

First photographic record of Himalayan Rubythroat from Hooghly District, West Bengal, India

Himalayan Rubythroat *Calliope pectoralis* is found throughout the Himalaya from northern Pakistan, Kashmir, western Ladakh and northeastern India to central Nepal (Billerman et al. 2022). It breeds in the semi-open landscape above treeline, such as tall-grass thickets in meadows, dwarf rhododendron patches, willow, furze, juniper and often near water in the Himalayan belt, mostly at 2,600-4,000 m. It spends its non-breeding winter at lower altitudes of the Himalayan foothills region and adjacent plains of the central Himalaya (Avibase 2024).

The male Himalayan Rubythroat is gunmetal grey on upper parts with white supercilium, bright red throat, black breast band, tinged pale grey on flanks contrasting with white belly and black tail with white sides panels and tip. Females have weaker eyebrows, white throat and grey-brown upper parts (Majumder et al. 2022).

Boshipota (22.689 N, 88.320 E) in Kanaipur Gram Panchayat is an important birding spot. Situated in the Hooghly District of West Bengal, it is often considered a birders paradise, especially for winter migrants. The area is part of farmland where local people cultivate seasonal crops (paddy, mustard, sugarcane, and seasonal vegetables). Heavy showers during the monsoon period result in 1 m water logging, helping the growth of tall grasses and reeds. The entire area becomes covered with shrubs,



Himalayan Rubythroat (Male). © Tuhin Mondal.



Himalayan Rubythroat (Male). © Mrinal Mal.

mainly Dhanche *Sesbania bispinos* and Kath Shoala *Aeschynomene aspera*.

Early in the morning on 4 November 2023, we went birdwatching in Boshipota. At around 0650 h, from 100 m distance we noticed a little bird perched on a lower tiny branch of the Dhanche plant, which seemed to be a Rubythroat. Very quickly, we focused our devices and captured a couple of shots. The presence of a black breast with fringed white and a tail with white sides and tip made its appearance different from that of the Siberian Rubythroat *Calliope calliope* (Grimmet et al. 2016).

Himalayan and Chinese Rubythroats were earlier considered conspecific and were given the English name White-tailed Rubythroat by ornithologist and bird artist John Gould in 1837. In later years, based on mitochondrial DNA, vocalization, and morphology of several *Calliope pectoralis* subspecies, the Chinese Rubythroat was elevated to an independent species.

The lack of a sub-moustachial stripe eliminated the possibility of it being a Chinese Rubythroat *Calliope tschebaiewii*, thus leading us to identify the bird as a male Himalayan Rubythroat *Calliope pectoralis* (Majumder et al. 2022).

Mrinal Mal (co-author) revisited the same habitat regularly and recorded its presence for the next three days. After 6 November 2023, the bird, a rarity in the lower Gangetic plain of West Bengal has not been sighted to date. We reviewed the published literature and online citizen science platform (eBird 2024) from India and found no record of the observed bird from Hooghly District. In the recent past, one male

was reported from the Uluberia subdivision of the Howrah district in 2017 (Hazra 2019). Therefore, this can be considered as first record from Hooghly District and the second one from southern Bengal.

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