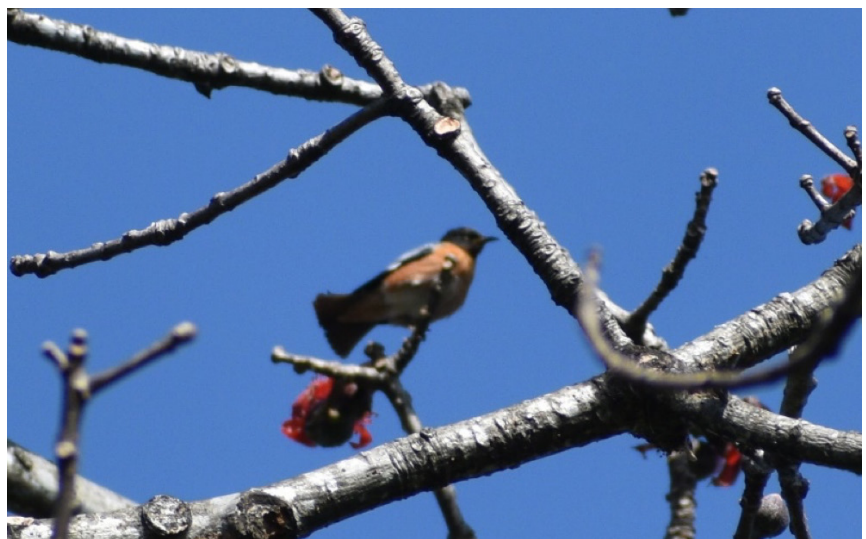


## Sighting of Spot-winged Starling and Fire-capped Tit from Bornadi Wildlife Sanctuary, Assam, India

The altitudinal migration of avian species within the Indian subcontinent primarily involves movement from the Himalayan regions to the plains and foothills of India. It has been observed that a significant portion of altitudinal migrants migrate from higher to lower elevations as winter approaches (Barçante et al. 2017). While the majority of winter migrants in the area comprise water birds, a number of forest birds are also known to migrate. However, due to the inherent challenges associated with detecting forest birds compared to water birds, there are limited sighting records for these species, resulting in a lesser understanding of their distribution patterns.

The Spot-winged Starling *Saroglossa spilopterus* (Vigors 1831) is a migratory bird found in parts of the Himalayan foothills region. They are known for their seasonal east-west migration from their breeding grounds in the northern Indian Himalayan



Male Spot-winged Starling *Saroglossa spilopterus* (Vigors, 1831). © Vivek Chetry.

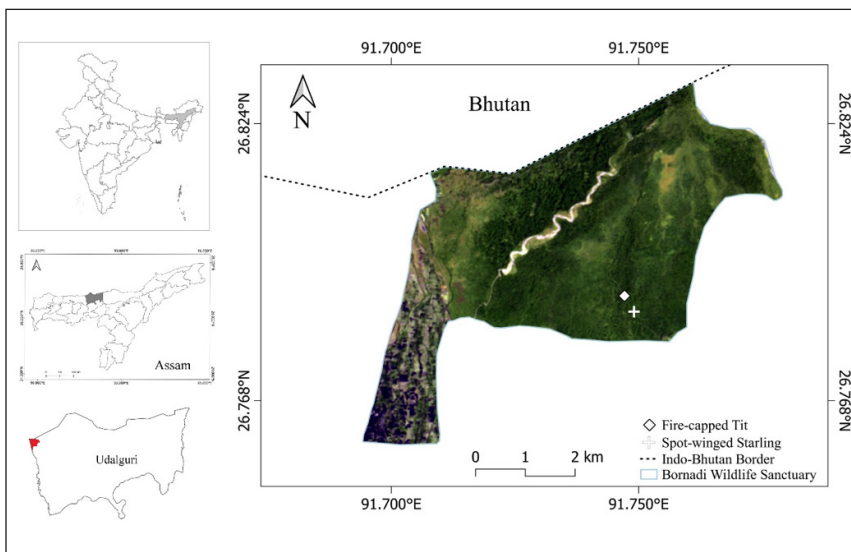
foothills in the summer to their wintering grounds in northeastern India (Grimmett et al. 2011). They are reported to reside generally between 700–1,200 m and up to 2,000 m, but up to 1,000 m in northeastern India (Ali & Ripley 1987). It is mostly found in

open forests, edge as well as cultivated areas occasionally in non-breeding ranges (Craig & Feare 2020).

The Fire-capped Tit *Cephalopyrus flammiceps* (E. Burton, 1836) is a tiny passerine bird found in the

**Table 1. Observation notes of the two bird species.**

| Common Name          | Individuals | Date        | Time   | Location                             | Activity | Remark                                    |
|----------------------|-------------|-------------|--------|--------------------------------------|----------|---|
| Spot-winged Starling | 2 males     | 30.xii.2020 | 0946 h | 26.785995°N,<br>91.749055°E<br>182 m | Foraging | Seen on top canopy of <i>Bombax ceiba</i> |
|                      | 1 male      | 21.ii.2021  | 0843 h | 26.789187°E,<br>91.747012°N<br>183 m | Foraging | Seen on top canopy of <i>Bombax ceiba</i> |
| Fire-capped Tit      | 1 male      | 21.ii.2021  | 0843 h | 26.789187°E,<br>91.747012°N<br>183 m | Foraging | Seen on top canopy of <i>Bombax ceiba</i> |



**Map of the study area with specific sighting locations of the Spot-winged Starling and Fire-capped Tit.**

Himalayan region mostly at elevations ranging from 1,800–3,000 m. They are recognized for their characteristic brilliant red or orange crown, which gives them their common name. Fire-capped Tit has two subspecies namely *Cephalopyrus flammiceps flammiceps* and *Cephalopyrus flammiceps olivaceus* (Madge 2020). The former is known to reside in the western Himalaya while the latter is found in the

eastern Himalaya (Grimmett et al. 2011). Fire-capped Tit is an altitudinal migrant known for its migration from higher altitude mountains to lower foothills in winter. The distribution of Fire-capped Tit in Assam is uncertain. Choudhury (2000) suspected its presence but was unsure about its abundance and distribution. The confirmed record with photographic evidence comes from Manas

National Park (eBird Basic Dataset 2023).

Located to the south of the foothills of the eastern Himalaya, Bornadi Wildlife Sanctuary spans an area of 26.22km<sup>2</sup>. The sanctuary shares its northern boundary with Bhutan’s foothill region and is located in the Udalguri District of Assam. The sanctuary’s geographical boundaries are 26.7500–26.8352N; 91.7000–91.7793E. We encountered Spot-winged Starling and Fire-capped Tit at Bornadi Wildlife Sanctuary during two field trips. Two individuals of Spot-winged Starlings were sighted at 0946 h during our first field visit on 30 December 2020. The individuals were seen foraging on the upper canopy of a *Bombax ceiba* tree. Through the aid of binoculars, the species was identified by

its dark reddish throat, pale rusty-orangish breast, and a prominently visible white patch on the wing. Subsequently, the two individuals were last sighted flying toward the northern part of the sanctuary.

During another field visit on 21 February 2021 at 0843 h, we observed one individual Spot-winged Starling and another individual male Fire-capped Tit foraging on the topmost canopy of *Bombax ceiba* tree. Fire-capped Tit was identified by its small-sized bill, tail with a slight notch and greenish upper part with a yellowish underpart body.

The individual was identified as male by its bright orange colouration on the forehead and throat which is distinctive of breeding plumage. Both species are observed for the first time in the Udalguri District of Assam.

The Western race (*flammiceps*) has been observed migrating from the western Himalaya to sections of India's central plains, including eastern Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, and southern Uttar Pradesh (Madge 2020). However, little



Male Fire-capped Tit *Cephalopyrus flammiceps olivaceus* (E. Burton, 1836). © Vivek Chetry.

is known about the range and breeding of the Fire-capped Tit subspecies *olivaceus* (Madge 2020). Ali & Ripley (1973) described its occurrence at 300–2,300 m from collected specimens in Sikkim and Bhutan. The sighting of a male individual in breeding plumage suggests that the subspecies *olivaceus* might breed early and also at lower elevations as compared to subspecies

*flammiceps*. Sighting such lesser-known birds from various regions might be helpful in understanding their distribution and life history.

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**Citation:** Chetry, V., P. Mahananda, P.K. Saikia & M.K. Saikia (2023). Sighting of Spot-winged Starling and Fire-capped Tit from Bornadi Wildlife Sanctuary, Assam, India. *Bird-o-soar* #205, In: *Zoo's Print* 38(7): 24–27.