migrating locally towards the south of India. Being a shy skulker, it is only visible during its breeding season from June to September. The male bird is seen circling and singing as it sallies up before diving into the tall grass or perches atop a bush. It continuously serenades the female. Once she decides to accept his advances and start nesting, the singing comes to an end and the bird falls silent. The silence continues till the next breeding season.

The nest is placed at the base of a clump of grass where the female solely sits on the clutch of four or five eggs.

Due to its secretive behaviour, there has been very little targeted study of this specie. It is listed as Globally Vulnerable (VU) on the IUCN list. In India it has recently been declared 'Endangered.'

The recently updated IUCN Red List by Birdlife Red List Team suggests that the global population of Bristled Grassbird may be 10,000 to 50,000 mature pairs. Of these, the largest number are from Nepal (1300- 1600 mature pairs). More recently a large population has been reported from Bangladesh where it was rediscovered in 2014 after almost a hundred years. Till that time it was thought to have become extinct. 'Around 757 mature pairs are estimated to inhabit the flood plain grasslands of Padma and Jamuna river systems in Bangladesh' (Chowdhury et al 2023)

Lack of study and under reporting in India and Pakistan have resulted in smaller numbers.

As most other avian species, Bristled Grassbird population also suffers from habitat loss. The species are considered to have declined in both abundance and range in the last 200 years (Birdlife International 2001)



Jawaharpur habitat

Grasslands and Riverine habitats are the most neglected ecosystems. They are considered to be wastelands. Due to this attitude, these habitats fall victim to being burnt, drained and destroyed. The land is used for grazing or converted to agriculture.

In Jawaharpur, Dera Bassi birders from Chandigarh Bird Club have been observing the birds during the breeding season of the Bristled Grassbird over the last few years. Though usually only one pair was seen this year (September 2024) two pairs were recorded. This grassland is extremely vulnerable to the vagaries of humankind. The surroundings are under agriculture. Local farmers use this small patch of grassland as a dumping ground for garbage. Sand mining is a common occurrence. The grass is also burnt down, to provide better grazing for the village cattle. Recently a packaging unit has been set up at the edge of this grassy patch discharging effluents.

The future of this shy bird is in some very careless hands.

The Mulberry Tree of my Park!!

By: Aaryan Bhalla



“As the Mulberry tree bears witness to the changing seasons, may we embrace the cycles of life with grace and acceptance.”



Hi, Friends Here's a new article and also I think this is one of my favorite articles I've ever written yet.

Discover the magic of nature's awakening, where blossoms paint the landscape and birdsong fills the air, inviting you to immerse yourself in the beauty of this wondrous time.



One must have eaten and enjoyed the juiciness of the mulberries from a mulberry tree in one's childhood. If not, try to experience the joy of a delicious feeling and mouth full of red water. However excess eating may bring uncomfortable consequences!



Summer arrived this year so early in March that the mulberry tree of my park sprouted its leaves, buds and flowers really early this year. The previous year, my Dad and I enjoyed so many mulberries from the park. But this year I only got a few as the neighbourhood children and aunts plucked them and ate them before I realized they had ripened! But not only this, someone else fascinating was also appearing on the tree there!

The park is just opposite my home. so I can come a couple of times a day to observe the birds in the tree. Our birds were enjoying the mulberries on the topmost branches.

As I'm still in the learning stage of photography, I acknowledge there's room for improvement.

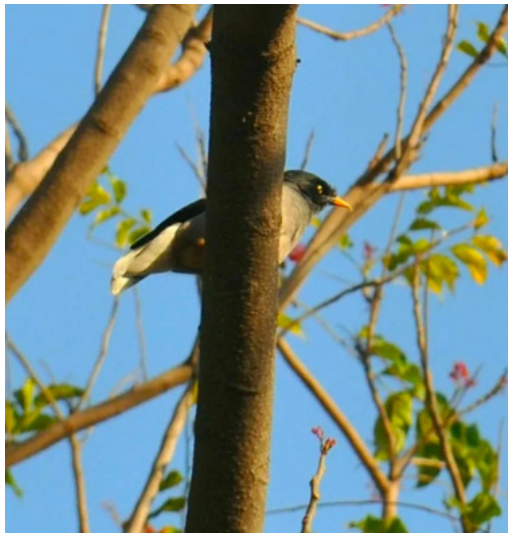
Several old but some new guests also came to have the delicious red-purple mulberries. The following birds were regulars at the mulberry feast. Let's have a quick look at all of them.



Jungle Myna *Acridotheres fuscus*

Jungle Myna is a member of the Starling family. it was for the first time that I saw this bird having hair spikes.

These birds are not seen easily. One had to travel outside the city to see them. However they are resident in Chandigarh.



Jungle Myna
Acridotheres fuscus

I always wondered why Wagtails and Indian Chats and many more wag their tails up and down again and again?



Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

It's thought that tail wagging in birds may help flush out insects or act as a signal, either to others in the group, maybe as a dominance display, or to potential predators, as if saying that "I'm alert: you won't catch me Ha...Ha";)



Grey Wagtail
Motacilla cinerea

A sunny morning with a muddy, grassy wetland in the park because of opened pipes attracts the flocks of these beautiful White Wagtails too.



European Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*

Starling - A winter migratory

(A rare sighting for the tree)

Common Starling is also known as European Starling. I used to watch it and was initially confused by the common myna. Then finally, I clicked the beautiful bird with a glossy black plumage with a metallic sheen of green-golden and blue spots on it. I was pleased to view this majestic bird.

Their lively chirps and melodious calls continuously echo through the park, adding a lively soundtrack to the serene surroundings.



European Starling
Sturnus vulgaris

My happiness has rubbed off a little on this Black Redstart (female) which gave me a tough time. but, I finally caught it hiding in the bushes of jasmine/Motia flowers with its tail feathers spread like a hand fan while wagging quickly. Black Redstart is a bird that arrives in early Sep-Oct and generally migrates back in late March-April.



Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*

WHEN A FAIRY COMES TO MEET YOU!



Indian Paradise flycatcher

Terpsiphone paradisi

The Mulberry tree holds its own charm, drawing both human visitors and a diverse array of avian friends. The more I explore the trees and bushes of my park the more gems I found, hiding themselves camouflaged. All around crows and sunbirds were shouting and when I just glanced it... It was for the first time to see a beautiful rufous 'Indian Paradise Flycatcher' female in my park which was in the trees.

Walong Birding

By: Dr. B. K. Goel



I first visited Walong in Jan 22. The road condition from Tezu to Walong, a distance of about 200 km, was really bad then. There were hardly any places to stay then, except one or two, and there was almost nowhere to eat during the day along our birding route, the entire distance of 35 km from Walong to Kaho, the first Indian village.

Things have really changed over the last two years. Road construction work has progressed a lot, as it is an important requirement for the Army now. The 60 km stretch from Hayuliang to Hawai (Yes - Hawai ! With a single I though) is almost like Kartavya Path of Delhi now.

There is a very comfortable Homestay that has come up in the middle of Walong Bazaar - Anu Nimai Homestay - being run by a very pleasant lady, Mrs Chudung Kri, and her family who provide thoughtfully arranged accommodation, delicious food, served in a home-like Dining Room, and excellent service. The view from the balcony is breathtaking - rapidly flowing Brahmaputra river with pristine forest on one side and Walong village on the other.



There is a small multipurpose shop around 12 km short of Kaho at Karowti now. It provides Maggi and other basic meals and some really delicious mint tea. There's another very colourfully stocked shop near Kaho which sells all types of packed foodstuffs and drinks, and has the big poster on its wall proudly announcing the status of Kaho as the FIRST village of India and you will surely get yourself photographed with it for posterity.

The hill right behind the homestay is in fact the Helmet Top, an important birding destination. The road to the top is about 18 km and there's an Army post at the top. There's excellent birding all along the way. In winters, you will have easy pickings of Black-browed Tit, Yunnan Nuthatch, Chestnut-vented Nuthatch, Spot-breasted Parrotbill and many other species there.

About 5 km from Walong is another sharp turn on your left at Tilam that takes you to Tilam Top, about 5 km drive. Same habitat and birds as on the road to Helmet Top. Yes, we also saw Koklass Pheasant, the Chinese sub-species, both at Helmet Top as well as Tilam Top.



YUNNAN NUTHATCH
HELMET TOP WALONG ARUNACHAL

As you go further towards Kaho, the landscape starts changing - more of pines than the mixed forest trees. And small flats on road sides with some shrubs. It's somewhere short of Karowti, near an Army Camp that we sighted at least five pairs of Derbyan Parakeets, merrily occupied with their breeding and nesting activity. The hollows in the dead/dying pine trees provide them the perfect nesting site. If you go there in May, you will see them cleaning out their nest holes or peeping out of them or just sitting on the stump of a branch next to the nest hole. Very pretty sight indeed.

Somewhere in the flats, you will find the Black-headed Greenfinch that will often come down to the ground to feed and then go and perch on some shrub or a wire and provide the perfect shot to you. We saw many small flocks of them. Somewhere around there, you will also get to see Chestnut-eared Bunting posing for you.



We went down further towards Kaho, past the 100 year old Buddhist Gompa, clicked pictures with the First Indian Village poster and celebrated our fulfilling morning with some chips, bhujia and Amul Kool milk from the very colourful Kaho shop.

A stretch of road between Walong and Kaho was undergoing widening and the road was being closed for most of the day except one hour at about 9:00 A.M. and one hour at about 1:00 P.M. So better to check about road conditions beforehand and plan your move to Kaho accordingly.

Sichuan Leaf Warbler is in abundance and Red-flanked Bluetail is more likely during early winter months visits but they would have left by March end. Also, Black-browed Tit, that's easy to get early in winter, moves up to the top of pine trees by May and is hard to get. However, your May visit will surely get you the Derbyan Parakeet which will come here only in April. And the Godlewski Bunting and the Black-headed Greenfinch can be clicked in their prettiest plumage only in May. So, there is an opportunity cost that you have to pay - you decide what you want!





White-bellied Heron has been regularly visiting Walong for the last few years and you don't have to try very hard to get it - it's right there on the river islands next to Walong itself. If you are lucky, you may sight it from your homestay balcony! The rains had come by the time we went there this time, thanks to Cyclone Remal, river had swelled up, marooning the island, and, with that, the heron also disappeared somewhere. So if you choose to visit earlier in the winter, you are most likely to be rewarded with sighting of this critically endangered species of heron.

Tezu to Hayuliang can be reached by two routes; the one via Udayak Pass, at a height of about 6500 ft, is teeming with avifauna. If I combine the important species that we got there over my two trips, the list is staggering! Rufous-headed Parrotbill, Beautiful Nuthatch, Cachar Wedge-billed Babbler, Long-billed Wren Babbler, Black-crowned Scimitar Babbler, Grey-chinned Minivet, Silver-eared Mesia and many others. Please do make sure that you are taking this route.

A bird guide makes a huge difference to your birding experience. Rofikul Islam of Kaziranga, Ravi Mekola of Roing and Binanda Hatibaruah of Maguri Beel are exceptionally good and so are Jibon Dutta and Palash Phookan of Maguri Beel and Papu Choudhary of Kaziranga. I will be sharing their contact numbers here, as also of the Homestay owner's.

There are no chemists after Tezu so please get your requisite medicines with you or stock up in Tezu. Leech socks frequently required and sufficient quantity of mosquito repellents.

Also, importantly, there's no mobile connectivity in Walong except BSNL and almost no network. So, just imagine you've rolled back 40 years in time.

So long!

Contact Numbers:-

Anu Nimai Homestay

Samir Kri 9366048518

Bird Guides:

Rofik ul Islam 8133964461

Ravi Mekola 9402457180

Binanda Hatibaruah 7002189756

Jibon Dutta 9954135613

Palash Phukan 9707160530

Papu Choudhary 8638538909



Pheasant-tailed Jacana
Hydrophasianus chirurgus

ANUJ JAIN 
SEP. | 2024 | MOTEMAJRA



“COMMON KINGFISHER” *ALCEDO ATTHIS*

BY: - PARVEEN NAIN

SEP. | 2024 | SUKHNA LAKE, CHANDIGARH



CHANDIGARH[®] BIRD CLUB



Chandigarh Bird Club[®] is a registered organisation formed by a group of local birdwatchers. The idea is to record the local avi fauna, its habitats and help make the residents of Tri-City aware of birds in our region and protect them.

Incepted in 2008, the Chandigarh Bird Club dedicated itself to its goal of protecting the environment.

The Club owes its existence to those few dedicated and expert members, who started this club in the Chandigarh Boat Club, namely Navjit Singh, Narbir Kahlon, Vikramjit Singh, Mrs Rima Dhillon, Mrs Sarbjeet Kaur, and Mrs Geeta Goswami.

The fundamental objectives of Chandigarh Bird Club Continue to be to:

1. Bring people, especially the younger generation closer to nature, through birding and help them to enjoy the outdoors while making out a fun activity.
2. To make individuals and government more sensitive towards the environment to create a dynamic database for analysis to focus on conservation efforts.
3. To create a forum for birders to share information and discuss related to this activity.

President :- Rima Dhillon

Vice President :- Narbir Singh Kahlon

Hony Secretary :- Sarbjeet Kaur

Joint Secretary :- Navjit Singh

Hony Treasurer :- Mahesh Garg

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