

Whispering Wings®

Newsletter of the Chandigarh Bird Club®

Volume 9 Issue 4 — April to June 2025



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Front Cover - Zitting Cisticola (*Cisticola juncidis*) by Lalit Mohan Bansal
Winner of Breeding Birds Photography Competition



Sirkeer Malkoha (*Phaenicophaeus leschenaultii*) by Amandeep Singh

From the Editor's Desk

Rima Dhillon



The wildlife sanctuaries are once more in the news, with the government trying to divert some areas of forest land or cut right through core areas of sanctuaries in the name of progress or tourism. Various highway projects in Maharashtra and Odisha, ropeways in Uttarakhand, and defence installations in the eco-fragile region of Ladakh will result in hundreds of hectares of sanctuary land, tens of thousands of trees, and numerous waterbodies being lost. Important tiger reserves like Kanha and Kapilash — an important elephant habitat — will come under the bulldozers.

Without careful thought and checks and balances in place, these projects could wreak havoc on the wildlife of our country. The latest issue of *Whispering Wings* carries trip reports from some great birding areas visited by Jaideep Singh Grewal and Mohit Kohli.

The breeding season in the region around Chandigarh, starting in early April, witnessed the arrival of species that come solely for nesting. The early morning calls of the Indian Pitta, the Indian Golden Oriole with its flashing yellow wings, and the ethereal Indian Paradise Flycatcher flitting among the green leaves herald their presence — to the delight of birders. Suddenly, birding and wildlife-related social media groups are flooded with their photographs.

It is indeed heartening to see that these species still find the habitat in this region conducive to a successful breeding season — and we live in hope that it stays this way in the years to come.

Happy Birding!

Secretary's Report

Amandeep Singh



This last quarter of the year has been another exceptional and important one for Chandigarh Bird Club. This quarter has involved the Club in many projects. But it has also been marked by the death of a friend of the Club.



In April, Chandigarh Bird Club was invited by Cordia Group of Colleges, Sanghol. Cordia Group was established by Lord Diljit Singh Rana under his charitable trust. The administration invited us to establish their own bird club. This was done at the behest of Mr Kamlesh Sharma IFS, GCVO, former Secretary-General of the Commonwealth of Nations and former Indian High Commissioner to the United Kingdom, who is also on the trust's board. CBC President — Rima Dhillon, CBC Secretary — Amandeep Singh, and Executive Member — Sarbjeet Kaur were received by Lord Rana and Dr Urmil Verma. A lively discussion was held with heads of various departments of the institution — agriculture, botanical science, environmental science, and the principals of junior and senior schools, among others. A basic framework was decided upon, which included providing information for the environment club and procurement of educational material for birdwatching.



In May, the Club was again invited by Cordia to set up the bird club itself. CBC President — Rima Dhillon, Executive Member and former CBC President — Professor Mitinderpal Singh Sekhon, and CBC Secretary — Amandeep Singh were received by Lord Rana, Mr Kamlesh Sharma and Dr Urmil Verma. This time, the discussion was around the purchase of binoculars and field guides and documenting the species in the campus of the college. The bird club was formally established and named Cordia Bird Club (Babli's Birders), after Mr Sharma's wife, who was a passionate birder herself. Professor Sekhon also emphasised the importance of imparting knowledge of birds and birdwatching in Punjabi. It was also proposed by him that members of the Club would visit the campus and photograph the species found there for the college to print and display in their classrooms. To thank us, Mr Sharma gifted us with a coffee-table book 'Birds of Antara', a book on birds in Antara in Dehradun. In turn, we gifted them with nest boxes.



In June, Chandigarh Bird Club was invited by Plaksha University for a birdwalk for their students. Rima Dhillon and Sarbjeet Kaur took the students for the walk. CBC field trip was held at Thapli. The summer heat, which had plagued us in the earlier months, was somewhat lessened, or was not as bothersome as it would have otherwise been after being cooped in. Members participated heartily. The quest was to find the Indian Pitta (*Pitta brachyura*) which has been seen in this area for over four years. The detailed report of the field trip is in the following pages.

In Memoriam



Sunjoy Monga

1962 - 2025

Sunjoy Monga was a wildlife photographer, conservationist, naturalist, and writer. He served as a member of the Bombay Natural History Society, the executive committee of the Mumbai Metropolitan Area Environmental Improvement Society, and the Maharashtra Nature Park Society. He was also an honorary Warden of Sanjay Gandhi National Park.

Monga began his naturalist career in the early 1990s, when he led nature trail walks for the BNHS and served as associate editor of the conservation magazine Sanctuary Asia between 1990-94.

Monga was the first green activist to raise the issue of rampant destruction of nearly 85% of wetlands in Uran in 2006-07 and urged all nature lovers to protect the surviving wetlands — or flamingos may disappear forever from our coast.

Monga conceived in 2005, co-managed until his death, the India BirdRaces, an annual initiative now renamed WINGS. The program



brings together birdwatchers on a designated day to record sightings, particularly in urban regions, over the course of a day. Under this banner, Chandigarh Bird Club has conducted the Chandigarh BirdRace every year since 2010.

Monga's School Nature Education Programs in the form of 'Chhoton ka Funda — Hara Banao Project', and 'Young Rangers' reached out and interacted with several students of over a hundred schools in Mumbai, getting thousands of youngsters to take an interest in the great outdoors, while informing them of the crucial role nature plays in our day-to-day lives.

Monga has written prolifically, in newspapers and magazines, and has penned several books — *City Forest*, *Wildlife Reserves of India*, *The Mumbai Nature Guide*, *Birds of Mumbai*, *Journeys Through India's Last Wild Places*, *Mumbai Safari*, and *Birds of the Mumbai Region*.

Monga's many contributions to the conservation of wildlife in India, especially in Mumbai, have earned him the name 'BirdMan'. He passed away on 28 May 2025 at the age of 63, after fighting a nine-year battle with blood cancer. Chandigarh Bird Club and all its members mourn the loss of Sunjoy Monga greatly.

Bird in Focus - Eurasian Wryneck

Rima Dhillon



A strange-looking bird with equally strange behaviour and one of the most unusual names — the Eurasian Wryneck, also called the Northern Wryneck, is truly fascinating. It breeds in the temperate regions of Europe. And migrates to Asia and Africa during winter. Of the six recognised subspecies, two are found breeding in India: *Jynx torquilla chinensis* in the Indian Subcontinent up to Northeast India, and *Jynx torquilla himalayana* in the Western Himalayas. The only other Wryneck found in the world is the Red-necked Wryneck (*Jynx ruficollis*), which is found only in sub-Saharan Africa.

What sets this bird apart for birders, aside from its twisting neck and snakelike movements to deter predators, is its name rooted in folklore. ***Jynx*** comes from Latin, meaning to cast a magical spell or curse, and is linked to a Greek myth wherein a character named Lynx tried to enchant Zeus. Hera, Zeus's wife, turned Lynx into a bird; thus, to be “jinxed” came to mean being cursed. ***Torquilla*** means “to twist”, a nod to the bird's habit of rotating its head up to a hundred and eighty degrees.

Being a member of the woodpecker family, the Wryneck similarly has a large head, zygodactyl feet, and a long sticky tongue used to extract ants and other insects. However, unlike true woodpeckers, it does not drum or excavate a nest (it uses old woodpecker nests and natural cavities) and it lacks stiff tail feathers and thus prefers to perch on branches rather than cling upright to tree trunks.

The clutch can have anywhere from five to a dozen off-white eggs laid from May to June. The species is monogamous, and both parents share the duties of raising the young until they leave the nest.

Remarkably, the Eurasian Wryneck is the only known migratory woodpecker, undertaking long-distance flights from temperate Europe and Asia to sub-Saharan Africa and South Asia each year.

In the IUCN Red List of threatened species, this species is considered one of least concern. However, it has shown a reduction in numbers and range in the last few decades owing to loss of its natural habitat, such as orchards and open forests, and owing to changes in agricultural practices. Furthermore, climatic changes may have resulted in too much rain during the breeding season.



Lifer in Kasauli

The Himalayan Wood Owl (*Strix nivicolum*)

Sarbjeeet Kaur

I've been birding in Kasauli for almost fifteen years, yet I had never come across the elusive Himalayan Wood Owl until now. Also known as the Himalayan Owl, this forest-dwelling species ranges from the Himalayas to Korea and Taiwan. It is a medium-sized owl with a rounded head lacking ear tufts. Its head is beautifully mottled with shades of grey, dark brown, and light brown, while the body is light brown adorned with dark brown and yellow patches that form thin vertical lines across the breast. The flight feathers are dark brown with light brown spots near the tips, and its wings bear light brown and white horizontal bands. Both sexes appear morphologically similar.



This owl was once considered a subspecies of the Tawny Owl (*Strix aluco*), but it is now recognised as a distinct species. Being nocturnal, it typically begins hunting at dusk, perching silently in trees. However, what I observed was rather unique. During my

stay from 6 to 9 June 2025, I found it perching daily atop a duct in a small niche high up about 35 feet in the wooden ceiling of a hotel porch. Instead of hunting, it seemed to be simply relaxing, perhaps finding the spot safe and secluded. Occasionally, it even visited during the day, sometimes around noon, only to vanish again before dawn.

The hotel staff and local residents told me that sightings of this owl in the area are quite rare. Interestingly, the spot it chose is usually occupied by feral pigeons, who surprisingly appeared to tolerate this new and unusual guest. It felt as though the owl was testing the space, perhaps considering it for nesting. Their breeding season usually spans from late winter to spring (December through April), during which they nest in tree cavities or rock crevices. This high wooden structure might seem like a perfect safe haven to raise a family.

The only noticeable rivalry is from Common Mynas, who nest in the roof crevices above the porch and tend to harass the owl during the day. Still, I hope this beautiful bird stays. Though I couldn't manage a good photograph during my four-day visit, the experience itself was unforgettable. It was a blessing to witness this stunning creation of nature, an unexpected lifer that filled my heart with awe and gratitude. All my good wishes are with this quiet, dignified visitor.

Warm regards.



Breeding Birds Photography Competition



Black-rumped Flameback (*Dinopium benghalense*) by Jasbir Randhawa



Common Rosefinch (*Carpodacus erythrinus*) by Gurjeet Virk



Rose-ringed Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*) by
Vikas Sharma



Rufous-bellied Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos hyperythrus*) by Gurjeet Virk



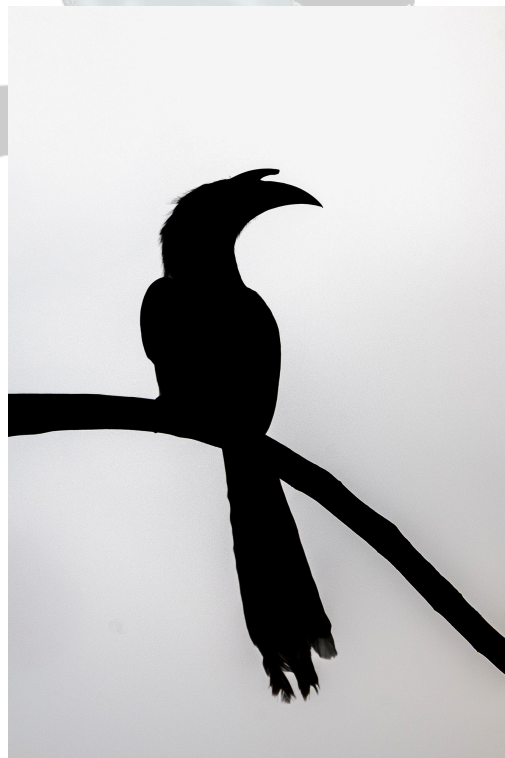
Indian Pitta (*Pitta brachyura*) by Gurjeet Virk



Indian Scops Owl (*Otus bakkamoena*) by Rima Dhillon



Himalayan Bluetail (*Tarsiger rufilatus*)
by Gurjeet Virk



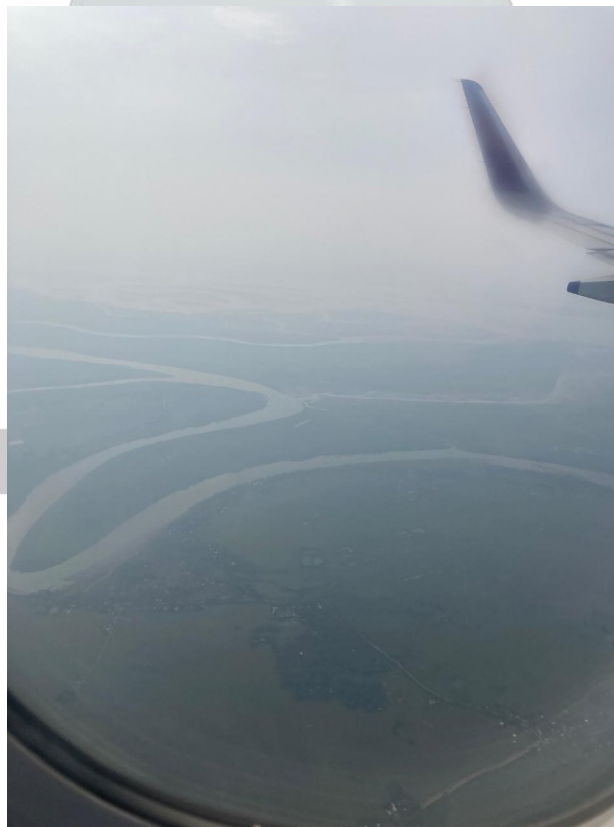
Indian Grey Hornbill (*Ocyrocus birostris*) by Vikas Sharma

Escape to Mishmi Hills

Jaideep S Grewal

Sitting in Chandigarh, one wonders if places like Arunachal Pradesh are within striking distance or not for birding. The variety of species in the North East that one discovers through various social forums or by glancing through pages of a bird book gets the birding juices flowing.

Having been born in Assam (Tinsukia is on my passport as place of birth) and leaving this place 50 years ago, any opportunity to visit again is gladly accepted. So, I signed up with Avian Trips for a five-day birding trip to the Mishmi Hills in Arunachal Pradesh from 18 to 23 April 2025. These hills are in the Lower Dibang Valley, just across the Brahmaputra River. From Chandigarh, I took a flight to Dibrugarh and stayed overnight at Tinsukia before joining the rest of the group.



Sources of the Brahmaputra

We drove out to Roing town in Arunachal once the others arrived from Delhi and Kolkata on morning flights. Assam roads were like riverbeds in the old days, and I was delighted to see the new highway, making the journey very comfortable. I was born in the tea estate group hospital of Brooke Bond Company at Beesakopie Tea Estate near Doom Dooma town, and to my surprise, the new highway passed right through these tea gardens. We were also driving past the Samdang Golf Course and Doom Dooma Planter's Club. I had spent 13 years of my childhood here, and we were speeding through it with memories flowing rapidly within me. A very nostalgic moment indeed. We were a

group of five along with our guides and drivers in two Scorpios, and there was no time to stop. I inwardly promised myself to come here again with my family sometime in the future to relive those precious moments that seem so far away.



Low traffic on the new highway



Lush green tea gardens along the highway

The two-hour journey actually took us four hours, with many birding stops for the Great Myna, Ashy Woodswallow, Indo-Chinese Roller, Gray-backed Shrike, Asian Barred Owlet, Striated Grassbird, and other birds. Along the way, we crossed the splendid Bhupen Hazarika bridge spanning 9.15 kms over the Lohit River. When we were living in Assam, this bridge did not exist. However, Sadiya village is a point from where this bridge starts, and we would go from there in boats driven by outboard engines for overnight camping. This could be done only in the winter, on islands created in the midst of the ever-changing course of the river. Good memories of good times.

Lunch was in a roadside place with Assamese thalis and non-veg add-ons. The fresh fish was too good to resist. Soon we were at the state border and stopped to get our Inner Line Permits.

It was nearing 4 pm when we reached the outskirts of Roing. Time being precious to all birders, we decided to do some quick grassland birding before checking into our place of stay. At the Dambuk grasslands, we were welcomed by a Chinese Rubythroat sitting on the edge of the dirt track in the riverbed that we had just turned into. Next, the Chestnut-capped Babbler, Jerdon's Babbler, and Black-breasted Parrotbill entertained us in the tall grass and tested our photography skills with the short time that they would give us. It was challenging to get clear shots without the grass getting in the way!!! There were many birds in the forest close by, but we did not target them on day 1. The common Red-whiskered Bulbuls and Siberian Stonechats were added distractions that evening. It got dark pretty quickly as we were in the eastern part of the country. We had to quickly learn to adjust to early sunsets and very, very early sunrises.



Black-breasted Parrotbill (*Paradoxornis flavirostris*)

We were put up at Yatri Niwas in Roing instead of the usual Frogmouth Camp, a short drive away from Roing, where birding groups normally stay. But due to some water availability and other issues, plans were changed a few days before the trip. We had an early dinner as we had a 4 a.m. start the next day, targeting the higher altitude species. In fact, we were going to stay at Yatri Niwas for the next four days as The Coffee House (another guest house) located closer to the high Mayodia Pass was also having accommodation issues. This would make us travelling more distance every day, but we



Chestnut-capped Babbler (*Timalia pileata*)

would have a more comfortable night's rest, good food, and a nice bath. Flexibility and adaptation are needed when out on such trips!!!



Yatri Niwas, Roing

On day 2, we drove up the Mishmi Hills on a good-surfaced road for about 1 ½ hours before settling down to wait for the Blyth's Tragopan. It was calling a bit higher up from where we were sitting and refused to come down. We moved on along the road, which had very little traffic except for a few other birding groups and an odd military vehicle. This road goes to Anini about 200 kms away, and vehicle movement does increase a bit during the day, but still is quite low. A new road is being made to Anini, which would make this section great for undisturbed birding again.



Snow-capped mountains behind Mishmi Hills

Arunachal jungles are thick, and all birding in the hills is from the road. Leaving the Tragopan location, we spotted Yellow-cheeked Tits dancing around in the trees, attracting us, but we were told to ignore them. A hunting flock of small birds gave us quick views of Ashy Crowned Warblers, Whistler's Warbler, Chestnut-crowned Warblers, Blyth's Leaf Warbler, White-naped Yuhina, and Stripe-throated Yuhinas. Our next target was the Ward's Trogon at a section before the high-altitude pass. This bird too eluded us. The jungle had plenty of other species, and over the next hour or so, we saw Beautiful Sibias, Striated Laughingthrushes, Streak-throated Barwings, Chestnut-tailed Minlas, Green-tailed Sunbirds, Rufous-winged Fulvettas, and Manipur Fulvettas, along with a loud Collared Owlet.



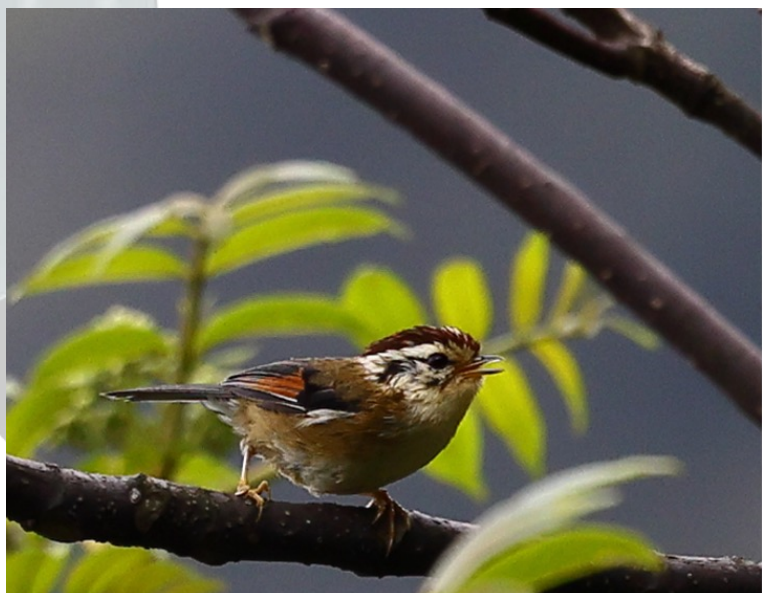
Manipur Fulvetta (*Fulvetta manipurensis*)

White-naped Yuhina (*Yuhina bakeri*)



Stripe-throated Yuhina (*Yuhina gularis*)

Rufous-winged Fulvetta (*Alcippe castaneiceps*)



We reached Mayodia Pass at an elevation of 8,711 feet for breakfast to find the one and only Maya dhaba shut. We were all very hungry and had to speed across another 6 km to the 65km dhaba for a welcoming soupy-style Maggi meal spiced up with some chilies and boiled eggs thrown in. This area has two dhabas and a few homes nearby, with all travellers stopping here for a break. The dhabas are neat and clean with fresh, tasty food, but with a limited menu. There were Mishmi tribals seen near some houses from a distance, heading out to their fields in the jungles with their baskets and machetes slung over their shoulders. These people maintain a good relationship with the environment, but do follow nomadic agricultural practices. The Mithun or Gayal, which looks like a Gaur or Bison and is probably its descendant, is seen at many points on the road and is their domestic cattle. They interestingly do not milk them or use them for agriculture but do protect them.



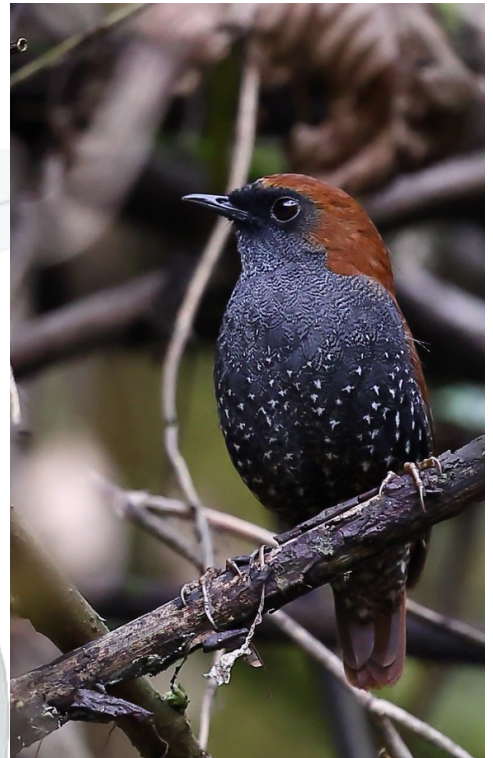
Mithun or Gayal (*Bos frontalis*)

After filling our bellies and satisfying our chai needs, we were enthusiastic for the next lot of birds. Descending on the other side of the hill, we stopped on hearing the call of the Gould's Shortwing. This bird did not disappoint us and gave us some good views. We walked along the road to find a pair of Black-eared Shrike Babblers close by. During the next few hours, we saw Black-faced Warblers, Golden Warblers, Rufous-capped Babblers, Yellow-throated Fulvettas, Himalayan Cutias, Rusty-fronted Barwings, a Small Niltava, and a Pygmy Flycatcher.

Lunch was again at the 65 km dhaba with veg and non-veg thallis quite well prepared. Post lunch, we walked up towards Mayodia Pass, sighting the Large Hawk Cuckoo immediately. This was followed by a Yellow-browed Tit, Golden-breasted Fulvettas,



Rufous-capped Babbler (*Stachyridopsis ruficeps*)



Gould's Shortwing
(*Brachypteryx stellata*)



Black-eared Shrike Babbler
(*Pteruthius melanotis*)



Pygmy Flycatcher (*Muscicapella hodgsoni*)

Gray-sided Laughingthrush, Striated Bulbul, and some more fulvettas, sunbirds, tits, barwings, and babblers that we had seen earlier. Around dusk, we tried looking for the

Himalayan Owl on its usual perches but could not spot it. The Hodgson's Frogmouth found at lower altitudes was also not obliging.



Golden-breasted Fulvetta (*Lioparus chrysotis*)



Yellow-throated Fulvetta (*Alcippe cinerea*)

Day 3 started very early again with a 1.5-hour drive. Once again, we heard the early calls of the Tragopan but no views. Our next target was the Mishmi Wren Babbler, which was a very exciting bird to see and an even more difficult bird to photograph. The Himalayan Shortwing called out quite close to where we were and gave us a very brief sighting. While driving up further, we saw a flight of Gold-naped Finches settle down along the roadside before flying into the nearby bushes.

We birded through the day with brief spells of rain and mist interrupting us. The mist can be very thick at times, affecting the lighting for capturing good photos. The big target left for the day was the Ward's Trogon, for which we had to go to specific search areas, and after some struggles and wait, we finally saw a male. Other groups had

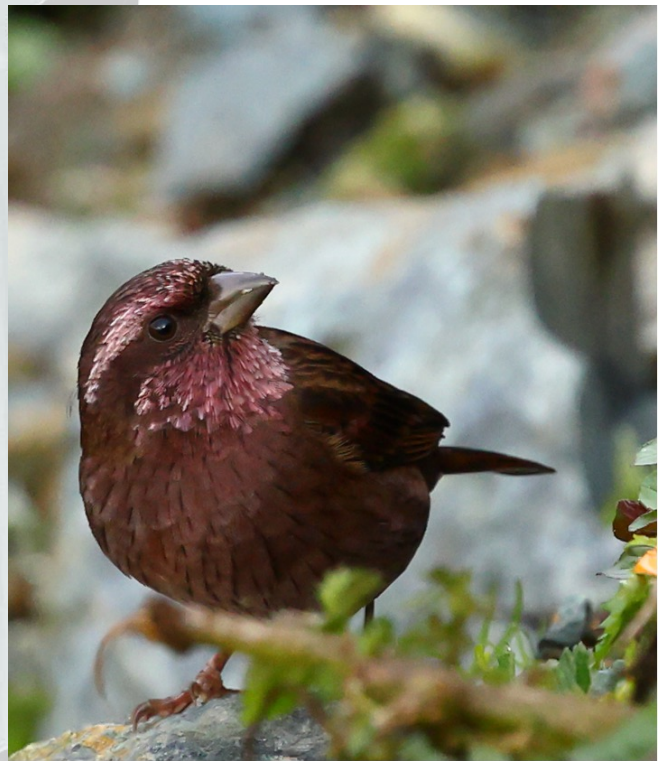
seen the female a few days ago. Apart from the birds seen the previous day, our highlights were Darjeeling Woodpecker, Long-billed Thrush, Red-throated Thrush, and Dark-rumped Rosefinch.



Mishmi Wren-babbler (*Spelaeornis badeigularis*)



Ward's Trogon (*Harpactes wardi*)



Dark-rumped Rosefinch (*Carpodacus edwardsii*)

Day 4 started with a surprise – while we were in the parking lot at 4 a.m. waiting for the Scorpions to pick us up, we saw a very small bird lying stunned on the ground

after hitting a tall water tank structure. It was a Black-backed Dwarf Kingfisher headed out to the river close by. Luckily, it was only shaken to get up and fly again. Surprising how it banged against an obstacle so large, but I guess it may have been chased or distracted by something else.

Going up, we finally saw the Blyth's Tragopan. We were 15 minutes earlier than the previous two days and sighted it going up a path. It was not a close sighting but fulfilled our present desires!! Before breakfast, we stopped on hearing the Long-billed Wren-Babbler and got some record shots as it refused to come out into the open. Striated Bulbuls, Rusty-fronted Barwings, the two Niltavas, some Yuhinas, Himalayan Cutia, Black-throated Sunbirds, and an Orange-bellied Leafbird are what we sighted.



Blyth's Tragopan (*Tragopan blythii*)

Rufous-fronted Barwing (*Actinodura egertoni*)



We came down to mid-elevation for breakfast to a small village by the name of Tiwari Gaon. The dhaba with a terrace overlooking the valley had a very peaceful, serene setting, which lulled us into silence after the meal. The guide awakened our somber mood to show us a pair of Little Buntings on a blossom tree in the village. We then continued to walk downhill along the road and got to see some Beautiful Nuthatches at work, a short distance away. Silver-eared Mesias were busy chasing each other in the bushes off the road and finally did come out onto some higher branches. A Bronzed Drongo was nesting very close to the road and we viewed it without disturbing it at all. The few raptors that were sighted flying around were the Black Eagle and Crested Serpent Eagle. A Square-tailed Drongo was performing acrobatic feats on the tall trees in the distance and some Gray-chinned & Scarlet Minivets were sighted as we walked along. There was a repeat of birds we had seen earlier as this jungle is lush green and full of life everywhere we stopped or walked around!



Beautiful Nuthatch (*Sitta formosa*)

Silver-eared Mesia (*Leiothrix argentea*)



As we came further down the hill, we started seeing Long-tailed Sibias, Golden-throated Barbets, more Bronzed and Square-tailed Drongos, Striated & White-throated Bulbuls, Mesias, Minivets, Nuthatches, Flycatchers, and Sunbirds.

We drove back to Roing for lunch and followed it by evening birding by the grasslands. A Lesser Coucal was seen from a distance and so was a Striated Grassbird. Rosy Minivets, Mountain Bulbuls, Great Mynas & Rufous-necked Laughingthrushes were seen from a bridge overlooking the grassland below.



Rosy Minivet (*Pericrocotus roseus*)

On day 5 we did not have to leave at an unearthly 4 a.m. and had an easy 5:30 a.m. start. Birding was in the foothills just 15 minutes from Roing. The first section of bamboo revealed a lot – Pale-billed and Gray-headed Parrotbills, Red-billed Scimitar Babbler, Collared Treepie, Common Green Magpie, Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo, Streaked Spiderhunter and White-hooded Babblers. We then drove up attentively listening for the Cachar Wedge-billed Babbler, another must-see bird in the area. Sure enough, we got them in 2 locations before breakfast. While having breakfast at the dhaba we spotted a Brown-flanked Bush Warbler directly below us, a Taiga Flycatcher hunting for flying insects and a Tickell's Leaf Warbler flitting around the bushes. Subsequently we sighted a Little Pied Flycatcher high up against the skyline, a Rufous-backed Sibia clambering up the trunk of a thick tree, Gray-cheeked Warbler in a hunting group of small birds, a White-browed Piculet, a Mountain Tailorbird, a Barred Cuckoo Dove and a Hodgson's Hawk-Cuckoo.

In the hour before we wound up the hill birding to head to Roing for lunch, we saw the smart White-browed Shrike-babbler, Black-winged Cuckooshrikes and Olive-backed Pipits.



Brown-flanked Bush Warbler (*Horornis fortipes*)



Hodgson's Hawk-Cuckoo (*Hierococcyx nisicolor*)



Cachar Wedge-billed Babbler (*Stachyris roberti*)



White-browed Shrike-Babbler (*Pteruthius flaviscapis*)

We then left Arunachal to drive back to Tinsukia, Assam, with a stopover at Maguri Beel for some evening birding.



Lesser Adjutant (*Leptoptilos javanicus*)



Brown Boobook (*Ninox scutulata*)



Oriental Scops Owl (*Otus sunia*)

On our drive in the plains of Assam, we did not miss out on the Lesser Adjutant, at its favourite spot in open grass fields feeding. Maguri Beel is more a winter destination for migratory birds, but we were here to target some owls in the night. We went to a village adjoining the tea gardens and got to see the Brown Boobook and Oriental Scops Owl.

This concluded a wonderful and exciting five-day birding trip to the northeast. For me, it was just the beginning of more places to explore. I had great company during this trip - an architect, a young techie, and a senior corporate guy from Delhi, a smart middle-aged businessman from Kolkata, our group leader cum bird photographer from Mumbai, our young guide from Tinsukia, and two enthusiastic drivers from different parts of Assam. The experience was memorable – the journey, new places, habitat, cultures, sights, smells, flavours, fascinating bird life, challenging photography for light/speed/settings - and finally, an addition of 55 lifers!!! All in all, a great birding & travel experience... and with a lot of learning too!!!

Birding Trip to Ladakh

Mohit Kohli

Our journey began from Chandigarh, with the primary objective of exploring high-altitude avifauna across the Ladakh region. The route covered a diverse range of habitats from alpine meadows and riverine valleys to arid cold deserts, offering exceptional birding opportunities.



Hanle

We drove from Chandigarh to Jispa, a picturesque hamlet in Lahaul nestled along the Bhagar River. En route, brief stops near Keylong yielded early sightings of



Brown Dipper (*Cinclus pallasii*)

Himalayan Griffon, Yellow-billed Chough, and Brown Dipper. Jispa's riverside location

and willow thickets proved to be productive, with sightings of Blue Rock Thrush, Plumbeous Redstart, and White-capped Redstart.



Horned Lark (*Eremophila alpestris*)

The next leg took us to Pang, a remote transit stop surrounded by barren mountain slopes and cold desert terrain. Though the altitude began to challenge us, we recorded scattered sightings of Horned Lark and Hume's Short-toed Lark. The drive from Pang to Leh via Tanglang La provided brief glimpses of Red-billed Chough.



Great Rosefinch (*Carpodacus rubicilla*)

In Leh, we took a brief acclimatisation break and explored the Indus River stretch near Shey and Thiksey. These wetlands hosted Ruddy Shelduck, Common Merganser, and several species of waders and warblers. A short trip to Hemis added Red-fronted Serin and Great Rosefinch to our checklist.

From Leh, we proceeded to Hanle, a premier birding destination in the Changthang plateau. The vast grasslands, marshes, and riverbeds of Hanle were alive with Black-necked Cranes, Bar-headed Geese, Tibetan Lark, Robin Accentor, and Horned Larks in large flocks.



Black-necked Crane (*Grus nigricollis*)

Robin Accentor (*Prunella rubeculoides*)



Black-winged Snowfinch (*Montifringilla adamsi*)

Chukar Partridge (*Alectoris chukar*)



Our journey continued to Umling La, the world's highest motorable road at over 19,000 ft. The terrain was stark and barren, yet we were fortunate to spot Brandt's Mountain Finch, Desert Wheatear, and Black-winged Snowfinches in brief windows of calm. The extreme altitude limited bird activity, but the sighting of Hill Pigeon, Blue

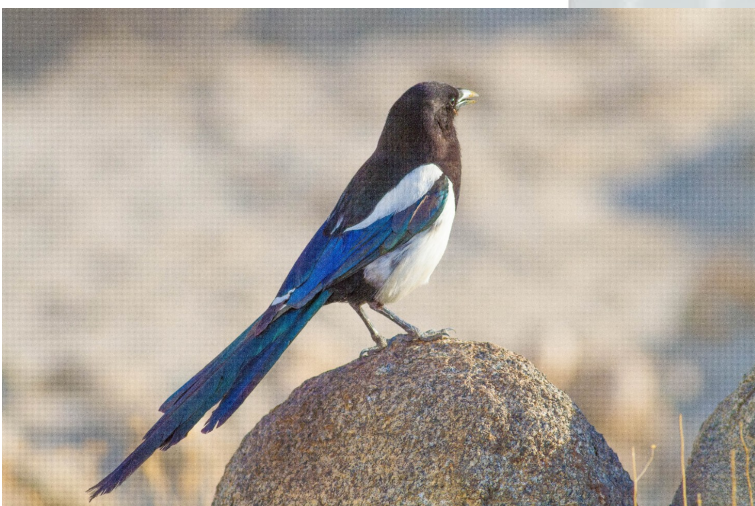


Güldenstädt's Redstart (*Phoenicurus erythrogastus*)

Sheep (Bharal), and Tibetan Wild Ass added excitement to the day.



Ruddy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*)



Eurasian Magpie (*Pica pica*)



Common Merganser (*Mergus merganser*)



Kiang (*Equus kiang*)

We returned to Hanle for a night halt, and then travelled to Puga Valley, known for its geothermal springs and wetlands. Puga marshes also offered sightings of Guldenstadt's Redstart, a winter visitor occasionally found in high-altitude summer zones.



Bharal (*Pseudois nayaur*)

Retracing our route back to Pang, Jispa, and then to Manali, we made brief birding stops and logged several high-altitude residents along the way. The lush forests near Manali offered a welcome change in habitat with species such as Verditer Flycatcher, Grey-winged Blackbird, and Rufous Sibia.

Overall, the expedition was highly rewarding, with over 45 species recorded across a wide altitudinal gradient. The journey reaffirmed the ecological richness of the Trans-Himalayan region and the critical importance of preserving these fragile habitats.



Lamayuru Monastery

The Joy of Photographing Large Birds

Lalit Mohan Bansal



Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristata*)

Over the past few years, bird photography has become more than just a hobby for me - it has become a passion. In these more than three years, I've had the opportunity to photograph a wide range of bird species, from the tiny and agile Common Tailorbird and Common Kingfisher to the majestic and imposing Sarus Crane, Painted Stork, Himalayan Griffon, and Purple Heron. Each bird offers its photographic challenge, but one thing I've noticed is that larger birds are generally easier to spot, track, and photograph compared to their smaller counterparts.



Greater Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus roseus*) at
Chandu Wetlands near Gurgaon

Over the years, I've been fortunate to photograph several stunning large bird species in their natural habitats. Each of these encounters left a lasting impression, not just visually but emotionally. Photographing them wasn't just about getting the perfect shot—it was about the experience, the moment, and the connection with nature.



Great Egret (*Ardea alba*) at Keoladeo National Park, Bharatpur

I'd like to share my experiences and insights into photographing large birds and why they often make better subjects - especially for bird photographers who are still learning the craft.

The Appeal of Large Birds in Photography



Spot-billed Pelican (*Pelecanus philippensis*) at Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary, Karnataka

Something is awe-inspiring about seeing a large bird in the wild. The sight of a Great Egret gliding silently over a wetland or a Himalayan Griffon soaring against a mountain backdrop never fails to stir the soul. These birds command attention, not just in real life but also in photographs. Their sheer size, dramatic wingspans, and distinctive postures make them excellent subjects for impactful compositions. Large birds often evoke a sense of grace, power, and freedom, all of which are qualities photographers strive to capture.

Easier to Spot and Frame



Painted Stork (*Mycteria leucocephala*) Mote
Majra pond, Mohali



One of the first things I noticed when photographing large birds is how much easier they are to spot. Unlike small birds that blend into dense foliage or flit about rapidly, large birds often stand or move in open landscapes—wetlands, grasslands, lakesides, where they are visible even from a distance. This makes them easier to track and frame in your viewfinder, especially in natural light.

For instance, I remember spotting a group of Painted Storks at a wetland during sunrise. Their long necks and distinct pink-edged wings were impossible to miss, even from 200 meters away. With a bit of patience and a slow approach, I managed to capture some stunning shots without needing to move too close.

Slower Movements, More Predictable Behaviour

Another key advantage is their relatively slow and deliberate movement. While smaller birds are quick to hop, flutter, or dive into cover, large birds tend to move with calmness. Whether it's a Grey Heron stalking fish or a Sarus Crane walking through a paddy field, their pace gives you more time to observe and compose your shot thoughtfully.



Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*) at Sukhna Lake, Chandigarh.
Catching this image in mid-air required patience and quick shutter speed

This slower movement also allows you to anticipate action. If you notice a Great Egret preparing to take flight, you'll likely have a few seconds to adjust your camera settings and position yourself to capture that beautiful lift-off moment.



Black-necked Stork (*Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*)
at Dhanauri Wetlands

Gear Considerations: Less Need for Extreme Focal Lengths

Another practical benefit of photographing large birds is that you don't always need the longest lens in your bag. Because of their size, large birds can fill your frame even with moderate focal lengths - say 300mm to 400mm. This is especially helpful for beginner photographers or those who may not have access to high-end super-telephoto lenses.

I've used a 100–400mm lens extensively for photographing large birds, and it has served me well in capturing everything from the broad wings of the Himalayan Griffon to the elegant stretch of a Purple Heron's neck.

Photographic Challenges of Large Birds



Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*) at Sukhna Lake,
Chandigarh

Of course, large birds come with their own set of challenges. They often inhabit areas that may be difficult to access, like remote wetlands or marshy fields. And though they move slowly, some can be shy and alert, requiring you to maintain a respectful distance. Moreover, photographing them in harsh sunlight can lead to overexposed patches on their broad wings or bodies, so timing becomes crucial.



Asian Openbill (*Anasromus oscitans*) at
Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary, Karnataka

Sometimes, the challenge is compositional - how to make a still bird interesting. When a stork or heron stands motionless for minutes, it forces you to think creatively: use reflections, foreground framing, or wait for subtle actions like stretching or wing-flapping.

Favorite Encounters and Photo Stories

Some of my most memorable photography moments have been with large birds. I recall one winter morning at a wetland near Gurgaon, where I finally fulfilled a long-standing dream of photographing a Sarus Crane in the wild. The mist was slowly lifting,

and the crane stood in perfect light, its red crown glowing gently. That image is still one of my favourites.



Sarus Crane (*Grus antigone*)

On another occasion, I had the rare fortune of watching a Himalayan Griffon circling overhead at a vantage point in Himachal Pradesh. Its massive wingspan and effortless glide were a sight to behold, and capturing it mid-flight against the blue sky was a thrilling experience.



Himalayan Griffon (*Gyps himalayanensis*)

Photographing large birds has not only improved my skills but also deepened my appreciation for these majestic creatures. Their beauty, elegance, and presence in the frame make them ideal subjects, especially for bird photographers at any level. If you're just starting or looking to refine your bird photography, I highly recommend spending time with larger birds as you'll be rewarded with images that are both striking and soulful.

The next time you're out in the field, keep an eye out for that heron by the water or that stork flying overhead. You might just come home with your next favourite shot.

Thapli Field Trip

Chandigarh Bird Club Field Trip | 15 June 2025

Rima Dhillon

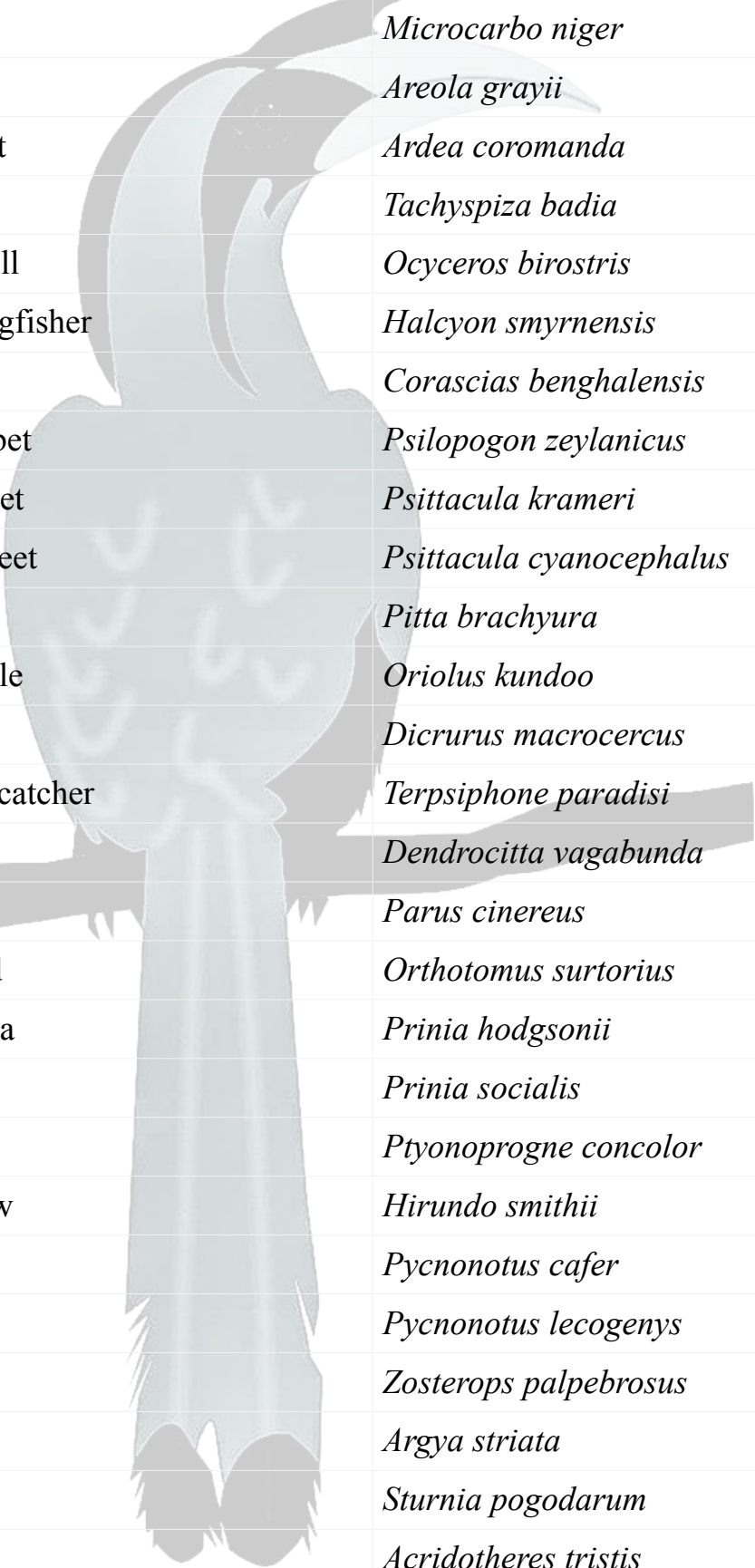
Birders:

1. Lalit Mohan Bansal
2. Gurdip Boparai
3. Sushil Chahila
4. Rima Dhillon
5. Sumeet Labana
6. Aprajita Lobana
7. Alpana NP Singh
8. Manjot Singh

Weather: Heavily overcast during the entire field trip, culminating with a sharp downpour at 0830 hrs. Wind speed around 30 kilometres per hour.

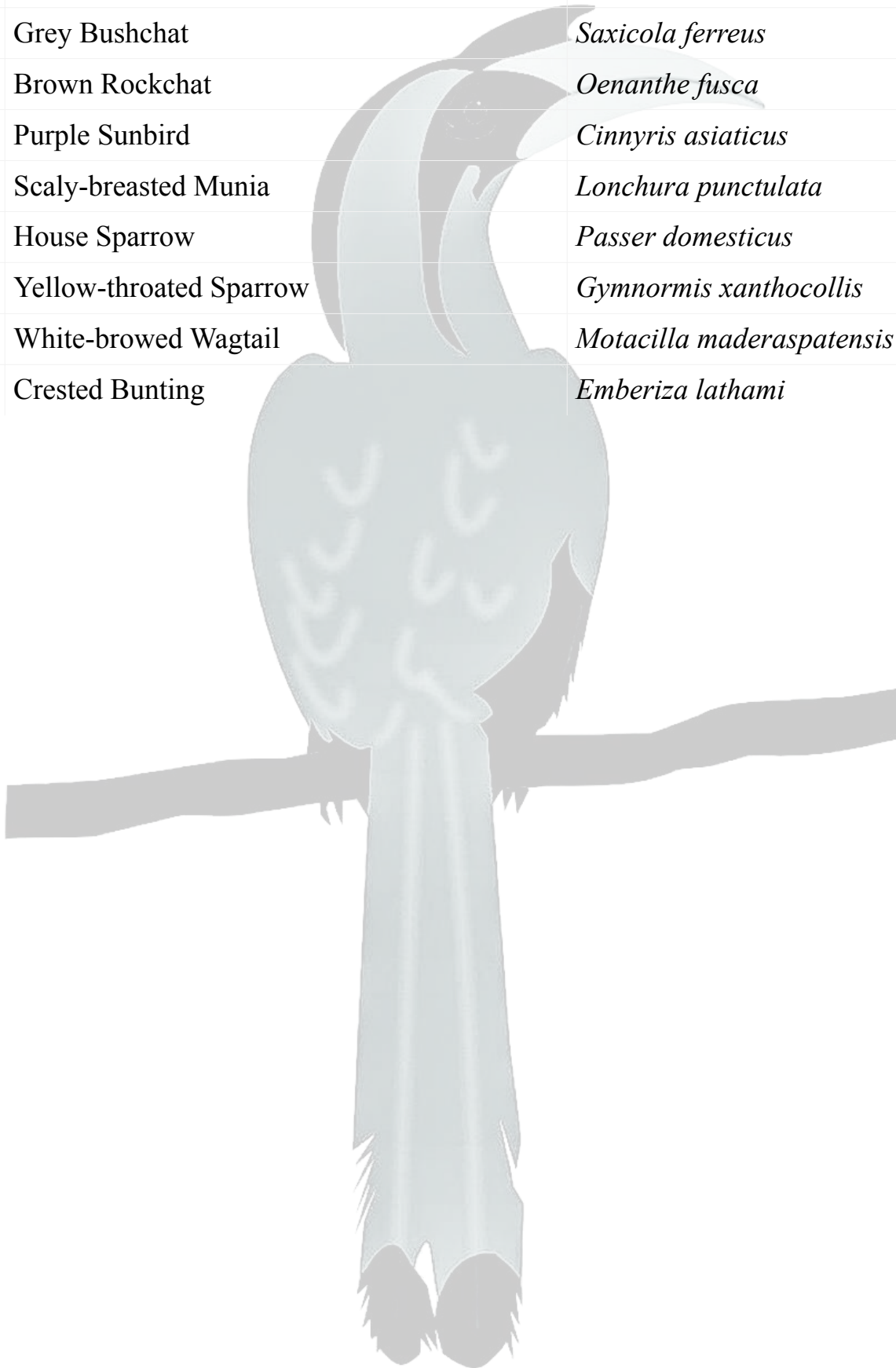
A field trip was conducted at Thapli/Bharal village for the purpose of observing and recording summer breeders like Indian Pitta, Indian Paradise Flycatcher and Indian Golden Oriole. These species regularly use this location for nesting. Thapli/Bharal is a small village surrounded by terraced agricultural fields dotted with Mango, Peepal and Banyan trees. Above the fields, the higher ground is covered by a light scrub and mixed forest. In total, fifty species were observed, most of which were involved in various breeding activities. Indian Pitta, Cuckoo-shrike and Brown-headed Barbets were calling, Baya Weavers, Yellow-throated Sparrows and Oriental Magpie robins were carrying nesting material, and Red-vented Bulbuls and Jungle Babblers were feeding their young.

1	Red Junglefowl	<i>Gallus gallus</i>
2	Indian Peafowl	<i>Pavo cristatus</i>
3	Grey Francolin	<i>Ortigonis pondicerianus</i>
4	Rock Pigeon (Feral)	<i>Columba livia</i>
5	Eurasian Collared Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocta</i>
6	Spotted Dove	<i>Spilopelis chinensis</i>
7	Laughing Dove	<i>Spilopelia senegalensis</i>
8	Yellow-footed Green Pigeon	<i>Treron phoenicopterus</i>
9	Greater Coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>
10	Asian Koel	<i>Eudynamis scolopaceus</i>



11	Common Hawk Cuckoo	<i>Heiropococcyx varius</i>
12	Red-wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanillas indicus</i>
13	Little Cormorant	<i>Microcarbo niger</i>
14	Indian Pond Heron	<i>Areola grayii</i>
15	Eastern Cattle Egret	<i>Ardea coromanda</i>
16	Shikra	<i>Tachyspiza badia</i>
17	Indian Grey Hornbill	<i>Ocyrceros birostris</i>
18	White-throated Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>
19	Indian Roller	<i>Corascias benghalensis</i>
20	Brown-headed Barbet	<i>Psilopogon zeylanicus</i>
21	Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>
22	Plum-headed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula cyanocephalus</i>
23	Indian Pitta	<i>Pitta brachyura</i>
24	Indian Golden Oriole	<i>Oriolus kundoo</i>
25	Black Drongo	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>
26	Indian Paradise Flycatcher	<i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i>
27	Rufous Treepie	<i>Dendrocitta vagabunda</i>
28	Asian Tit	<i>Parus cinereus</i>
29	Common Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus surtorius</i>
30	Grey-breasted Prinia	<i>Prinia hodgsonii</i>
31	Ashy Prinia	<i>Prinia socialis</i>
32	Dusky Crag Martin	<i>Ptyonoprogne concolor</i>
33	Wire-tailed Swallow	<i>Hirundo smithii</i>
34	Red-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>
35	Himalayan Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus leucogenys</i>
36	Indian White-eye	<i>Zosterops palpebrosus</i>
37	Jungle Babbler	<i>Argya striata</i>
38	Brahminy Starling	<i>Sturnia pogodarum</i>
39	Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>
40	Indian Robin	<i>Copsychus fulicatus</i>

41	Oriental Magpie-Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>
42	Blue-throated Flycatcher	<i>Cyornis rubecoloides</i>
43	Grey Bushchat	<i>Saxicola ferreus</i>
44	Brown Rockchat	<i>Oenanthe fusca</i>
45	Purple Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris asiaticus</i>
46	Scaly-breasted Munia	<i>Lonchura punctulata</i>
47	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>
48	Yellow-throated Sparrow	<i>Gymnornis xanthocollis</i>
49	White-browed Wagtail	<i>Motacilla maderaspatensis</i>
50	Crested Bunting	<i>Emberiza lathami</i>



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 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:

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



President - Rima Dhillon

Vice President - Narbir Kahlon

Secretary - Amandeep Singh Channa

Joint Secretary - Navjit Singh

Treasurer - Mahesh Garg

Editors:

Rima Dhillon

Amandeep Singh Channa

Back Cover - Baya Weaver (*Ploceus philippinus*) by Amandeep Singh Channa

