

Distribution of Rusty-bellied Shortwing in Assam with a recent record from Lakhimpur District

Assam, being a unit of two zoogeographic sub-regions, the Indian and the Indo-Chinese, is immensely rich in avifaunal diversity with more than 800 species (Choudhury 2000) and holds 55 Important Bird Areas (Rahmani et al. 2016).

The Rusty-bellied Shortwing *Brachypteryx hyperythra* is a restricted range species found in eastern Himalaya in extreme northern West Bengal, Sikkim (possibly adjacent western Bhutan), Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, extreme northern Myanmar, and southern China (Xizang & Yunnan) (Collar 2020).

In Assam, the distribution of Rusty-bellied Shortwing is mostly concentrated in the eastern part of Assam, i.e., records of Rusty-bellied Shortwing are mostly from different areas of the three districts of upper Assam, Tinsukia, Dibrugarh and Majuli (eBird 2023). Recently, the Rusty-bellied Shortwing was recorded from the Kuhiabari (27.102 N, 94.109 E) area of

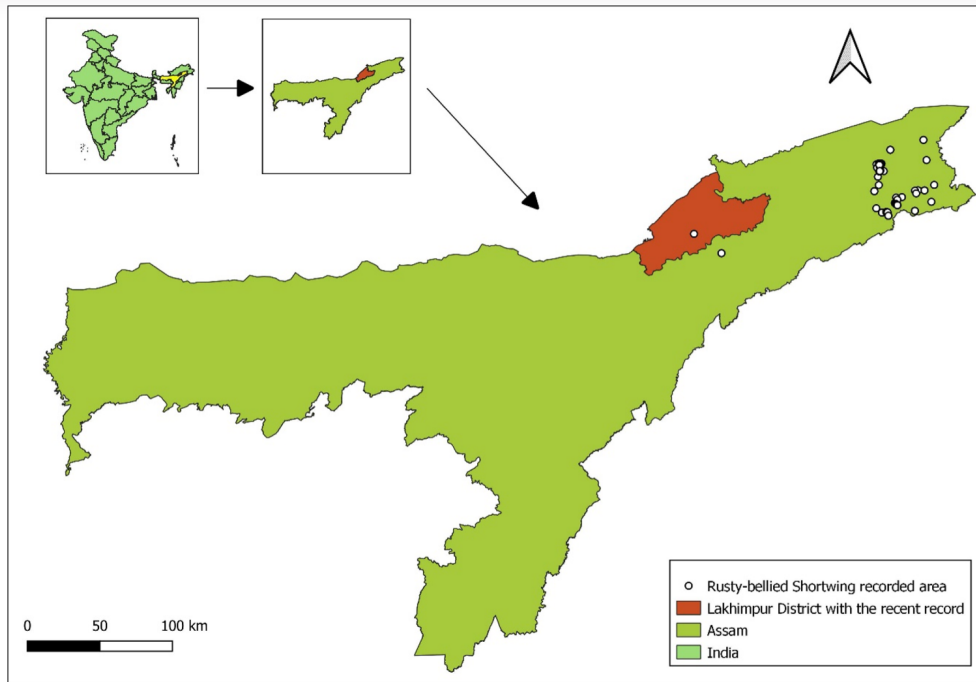


Rusty-bellied Shortwing. © Jugal Borah.

the Lakhimpur District, 17 km from the north Lakhimpur town on 16 December 2023 and was photographed on 17 December 2023. After analysing the records of the species in the eBird basic dataset, we consider this record from Lakhimpur District as the western most record of the species from Assam.

The Rusty-bellied Shortwing is 10–15cm in size, male has a short white supercilium and black lores, blue upperparts including wings and tail and rufous-orange underparts.

Female has olive brown upperparts, paler rufous-orange underparts with whitish centre to belly and lacks the white supercilium. Terrestrial habits, orange chin, undertail coverts, shorter tail, and longer legs help separate from the Snowy-browed Flycatcher (Grimmett et al. 2016). The recorded individual was identified by noting the short white supercilium and rufous-orange underparts along with pinkish-black long legs. The individual was also giving response to the song playing for confirmation of the species.



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The species is listed as ‘Near Threatened’ on the IUCN Red List with criteria C2a(i) and population trend is decreasing (BirdLife International 2018) because of forest clearance and degradation probably mainly through logging, small-scale fuelwood collection, conversion to tea plantations, shifting agriculture and livestock grazing (Collar 2020).

Lakhimpur District is located in the northeast corner of the state and lies on the north bank of river Brahmaputra and covers an area of 2,277 km². Lakhimpur District witnessed several changes in terms of land use and land cover which

has negative impacts on its environment. There have been remarkable changes in terms of area of forest land from 1998 to 2020. As in 1998, forest land covered 845.45 km² (37.12%) which decreased to 393.93 km² (17.30%) in 2020. The forest area has declined by 19.82% over the period which may be due to increasing population pressure as well as for various developmental activities (Singh & Bhattacharjee 2021).

Occurrence of the species in the Kuhiabari area of Lakhimpur District, Assam indicates that the area has suitable habitat for the species. Since the species is

‘Near Threatened’, therefore necessary action to conserve the habitat and awareness among local people about the species and habitat is utmost important in order for long-term conservation of the species.

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