

## Two new additions to the avifaunal diversity of Chamba District, Himachal Pradesh, India

Birds are crucial to ecosystems because they function as biological indicators, manage pests, pollinate and disperse seeds (Gregory et al. 2003). The avifauna of India is incredibly diverse, comprising 485 genera and 1,332 distinct species (Praveen et al. 2020).

Previous scientific studies on the avifauna of Chamba District, conducted by Marshall (1884), Litledale (1898), Singh (2011), Singh & Banyal (2013), along with valuable insights from other researchers, were accurately compiled by Shah et al. (2016). Their comprehensive work identified 302 bird species in Chamba District, with subsequent publications by Verma & Abhinav (2021) on the Rustic Bunting and Abhinav et al. (2022) on the Nepal House Martin added new records to the district.

It is important to note that the data mentioned above do not include the Chestnut-headed Bee-eater *Merops Leschenaultii* (Vieillot, 1817) and Rock Eagle-Owl *Bubo bengalensis*



Rock Eagle-Owl *Bubo bengalensis* (Franklin, 1831). © Deepak Garg Sharma.



Chestnut-headed Bee-eater *Merops Leschenaultii* (Vieillot, 1817). © Deepak Garg Sharma.

(Franklin, 1831). Thus, we present two new bird records for the Chamba District in this note, contributing further to our understanding of its avian

diversity. On 4 November 2022, at 0856 h, the first author visited Mangla Village in the Chamba District for birding. He photographed an owl species

using a Canon EOS 700D camera mounted with a 150–600 mm Tamron G2 telephoto lens at coordinates 32.5419N, 76.1167E, 1,069 m. The owl species was identified as the Indian Eagle-Owl *Bubo bengalensis* (Franklin, 1831) based on Grimmett et al. (2016) and consulting with experts. Over the next five days, the owl's activity was observed and sighted four times during this duration. The owl was predominantly found perched on top of electricity poles in open fields, with a sparse Pinus Forest nearby.

On 1 April 2023, at 0534 h, another noteworthy avian observation was made by us in the Chamba District. A pair of Chestnut-headed Bee-eaters *Merops Leschenaulti* (Vieillot, 1817) was sighted and photographed in Sach Village, located at coordinates 32.5667N, 76.0978E, at an elevation of 1,162 m. The bee-eaters were spotted perched on a *Bombax ceiba* tree.

It is worth noting that the avifaunal diversity of the Chamba District is not extensively documented. Exploring and studying the avian population in the district may unveil several new and exciting species waiting to be recorded.

## References

- Abhinav, C., A. Vikrant, P. Dogra & D.G. Sharma (2022).** Range extension of the Nepal House Martin *Delichon nipalense* into Himachal Pradesh and Punjab, India. *Indian BIRDS* 18(4): 126–129.
- Gregory, R.D., D. Noble, R. Field, J. Marchant, M. Raven & D.W. Gibbons (2003).** Using birds as indicators of biodiversity. *Ornis Hungarica* 12–13: 11–24.
- Grimmett, R., C. Inskipp & T. Inskipp (2016).** *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent: India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and the Maldives*. Bloomsbury Publishing, UK, 448 pp.
- Littledale, H. (1898).** Camping in Chamba. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 11(3): 482–505.
- Marshall, C.H.T. (1884).** Notes on the Birds of Chamba, in the N.W. Himalayas. *Ibis* 26(4): 404–425.
- Praveen, J., R. Jayapal & A. Pittie (2020).** Taxonomic updates to the checklists of birds of India, and the South Asian region-2020. *Indian BIRDS* 16(1): 12–19.
- Shah, T.A., V. Ahuja, M. Anandam & C. Srinivasulu (2016).** Avifauna of Chamba District, Himachal Pradesh, India with emphasis on Kalatop-Khajjiar Wildlife Sanctuary and its surroundings. *Journal of Threatened Taxa* 8(1): 8333–8357.
- Singh, A.P. (2011).** Birds of the upper catchment of Ravi River, Chamba District, Himachal Pradesh, India. *Indian BIRDS* 7(4): 97–103.
- Singh, V. & H.S. Banyal (2013).** Avian fauna of Khajjiar Lake, district Chamba, Himachal Pradesh, India. *Proceedings of the Zoological Society* 66(2): 130–136.
- Verma, G. & C. Abhinav (2021).** A Rustic Bunting *Emberiza rustica* in Chamba District, Himachal Pradesh: An addition to the northern Indian avifauna. *Indian BIRDS* 17(3): 80–81.

## Acknowledgments

We thank the Forest Department of Himachal Pradesh. Nishant Mandhotra, Sanjeev Kumar, and Gajinder Verma are acknowledged for their invaluable support.

## Deepak Garg Sharma<sup>1</sup>, Virender Kumar Bhardwaj<sup>2</sup> & Rakeshwar Kapoor<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> House No 234, Ward 3, Chamba, District Chamba, Himachal Pradesh 176310, India.

<sup>2</sup> Department of Zoology, Mizoram University, Aizawl, Mizoram 796004, India.

<sup>3</sup> Department of Zoology and Environmental Sciences, Punjabi University, Patiala, Punjab 147002, India.

Email: <sup>3</sup>rakeshwarkapoor123@gmail.com (corresponding author)

**Citation:** Sharma, D.G., V.K. Bhardwaj & R. Kapoor (2023). Two new additions to the avifaunal diversity of Chamba District, Himachal Pradesh, India. *Bird-o-soar* #207, In: *Zoo's Print* 38(7): 31–32.