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WHISPERING WINGS[®]

NEWSLETTER



CHANDIGARH BIRD CLUB[®]

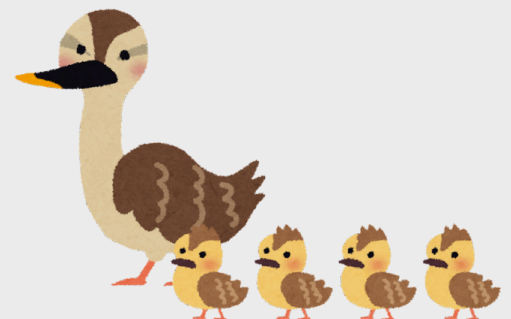
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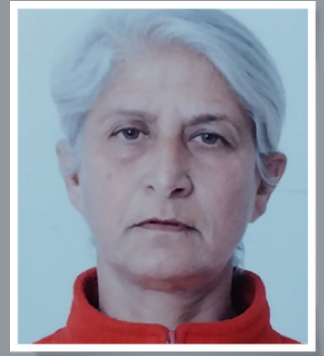
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From the Editor



RIMA DHILLON

PRESIDENT, CHANDIGARH BIRD CLUB

Wishing all birdwatchers a joyful and fulfilling New Year! May 2025 be a year of positive change for the conservation of habitats, creating a better world for all of God's creatures.

The months from October to December signal the arrival of winter migrants, graceful songbirds and waterfowl alike - as they journey to the waterbodies around Chandigarh and its verdant public and private gardens. Members of the Chandigarh Bird Club have been actively documenting resident birds and these seasonal visitors across the Inter State Chandigarh Region (ISCR).

Last winter, their dedication yielded remarkable sightings, including Pushkar Bali's discovery of the Greater Scaup at Siswan Lake and Lalit Bansal's sighting of Barnacle Geese at Motemajra village pond. With the new season underway, we remain hopeful for more rare and exciting finds.

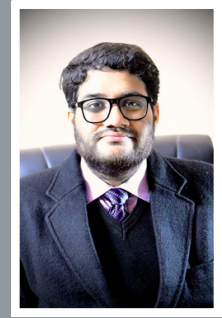
This issue also features notable contributions from our members. Bhupesh K. Goyal shares his adventurous pursuit of the elusive Sclater's Monal, while Narbir Kahlon's article invites us to explore Tasmania, the beautiful Australian island known for its incredible wildlife.

Closer to home, the annual Salim Ali Sukhna Waterfowl Census was conducted at Sukhna Lake. While the usual species made their presence felt, the overall numbers were underwhelming. This serves as a reminder of the importance of habitat restoration and conservation efforts to ensure thriving populations.

As we move into 2025, let us renew our commitment to preserving the natural world. Together, we can work toward a future where birds and their habitats flourish.

Happy New Year and Happy Birding!

Secretary's Report



AMANDEEP S. CHANNA
SECRETARY

As the year comes to a close, Chandigarh Bird Club has been as active as ever. The last quarter of the year is the time when our winter migrants start to visit Chandigarh and its surrounding areas.

In October, Chandigarh Bird Club was invited by the Department of Forests and Wildlife, Chandigarh on the occasion of Wildlife Week, to exhibit the photographs of birds of Chandigarh, captured by our members. The exhibition was held on 2 October 2024 at Sukhna Lake. Many members participated and helped make the exhibition a success.

In November, CBC celebrated the birth anniversary of the Bird Man of India, Dr Salim Ali on 12 November 2024. CBC held its Annual Dr Salim Ali Birth Anniversary Waterfowl Census and Species Count on 17 November 2024. Birders counted birds in Sukhna Lake, covering both the jogging track and the nature trail. On 30 November 2024, members of the Club participated in a workshop held at Punjabi University, Patiala by eBird.

In December, the Club released a calendar for the coming year. Members contributed by providing beautiful pictures of waterfowls, the theme for the calendar. Members met for the December meeting to discuss the activities for the coming months.

Amandeep Singh Channa



The Sclater's Monal Trip

By: Bhupesh Kumar Goyal

Just as the movie buffs are thinking about their next movie when they are exiting the cinema halls after watching one, the birding buffs are planning their next birding trip when lounging at the Airport, waiting for their flight back home, upon culmination of their just concluded and most satisfying birding outing. So, in early June 2024 when we had completed our Mishmi-Walong trip, we were driving back to Dibrugarh airport and discussing 'what next' with our guide Rofik, and the possibility of sighting the Sclater's Monal in the second half of November nailed it for us. Considering the waves that the discovery of the Lisu Wren Babbler was making in birding circles, we decided to throw in Namdapha-Vijaynagar also into the scheme and, ever since, we were excitedly waiting for time to roll fast and take us to November as soon as it could.

Early in November, Rofik led a group to Vijaynagar and on his return he narrated to us the horrifying and treacherous road conditions on the Miao-Vijaynagar Road. He was on his Jessami trip when he called us and he had just clocked Yellow-throated and Moustached Laughingthrushes. The plan was instantly reshaped and it became for "Namdapha-Vijaynagar" read "Jessami-Khonoma".

Dr. Sanjeeth Peter had to bow out of this trip most unwillingly due to his work circumstances, and I decided to go solo with Rofik on Mission Monal. Binanda had posted his characteristic Eureka moment pictures of the Sclater's sighting on 14 November on his WhatsApp page and we were hopeful that we might get it too. We gave ourselves 3 morning sessions at Mayudia Pass in our itinerary, just in case.

On 19 November, I took the first flight to Dibrugarh and landed there before 9 A.M. The idea was to get to do a bit of birding in Mishmi in the afternoon before we reached the Coffee House for our proposed 3 nights stay, in the expert and personal care of the 'Daaju' (Dhan Bahadur Thapa) of the Coffee House guest rooms.

We crossed the Frogmouth Camp of Ravi Mekola and a little before Tiwari Gaon, at about 3 P.M., we heard the Cachar Wedge-billed Babbler calling an exuberant hello to us. We quickly got down from our Scorpio and very soon had it come out in the open at an unexpectedly close distance for our cameras to swing into action. Just as the babbler was getting ready to come out to meet us, two Scaly Laughingthrushes also chose to greet us by coming to the parapet on the road and hung around there for a considerable period of time. A Mishmi Wren Babbler also called out and played 'hide-and-seek' with us but just about that. A little time and distance later, a number of Yellow-cheeked Tits came dancing on the roadside and pranced about on an open branch overhanging the roadside and at perfect eye level. Good pictures of even not-so-uncommon birds can also enliven a bird photographer's heart.

We reached Coffee House around 5 P.M. when the night was already well underway! It gave me great joy in meeting Daaju, the old faithful, after a gap of 7 years. I also met another solo birder, Manjula Desai, who had been there for a couple of days but the Sclater's had been playing truant. The next morning was going to be our first and her last at the Sclater Point and she hoped like hell that the trophy bird shows up. There were at least 10 other birders, of varying vintage in Mayudia, waiting for the prized sighting. The male had been elusive since Binanda's sighting though a couple of females had been seen in the interim.

Rofik and I were the first to reach the location next morning at about 4:30 A.M. Gradually, the rest of the birders and guides also joined in. There was hushed silence in the cold and dark morning at the exact point. Everyone there seemed to well understand how the slightest of unwarranted sound or movement could turn the bird away. The clock ticked and the shroud of darkness started lifting, albeit very very gradually. It was past 5:15 A.M. and the expected time of the bird's passage through the valley had already crossed. Nervousness and anxiety were building up. Rofik gingerly walked a few steps back and looked over the edge for any signs of the Sclater's coming, and equally slowly walked back and whispered that 'the' Monal is coming.



Birder at large

A male! All hearts went racing. Nobody moved or coughed despite the weather. 20 minutes later, the 'lungi' bird reached high enough in the valley for the entire wall of birders to get their first look of the mesmerising beauty. The Sclater's Monal, completely unaware of the presence of the sizeable number of human beings in its vicinity, due only to the perfect discipline exhibited by each and every one of those present there, trotted up towards the road most nonchalantly as the mirrorless cameras, of most birders, went about their business absolutely silently. The bird took at least 3 minutes in covering the 50 metre slope at a leisurely pace till it climbed out of sight. More than enough time for bird photographers who usually measure time allotted to them in seconds! As the sighting was delayed that morning, the light was much better. The hushed silence finally gave way to still hushed 'high fives' and handshakes and celebratory group photographs, like Binanda's. What a moment! Defies description!

We were on a high for quite some time after the Sclater's sighting and then, eventually, went about our business of cajoling more birds out of their hiding places. Manipur Fulvetta not only came out in the open but climbed right up on the top of a solitary branch as if he was going to address an audience from the podium. It made for a perfect bokeh shot. A number of sunbirds, mesias and a pair of Bar-winged Wren Babblers also presented themselves for our cameras.

As soon as we sat in the car to go back to Coffee House for our breakfast, we got thinking. Do we really need to stay back in Mishmi for 3 days as per the original plan or is there something more that we could do with our time, now that the prime objective of coming to Mishmi was already achieved?



Sclater's Monal
(*Lophophorus sclateri*)



Manipur Fulvetta
(*Fulvetta manipurensis*)



Eyebrowed Wren-babbler
(*Napothera epilepidota*)

“Could we instead go for the White-tailed Flycatcher, another much-awaited lifer, to Joypur-Dehing?” I wondered. Rofik thought for a while and then suggested that we go to Namdapha instead for the two nights that were saved from Mishmi which is a more likely destination for the Flycatcher and, in addition, will also give me a chance for two more lifers viz Hill Prinia and Tawny Fish Owl. Booking guest rooms at Deban Forest Camp in Namdapha at a short notice isn’t easy, ever since it became an online process but Rofik’s good relations with the lady at the DFO office in Miao and my access to the PCCF Tamil Nadu, made it happen. We would have happily settled for the most ordinary rooms at the Deban Forest Camp but we were pleasantly surprised when welcomed into their VIP rooms on the first floor of the central cottage, commanding a scenic view of River Noa Dehing, much to our delight.

Ravi Mekola had recently visited Namdapha and had shared the precise details of the Fish Owl’s location with Rofik. As soon as we crossed the first entry gate of the Park, we saw the bridge over the river that was our reference point for the Tawny Fish Owl and we alighted from the car short of the bridge to take a walk upstream along the river bank, over the pebbles, in search of the owl. Human shoe prints on the sand between the rounded stones confirmed that we were on the right track.

A number of redstarts and forktails, a dipper and a few sandpipers enjoyed flitting from stone to stone, providing a pleasing sight for any birdwatcher. The trees on the river bank on our side were alive with the evening chorus of a number of species of small birds that were expected to be there, but our eyes and binoculars were searching every branch of the tall trees on the far bank, for it was on one of those branches, maybe hidden inside the foliage, where the Tawny was expected to be perched. When scouring for more than half an hour yielded no result, we called for it.



White-tailed Flycatcher
(*Leucoptilon concretum*)



Hill Prinia
(*Superciliaris*)

After almost an hour of unsuccessful search for the Owl, we gave up for the day, as it was getting late for us to get past the second gate within the Park's deadline of 5 P.M. We hoped to check the place once again another time. Has the owl got disturbed with too many binoculars and cameras pointing at it in the recent past and has chosen to relocate? That was considered as a distinct possibility.

At the crack of dawn the next morning, we resumed our birding journey once again. Birding happens on either side of the stretch of the Miao-Vijaynagar Road that passes through the Namdapha Park. The 'road' is actually just a dirt track carved out on a densely forested hill slope. The Park is a home to not just the wide variety of birds that we had come for, but also to tigers, leopards, elephants, deer, and the like. We were chasing the White-tailed Flycatcher as our prime target that morning. It's in the mornings that the birds are most active and we could hear a variety of birds as soon as we were on the MV road. Within a couple of kilometres from the camp, Rofik picked up the call of the Flycatcher and we quickly got looking for it. And that's when I realised that the behaviour of this flycatcher is very different from the others that are so much more responsive and so much more forthcoming. This one we were looking for would choose to stay in a dense and dark grove of bamboos and keep moving from one bamboo to another on the far end of the grove in dart-like movements while continuously calling. Eventually, after much cajoling, we were able to sight a brownish bird in a dim corner of the grove and quickly took some record shots. It was the drably dressed female of the species. Lifer clocked but nothing more! We moved further to see if we would see the brightly coloured glistening blue male somewhere. Most flycatchers in India are winter visitors and their geographical distribution as well as density are highly variable. The White-tailed Flycatcher is seen in very limited regions of Namdapha and Dehing Patkai forests. We heard the presence of another bird only after travelling another 6-7 km in the car and another intensive effort from Rofik brought another female to our vicinity. A couple of other attempts to coax the bird out from its safe habitat came a cropper and by now we had reached the Hill Prinia zone of the Park, another of our targets. A shy bird, it was busy feeding in the low bushes and grasses on the road side and we could successfully draw its attention to our calling. It won't pose on a perfect perch for a heartwarming picture though. That happened after another few kilometers when a more obliging Prinia sat out in the open, though at some distance, for me to capture a reasonably good shot. Having ticked our target birds, we spent the afternoon in search of the wren babblers, typically found in Namdapha and got some cracking shots of the Eyebrowed Wren Babbler. When we were looking for the Streaked Wren Babbler, we met Binanda, who was leading another group of birders, and he suggested that we go to the river for seeing the critically endangered White-bellied Heron, another speciality of Namdapha that I had bagged during my earlier trip here five years ago. We decided that we might as well have another look at this bird; who knows it may not be there at all when we come here the next time. Walking back to the car involved crossing very treacherous and slippery slush on the road and despite all care, I slipped.

With my camera and binoculars in tow. Fortunately, only minor injuries to the hands, badly muddied clothes but, importantly, the camera was unhurt. Now that's what bird photographers prize more on their birding trips than anything else! We quickly reached the river and soon after negotiating the pebbles for about half a kilometre, reached the bend in the river from where we could just about see the heron, daintily walking away from us on the far bank. The light was poor as the evening had set in, the bird was very far but we were satisfied to have seen it once again - twice in my two outings to Namdapha.

I was sipping a hot cup of tea sitting on the balcony sofa of our cottage and enjoying the gradually deepening orange hues of the horizon when Rofik called out, "Sir, would you want to see the Himalayan Giant Flying Squirrel?" I immediately put my tea aside, picked up the camera and rushed to the place with a heavy commotion of people, all looking up towards the sky.



Golden-crested Myna
(*Ampeliceps coronatus*)

A number of other birders staying at the camp were enjoying seeing or clicking the beautiful squirrel busy nibbling into the bark high up in the tree as one of the other guides in the camp shone the torch on it. Lovely chestnut colour on the back and dazzling white underparts. We could easily see the web of skin between its fore- and hind legs that would be stretched out during its glide from one tree to another and, would you believe, it can even cover a distance of 20-30 meters, 'flying' thus. For every birder on a birding trip these incidental sightings are pure value addition and much looked forward to.

The exit from Namdapha National Park on the 22nd morning proved to be very productive. An obliging White-tailed Flycatcher male, in its glistening blue plumage, answered our heart's call and gave us good shots - as good as they get for a super skulker that it is. Further down, we came across a tree full of a variety of green pigeons, mostly Ashy-headed but a few Pin-tailed too. And next to it, there was a tall bare tree, whose branches were embellished with gold. Yes, gold! A large flock of Golden-crested Mynas was perched all over, preening away, providing a sight to behold. Till Rejoice Gassah discovered these mynas in the Dosdewa village of Karimganj District of Assam a few years ago, Namdapha was the only known destination for sighting the Golden-crested. Further down, there were Rufous-bellied Niltavas on the road itself and a solitary Pied Falconet high up on a dry tree. The visit to the river bank once again did not show us the Tawny Fish Owl but gave excellent shots of Slaty-backed Forktail at an unusually close range. Hits-and-Misses are part and parcel of birding; and most seasoned birders take their 'misses' in their stride, rather than feeling disappointed about them. Missing the Tawny Fish Owl, by just a couple of days, was one such experience for us and we hoped to see it another day, another place, when we were destined for it.

We reached the River View Camp in Maguri Beel near Tinsukia just in time for a piping hot lunch. A lavish spread of delicious dishes and a variety of chutneys, in a typically Assamese- style cuisine prepared personally by Mrs Phuken herself. We got to shut our eyes for a couple of hours after the sumptuous lunch before heading out for our next target, the White-cheeked Starlings. A small flock of them has been regularly sighted in this area in this season for the last few years, mingled with the visiting Common Starlings and the resident Indian Pied Starlings. We set out on foot in search of this lifer on this side of the Beel.



Ashy headed Green Pigeon
(*Treron phayrei*)

I learnt for the first time during this trip what a Beel is. When the swollen Brahmaputra shrinks after the rainy season is over, it leaves behind water bodies on the sides, either as static wetlands or sluggishly flowing water bodies connected with the main river by a small stream. These Beels are a rich source of fish for the locals and a very rich 'source' of migratory birds for the birders. The flocks of starlings that were initially on this side of the Beel had now moved to the other side and we quickly summoned a boat to take us across. The setting was truly very scenic - the golden glow of the setting sun bathing the Beel waters and the crimson-orange hues of the horizon providing a perfect backdrop for landscape photography.



Brown Hawk Owl
(*Ninox scutulata*)

When we were trying to cross a rapid in the Beel and the effort of the boatman alone wasn't proving sufficient to take the boat further upstream, Rofik, a son of the soil, came into his own, picked up another oar and successfully gave the boatman a hand. The sun was kissing the horizon and the skies were displaying lovely colours, and I quickly captured a few memorable landscapes. Birding is not just about birds. It's about savouring every beautiful moment, every unique opportunity that Nature provides along the way.

The starlings kept flying away as the sun went down, and we kept the lifer hunt for the next morning. Even though we did not get our bird, the joy of witnessing a beautiful sunset over placid waters from a simple boat was in itself quite a satisfying for us.

Rofik was in a bit of a rush to get out of the Beel. I was visibly excited when I learnt that we would now be going for the 'owl' - the Eastern Grass Owl, another trophy bird of the North East, earlier sighted only in Manipur, then it started showing up in the Talap area near Tinsukia, and only on 29th August this year, it was for the very first time identified in the Motapung Beel, a little distance from Maguri Beel. While the sightings of this elusive owl at Manipur and Talap were mostly in-flight, at Motapung it was being seen nicely perched on sticks, providing perfect portrait shots.

The air was filled with expectancy. It wasn't yet pitch dark when we reached Achinta Chutia's 'hotel' near the Motapung Beel and we were served tea and biscuits with much warmth, to pass time, till it was dark enough to go for the owl. We were to get into a boat and go all around the Beel and we would hope to see the bird perched on one of the bamboo posts holding fishing nets or on any of the random posts standing here and there in the water body. We set out for the boat point with Achinta and two of his helmsmen, a distance of about 200 meters from the 'hotel'. With eyes trained to see in the dark, as soon as we reached the boats, the diminutive Achinta sighted the prized Owl super silently flying in towards us. He quickly shone his floodlight on the bird and said, "The Owl!" The majestic owl gently flapped its wings as it went past us, flood lit, constantly looking at us. What a fabulous sighting! The lifer was clocked. I was so mesmerised by the unexpected bounty that I did not even think of switching on my camera, leave aside taking a flight shot of the owl. Everyone was feeling absolutely confident now about catching the bird on a perfect perch somewhere around the Beel for a dream picture. We got into the boat and the boatmen took us all around the Beel, keenly searching every potential post for the owl. Two full rounds of the large water body and almost two hours later, no Eastern Grass Owl. However, the Brown Hawk Owl, perched on one of the Grass Owl's posts, provided a poor consolation for what we had missed. We thanked our stars, and we thanked Achinta Chutia, for we could at least see the elusive owl even if we missed the photo opportunity





TASMANIA BIRDING

By:

NARBIR S. KAHLON

In October of 2024 my family decided to visit Tasmania. Tasmania is located 240 kilometres to the south of the Australian mainland, and is separated from it by the Bass Strait, a channel that's about 150 miles (240 km) wide. The state encompasses the main island of Tasmania, the 26th-largest island in the world, and the surrounding 1000 islands. The Furneaux Group of islands is located at the eastern end of Bass Strait, while King Island and the Indian Ocean are at its western end. Some of the better known islands near Tasmania are Maria Island (I am given to understand that it is a good place to visit for those interested in wildlife), Bruny Island and Flinders Island.

Seafarer, explorer and merchant Abel Janszoon Tasman was the first European to discover the island in 1642. He named it after Anthony van Diemen, the governor-general of the Dutch East Indies who had sent Tasman on a voyage of exploration. Till 1856 it was known as Van Diemen's Land, when it was renamed Tasmania, removing the unsavory link the name Van Diemen's Land had with its penal settlements (and the "demon" connotation). The name Tasmania was chosen to honor A. J. Tasman.

Tasmania is a good place to see the Southern Lights, also known as the Aurora Australis, which are seen year-round, but the best time to see them is during the winter months of May to August. Since the further south you are, the better, popular viewing spots are the South Arm Peninsula (40 km southeast of Hobart) and Cockle Creek on the southern tip of Tasmania (120 km southwest of Hobart).

With a population of just 5.71 lakh people in an area approx. 68,000 Sq. Km (a majority of who stay in Hobart the provincial Capital) it is sparsely populated to say the least, infrastructure is well developed and tourism is its mainstay in spite of this it is still one of the least polluted places on earth.

Currently used reference model, for tectonic plate movement has total separation of Tasmania pegged at 60 million years ago from mainland Australia. In this period some endemic species evolved on the island, and this was one of the reasons that I was keen to visit Tasmania.

We flew out of Melbourne to Devonport in a small 30 seater propeller aircraft. It had been a long time since I had flown in a small aircraft and during the two hour flight over the Bass Strait one could see the white capped waves as well as sea faring vessels. After completing the formalities of hiring a car which we picked up from the airport at Devonport and a hearty breakfast in town we drove down to Wynard to see the Tulip Farm, the one hour drive was very scenic. At the Tulip farm we were treated to a kaleidoscopic view of vibrant colors much to everyone's delight.

Just outside the airport one did come across a Forest Raven in fact this is the only corvid found in Tasmania, along the coastline there were Silver Gulls and a few Pacific Gulls. At the farm we were welcomed by Swallows, a pond there had Pacific Black Ducks and atop a tree I came across a European Goldfinch which intrigued me, till I read that it was introduced to Australia in the 1860s. Originally restricted to urban areas, the European Goldfinch has successfully moved out into country areas of south-eastern Australia, including Tasmania. The other bird that surprised me was the Eurasian Blackbird (Common Blackbird). This too was introduced to Australia by a bird dealer visiting Melbourne in early 1857, and its range has since expanded from its initial foothold in Melbourne and Adelaide to include all of southeastern Australia, including Tasmania and the Bass Strait islands.



European Goldfinch
(*Carduelis carduelis*)



Pink Robin
(*Petroica rodinogaster*)

After everyone had satisfied themselves to the visual treat of tulips we decided to proceed to Cradle Mountain. We needed to pick up groceries as we were had been forewarned by Gail Walker, manager of Cradle Cave (an Airbnb) near Moina where we were staying. We were told that the Airbnb is a nature retreat and the closest convenience store is 30 Km away and that too closes down by 5 pm.

We reached the Cradle mountain national park information center from Wynard at 5.15 pm and we found it closed. We were however guided to 'Peppers' , a Hotel on the edge of the National Park by Jenny, On her suggestion we went on the Enchanted Walk trail. This was along a glacial stream, the forest was truly enchanting, in fading light I came across the beautiful Pink Robin, it took me totally by surprise as it sat silently just a few feet off the track and I may have missed it, but for its rather striking pink colour.

Cradle Cave is on 172 acres of forest that was clear-felled 30 years before purchase and now, 50 years on, the forest is thriving and there is little evidence of such activity. The house has a minimal impact on the environment and was designed to capture the incredible beauty around. The property has a very nice walking trail and you wake up to an incredible chorus of birdsong, Here I came across The Black Currawong, Green Rosella, Tasmanian Thornbill, Yellow Wattlebird, Black-headed Honeyeater and t Yellow-throated Honeyeater all endemic to Tasmania, Apart from these I got The Grey Shrikethrush, Fantail Cuckoo and the Satin Flycatcher, which were also lifers for me. Other birds included the Grey Fantail flycatcher, Barn Swallows and the Superb Fairy Wren. The latter was constantly at war with its own image in the side view mirror of the parked car. The other interesting bird sighting just outside the property was that of a Peacock!! Peacocks were introduced to Australia during the colonial period as pets brought from India. They were also released into the wild in Western Australia for hunting while they are not native to Tasmania, Quite obviously there are a few feral birds there.



Superb Fairy Wren
(*Malurus cyaneus*)



Black Currawong
(*Strepera fuliginosa*)



Beautiful Firetail
(*Stagonopleura bella*)



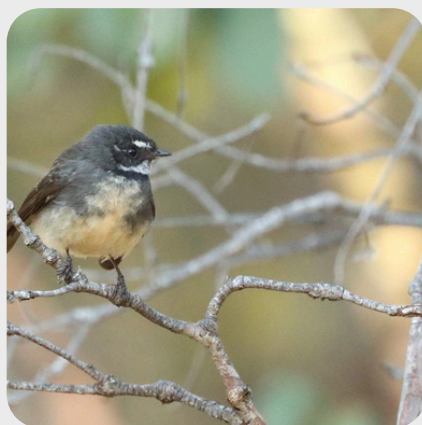
Cape Barren Goose
(*Cereopsis novaehollandiae*)



Common Bronzewing
(*Phaps chalcoptera*)



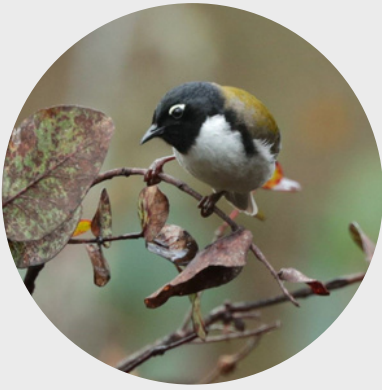
Green Rosella
(*Platycercus caledonicus*)



Grey Fantail
(*Rhipidura albiscapa*)



Grey Shrikethrush
(*Colluricincla harmonica*)



Black-headed Honeyeater
(*Melithreptus affinis*)



Wombat



Red-bellied Pademelon



Tasmanian Native Hen
(*Tribonyx mortierii*)

On the grounds of 'Peppers' we came across Wombats that are close relatives of the Koala bear, The Red-bellied Pademelons (*Thylogale billardierii*), now possibly endemic to Tasmania hence the name Tasmanian Pademelon and the Forester Kangaroo also endemic. Amongst the birds seen there were Scrub Tit (*Acanthornis magna*) another endemic species and across the road were Tasmanian Native Hens that are a flightless species of rail, endemic to Tasmania. In effect the Cradle Mountain area was where I came across 8 of the 12 endemic bird species found in Tasmania over the two days that we spent there.

The Cradle Mountain National Park itself offers some of the most amazing landscapes and it is a photographer's paradise, with lots of treks, varied flora and I suppose in summer it would be a paradise for birds and birders alike. At this time of the year however birds were not there in large numbers, nor were there many species.

At Peppers you could dine with the devils (Tasmanian Devils), and meet carnivorous marsupials like the Eastern Quoll and the Spotted-tailed Quoll, on a night safari (I did not get a chance to go on the safari though). Quolls are probably the only Marsupials that hunt birds and other prey while Tasmanian Devils are mainly scavengers.

Next on our Itinerary was the Freycinet National Park and we decided to stay at Coles Bay. It was a long drive past the rolling countryside. On the drive we noticed a large number of road kills, Wombats, Quolls, Echidnas (a type of Marsupial Hedgehog) and Pademelons were all casualties to fast moving traffic. At the Airbnb at Coles Bay there were lots of House Sparrows, Little Wattlebirds and New Holland Honey eaters to greet us on arrival. On a late afternoon walk down to the pristine beach we came across Eurasian Blackbirds, Common Starlings, Tasmanian Thornbills, Green Rosellas and Scrubtits. The beach itself had a Pacific Gull and a few Silver Gulls.



Tasmania

Next day at the Information center we were welcomed by a Black Currawong. The walk up to view the Wine Glass Bay, one of the most iconic views of Tasmania involved a one hour trek and over a thousand steps cut out into the rocky terrain. The flora was very different, a sort of Dry Scrub Forest, here there were Grey Wagtails, their beautiful song wafting along the air waves as they went about their business, but the highlight was the Beautiful Firetail of which I got a few images as it flitted around in the tree above rendering its mournful floating whistle. Back at the parking lot we were bid adieu by the Silvereyes and Tasmanian Thornbills.

What followed was a sumptuous lunch at the Oyster Farm. The trees at the farm were teeming with birdlife, Black Currawongs were hopping amongst the tables looking for leftover scraps, the harsh call of the Yellow Wattlebirds interspersed with the melodious rendition by the Grey Shrikethrush, all added to the ambience of the place. The Fantail Cuckoo, Yellow-throated Honeyeater and the Eastern Spinebill kept me busy while we waited for our meal.

After the well-deserved lunch we made our way to the Moulting Bay, the shores of the bay was a carpet of tiny yellow flowers and the soft ground was a treat for tired feet. The Moulting Bay appears to be the breeding ground for Black Swans, of which there were hundreds with white cygnets in tow, they were wary of humans and not very happy with our presence. A White-faced Heron stood guard on a dry tree at the edge of the scrub forest, and as we were making our noisy way through this forest we were startled by a deer! The feral deer is another introduced species. Back in the comfort of the Airbnb, a game of Sequence and wine & cheese rounded off a nice day at Coles Bay.



Hare



Little Wattlebird
(*Anthochaera chrysoptera*)



New Holland Honeyeater
(*Phylidonyris novaehollandiae*)



Scrubtit
(*Acanthornis magna*)



Streaked Spiderhunter
(*Arachnothera magna*)



Tasmanian Thornbill
(*Acanthiza ewingii*)



White-bellied Fish Eagle
(*Haliaeetus leucogaster*)



White-faced Heron
(*Egretta novaehollandiae*)



Sylvan surroundings



Yellow throated Honeyeater
(*Lichenostomus flavicollis*)



Yellow Wattlebird
(*Anthochaera paradoxa*)

The Drive to Hobart, apart from a few welcome Swallows, Common Starlings and the occasional road kill was rather uneventful. In the evening we visited The Royal Botanical Garden and if you are in Hobart I would say it is worth a visit. Black Pacific Ducks and Australian Wood Ducks were roaming around the grounds with the ducklings in tow. We were staying in the CBD area and the waterfront was an ideal setting for an early dinner. For a photographer the play of light on the water, the boats in the dock with an urban landscape in the background offers plenty of creative opportunities.

The next morning, we visited Port Arthur. It was a lesson in the history of penal colonies and exploitation in Van Diemen's Land. The historical prison is now a tourist attraction with beautifully landscaped lawns, the surrounding lush green forest with towering trees and birdsongs from the canopy. One needs time for exploration, something that I was short of (this was a family holiday) but I did get a glimpse of the Laughing Kookaburra and the Horsefield's Bronze-Cuckoo high up in a dense canopy.

On the way back from Port Arthur because, 'Mona' the Art Gallery was shut, we decided to stop at 'Unzoo' as I wanted to see Tasmanian Devils before leaving Van Diemen's Land. A decision which was well worth it because not only did we get to see the Tasmanian Devils being fed we were treated to lovely views of the Cape Barren Geese, Common Bronzewing, White-faced Heron, White-bellied Sea Eagle, Silver Gulls and high up in the canopy a Black-faced Cuckooshrike, apart from the by now usual Scrubtit, Tasmanian Thornbill, Yellow Wattlebird and Green Rosella. We could pet and interact with Kangaroos there.

On the drive back we were treated to an Echidna sighting as it ambled along the roadside. In spite of stopping and rushing to get a better view, it was not to be, it just disappeared into the undergrowth.

A beautiful sunrise was a befitting farewell as we made our way to the Airport. At the parking lot we came across Hares, another introduced species. Strangely, there was no one to take the delivery of the Car or the Keys. We parked in a designated area and just put the keys in a drop box and said 'Farewell' to Tasmania.



Black Swan
(*Cygnus atratus*)



Hobart, Tasmania



Cottage by the lake



Crater Lake Tasmania



Red-faced Liocichla

Birding Trip to Sikkim

By: Sarbjeet Kaur

It was a dream come true when Neerja invited me to join her for a birding adventure in Northeast Sikkim. Without a second thought, I accepted and promptly made the necessary booking. Pushkar Bali also joined us.

We departed from Chandigarh on October 1st, 2024 taking the Jan Shatabdi Express to Delhi. From Terminal 3, we boarded Air India Express at 3:50 PM and arrived in Bagdogra by 6:00 PM. Since it was late in the evening, we decided to stay at the Police Mess in Siliguri for the night.

On October 2nd, we left at 5:30 AM for Takchi Homestay in Rongli, along the Old Silk Route. Although the roads had been widened, heavy rainfall had caused landslides, leading to significant damage. We encountered collapsed and caved-in roads every few kilometers. Despite these setbacks, we managed some birding along the way and eventually reached Takchi Homestay by evening.



Brown Parrotbill
(*Paradoxornis unicolor*)

On October 3rd, we woke up at 3:30 AM. Unfortunately, the weather was not favorable, and we found ourselves waiting until 5:30 AM due to the incessant rain. Nevertheless, we embarked on our birding trip to Gnathang Valley, hoping to spot some lifers. On our way, we stopped at several birding spots in Zuluk and Lungthung. We reached Gnathang Valley by 1:30 PM, and as soon as we entered the last small village, we were thrilled to spot a Red-billed Chough in the residential area.



Streaked Spiderhunter



Nepal Fulvetta
(*Alcippe nipalensis*)



Grey-headed lapwing



Daurian Redstart
(*Phoenicurus aureus*)

We also noticed a large flock of Eurasian Tree Sparrows on the rooftop of a cowshed and 14-15 Asian House Martins nesting nearby. Despite the challenging conditions, we were fortunate to spot several lifers, including the Himalayan Monal, Brown Parrotbill, Fire-tailed Myzornis, Great Parrotbill, and Dark-rumped Rosefinch, among others.

On October 4th, we went birding again along the same route, this time up to Lungthang.

The morning started off clear, and bird activity was promising; however, it soon began to rain again, spoiling our birding plans. We decided to return to Takchi Homestay for breakfast before beginning our journey back to Khimsheeka (Parkha Road) in Pakyong. This area was surrounded by rich vegetation, making it ideal for various species. During our journey to Khimsheeka Homestay, we managed to spot 5-6 Rufous-crowned Prinias in the bushes along the roadside.

On October 5th, we explored the nearby habitat on foot and were fortunate to experience an exciting birding encounter. We had a good sighting of a Red-faced Liocichla, as a pair of these beautiful birds played hide and seek for almost half an hour. After breakfast, we went for more birding on Parkha Road in the surrounding area, which was vibrant with bird activity—definitely worth visiting again.

After lunch, we moved to Dikling, just a few kilometers away in Pakyong, to search for another lifer: the Slaty-backed Forktail. The Dikling River provides a habitat for this bird. Though we saw the Forktail that evening, we couldn't capture a good shot, so we returned the next morning and were fortunate to see a pair hunting along the river. Neerja and Pushkar managed to get some excellent photographs of them.

As we had a flight for Delhi in the evening, we enjoyed breakfast at the homestay in Dikling and started our journey back to Bagdogra.



Following the Flock: Birding with My Inspiration!!...

By: Aryan Bhalla

A Journey into Birdwatching: How My Teacher
Opened the Doorway to a World Full of Birds!

Nisha Vashisht Gupta Ma'am - 'Hamari Chalti Phirti
Encyclopaedia' - A polymath!!

"A teacher's role goes beyond the classroom—they
open our eyes to the wonders of the world. Mine
showed me how to see the world through the eyes
of a bird."



"In the Company of Birds and the Kindred Spirit"

When you planned a Birding field trip with the person who entered you into this
passion!

The person who introduced me to Birding and CBC 4 years back called me to have a
Birding Session with me and her friend from Ahmedabad and our Respected Lalit
Bansal, sir, joined us!



"In the Company of Birds and the Kindred Spirit"

So exciting, so fun, getting to learn along... with another Lifer: Common Greenshank enjoying the company of Lapwings at Sukhna Lake's Regulator End, watching through the monocular, Common Kingfisher, pipits, prinias, starlings, ducks, and more!

Wandering around the fields of Saketri, carefully listening to the crying calls of a Large Grey Babbler, a Common Kingfisher diving for fish, and a Grey Heron basking in the sunshine!

The vibrant colours of a White-breasted Kingfisher or the elegant plumage of a Grey Heron sparked excitement and awe. Fast forward four years, and that passion has only grown.





It all began with an unspoken love for nature that had always been within me for the last 6 years when I was in 7th standard. I remember those moments spent gazing at the sky, the hanging leaves of the trees, watching birds soar, or observing them hop around trees.



My biology teacher, Nisha Ma'am, noticed this quiet fascination of mine. She could see that my love for the outdoors wasn't just about being in nature but about the details – the flutter of wings, the soft chirps, and the vibrant colours of the birds around me.

Recognizing this passion, my teacher did something that changed everything. One day, she mentioned the Chandigarh Bird Club (CBC), which I was unaware of. She knew it would ignite a deeper love for this world of birds that I hadn't fully explored yet. She encouraged me to join and to call to the number she gave to me - Ms. Saroj Gulati Ma'am!



"A Moment of Grace: The Sunbird's Dazzling Ballet."

It's not every day that someone comes into your life and changes it in the most unexpected way. For me, that person was my teacher. She didn't just see a student sitting in a classroom – she saw my potential, my curiosity, and the enthusiasm I had for the world around me, especially for birds and nature, gazing outside the windows. With her generous spirit and kind heart, she introduced me to a passion that would stay with me for a lifetime. She showed me the nest pics she encountered in her house, she mentioned me in her birding blogs.

She stood captivated by the sight of this Purple Sunbird, its iridescent blue feathers gleaming in the sunlight as it hovered mid-air, a perfect symbol of nature's brilliance and the wonder it brings to those who truly see it.

My love for birds wasn't something I had fully realized until she noticed it. I was always fascinated by the flutter of wings, the soft calls of the sparrows outside the window, and the bright feathers of a passing kingfisher calling, but, it was my teacher who truly opened my eyes to the wonders of birding.

She saw something in me—a spark, a deep connection to the natural world—and with her warm encouragement, she led me down a path that has brought me nothing but joy and fulfilment.



A village couple setting out to graze their cows in a pasture on the outskirts of a town in Haryana

Her friend, Ms. Vandana came all the way from Ahmedabad. Without hesitation, I agreed, unaware that this would be the first of many birding adventures with her. The day she suggested we go birdwatching together, I could hardly contain my excitement.

It wasn't just any field trip; it was the beginning of a super adventure which was in my bucket-list. Her dedication and passion for the environment were contagious. She made every moment feel special, pointing out different species with awe, excitement , surprise and patience, and sharing her vast knowledge about each bird we encountered.

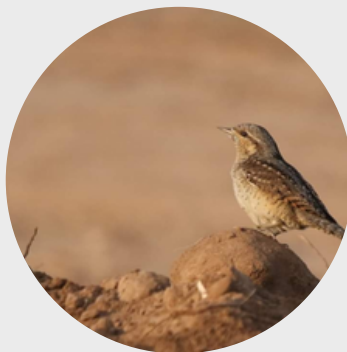
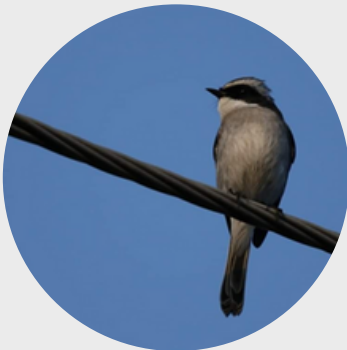


We set off early one morning to Sukhna Lake, a place I had visited many times but never viewed from the lens of a birder. With a monocular in one hand and a guidebook tucked under her arm, my teacher with her friend began pointing out different species that she spotted.

Birds that I had always overlooked were suddenly vivid and full of life. Each sound and each movement became an invitation to learn more, to see more, and to understand the delicate ecosystem of these creatures.

Later, we went to Saketri, a spot that had become a hub for birdwatchers. It was here that I first experienced the true thrill of birding - waking up early, the cool morning air, the whispers among the birds, and the sudden excitement when a rare winter migratory bird was being spotted - a Eurasian Wryneck. It was a world I didn't know existed, and yet, I felt I had always been a part of it.

Her knowledge in every field is quite distinguished I must say-: Mining is a risky activity; the risk factor increases exponentially when it comes to underground mining.



Like Scaly breasted Munias, in the earlier days of gas detection in areas of Jharkhand, warm-blooded birds like munias were commonly used as they were affected much earlier than man by CO₂. Such birds formed essential equipment for the rescue party entering into the mines after an explosion or fire. Marvelous information, which we didn't know!

Through these experiences, I realized that birdwatching isn't just a hobby; it's a doorway into a more mindful way of being. It teaches you about patience, the attentiveness, and a deep appreciation for the natural world too.

My teacher, seeing the potential in my love for nature, had given me a gift—a way to connect with the world in a way I hadn't known before.

Throughout the day, we encountered many more species: the charming Siberian Stonechat, the surprise of a Gray Bushchat, crying calls of Large grey babblers, black restart, silverbills, and, of course, the lifer Common Greenshank that made the trip even more memorable. Each sighting was a celebration of nature's beauty, and Ma'am's passion made the experience all the more special.



As I continue my birding journey, I often think of her and the kindness she showed me. She was more than a teacher—she was a mentor, a guide, and a friend. I can only hope to carry forward the same warmth and generosity she showed me.

Every birdwatching trip since has been an adventure of its own, but none of it would have been possible without the gentle nudge my teacher gave me. She saw something in me that I hadn't yet seen in myself, and for that, I am endlessly grateful.

As I continue on this journey, I carry with me the lessons and memories from that day and every birding adventure after it. May the birds sing forever, and may the bond between teacher and student continue to inspire new journeys into the wild.



"She didn't just teach me about birds; she taught me to see the beauty in every wing that took flight, in every chirp that broke the silence."

May you hear the birdsong Forever!!

"The Call of the Wild: A Bond Forged in Birdsong"

- By Aaryan Bhalla



Rima Dhillon

BIRD IN FOCUS

Sirkeer Malkoha
(*Phaenicopheus leschenaultia*)

By: Rima Dhillon

Of the cuckoo family, the malkohas are a nonparasitic species of this group of birds. It builds a broad saucer like nest of twigs lined with leaves. In spite of its slightly large size (42 cm) its earthy colour along with shy and skulking behaviour makes it almost invisible to observers. The word Mal-koha is derived from Sinhalese word for Red-faced Malkoha meaning flower cuckoo. The Sirkeer Malkoha also carries the moniker of 'mongoose bird' as, rodent-like, it scuttles through the tall clumps of Typha grass (sarkanda). Its name Sirkeer is believed to originate from sirki or chik traditional rural mats and curtains made from this grass. Preferring to run rather than fly, the Sirkeer Malkoha spends much of its time on the ground, hunting its prey of grasshoppers, caterpillars and other such invertebrates. This behaviour is akin to its exotic cousins - Roadrunners of Central America, Anis of Tropical America and Hoatzins of The Amazon, and Coucals.

Though its plumage is unremarkable, the Sirkeer Malkoha boasts some striking features to offset its drab appearance. This includes the two dark bare patches around its eyes, encircled by long curved bristles which protect its bright red irises as it creeps through the low vegetation and a brilliant red beak tipped with yellow. The brightness of the beak is an important feature considered by females while choosing a mate as the levels of Carotinoids present in the body are responsible for the red colour to the beak and also signal better health and immune functions.

Those more sympathetically inclined toward the bird prefer to call it 'lipstick bird'. Globally, there are fourteen species of Malkoha primarily inhabiting South and South-east Asia, from the Phillipines to Indonesia. Of these, three species can be found in the Indian subcontinent. The Sirkeer Malkoha inhabits the grasslands and thorny habitats ranging from Pakistan to Nepal. In India its range is from the Himalayan foothills (up to 1800 m) across the states of Rajasthan and Gujarat down to Maharashtra. Around Chandigarh it has been photographed at Saketri, Nagarvan, New Chandigarh, Sukhna Wildlife Sanctuary and as far up as Chakkimodh.

Sirkeer Malkoha of the east is darker and larger than its north-western counterpart which is pale with yellowish throat and breast. During courtship both the male and the female display their tails by fanning them out and holding them upright. However, there is no melodious song to accompany this display except for a series of clicking and buzzing sounds from both the sexes.

Although listed as a species of "Least Concern" the Sirkeer Malkoha faces potential threats from the continuous degradation of its habitat which could alter this status any time.



Sirkeer Malkoha
(*Phaenicopheus leschenaultia*)

ANNUAL DR. SALIM ALI BIRTH ANNIVERSARY WATERFOWL CENSUS, SUKHNA LAKE, CHANDIGARH NOVEMBER 2024

S No.	Name of Bird	L-1	L-2	L-3	L-4	L-5	TOTAL
1	Lesser Whistling Duck					13	13
2	Northern Shoveller					6	6
3	Gadwall		34		18	70	122
4	Eurasian Wigeon		6		6	13	25
5	Indian Spot-billed Duck		5	3	7	48	63
6	Mallard					4	4
7	Northern Pintail					9	9
8	Common Pochard		46		4	6	56
9	Red-crested Pochard		5				5
10	Little grebe		3		1		4
11	Tufted Duck		9				9
12	Eurasian Moorhen			18	3	22	43
13	Grey-headed Swamphe		13	8			21
14	Eurasian Coot		27	2			29
15	White-breasted Waterhen		2	7	6	2	11
16	Black-winged Stilt	2		33 + 65	3	9	112
17	Red-wattled Lapwing	2	2	7			11
18	Green Sandpiper		2		4	1	7
19	Little Cormorant	1	1	1	3	1	7
20	Great Cormorant		1	3	19	8	31
21	Grey Heron		1		1	2	4
22	Purple Heron					2	2
23	Great Egret		1				1
24	Cattle Egret		3	7			10
25	Little Egret	1		5	1	1	7
26	Indian Pond Heron		6	1	2	4	13
27	Black-crowned Night Heron		19	4	6		29
28	White-throated Kingfisher	1		1	4	2	8
29	Common Kingfisher			1			1
30	Ruddy Shelduck	4			4	33	41
31	Pied Kingfisher				1		1

L-1 CANTEEN TO TOWER

L- 2 TOWER TO WATERLILY POND/REGULATOR

L-3 REGULATOR TO DOWNSTREAM

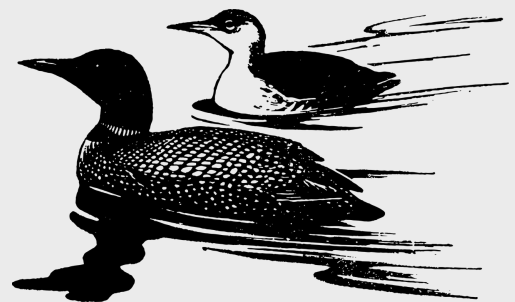
L-4 BANDH (LEFT & RIGHT OF T-POINT)

L-5 BIRD HIDE



ARBOREAL SPECIES

- 1 *White-browed Wagtail*
- 2 *Lesser Whitethroat*
- 3 *Blue Whistling thrush*
- 4 *Red Junglefowl*
- 5 *Indian Peafowl*
- 6 *Taiga Flycatcher*
- 7 *Grey Wagtail*
- 8 *Yellow Wagtail*
- 9 *Black Kite*
- 10 *Rufous treepie*
- 11 *Hair-crested Drongo*
- 12 *Black Drongo*
- 13 *Common Chiffchaff*
- 14 *Red wattled Lapwing*
- 15 *House Crow*
- 16 *Red-vented Bulbul*
- 17 *Greater Coucal*
- 18 *Common Myna*
- 19 *Pied Myna*
- 20 *Wire-tailed Swallow*
- 21 *Nepal House Martin*
- 22 *Shikra*
- 23 *Purple Sunbird*
- 24 *Scaly-breasted Munia*
- 25 *Indian Silverbill*
- 26 *Humes' Warbler*



Through the Lens



Asian Green Bee-eater
(*Merops orientalis*)

Jaideep S Grewal



Crested Serpent Eagle
(*Spilornis cheela*)

Rima Dhillon



Greater Scaup
(*Aythya marila*)

Pushkar Bali



Siberian Rubythroat
(*Calliope calliope*)

Jaideep Grewal



Swamp Francolin
(*Francolinus gularis*)

Sarbjeet Kaur



Green-tailed Sunbird
(*Aethopyga nipalensis*)

Parveen Nain



CHANDIGARH BIRD CLUB



Chandigarh Bird Club® is a registered organisation formed by a group of local birdwatchers. The idea is to record the local avifauna, 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.



Tawny Owl
(*Strix aluco*)

---Karan Toor



President :- Rima Dhillon
Vice President :- Narbir Singh Kahlon
Hony Secretary :- Amandeep S Channa
Joint Secretary :- Navjit Singh
Hony Treasurer :- Mahesh Garg



Editor :- Rima Dhillon

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