



DAANGEER

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A Quarterly Analysis of Pakistan's Birds

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COVERS:

Front featuring a stunning male Himalayan Rubythroat *Calliope pectoralis* on a wild rose bush, taken on 14 June 2025 at Naltar Valley, Gilgit-Baltistan by Rashid Asgher.

Backcover features an adult Rock Eagle-Owl *Bubo bengalensis* with piercing gaze perched on a rock at Nagarparkar, Sindh, photographed on 1 January 2025 by Muhammad Babar.



A rare Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrush *Trochalopteron erythrocephalum* at Toli Peer, Rawlakot, Azad Jammu & Kashmir, 14 September 2025. (© Muhammad Babar)

On 11 September 2025, a district-first White-cheeked Tit *Aegithalos leucogenys* was reported from Sulaiman Mountains, Dera Ismail Khan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (© Muhammad Ali Rajput)



Introduction

Daangeer: A Quarterly Analysis of Pakistan's Birds is a platform dedicated to celebrating the avian diversity of Pakistan. We invite submissions from all bird enthusiasts, researchers, and writers who wish to share their insights, observations, and experiences related to birds and birdwatching in Pakistan. Here are some basic guidelines for submitting your work:

- **Scope:** *Daangeer* accepts any writing related to birds and birdwatching in Pakistan.
- **Format:** Email submissions to rewildingindusmanagement@gmail.com with "Submission: [Title]" in the subject line. Attach your submission as a Word document and send in relevant figures and photographs separately.
- **Review Process:** Our editorial team will review submissions for quality and adherence to guidelines.
- **Publication:** Accepted submissions will be featured in *Daangeer*. Contributors will be credited.
- **Copyright:** Contributors retain the copyright to their work but permit us to publish it.

Editors Note:

The *Daangeer* Team strives for the best quality of data and information published. However, given the extent of the experience of the editorial board, some discrepancies may be expected. If our readers come across any inaccuracies, we motivate them to get in touch with us so we may aspire to identify, address and learn accordingly.

Pakistan Rarities & Distribution Committee (PRDC)

Guidelines for submissions to PRDC

Rare bird assessment is an initial step to establishing a record; evidence must be submitted to PRDC. Here are our essential guidelines for explorers; we would expect you to follow them strictly. We understand that it may not be possible to follow all of the guidelines in every situation. However, if most of the key requirements are not met, the record will be marked as pending until additional evidence is provided, or it may be independently declined. We still encourage you to submit any record you think is rare to PRDC.

Ideally, we would like to receive reports/sightings that include the following:

1. Enable GPS tagging or Location Data settings in your camera (EXIF data), or use the eBird Mobile App (live track mode) for accurate location or track recording.
2. Include complete date in this format (DD/MM/YYYY), exact location (preferably coordinates), and full name of observer(s).
3. Provide documentation (photos/videos) of habitat and surroundings.
4. Clearly state species identification basis (personal observation, expert verification, online forums discussions); PRDC will further review critically.
5. Avoid disturbing breeding birds (e.g., active nests, playbacks during breeding season) and discourage others from doing so.
6. Submit high-quality photos/videos from various angles and sound recordings if possible.
7. Include supporting evidence from co-observers, if any (they may be contacted independently).
8. Submit in English (preferred), Urdu, or major provincial languages; published records will be in English.

Supporting evidence (such as photos, videos, or recordings) is used solely for record evaluation and potential inclusion in the newsletter, unless the contributor has given explicit permission for other uses. Please note that we can not guarantee publication of all or any submitted photographs in the newsletter. Historical data (books, articles, field notes, museum specimens) are valuable for verification. Lack of digital proof does not invalidate past records in usual cases. For submissions or queries, email iazankhan4@gmail.com.

Rarities Review

1 April - 30 September 2025

Azan Karam

These notable records have been accepted based on their adherence to most of the Pakistan Rarities & Distribution Committee (PRDC) guidelines. However, all records remain open to critical review following publication. Should any record be deemed weak or questionable upon further scrutiny, and if compelling counter-evidence is submitted to PRDC, it will be addressed and corrected as an erratum in a subsequent issue. Records marked with a (Δ) symbol indicate that supporting digital media was submitted to PRDC.

In the last six months, nearly a dozen notable observations were made by Pakistan's growing bird-watching community, in addition to a belated but previously unreported case of hybridisation and a reopened case of identification concerning an important record.

Pakistan's second record of Black-headed Cuckooshrike *Lalage melanoptera* (Δ) came from nearly the same locality as the previous record after two years. Reportedly a female, photographed on 6 and 12 April at Kad Bazar, Thado River Malir, Sindh (MSB and SB).

Once on the official list of 'Search for Lost Birds', Long-billed Bush Warbler *Locustella major* (Δ) was re-sighted once again since its rediscovery in Naltar Valley, Gilgit District, Gilgit-Baltistan. A single, vocally active bird was observed in a Sea Buckthorn thicket in the aforementioned locality from 12-14 June (AK, PNA, SB, MSB, ZAS, RA, KP and HAP).



© Salman Baloch

Black-headed Cuckooshrike, a recent addition to Pakistan's birds

A single Brown Fish Owl *Ketupa zeylonensis* (Δ) was reported on 5 July from Pachran Abshar, Kirther National Park, Sindh (ZAS). Another belated record from Battangee, Abbotabad, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, on 7 August 2016, whose identification was just recently reopened and confirmed, turned out to be this species (ASNA). A species lost in Pakistan for nearly a century and a half and just recently rediscovered on 6 May 2022, two Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrush *Trochalopteron erythrocephalum* (Δ) were recoded on 14 September this year at Toli Peer, Rawlakot, Poonch District, Azad Jammu & Kashmir (MB).

A promising individual of Menetries's Warbler *Curruca mystacea* (Δ) came from Sulaiman Mountain Range, Dera Ismail Khan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, on 11 September. Generally localized in west-central Baluchistan, this sighting marks the second provincial record since 1993. Additionally, three previously unreported species were added to District Dera Ismail Khan: White-cheeked Tit *Aegithalos leucogenys*, (Δ) Western Crowned Warbler *Phylloscopus occipitalis* (Δ) and Black-headed Jay *Garrulus lanceolatus* (Δ) (MAR).

© Zafeer Ahmed Shaikh



Brown Fish Owl, first record from Kirther National Park

© Salman Baloch



A vocally active Long-billed Bush-Warbler

In the past six months, a few relatively under-reported species in the country came to the surface. These include a pair of Knob-billed Duck *Sarkidiornis melanotos* (Δ), at a waterbody near the Indian border at Vatvaro, Sindh, on 15 July (YP). At least three adults and potentially one juvenile Bridled Tern *Onychoprion anaethetus* (Δ) were reported on 10 June from Mubarak Village (ZAS), and later two were seen on 13 September at Bhit Khori, Sindh (SB, MSB, ZAS, RA), respectively. From the same locality and date, they also documented one Masked Booby *Sula dactylatra* (Δ) and eight Wilson's Storm-Petrel *Oceanites oceanicus* (Δ) in the sea.

An interesting case of hybridization between Eurasian Wigeon x Green-winged Teal *Mareca penelope* x *Anas crecca* (Δ) documented on 12 January 2019 at Langh Lake, Sindh (NI), was found by the author in Macaulay Library media. This could potentially be the first reported case in Pakistan.



© Nusrat Ihsan

The thin metallic green eye-stripe in this hybrid bird is from teal, which is lacking in normal wigeon.

CONTRIBUTORS

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Hotspot Review: Haleji Lake

Zafeer Ahmed Shaikh

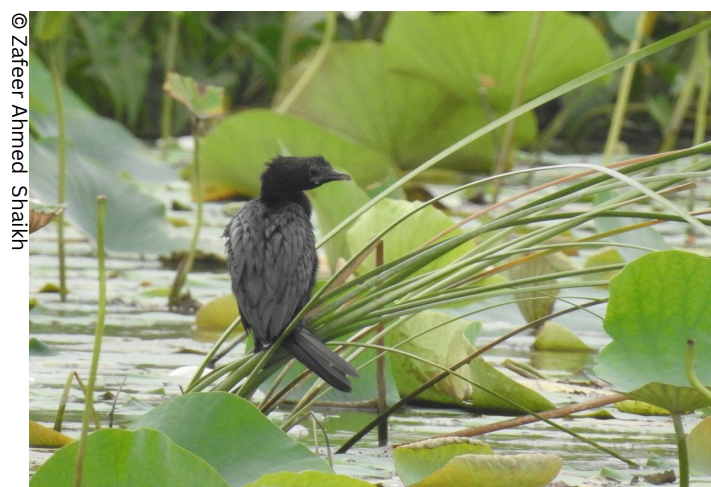
Haleji Lake is a man-made freshwater body in Thatta district, Sindh Province. Historically, a brackish water body, it was converted into a proper reservoir with solid embankments in the 1940s to supply freshwater for the soldier barracks during the Second World War. Thus, this massive waterbody with a circumference of 17 km came into being with a sizable seepage zone on almost all edges. The lake is fed by a canal that offshoots from Gujjo waterworks. The lake was established as a Protected Area under Wildlife Sanctuary status in 1977 and additionally received Ramsar Site status in 1976.

The habitat is mainly a typical wetland habitat of lower Sindh, comprising reed beds of *Typha* and *Saccharum munja* syn. *S. spontaneum*. With some lotus paddies (mainly in the main lake) and embankments consisting of old-growth Babul *Vachellia nilotica*, Peepal *Ficus religiosa*, and Banyan *Ficus benghalensis* trees, which historically used to be in greater numbers and quality but faced decline due to logging pressures during the late '90s, when the lake's habitat quality began to degrade due to mismanagement of the multiple stakeholders involved.

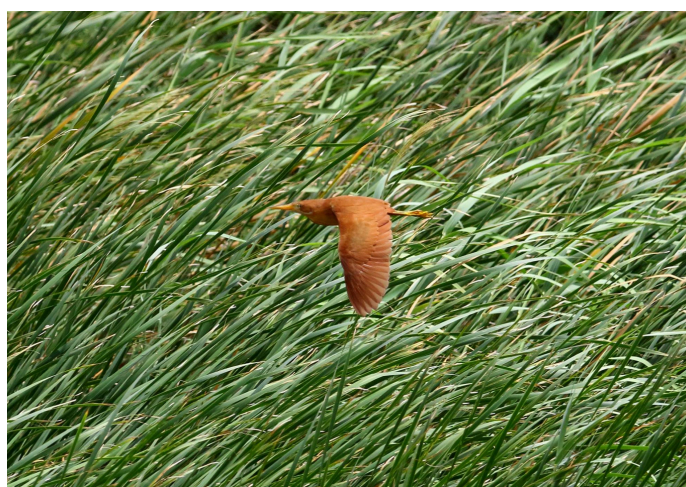


Cluster of Reed and Lotus *Nelumbo* sp., in the middle of the lake is the typical site from the embankments

There has been a considerable change in avifaunal diversity within the Sanctuary; therefore, I will mainly focus on the current position. The lake and adjoining seepage zone are home to year-round residents like the Wire-tailed Swallow *Hirundo smithii*, Streak-throated Swallow *Petrochelidon fluvicola*, Pale Martin *Riparia diluta*, Grey-throated Martin *Riparia chinensis*, Greater Coucal *Centropus sinensis*, Pheasant-tailed Jacana *Hydrophasianus chirurgus*, Lesser Egrets *Egretta spp.*, Streaked Weaver *Ploceus manyar*, Pied Bushchat *Saxicola caprata*, Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*, Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis*, White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*, Grey-headed Swampfen *Porphyrio poliocephalus*, and other related resident species of the Lower Sindh riparian zone. Indian Scops-Owl *Otus bakkamoena* and Spotted Owlet *Athene brama* are commonly found near the Information Centre. The Indian Nightjar *Caprimulgus asiaticus* is a common sight after dark, and Sykes's Nightjar *Caprimulgus mahbrattensis* is also found but in lesser numbers.



Little Cormorant *Microcarbo niger*



Cinnamon Bittern *Botaurus cinnamomeus*

During peak summer months, the lake hosts the Bittern trifecta: Cinnamon Bittern *Botaurus cinnamomeus*, Yellow Bittern *Botaurus sinensis*, and Black Bittern *Botaurus flavicollis*. Pied Cuckoo *Clamator jacobinus* and Red-collared Doves *Streptopelia tranquebarica* arrive to breed in the trees near the Information Centre, where the trees are also used as heronries. The lake has had rare summer records of Black-breasted Weaver *Ploceus benghalensis*, Rufous-vented Grass-babbler *Laticilla burnesii*, and White-browed Wagtail *Motacilla maderaspatensis*, all of which are rare in Lower Sindh. River Tern *Sterna aurantia* are rapidly declining in the region, but small numbers still breed in the seepage zone behind the Centre. Due to the stagnant water depth, the lake hardly supports any waterweed growth, and consistent hunting pressures, beginning about three decades ago, have wiped out native breeding ducks such as the Lesser Whistling-Duck *Dendrocygna javanica*, Cotton Teal *Nettapus coromandelianus*, and Indian Spot-billed Duck *Anas poecilorhyncha*. The Whistling Teal is now only a rare summer visitor with occasional breeding success, while the Cotton Teal is a rare winter visitor. Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus* does breed in the nearby Eucalyptus trees, where historically, Pallas's Fish Eagle *Haliaeetus leucoryphus* also used to breed. Watercock *Gallicrex cinerea* arrive during the summers but are under-reported due to their skulking nature.

© Muhammad Babar



Indian Scops-Owl *Otus bakkamoena*

© Muhammad Ali Rajput



Streak-throated Swallow *Petrochelidon fluvicola*

© Sadig Baloch



Greater Painted-Snipe *Rostratula benghalensis*

© Zafeer Ahmed Shaikh



Red Collared-Dove *Streptopelia tranquebarica*

© Sadig Baloch



Lesser Whistling-Duck *Dendrocygna javanica*

© Zohaib Ahmed



Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri*

© Zafeer Ahmed Shaikh



Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

© Heba Moeen



Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea*

During the Autumn passage, scores of Blue-cheeked Bee-eater *Merops persicus* can be seen on most pylons in and around the lake. Red-tailed Shrike *Lanius phoenicuroides* inhabit the thickets around the seepage zone, while the Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* and Indian Golden Oriole *Oriolus kundoo* stick to the Acacia woods. Garganey *Spatula querquedula* are the first ducks to arrive and stick to the seepage zone in small numbers. Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus* have been noted in the seepage zone as well during this time, along with Painted Stork *Mycteria leucocephala*, Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*, and more. Haleji also had the last confirmed photographic record of Black-necked Stork *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus* for Pakistan in the 1980s.

During the winter, the wetland comes alive with diversity. Almost all duck species expected in the plains during winter have been recorded, including rarities for the region such as Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina* and Whooper Swan *Cygnus cygnus*. The lake and the adjoining dry barren area to the seepage zone offer a great diversity of raptors from the Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis*, Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca*, Griffon Vulture *Gyps fulvus*, Cinereous Vulture *Aegypius monachus* to the Black-winged Kite *Elanus caeruleus*, Eurasian Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*, Osprey *Pandion haliaetus*, Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus* and Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*. Waders and allies such as the Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*, Slender-billed Gull *Chroicocephalus genei*, Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida*, Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia* can be encountered in the seepage zones. Pallid Scops-Owl *Otus brucei* has been recorded from the treeline on the embankment along with Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*.

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Wings Across Continents: Tracking the European Roller to Pakistan and Beyond

Jessica Wilmot

The European Roller *Coracias garrulus* is a striking long-distance migrant that links continents and cultures. Breeding across Europe and Asia, it travels thousands of kilometers to overwinter in the savannas of southern Africa. Like many migratory birds, however, its populations are under pressure. Habitat loss, agricultural expansion, pesticide use, and hunting are causing declines. While targeted conservation in parts of Europe has supported local recoveries, the overall global trend remains concerning, with population assessments showing a 29–30% decline over the past decade (Kiss et al. 2020). Currently, the European Roller is classified as Least Concern (LC) globally but is listed as Near Threatened (NT) in South Africa due to regional declines in range and habitat availability (Wilmot 2024).

Two subspecies of European Roller are recognised: *C. g. garrulus* in the western Palearctic and *C. g. semenowi* in western and central Asia. Both migrate to southern Africa, but *semenowi* appears to dominate in the region. While *garrulus* is relatively well-studied, major gaps remain for *semenowi*, particularly its migration routes, stopover sites, and wintering habitats. Understanding these movements is critical if we are to address threats along the entire flyway.

The Flyway Action Plan for the European Roller (Tokody et al. 2017) highlights three major research priorities for the conservation of the species:

- Monitoring at overwintering grounds.
- Understanding habitat use during migration and in Africa.
- Assessing the impacts of climate change on the species.

Since South Africa was identified as a priority country along the migration route, and addressing the knowledge gaps in migration patterns is considered a high-priority task, BirdLife South Africa launched a long-term European Roller Monitoring Project in December 2021. This initiative combines citizen-science surveys with cutting-edge satellite tracking to build a comprehensive picture of the species' threat status (see Fig. 1).



Figure 1. Researcher fitting a lightweight satellite transmitter to a roller for long-distance migration tracking.

The Southern African Bird Atlas Project 2 (SABAP2) has been central to tracking distribution trends across South Africa, Eswatini, and Lesotho, revealing a concerning contraction in the Roller's range (Lee 2024). Citizen science efforts like SABAP2, together with distance-sampling protocol monitoring in key hotspots across South Africa, play a critical role in tracking these changes. Collectively, they provide essential insights into species abundance, distribution, and the identification of priority areas for conservation.

These devices are uncovering the immense challenges Rollers face as they cross physical barriers, such as oceans, deserts, and mountain ranges. More importantly, they are strengthening conservation links between South Africa and Asia. Several individuals either passed through Pakistan or relied on it as a key stopover during the breeding season. Notably, two females spent more than two months in Pakistan, arriving from the Horn of Africa in early May and staying for extended periods until late August (see Fig. 2).

Alongside satellite tracking, 20 Rollers have been fitted with colour-coded leg rings. These birds may also be passing through Pakistan and other regions during migration, and every reported sighting adds another piece to the flyway puzzle. Each observation helps transform data into real conservation impact.

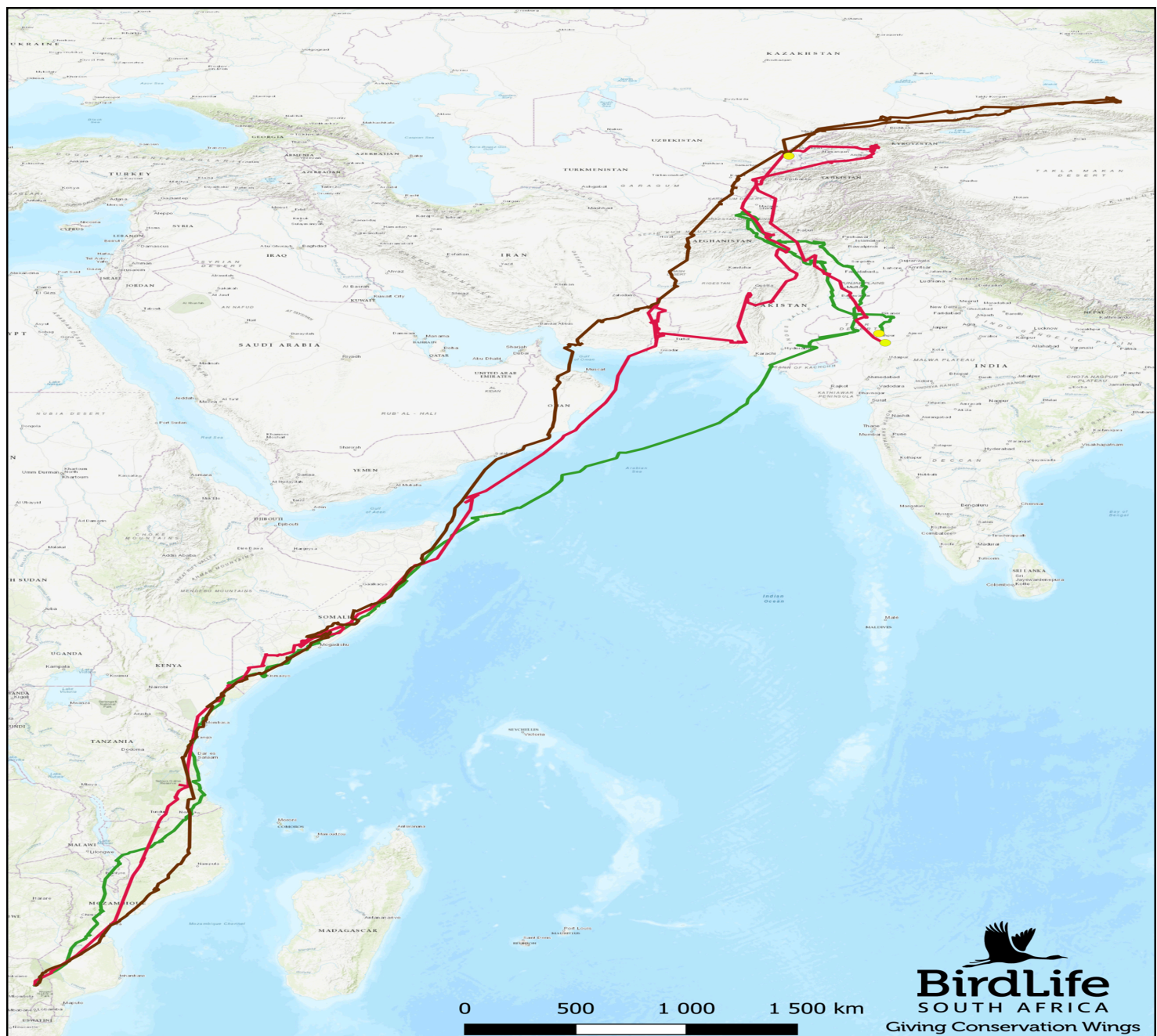


Figure 2. Migration routes of tracked birds between southern Africa and South Asia

That is why BirdLife South Africa is calling on researchers, birders, and conservationists across Africa, the Middle East, and Central Asia to be part of this effort. Whether your region hosts breeding, stopover, or wintering sites, your contribution helps build the full story of the European Roller migration.

Together, we can ensure that future generations will continue to marvel at the unforgettable turquoise flash of the European Roller crossing summer skies.

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Daaman and Peelus: A Personal Note

Syed Abid Hussain

Though it is June (at the time of writing) now but May is the start of high summer on Damaan when temperatures hit 50 plus degrees in the shade. Damaan is a sparse grass scrub plains country dotted with various species of trees, so peculiar to dry forbidden regions here in Dera Ismail Khan. It stretches from District Tank in the north and ends at the boundary of southern Punjab to the south, and the river Indus to the east near Dera Ismail Khan, to the towering Sulaiman Range wrapped in the haze of distance far away to the west.



Peelu Tree *Salvadora persica*, Damaan

© Syed Abid Hussain

These vast, arid plains are parched, dry, and fissured, and in places have eroded into deep ravines where Fox *Vulpes* sp., Golden Jackals *Canis aureus*, Indian Crested Porcupine *Hystrix indica*, Hedgehog *Paraechinus hypomelas*, Jungle Cat *Felis chaus*, and odd Wolf *Canis lupus* pairs and Striped Hyena *Hyaena hyaena* live. Quivering and vibrating in peak summer months, copper hot with scorching winds burning and singeing one's body and blurring one's vision. The blinding glare of the relentless sun hurts one here, and one cannot look around without squinted eyes, and only a wet muslin cloth as a headgear can help one keep away the sun. This is a country that seemingly promises nothing, but it is so rich in wildlife.

From one's feet to the zenith's height, there is always something to watch if one is an enthusiast and a lover of flora and fauna. There are surprises every step of the way, provided one is vigilant and has a discerning eye. Travelling on these plains is gruelling and strenuous, and potable water is so scarce. This, in short, was a simple portrait of Damaan, a country with many birds to watch over the year in different seasons, particularly the migrants, besides the resident species. One can suddenly spot a male Indian Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradisi*, Pied Cuckoo *Clamator jacobinus*, Long-tailed Minivet *Pericrocotus ethologus*, the local Laggar Falcon *Falco jugger*, Black Kite *Milvus migrans*, Demoiselle Crane *Anthropoides virgo*, Common Crane *Grus grus*, and also harriers *Circus* sp., scop-owls *Otus* sp., eagles *Aquila* sp., and seemingly the list is endless. I will not go into the details, for it would then turn into a research paper.



Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri* on peelu tree



Ripening Peelu fruits

Saraiki wasaib of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab comprise three main regions across both provinces: Damaan, which includes two districts in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (Districts Tank and Dera Ismail Khan) and two districts in Punjab (Dera Ghazi Khan and Rajanpur). The two other regions, Rohi or Cholistan and Thal, are also in Punjab. These regions are primarily Saraiki-speaking and share close cultural similarities. Peelus grow in all these regions.

Up to 2007, when I left Tank City, District Tank, I did not spot a single Asian Koel *Eudynamys scolopaceus* anywhere in Tank, nor did I spot a single Brown Rock Chat *Oenanthe fusca*, and there are some other birds, such as Rufous Treepie *Dendrocitta vagabunda* and many more, but there used to be some surprise appearances like herons, spoonbills and ibises.

There used to be sandgrouses and wild pigeons, as well as waterfowl and other aquatic birds, as many as are found in a decent field guide with plains as their habitat during migration, including the resident species with local or regional migrations. All five species of shrikes were there, the predominant one being the Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor*, which is the king of Damaan and an adept hunter, and we cousins once kept one as a pet, and it was a novel experience. I also love Common Raven *Corvus corax*, Tawny Eagle *Aquila rapax*, Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis*, and our vultures sans the Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*, which I have not seen for quite some time on Northern Damaan, and most of my references are related to that place.

In mid-2007, I had permanently settled at Dera Ismail Khan and had left Tank City for good, the place where I was born and bred; in other words, I had severed my ties with Northern Damaan once and for all and now lived in the river country where once the mighty river Indus flowed with such grandeur which words can barely encompass. Then the Chasma Nuclear Power Plant descended on this land like the curse of God, and the situation further worsened when Lucky Cement Factory rose as a monolith near the Pezu town and further marred and polluted the landscape, ravaging the Pezu Hills, engulfing and devouring them ravenously like a mechanical monster. Now we have DINAR Cancer Hospital, which tries to treat ever-increasing cases of various types of cancers. This is modern-day scientific advancement and its horrific, detrimental effects. And the old river ails now, shrunk between its banks; it stinks badly as the sewage water from the city pours in with ominous odours and harmful, non-biodegradable pollutants, killing and ailing the aquatic life, and to crown all this, the rampant corruption in the complacent Wildlife Department further endangers the riverine aquatic life, the worst hit being the eight species of freshwater turtles, the pride of this river, along with its world-famous and unique Indus River Dolphin *Platanista minor*. The old, heady, tumultuous, headstrong river of yore is missed by the sentient few of this famous old city, and they often wistfully stand on its bank and heave a sad sigh of grief at the pathetic sight before them. Yes, some things have changed permanently, the way death is an ultimate transition. They know their river is in irreversible death throes.

In such a grim scenario, I got lost in job-related worldly responsibilities, rebuilding and reawakening a failing institution, almost a century old, which sapped all my energies and kept me aloof from nature and wildlife, but not on a permanent basis. In the limited world of the green lawns of Government Degree College No. 1, Dera Ismail Khan, which is a small haven for birds and other wildlife, I kept myself in touch with nature, photographing on a regular basis whatever came across me, and in this way recorded and documented something invaluable as regards birds and wildlife in general. Not only this, in leisure times... if ever I had any, I visited the graveyard of Shah Sahib near my home, which is a miniature jungle of Toothbrush or Peelu/Pillu *Salvadora persica* trees, all meaning the same. Here, too, I observed flora and fauna and saw many wondrous things, which I still do.

So I was in touch with nature and wildlife, especially birds, in a very limited way, and with average cameras, I photographed on a regular basis the things that were beyond my wildest imaginings. Around Mid-to the end of May, the first broods of Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* and Bank Myna *Acridotheres ginginianus* leave their nests, and up to mid-June, both species are incubating the eggs of the second brood. Coinciding with this, the peelu/pillu trees are with their first fruit in late May, and parent birds with their juveniles are seen flying from tree to tree, eating the ripening peelu fruit, while otherwise food is quite scarce. During the first week of June, most of the trees are loaded with red, pale yellow, and greenish foliage. Since the end of May, Ring-necked Parakeet *Psittacula krameri*, besides eating the last of the sunflower seeds, are regular visitors to the Shah Sahib graveyard to take their share of peelus. Sharing the booty are the Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer* and White-eared Bulbul *Pycnonotus leucotis*, Indian Robins *Copsychus fulicatus*, House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*, Purple Sunbird *Cinnyris asiaticus*, Asian Koel *Eudynamys scolopaceus*, and a number of insects, including Yellow Paper Wasps *Polistes* sp., Giant Honey Bee *Apis dorsata*, Potter Wasps *Delta* sp., Oriental Hornets *Vespa* sp., and our three major species of ants, and the list can further be extended. But what surprised me most was the appearance of Rosy Starling *Pastor roseus* on 27 June 2021, chattering and eating pillus, for I have never seen them this late before this. Perhaps of late I have not been out to the wilderness in recent years that frequently to know how long they stayed with us. Whatever, it was a new addition and I was more than happy to record it.

And peelus/pillus often remind me of the great Saraiki/Punjabi poet Khawaja Ghulam Farid and so many other famous and prominent Saraiki poets, for this fruit, since long has carved a permanent niche for itself in our Saraiki poetry and folk literature with many sad, nostalgic songs and stories which leave behind an ache which perhaps words cannot encompass though the verses do:

جيڻھ مهينے پکن پيلو
تھل دياں جڻياں ما رن سینه
پيلو پکياں وے

But I think this pain can only be felt; it cannot be described, for those are desolate, deprived, thirsty areas where Saraiki has flourished and is spoken. But the romance of the land is unprecedented, for I personally love Damaan with all its thirst, desolation, immensity, high summers, and painful, frigid winters when man and beast cannot find food and water, and people even now migrate to greener regions of Dera Ismail Khan from Saraiki wasaib when the forbidding plains yield nothing but sorrows and sufferings.

So this is a little story of mine as a nature lover. Here are some photos which show how, during the changing seasons and breeding seasons, the fruiting of the trees and plants coincides with the survival and breeding of various birds, while providing sustenance to insects and indirectly to mammals, and how bounteous nature provides its denizens with food and shelter at times when the need is sore and dire. And beneficiaries are so many like myself, for I eat peelus too when the birds and insects are eating them all around me.

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Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer*



Bank Mynas *Acridotheres ginginianus* on Peelu tree

© Syed Abid Hussain

But people do not come to eat peelus anymore and the sprawling miniature jungle of peelu trees of Syed Munawar Shah Sahib's graveyard in Dera Ismail Khan has been left to the birds or an odd fanatic like me who goes there on a daily basis to watch nature thrive while the dead lie in their graves in deep mortal slumber. Besides, jungles of peelu trees have been wiped clean on Damaan, and with their annihilation, the romance and folklore are also dying, and perhaps the coming generations will not know a thing about these majestic trees and the tales of pain, sorrows, and pleasures woven around them, which only the stories and old poetry of the masters would reveal to them. Has Damaan changed? No, the wild deserted stretches are still there, the barren land and the animals and the birds. Even now, a Tawny Eagle *Aquila rapax* soars the blue depths of Damaan's enormous skies, and cranes pass too, and ravens croak from the high electricity pylons, and the Jungle Cats *Felis chaus*, Foxes *Vulpes* sp., and Jackals *Canis aureus* hunt and prowl around. Somewhere in the scrub, a Grey Francolin *Ortygornis pondicerianus* still flutters off your feet with alarm calls, and Pied Bushchat *Saxicola caprata* sings on a waving twig of an Acacia. The enthusiasts would find everything.



The Birds Of My Village

Muhammad Taha Rajput

Introduction:

My name is Muhammad Taha Rajput, and I am 17 years old. I have lived my entire life in Dahotar Jadeed village in Tehsil Paharpur of District Dera Ismail Khan. Since childhood, I have been captivated by the nature and landscapes around me, but my passion for birds and wildlife truly began in late 2017 when I was nine. While photographing around my village with my camera, I spotted a White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*. It was a breathtaking sight. Excited, I rushed home to show everyone a blurry photo of that stunning bird. That moment sparked something in me, and my brother, Muhammad Ali Rajput, and I began seeking out birds, starting with the crows, sparrows, and mynas near our home, and then gradually exploring the wilder habitats of our district. Since late 2017, I have continued my search for wildlife. To pursue our precious wildlife and nature, I have travelled to various remote corners of my district. I also keep a list of bird species I have observed within a 500-meter radius of my home in my village, and in this article, I will talk all about it.

My Village:

My village, compared to others in our district, is not very wild. Due to population growth, most wild habitats have been replaced by homes and cultivated fields (see Fig. 1). It lies right next to a major road connecting Dera Ismail Khan to Islamabad.



Figure 1. A satellite image of Dahotar Jadeed village, Dera Ismail Khan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

The entire village is in an irrigated zone, so it is heavily farmed. The village consists of hundreds of homes, with a nullah flowing through the middle and cultivated land, mostly wheat, rice, sugarcane, and maize, surrounding the village. These fields are dotted with trees, while sewage ponds and gardens provide additional habitats for birds. Located about four kilometers from the mighty Indus River, my village is an ideal spot for observing bird migration.

Checklist of Birds Observed Around My Village:

The following birds have been observed from my home or within a 500-meter radius of my home from December 2017 to the present (2025). Nearly all species mentioned below have been photographed, either by me or my brother, and I have personally observed every bird listed within my village (see Table.1).

Table 1. List of Birds of my Village as observed from end of 2017 to 2025

No	Common Name	Scientific Name	Status
1	Common Quail	<i>Coturnix coturnix</i>	Sighted very rarely. Hard to judge exact status of the population due to heavy use of call recordings by hunters / poachers.
2	Yellow-footed Green-Pigeon	<i>Treron phoenicoptera</i>	Very rare. Single birds seen twice.
3	Laughing Dove	<i>Spilopelia senegalensis</i>	Common resident.
4	Red Collared-Dove	<i>Streptopelia tranquebarica</i>	Rarely seen in Summer.
5	Eurasian Collared-Dove	<i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	Relatively common sight.
6	White-breasted Waterhen	<i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>	Constant resident in sewage ponds if enough water present.
7	Small Pratincole	<i>Glareola lactea</i>	Rarely seen passing above.
8	Black-winged Stilt	<i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	Uncommon. Birds seen in flight.
9	Red-wattled Lapwing	<i>Vanellus indicus</i>	Common resident.
10	Common Sandpiper	<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	Occasional sightings in winter.
11	Green Sandpiper	<i>Tringa ochropus</i>	Occasional sightings in winter.
12	Wood Sandpiper	<i>Tringa glareola</i>	Occasional sightings in winter.
13	River Tern	<i>Sterna aurantia</i>	Occasionally seen flying above. Usually, in flocks.
14	Black Stork	<i>Ciconia nigra</i>	Very rare migrant with a single confirmed record.
15	Glossy Ibis	<i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	Uncommon migrant. Flocks observed.
16	Indian Pond-Heron	<i>Ardeola grayii</i>	Common resident.
17	Eastern Cattle-Egret	<i>Ardea coromanda</i>	Common resident.
18	Little Egret	<i>Egretta garzetta</i>	Common sight year-round.
19	Grey Heron	<i>Ardea cinerea</i>	Rare migrant.

No	Common Name	Scientific Name	Status
20	Black-crowned Night Heron	<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	Common sight in Summer with birds passing above.
21	Osprey	<i>Pandion haliaetus</i>	Very rare. 2 sightings of birds in flight.
22	Oriental Honey-buzzard	<i>Pernis ptilorhynchus</i>	Seen almost year-round but numbers fluctuate in some months. Common sight in migration with birds flying high above.
23	Black-winged Kite	<i>Elanus caeruleus</i>	Breeding observed but numbers tend to fluctuate.
24	Black Kite	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	Common resident with great fluctuation in numbers.
25	Egyptian Vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>	Rare migrant. Flocks observed circling and migrating above in autumn and spring. At most, 21 birds seen in a single day.
26	Eurasian Griffon	<i>Gyps fulvus</i>	Rare migrant in spring and autumn. At most, 10 birds seen in a single day.
27	Western Marsh Harrier	<i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	Uncommon winter visitor and migrant. In winter, sometimes seen over fields, otherwise as a passage migrant passing through.
28	Shikra	<i>Tachypiza badia</i>	Sightings year-round but breeding not confirmed.
29	Eurasian Sparrowhawk	<i>Accipiter nisus</i>	Winter visitor and migrant. Somewhat common in Winter.
30	Common Buzzard	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	An uncommon migrant.
31	Long-legged Buzzard	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>	Common winter visitor and migrant.
32	Bonelli's Eagle	<i>Aquila fasciata</i>	Very rare. A single juvenile bird observed in flight.
33	Booted Eagle	<i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i>	Uncommon migrant.
34	Steppe Eagle	<i>Aquila nipalensis</i>	Uncommon sight in winter and in migration.
35	Indian Spotted Eagle	<i>Clanga hastata</i>	Uncommon but at times frequently seen. At one such occasion, birds (a pair?) were continuously seen for over 8 days. Seen flying above my home. Have been observed on a date tree as well, mobbed by House Crows.

No	Common Name	Scientific Name	Status
36	Greater Spotted Eagle	<i>Clanga clanga</i>	Rare migrant.
37	Tawny Eagle	<i>Aquila rapax</i>	Very rare. A single confirmed record.
38	Imperial Eagle	<i>Aquila heliaca</i>	Very rare migrant.
39	Eurasian Kestrel	<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	Uncommon migrant.
40	Red-necked Falcon	<i>Falco chicquera</i>	Very rare. A single sighting of two birds (a pair?) seen circling above my home.
41	Peregrine Falcon	<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	Very rare. A single adult bird of subspecies <i>Calidus</i> was observed very clearly overhead one evening but couldn't be photographed.
42	Rose-ringed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula krameri</i>	Very rare. Only once a flock of 5 birds observed in flight.
43	Common Hawk-Cuckoo	<i>Hierococcyx varius</i>	Population varies. But calls are often heard though the bird is rarely seen. In 2025, from Winter to Summer.
44	Pied Cuckoo	<i>Clamator jacobinus</i>	Relatively common Summer visitor. A chick of this species has been observed with Jungle Babblers.
45	Asian Koel	<i>Eudynamis scolopaceus</i>	Common summer breeding visitor. House Crows have been observed feeding Asian Koel chicks.
46	Greater Coucal	<i>Centropus sinensis</i>	Relatively Common resident.
47	Little Swift	<i>Apus affinis</i>	Relatively uncommon sight.
48	Alpine Swift	<i>Tachymarptis melba</i>	Uncommon passage migrant. Though at times large numbers of these birds suddenly appear, often in cloudy / rainy weather.
49	Eurasian Nightjar	<i>Caprimulgus europaeus</i>	A single fledgling observed near sugarcane fields.
50	Spotted Owlet	<i>Athene brama</i>	Common resident. Though some of its nesting trees have been cut.
51	Eurasian Hoopoe	<i>Upupa epops</i>	Common visitor and might breed in the village though breeding not confirmed but regularly recorded at times in Summer.

No	Common Name	Scientific Name	Status
52	White-throated Kingfisher	<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>	Common resident. One pair living behind my home in 2025.
53	Asian Green Bee-eater	<i>Merops orientalis</i>	Common sight in Summer.
54	Blue-cheeked Bee-eater	<i>Merops persicus</i>	Relatively uncommon migrant.
55	Indian Roller	<i>Coracias benghalensis</i>	Commonly seen year-round.
56	European Roller	<i>Coracias garrulus</i>	Uncommon passage migrant.
57	Black-rumped Flameback	<i>Dinopium benghalense</i>	Uncommon.
58	Long-tailed Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus ethologus</i>	Very rare migrant with a single confirmed record.
59	Long-tailed Shrike	<i>Lanius schach</i>	Common resident.
60	Bay-backed Shrike	<i>Lanius vittatus</i>	Uncommon Summer breeder.
61	Rufous Treepie	<i>Dendrocitta vagabunda</i>	Relatively common sight year-round but numbers fluctuate. Might breed here too as constant sight at times in Summer.
62	House Crow	<i>Corvus splendens</i>	Very common resident.
63	Common Raven	<i>Corvus corax</i>	Occasional sightings.
64	Crested Lark	<i>Galerida cristata</i>	Found only in some fields.
65	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	Sightings of Sand Martin-like birds but exact status unknown.
66	Grey-throated Martin	<i>Riparia chinensis</i>	Relatively common in right season.
67	Barn Swallow	<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Common sight year round. Juvenile seen but breeding not confirmed.
68	Wire-tailed Swallow	<i>Hirundo smithii</i>	Summer visitor but regular sightings in the latest years. Breeding not confirmed but at times birds seen at a particular place for many days.
69	European/Eastern Red-rumped Swallow	<i>Cecropis rufula/daurica</i>	Rare migrant in Autumn.
70	Streak-throated Swallow	<i>Petrochelidon fluvicola</i>	Relatively common sight. Exact status a bit uncertain as some birds can be confused with Grey-throated Martin.

No	Common Name	Scientific Name	Status
71	Red-vented Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>	Common resident.
72	White-eared Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus leucotis</i>	Relatively uncommon.
73	Zitting Cisticola	<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	Relatively uncommon and at times no sightings. But large numbers seem to breed when conditions are appropriate in sugarcane fields.
74	Rufous-fronted Prinia	<i>Prinia buchanani</i>	Uncommon. Exact status unclear.
75	Yellow-bellied Prinia	<i>Prinia flaviventris</i>	Uncommon. Exact status unclear.
76	Ashy Prinia	<i>Prinia socialis</i>	Rare visitor, might breed in sewage ponds.
77	Plain Prinia	<i>Prinia inornata</i>	Common resident.
78	Common Tailorbird	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>	Constant presence, at least in the latest years, but no large population.
79	Common Chiffchaff	<i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	Common winter visitor.
80	Blyth's Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>	Uncommon visitor.
81	Clamorous Reed Warbler	<i>Acrocephalus stentoreus</i>	Uncommon visitor with calls heard when present.
82	Striated Babbler	<i>Argya earlei</i>	Rare visitor.
83	Common Babbler	<i>Argya caudata</i>	Common sight. Breeding status unclear.
84	Jungle Babbler	<i>Argya striata</i>	Occasionally around trees in the fields but almost never near human population.
85	Yellow-eyed Babbler	<i>Chrysomma sinense</i>	Rare sight. Seen in the sewage ponds and in the fields.
86	Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	Common resident.
87	Bank Myna	<i>Acridotheres ginginianus</i>	Relatively uncommon sight.
88	Brahminy Starling	<i>Sturnia pagodarum</i>	Very rare with only 2 individuals observed.
89	Rosy Starling	<i>Pastor roseus</i>	Common migrant with large numbers of flock passing.
90	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	Relatively uncommon migrant.

No	Common Name	Scientific Name	Status
91	Black Drongo	<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>	Common resident.
92	Purple Sunbird	<i>Cinnyris asiaticus</i>	Common Summer breeding visitor.
93	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i>	Common resident.
94	Sind Sparrow	<i>Passer pyrrhonotus</i>	Uncommon sightings.
95	Yellow-throated Sparrow	<i>Gymnoris xanthocollis</i>	Rare migrant.
96	Indian Robin	<i>Copsychus fulicatus</i>	Uncommon resident.
97	Bluethroat	<i>Luscinia svecica</i>	Common Winter visitor.
98	Brown Rock Chat	<i>Oenanthe fusca</i>	Relatively common resident within village.
99	Pied Bushchat	<i>Saxicola caprata</i>	Common resident.
100	Siberian Stonechat	<i>Saxicola maurus</i>	Relatively common in Winter.
101	Variable Wheatear	<i>Oenanthe picata</i>	Rare migrant.
102	Paddyfield Pipit	<i>Anthus rufulus</i>	Common resident.
103	Western Yellow Wagtail	<i>Motacilla flava</i>	Common migrant and visitor.
104	Citrine Wagtail	<i>Motacilla citreola</i>	Relatively uncommon.
105	White Wagtail	<i>Motacilla alba</i>	Common Winter visitor.
106	White-browed Wagtail	<i>Motacilla maderaspatensis</i>	Uncommon visitor. Mostly in pairs.
107	Streaked Weaver	<i>Ploceus manyar</i>	Uncommon summer breeder.
108	Baya Weaver	<i>Ploceus philippinus</i>	Uncommon Summer breeder.
109	Black-throated Weaver	<i>Ploceus benghalensis</i>	Summer breeder. Relatively more common than other two species but the numbers of this and Streaked Weaver can fluctuate.
110	Indian Silverbill	<i>Euodice malabarica</i>	In the first few years, was occasionally observed but seems to have become uncommon in the latest years.
111	Common Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus erythrinus</i>	Rare passage migrant.
112	Red-headed Bunting	<i>Emberiza bruniceps</i>	Common migrant.

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An immature Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

© Muhammad Ali Rajput



Asian Green Bee-eater *Merops orientalis* at Sunset

© Muhammad Ali Rajput



Common Raven *Corvus corax*

© Muhammad Ali Rajput



Long-tailed Shrike *Lanius schach* with a rodent prey

© Muhammad Ali Rajput



An immature Eurasian Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*

© Muhammad Taha Rajput



Ashy Prinia *Prinia socialis*

© Muhammad Ali Rajput



Jungle Babbler *Argya striata*

© Muhammad Ali Rajput



Purple Sunbird *Cinnyris asiaticus* feeding its chick in my grandfather's home

Yellow-footed Green-Pigeon *Treron phoenicopterus* perchedVariable Wheatear *Oenanthe picata*

Some observed birds were not photographed and are excluded from the list due to potential identification disputes, including: Demoiselle Crane *Anthropoides virgo*, flocks of unidentified waterfowls, some sightings of *Falco* sp., Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis*, Pallid or Montagu's Harrier *Circus macrourus/pygargus*, Large Owl species in flight at night etc.

Threatened Species

Globally threatened species (as per the latest IUCN Red List of Threatened Species) have been observed from my village, which include: River Tern *Sterna aurantia* (Vulnerable), Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* (Endangered), Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis* (Endangered), Indian Spotted Eagle *Clanga hastata* (Vulnerable), Greater Spotted Eagle *Clanga clanga* (Vulnerable), Tawny Eagle *Aquila rapax* (Vulnerable), Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca* (Vulnerable), Red-necked Falcon *Falco chicquera* (Near Threatened). As is obvious from the above data, my home seems to lie in the migration route of many of the raptor species, and I am excited to do more work on it in future.

Why Keep a Record of Birds?

Keeping records of birds matters for both personal and scientific reasons. On a personal level, these observations become valuable memories. Scientifically, they help track changes in bird populations over time. For example, the Brown Rock Chat *Oenanthe fusca*, which was not even found in Dera Ismail Khan 25 years ago, is now common here. Meanwhile, the Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri*, which was found throughout the district in the past, has nearly vanished except for rare sightings. These are just two examples of many that highlight how rapidly nature is changing around us. By documenting these trends, we can identify species at risk and take steps to protect them before they disappear.

Acknowledgement

I am thankful to my elder brother, Muhammad Ali Rajput, for being a constant companion in our pursuit for wildlife and also for helping out in furnishing this article.

Forgotten Birds:

Lesser Florican *Sypheotides indicus*

Akram Awan

Lesser Florican *Sypheotides indicus* is one of the smallest species within the bustard family (Otididae) and the smallest found in the Indian subcontinent. Males weigh around 0.50 kg and measure 48 cm in length, whereas females are slightly larger, reaching 0.75 kg and 52 cm. Both sexes are characterized by their long, slender necks. During the breeding season, males acquire striking adornments: spoon-shaped head plumes, a white throat and a white collar at the base of the neck, and contrasting black-and-white plumage.



© Yash Darji

A displaying Lesser Florican *Sypheotides indicus* in Ajmer, Rajasthan, India July 2023

Courtship display involves repeated vertical leaps, during which the male flashes these features midair. Outside the breeding period, males resemble females in their cryptic, camouflaged plumage. In Gujarat and Rajasthan, the species is locally referred to as Khar Titar (Grass Partridge) and Khar Mor (Grass Peacock), names that reflect its ornamental breeding appearance. The florican breeds during the late monsoon in northwestern India (Gujarat, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, etc.) as well as in parts of Pakistan, including Sindh, Balochistan, and the eastern margins of Punjab, favoring dry grasslands with scattered trees (particularly *Zizyphus*) and millet, sugarcane, or cotton-growing areas. A summary of historical records from Pakistan is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Known historical sightings of Lesser Florican from Pakistan.

Balochistan	Punjab	Sindh
Makran-Side: Gili, Hingol River (September, Year Unknown); 2 individuals at Ormara (Date not known); Gwadar (Number/Date Unknown)	Lahore: 32 km North-east, July 1986.	Larkana: Bindi, Rodhan (January and February, Year unknown)
Lasbela-Side: 3 males were shot by Col. C.B. Rubin in Lasbela at Band Murad Khan, near Hab River (September 1937); 1 male near Hab River at Mangho Pir (September 1958); 18 birds (October 1875); 1 egg (August 1882)	Kasur: Alloo (July 1986), Sukh Beas River (July 1987)	Karachi and Vicinity: Moach Plains (in Monsoon, Year Unknown); Gadap (Undated Monsoon records); 3 birds at Tel Kanadrio (Year Unknown); Sapora (8 birds were shot in a single day (August 1872).

The Lesser Florican has suffered a sharp population decline, mainly due to habitat loss, climate change impacts such as erratic monsoon rains and droughts, widespread pesticide use, overgrazing, and excessive hunting in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The species is classified as Critically Endangered by the IUCN and is listed in Schedule II of CITES. Records from India show that its breeding range contracted by 60% during the 1940s-80s, whereas the last sighting in Pakistan was reported 38 years ago, from Punjab province.

Also known as 'Likh,' the Lesser Florican is a polygamous bird, which means that the male mates with several females. It visits peninsular India outside the breeding season and visits our region from July to September as a monsoon breeder. Its breeding is closely associated with the tall grasslands, nurtured by the southwest monsoon rains. It has become increasingly difficult to find this bird due to its skulking disposition and rapid decline in population, largely attributed to range contraction caused by habitat loss. However, there are chances of its occurrence after good monsoon rains in Sindh and Balochistan, from Badin to Kirthar and Makran.

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Trip Report: Northern Areas 2025

Zafeer Ahmed Shaikh, Salman Baloch, Pharanaz Naveed Ashraf, Azan Karam

Introduction:

Long-billed Bush Warbler *Locustella major* (LBBW) is a globally threatened bird species that has been reported from only a few valleys, mainly in northern Pakistan: Naltar, Gilgit, Skardu, and Kaghan (Roberts 1992). The species was hardly reported and considered a rare summer breeding visitor to the higher alpine valleys of the Karakoram range due to its local distribution. In the summer of 2022, Eaton (2022) found several individuals in Naltar valley, which was followed up by numerous sightings by both domestic and international visitors. A team of three (ZAS, AK, & TK) surveyed Naltar Valley in summer of 2024 and carried out a targeted survey in Naltar for the species and found a singular, non-singing individual in Naltar Riverside scrub (pers. comm.). That study was supported by Oriental Bird Club (OBC) and carried on by the Rewilding Indus Team. Thus, in a bid to monitor summer breeding population in Naltar valley, a team was formulated again this summer to survey for this enigmatic songbird, and what follows next is our efforts to reach the breeding ground of this bird species and other habitats close by.

Travel:

We mainly used Public transport throughout the majority of the journey, which included the use of Buses, Rental cars, Jeeps, and more. For a common Pakistani, it is fairly easy to utilise local transport services, some of which can even be booked on the spot. For long-distance transit, such as using Buses to and from provinces, it is recommended to book tickets in advance, especially NATCO bus tickets, which function from Islamabad to Gilgit and up North, since they run out of tickets faster, especially during peak breeding seasons.

Team Members & Contributors:

Azan Karam (AK), Pharanaz Naveed Ashraf (PNA), Haroon Palari (HP), Kamala Palari (KP), Rashid Asghar (RA), Muhammad Sadiq Baloch (MSB), Salman Baloch (SB), Taimur Khan (TK), and Zafeer Ahmed Shaikh (ZAS)



Left to Right: Salman Baloch (SB), Kamal Palari (KP), Haroon Palari (HP), Muhammad Sadiq Baloch (MSB), Pharanaz Naveed Ashraf (PNA), Azan Karam (AK), Rashid Asgher (RA) and Zafeer Ahmed Shaikh (ZAS) - Passu Cones, Gilgit-Baltistan.



Left to Right: Kamal Palari, Zafeer Ahmed Shaikh (ZAS), Salman Baloch (SB), Pharanaz Naveed Ashraf (PNA), Rashid Asgher (RA), Azan Karam (AK), Azan Karam (AK), and Haroon Palari (HP) - Borith Lake Hotel, Gilgit-Baltistan.

Journey:

10-11 June:

SB, MSB, KP, and HP had already arrived at the Faisal Movers Office in Saddar, downtown Karachi. I arrived shortly after and was joined by RA immediately afterwards as well. Both of us had met just a few hours before to sort out the tickets for the ride from Karachi to Islamabad. The almost 22-hour journey dropped us at Saddar, this time in Rawalpindi at 1500hrs. The group then took two taxis to the NATCO bus terminal on the other end of the town, which is full of busy tourists moving through. Freshened up from lunch at a restaurant at the end of the terminal, we waited for AK as our bus was ready to leave at 1900 hours. After a tense moment of worry, he made it just in time as the tyres of the bus had only started rolling, and thus, we started our 14-hour journey through some treacherous mountainous roads overnight to get to the next checkpoint of our journey: Gilgit city. PNA had alerted us to the good news that we would get to see the next day, but it was kept hidden for the time being.

12 June:

We reached Gilgit city around 1000 hours and packed up basic breakfast goods and utilities, such as the SIM card. Upon arrival, the first thing we did was hire transport for Naltar Valley, which is roughly two hours of travel depending on the mode of transport (we have travelled to and fro Naltar in Jeeps, Suzukis and even Motorcycles!). With brief stopovers in Nomal, the group was greeted by Blue Whistling-Thrush *Myophonus caeruleus* and Indian White-eye *Zosterops palpebrosus* in the roadside Oriental Plane *Platanus orientalis* and White Mulberry *Morus alba* trees. The Suzuki, upon arrival on the Naltar road, asked us (7 individuals with lots of luggage) to step out and walk a bit for the vehicle to climb the steep road. Our team, although tired, did enjoy the Brown Dipper *Cinclus pallasii*, White-capped Redstart *Phoenicurus leucocephalus* and Grey-crowned Goldfinch *Carduelis caniceps* along the Naltar river that flows right by. Once we arrived at the hotel in Naltar, we almost immediately stepped out to bird, and that is the best part about birdwatching with such passionate people, they do not spare a second to waste!

Outside the hotel were Grey-crowned Goldfinch *Carduelis caniceps*, Red-fronted Serin *Serinus pusillus*, Mountain Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus sindianus* and Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*. The group walked along the edge of the river and walked westwards along the main road to access the larger riverine scrub where another important team member was waiting for us: PNA, who had arrived here a day earlier and was waiting patiently for us with the mega bird of the trip. As per her instructions, she was near the riverine scrub in front of Naltar. To get to see Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros* and Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia* in their breeding grounds it was a surreal sight for many of us Southerners. While exploring the riverine

scrub we soon got to see the common bird assemblage of the area: Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus*, Plumbeous Redstart *Phoenicurus fuliginosus*, Siberian Stonechat *Saxicola maurus*, Masked Wagtail *Motacilla alba personata*, Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola*, and Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos*. Soon following PNA's live location, I got closer towards the patch of Sea Buckthorns *Hippophae rhamnoides* where we had seen the LBBW last year and just then, almost out of astonishment, I heard what we spent hours, if not days, listening to last summer, hoping to hear it in this very location. My heart sank as I tried to get closer to it, and then I saw PNA, who gave me the signal on its location. It was calling actively from a small, hardly 3 by 10 metres of thicket. In between all the excitement, I feel like the proper greetings were in the absence on my side. I saw the bird in great detail and took as many photos and recordings before running off to gather the rest of the team to the sighting of the trip! We spent the remaining afternoon as much time as possible with the bird. The team now completely took note of all the angles and documented the bird very well. I still can not believe I was hearing this enigma, a feeling I am sure was shared by AK as well. We left the gem around 1600 hours and slowly moved across towards the edge of the forest bordering this settlement. Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica*, Western Crowned Warbler *Phylloscopus occipitalis*, Tickell's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus affinis*, Streaked Laughingthrush *Trochalopteron lineatum*, Rufous-breasted Accentor *Prunella strophiatea*, Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea* joined in as we ventured deeper into the forest. Soon after, Dark-sided Flycatcher *Muscicapa sibirica* were seen everywhere in the forest, and their sweet trilling calls filled the forest. While (AK, MSB, RA, HP, and KP) enjoyed Brown Dipper *Cinclus pallasii*, we (SB, PNA, ZAS) found a pair of Red Crossbill *Loxia curvirostra* silently feeding in the backlit forest. The light was very harsh to view them properly, but the cross-bill is unmissable. When the rest of the group arrived, we were not able to trace back the birds. Brown Dipper *Cinclus pallasii* later showed up great as a pair and juveniles jetted past the smaller stream on the edge of the forest. While concluding the successful short session, a pair of Eurasian Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes* and a small flock of Common Swift *Apus apus* were counted as the last birds of the first but excellent birding session.

13 June:

The team was in the riverine scrub patch by 0500hrs to search for any additional specimens of LBBW, but to no avail. The bird from yesterday was still there, calling almost endlessly. Some important notes were taken during the time: the grasshopper-like trilling call continues with short breaks every 18-24 seconds, with the duration of the breaks lasting almost always less than 6 seconds. This can continue for over 10 minutes with ease unless disturbed. The same general bird assemblage kept us company this morning as well, with additions such as Rufous-naped Tit *Periparus rufonuchalis*, Asian Tit *Parus major*, and White-cheeked Nuthatch *Sitta leucopsis*. We departed back to the hotel to make it to breakfast and then prepare for the journey up the

the valley. By 0900 hrs, our drivers, whom we had booked the night before, had arrived, and we began our journey up the valley, traversing some very scenic roads through the Blue Pine *Pinus wallichiana* forest and almost getting washed down by the raging Naltar River in summer shape.

Our first stop was the Bishgari Forest. This proved to be an excellent spot for Kashmir Nutcracker *Nucifraga multipunctata*, which we did hear but could not nail down a look. The forest was alive with the sweet notes of Rufous-naped Tit *Periparus rufonuchalis*, Hume's Warbler *Phylloscopus humei*, and their speciality warbler, the Brooks's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus subviridis*. Inside the forest were also Dark-sided Flycatcher *Muscicapa sibirica*, Bar-tailed Treecreeper *Certhia himalayana*, and Oriental Turtle-Dove *Streptopelia orientalis*. The forest ends at the steep walls of a mountain, and these foothills are great for looking for birds that are more easily found on the edges of this habitat. This revealed Snow Pigeon *Columba leuconota*, Himalayan Bluetail *Tarsiger rufilatus*, Blue-capped Redstart *Phoenicurus caeruleocephalus*, and Yellow-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax graculus*. Some team members (AK, RA, SB, MSB) also found a White-winged Grosbeak *Mycerobas carnipes*. We left the forest soon after and went straight for the Satrangi Lake area.

After all of us got over the scenic beauty of the place, we got straight to work. Finding Hodgson's Treecreeper *Certhia hodgsoni* in the birch trees that line the lake's edge was the goal. Aside from the regular summer breeders, Tickell's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus affinis*, Mountain Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus sindianus*, Coal Tits *Periparus ater*, Plain Mountain Finches *Leucosticte nemoricola*, and Rufous-breasted Accentors *Prunella strophiatea* were noted.

With no luck with the treecreeper around the lake, we began to head back, only to stop by a bigger birch patch we had passed earlier. This is also attached to the lake. Everyone got out and began searching for the prime target. With rain showing up, staying in an area with slopes full of scree is definitely not a good idea, and thus, everyone was adamant about finding this last tick. After chancing upon a flock of three treecreepers, I looked for the target: the first, Bar-tailed Treecreeper *Certhia himalayana*, the second, also Bar-tailed, but the third one was much cleaner-looking, with a whiter face and belly, and an unmarked tail. We had found the bird we did not want to miss from this site and headed back down.

While we waited for the rest of the team (PNA, RA, AK, and SB) to arrive, we (MSB, HP, KP, and ZAS) decided to peek into Bishgari Forest again to see if anything else could be found, and our intuition was correct. The forest had a small flock of Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus* moving along the forest floor in typical thrush-like behaviour. When the rest of the

the team arrived, and I stayed back to show them the thrushes while others from my party headed back to the town. This added more time to my slot, and I was able to see another Pakistani speciality after one year: Blyth's Rosefinch *Carpodacus grandis*.

14 June:

In the same practice, the team first visited the riverine scrub patch by 0515 to explore the scrub for Large-billed Bush Warbler *Locustella major* and to listen for calls, but had no luck finding more birds.

Soon after, the vehicle arrived, and we travelled towards the adjacent valley, where terraced fields occupy a large portion of the landscape. In the Nagaral cultivation fields, particularly along the edges where Docks *Rumex* sp., and other vegetation grow, forming an ideal habitat for LBBW, we failed to locate any individuals.

However, we did record Eurasian Wrynecks *Jynx torquilla* singing from the trees and Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus* feeding on the ground. Other birds seen included Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica*, Red-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*, Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos*, Brooks's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus subviridis*, Tickell's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus affinis*, Western Crowned Warbler *Phylloscopus occipitalis*, Himalayan Rubythroat *Calliope pectoralis*, Rufous-breasted Accentor *Prunella strophiatea*, Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia*, and Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*. Sudden rainfall forced us to leave the fields.

By 0910 hrs, we moved towards the Snow Leopard Enclosure environs, located higher up on the mountainside, not far from the Nagaral fields. The area is covered with dense shrubs and tall trees. Here, we observed Oriental Turtle-Dove *Streptopelia orientalis*, Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica*, Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos*, Hume's Warbler *Phylloscopus humei*, Brooks's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus subviridis*, Western Crowned Warbler *Phylloscopus occipitalis*, and Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia*.

At 1100 hrs, we departed for the Natural Stadium, located in Hunza Nagar. This stadium sits at approximately 3000 meters above sea level. The off-road drive to the site was difficult, but surrounded by beautiful forest. When we reached the stadium at 1400 hrs, the area was crowded with people, which disturbed bird activity. However, we were fortunate to make some significant observations. We were welcomed by Rock Buntings *Emberiza cia* and Spotted Flycatchers *Muscicapa striata*. Overhead, we noted a high flight of a Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* and two flying Yellow-billed Choughs *Pyrrhocorax graculus*. Other birds seen included Brooks's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus subviridis*, Lesser Whitethroat *Currucula curruca*, Streaked Laughingthrush *Trochalopteron lineatum*, Sulphur-bellied Warbler *Phylloscopus griseolus*, Blue-capped Redstart *Phoenicurus coeruleocephalus*, Black Redstart *Phoenicurus*

ochruros, and Fire-fronted Serin *Serinus pusillus*. A particularly special record for this habitat came from WJ, who observed a single White-browed Tit-Warbler *Leptopoecile sophiae*. In addition, AK and SB observed four White-winged Grosbeak *Mycerobas carnipes*, feeding on Juniper *Juniperus* sp., fruits.

15 June:

This day was reserved for a visit to Borith Lake and Khunjerab Pass by the team. Two 4x4 jeeps were hired for this leg of the journey. Setting off early, we arrived at Borith around 0620hrs, and everyone got out of the jeeps to take a walk along the lake. The lake was quieter than expected: a Northern Shoveler *Anas clypeata*, a Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*, and a few Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra* paddled in the stillness. Also observed were a Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops*, a few Streaked Laughingthrush *Trochalopteron lineatum*, and, with their signature chatter, a flock of Fire-fronted Serin *Serinus pusillus*. While exploring the village behind the lake, the team also came across Oriental Turtle-Dove *Streptopelia orientalis*, Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*, and a Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos*, a species rather uncommon here.

At this point, the group split up, with AK, RA and PNA heading up towards the viewpoint of the Passu Glacier in the jeep to look for Chukar *Alectoris chukar*, and bingo, they were there, scuttling in their habitat, not easy to discern. Going up towards the glacier, several swifts were seen and photographed, of which RA and AK were lucky to capture an Alpine Swift *Apus melba* on camera. Other treats included a Snow Pigeon *Columba leuconota*, a family of Woolly Rabbits *Oryctolagus cuniculus*, some Himalayan Rock Agamas *Laudakia himalayana*, and the endemic butterfly Astor Argus *Bozanonia astorica*.

On our return, everyone scuttled to the nearby hotel for breakfast, over which, as always, notes and observations were shared and discussed. After breakfast at Borith around 0930hrs, the team stepped out upon learning of the presence of a Eurasian Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* that had been spotted by some members. Excitement broke out amongst the rest to find it, and the bird did not disappoint—cooperative and photographable, giving the group a fine send-off. Soon after, we loaded into the vehicles and set off towards Khunjerab Pass. The drive along the Karakoram Highway was nothing short of spectacular. Amidst sweeping views, fresh distractions appeared at intervals: a Yellow-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax graculus*, a Brown Dipper *Cinclus pallasii* by the streams, and a striking White-winged Redstart *Phoenicurus erythrogaster*.

By 1200hrs, we reached the Khunjerab checkpoint. After the necessary ID checks, clearance was granted to proceed further. The weather had begun to turn colder as we gained elevation. En route, we were treated to good sightings of Himalayan Ibex *Capra sibirica*, resting on the steep slopes of the majestic Karakoram. Arriving at the historic Khunjerab Pass itself, we were greeted by a lone Black-headed Mountain Finch *Leucosticte brandti* in the parking lot, and a

Horned Lark *Eremophila alpestris* was also spotted in the nearby vicinity. Both were on our target lists. We were also excited to see the imposing sight of a Himalayan Griffon *Gyps himalayensis* circling overhead, a Red-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*, and a White-winged Redstart *Phoenicurus erythrogastrus* on the Chinese side of the pass!

After spending substantial time combing the terrain and taking the mandatory selfies at the landmark gate of the Khunjerab Pass, we headed back. Amidst the Long-tailed Marmot *Marmota caudata* and Woolly Rabbit *Oryctolagus cuniculus*, our search for the Ground Tit *Pseudopodoces humilis* took an earnest and urgent turn. Happy to report, it was spotted single individual—but sadly not all team members managed to photograph it.

By evening, we arrived, tired but delighted, at the famous Yak Burger joint, Yak Grill in Passu. We made a stop at Hussaini for tea and left a pebble in memory of our “star of the trip,” the Long-billed Bush Warbler *Locustella major*, inscribed with the date of observation and the names of the team members. Laughs all around, thus concluded an amazing day.

16 June:

It was our last day in Gilgit-Baltistan, while saying goodbye to PNA. From that point onwards, we set off from Gilgit for Shogran in the morning. We reached Shogran Hill Station in the evening via the winding road of Babusar Pass, drenched in rain. It is a popular tourist spot in the Kaghan Valley at about 2360 m altitude, frequented by hundreds of visitors mainly in the summer.

When the rain stopped, we walked around adjacent pine forests for owling and specifically to search for two flying squirrels co-existing in this area, living off walnuts and apricots around the Pine Park Hotel & Resort. We heard Mountain Scops-Owl *Otus spilocephalus* and Lesser Cuckoo *Cuculus poliocephalus* constantly emitting their invariable diagnostic calls. In two nights at the station, in addition to these birds, we documented Kashmir Flying Squirrel *Eoglaucomys fimbriatus* and White-bellied Giant Flying Squirrel *Petaurista albiventer*. We used our hotel in Shogran as a stopping point, travelling back and forth to Siri & Paye and Malakandi. On the roadside forests of Shogran, during walks and rides on jeepable roads, our team saw the following birds during daytime: Himalayan Woodpecker *Dendrocopos himalayensis*, Ashy Drongo *Dicrurus leucophaeus*, Yellow-billed Blue-Magpie *Urocissa flavirostris*, Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos*, Green-backed Tit *Parus monticolus*, Western Crowned Warbler *Phylloscopus occipitalis*, Streaked Laughingthrush *Trochalopteron lineatum*, Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*, Grey-winged Blackbird *Turdus bouboul*, Blue Whistling-Thrush *Myophonus caeruleus*, Grey Bushchat *Saxicola ferreus* and Russet Sparrow *Passer cinnamomeus*.

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Naltar Bala, Gilgit-Baltistan

© Azan Karam



Bishgari Forest, Gilgit-Baltistan

© Azan Karam



Satrangi Lake, Gilgit-Baltistan

© Azan Karam



Nagaral, Gilgit-Baltistan

© Azan Karam



Passu Glacier, Gilgit-Baltistan

© Azan Karam



Borith Lake, Gilgit-Baltistan

17 June:

On the morning of 17 June, our team took a jeep ride towards Siri Paye over a bumpy track in the middle of dense forest. At over 3050 m high-altitude area above sea level, Siri Paye is often referred to by a singular term used for two closely associated sites. Paye, as the 'footing', comes first, where a small seasonal pond welcomes upcoming visitors, whereas Siri, as the 'heading', comes later with a further upward hike.

Upon arrival, a White-bellied Redstart *Hodgsonius phoenicuroides* was heard by AK, which was later photographed by another group of birdwatchers in the area. This area is particularly popular amongst birdwatchers for one prime target: Orange Bullfinch *Pyrrhula aurantiaca*. A male of this bulbous species was recorded by RA and SB at Siri. Other than that, at least three species of cuckoos were heard: Common *Cuculus canorus*, Lesser *Cuculus poliocephalus* and Himalayan *Cuculus saturatus*.

Besides, Great Barbet *Psilopogon virens*, Himalayan Woodpecker *Dendrocopos himalayensis*, Yellow-billed Blue-Magpie *Urocissa flavirostris*, Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos*, Coal Tit *Periparus ater melanolophus*, Lemon-rumped Warbler *Phylloscopus chloronotus*, Western Crowned Warbler *Phylloscopus occipitalis*, Brownish-flanked Bush Warbler *Horornis fortipes*, Streaked Laughingthrush *Trochalopteron lineatum*, Variegated Laughingthrush *Trochalopteron variegatum*, Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*, Indian Blue Robin *Larvivora brunnea*, Himalayan Bluetail *Tarsiger rufilatus*, Rufous-breasted Accentor *Prunella strophciata*, Russet Sparrow *Passer cinnamomeus*, Pink-browed Rosefinch *Carpodacus rodochroa*, Yellow-breasted Greenfinch *Chloris spinoides* and Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia*.

Additionally, ZAS saw a Himalayan Griffon *Gyps himalayensis*, Long-tailed Minivet *Pericrocotus ethologus*, Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* and Grey Bushchat *Saxicola ferreus*. In the Paye Meadows, a hovering Eurasian Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*, a mixed-species foraging party of Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*, White-cheeked Nuthatch *Sitta leucopsis*, Coal Tit *Periparus ater* and Bar-tailed Treecreeper *Certhia himalayana*, and a Coal Tit *Periparus ater* taking a sunbath were behaviorally great observations.

18 June:

By this point, the fatigue had gotten to two of our team members, and thus, RA and KP decided to sleep in, while the rest of the group set out to explore the Malkandi Forest Trail at 0600. Heading down from the hotel area, we almost missed the entrance to the trail, which, as per a great birdwatcher and friend, Muhammad Babar, is very little explored and rarely receives visitors.

Our approach was very slow and alert, hoping to run into some pheasants. We were greeted by Oriental Turtle-Dove *Streptopelia orientalis*, Ashy Drongo *Dicrurus leucophaeus*, Black Bulbul *Hypsipetes leucocephalus*, and Streaked Laughingthrush *Trochalopteron lineatum*. About roughly 800 metres into the trail, we noticed a flurry of activity among small birds: Brownish-flanked Bush Warbler *Horornis fortipes*, Western Crowned Warbler *Phylloscopus occipitalis*, and Indian Blue Robin *Larvivora brunnea* formed a constant background cacophony. A party of Coal Tit *Periparus ater*, Black-throated Tit *Aegithalos concinnus*, and Asian Tit *Parus cinereus* and Green-backed Tit *Parus monticolus* was a great observation. Despite multiple views, we were unable to pick out a White-throated Tit *Aegithalos niveogularis* among them.

Two Rufous-bellied Niltava *Niltava sundara* males fighting in the undergrowth added a brilliant splash of colour. Brown-fronted Woodpecker *Dendrocoptes auriceps* and Himalayan Woodpecker *Dendrocopos himalayensis* gave excellent views. A rather bulky-looking Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo* was observed and photographed midway through the trail when there was an opening in the canopy below. Yellow-billed Blue-Magpie *Urocissa flavirostris*, Blue Whistling-Thrush *Myophonus caeruleus*, and Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos* were also present along the trail. On our way back, a screeching call caught our attention, followed by a quick flyby of a thin, green figure. We later identified more of these as Slaty-headed Parakeet *Psittacula himalayana*, though we could only hear their calls and could not trace them in the thick foliage. Due to a lack of time, we left the trail around 1100 and prepared for a lengthy ride to Islamabad. We first caught a ride to Mansehra and then continued onward, reaching Islamabad late at night.

19 June:

Our target was to get to Trail 5, Margallah Hills National Park at the earliest and despite the fatigue from the extensive travel the day before, we reached the parking lot by 0615 and started the journey from the Mosque before the Information centre. We surveyed the dried-up gully behind the Mosque and sightings of Coppersmith Barbet *Psilopogon haemacephalus*, Blue-throated Barbet *Psilopogon asiaticus* and Ashy Drongo *Dicrurus leucophaeus* were quickly dismissed. The group rushed towards the freshwater stream about 1.5 km into the trail.

After being inspired by MSB at Nagar to take a solo view, I held back from the group and stayed in the dried-up gully to further investigate any activity, and I was not disappointed. Indian Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradisi*, Fulvous-breasted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos macei*, Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker *Yungipicus canicapillus*, Pied Cuckoo *Clamator jacobinus*, Grey-hooded Warbler *Phylloscopus xanthoschistos* and White-throated Fantail *Rhipidura albicollis* were noted. Amidst the flutter of activity, a distant red figure caught my attention and

it turned out to be a Barking Deer *Muntiacus vaginalis* fully eyeing its viewer and making space. Eventually, it vanished into the foliage.

Energised by this self-discovery, I took an even different approach and turned right behind the camping spot to discover a trail I was previously unaware of. The habitat, more dotted with mature pine trees, was almost devoid of any activity except Purple Sunbird *Cinnyris asiaticus* and Grey Treepie *Dendrocitta formosae*. With the summer heat slowly creeping up and being present without water, I moved to the main trail in an attempt to join the group. The trail was alive with the activity of Rusty-cheeked Scimitar-Babbler *Erythrogonys erythrogonys* (AK's lifebird), Jungle Babbler *Argya striata*, White-cheeked Tit *Aegithalos leucogenys* and Kalij Pheasant *Lophura leucomelanos*.

With the heat, together with a growling stomach, I rested underneath the Cluster Fig *Ficus racemosa* at the 0.4 km checkpoint. There is a bench here where I have almost always rested whenever I have been on the trail. Within a few minutes of rest, quaint sounds of splatter, thuds and rustling caught my attention. I was right in the middle of a feeding party. The Kalij Pheasant *Lophura leucomelanos*, Grey-winged Blackbird *Turdus boulboul*, Indian White-eye *Zosterops palpebrosus*, Purple Sunbird *Cinnyris asiaticus* and Blue-throated Barbet *Psilopogon asiaticus* were busy feeding on the ripe figs, which were everywhere on the forest floor.

The activity was quite a pleasant distraction from my fatigue, and just then it hit me, my colleagues, Akram Awan & John Pilgrim had observed a Thick-billed Flowerpecker *Dicaeum agile* on the trail a few months before, and what better spot to potentially have a bird that has fruit in its name! I pulled up Merlin and played its call to almost immediately get a fluttering response of a small bird that flew and landed in the canopy before quickly vanishing. After subsequent attempts to attract the mystery bird, the bird came right on top of me in a near-perfect branch where I could view its small size, drab body, hooked bill and bloodshot eyes. It was indeed the Thick-billed Flowerpecker *Dicaeum agile*, a rare year-round visitor in and around this region.

The bird was viewed with absolute delight in almost all possible angles and behaviours within that time frame. After spending about 20 minutes at the spot, I moved upwards to meet the rest of the group, only to meet them halfway on their way back. The team did see Speckled Piculet *Picumnus innominatus* (a nemesis bird) and Blue-throated Flycatcher *Cyornis rubeculoides* at the stream. Upon return, I pointed out the bird to SB, which, almost immediately after, flew away out of view and with no response or return to callbacks. We headed back to our hotel.

At around 1720, we returned to the trail to meet a dear friend, Anssi Kullberg, who had been

studying the birds of the National Park and the city in great detail over the last few years. His regular visits to the trails have revealed noticeable activity of some little-seen summer-breeding visitors such as the Oriental Scops-Owl *Otus sunia* and Large-tailed Nightjar *Caprimulgus macrurus*. Aside from most of the bird species noted earlier in the morning, we heard Indian Scops-Owl *Otus bakkamoena* almost immediately after sunset and, in the absence of hikers, trekkers and other species of chatters, soon came the unique two-tone call of the Oriental Scops-Owl *Otus sunia* and flyby views of the Large-tailed Nightjar *Caprimulgus macrurus*. They were among the most enjoyed lifebirds of the Islamabad Margallah Hills stopover and were followed by a scrumptious dinner courtesy of Anssi.

20 June:

At around 0745, the first half of the team (MSB, RA and ZAS) reached Lakeview Park. We greatly enjoyed views of Indian Pied Starling *Gracupica contra* (RA's lifebirds), Brown Rock Chat *Oenanthe fusca*, and nesting Yellow-throated Sparrow *Gymnoris xanthocollis*. Soon, came the rest of the team (SB, AK, KP & HP).

The small patch of woodland near the aviary resulted in Jungle Myna *Acridotheres fuscus*, Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*, Oriental Magpie-Robin *Copsychus saularis*, Indian Golden Orioles *Oriolus kundoo*, and more Indian Pied Starling *Gracupica contra*. The treelines also had Yellow-eyed Babbler *Chrysomma sinense*, as they are most commonly seen in this patch. We soon neared a viewpoint of the lake's edge, which revealed a receding waterline and, as a result, a grassland had formed that hosted Eastern Cattle Egret *Bubulcus coromandus*, Red-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus indicus* and Indian Pond-Heron *Ardeola grayii*. A view towards the edge of the waterline resulted in the actual waterbird diversity. Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia*, Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*, Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus*, Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea*, and Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* were noted along with an overstaying and much enjoyed Demoiselle Crane *Anthropoides virgo*. Little Cormorant *Microcarbo niger*, Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida* and a Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus* were also present in the mixed congregation.

The swampland on the right of the façade under which we were viewing the activity out in the lake seemed promising, and thus, we investigated it. As a result, Grey-bellied Cuckoo *Cacomantis passerinus*, Brahminy Starling *Sturnia pagodarum*, Black-crowned Night-Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*, White-breasted Waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus* and Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus* were noticed. On our way back, we also encountered a family of Spotted Owl *Athene brama*, a staple of this Park and a Long-tailed Shrike *Lanius schach*. We did not find a Chestnut-tailed Starling *Sturnia malabarica*, which breeds here in small numbers. We reached the hotel by afternoon, when it was time to bid AK a hurried goodbye, which we

soon found out would be short-lived when the bus left without him. We (SB, MSB, RA, KP, HP, and ZAS) departed from the same terminal at 1600 and he left at 1700 for Swat.

21 June:

The Sindh team made a brief stop at Hyderabad terminal, where KP and HP departed for their residences in Jhimpir. And verily, SB, MSB, RA and ZAS reached Karachi around 1300hrs and headed home in two separate teams; one to Malir and the other to Lyari.

Conclusion:

The team was able to achieve a total bird list of 186 bird species spread over 10 days, with the most important sighting being of the Long-billed Bush Warbler *Locustella major*.

Recommendations:

This trip was a team effort by and large, with many planning and management in the foreground. One of the most important factors to take notes from this trip report is that we did not take comfort into account for the most part, which is one of the reasons we were able to achieve such a large diversity of habitats and, verily, the bird species diversity. With a broad spectrum of backgrounds, it is possible to scan almost every inch of the habitat or birdwatching location, which allows recording of every important species in the area. However, large groups also lead to hustle and bustle at some point and lead to some observers missing a better view of the bird due to a human view-block or missing the bird completely! Thus, such large teams need to be carefully considered based on the taste of the birdwatcher. If you are willing to sacrifice a bit for the love of the game, such trips are for you.

In terms of logistics, our transport methods were quite simple and local. In most areas, we used local transport, which is safe and easier to manoeuvre for International visitors. The Northern Areas of Pakistan are relatively better equipped in logistical support and some infrastructure for tourism, which is almost entirely non-birding related, but still helps a lot in the field. It is highly recommended to get an SCOM SIM card for Gilgit-Baltistan travels. Although the cell reception is very obscure in Naltar Valley, the greater region needs to stay in communication since none of the SIMs work outside the big cities.

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© Haroon Palari



Long-billed Bush Warbler *Locustella major*

© Salman Baloch



Hodgson's Treecreeper *Certhia hodgsoni*

© Azan Karam



Brandt's Mountain Finch *Leucosticte brandti*

© Salman Baloch



Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*

© Rashid Asghar



Orange Bullfinch *Pyrrhula aurantiaca*

© Pharanaz Naveed Ashraf



Blyth's Rosefinch *Carpodacus grandis*

© Muhammad Sadiq Baloch



White-browed Tit-Warbler *Leptopoeile sophiae*

© Zafeer Ahmed Shalkh



Snow Pigeon *Columba leuconota*

Bird Count Initiatives

Editorial Team

© Abbas Rizvi



CornellLab 
OCTOBER
BIG DAY 
11 Oct 2025

White-cheeked Tit *Aegithalos leucogenys* - Margalla Hills National Park, Islamabad, 31 Oct 2021.

Mark your calendars for **11 October 2025**, the **October Big Day**! It's a global celebration of birds, uniting people everywhere through a shared love of birdwatching. Last year, nearly 750,000 participants joined in, contributing to this worldwide event.

Date: 11 October 2025

Where: Anywhere in the world

Celebrate birds with people across the globe on October Big Day. Last year, nearly 750,000 birders took part. This year, let's set a new record while supporting **Global Bird Weekend** and **World Migratory Bird Day**.

How to Join

1. Sign up on eBird mobile app or website.
2. Go birding on 11 October; even 10 minutes counts.
3. Submit your sightings on the eBird app by 14 October.

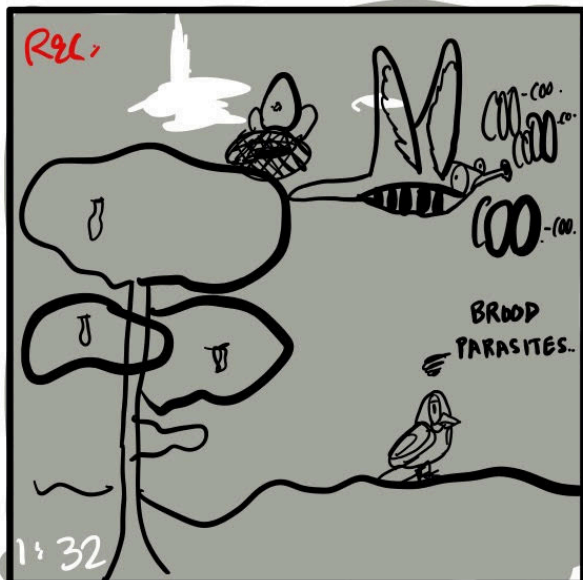
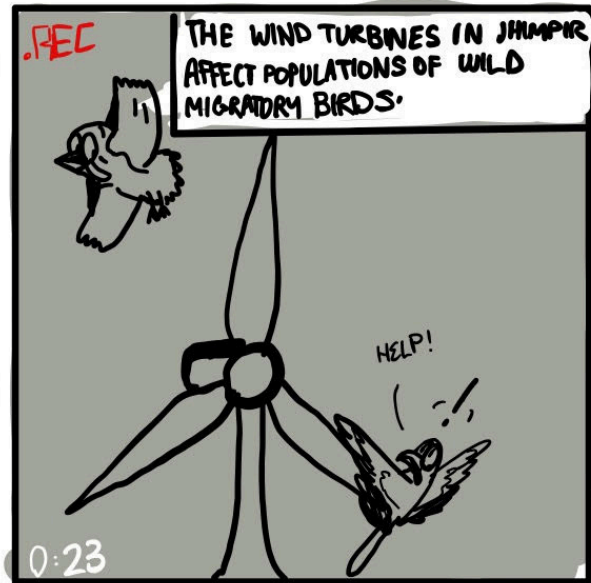


How to Get Ready

- Take the eBird Essentials course to brush up on your skills.
- Scan QR code to join eBird Pakistan community on Facebook for guidance.
- Use eBird Mobile Explore to find nearby hotspots.
- Explore Birds of the World website (free all weekend).
- Download Merlin Bird ID to help identify birds by sight or sound, or ask experts.

Comic Section

WINDMILLS IN JHIMPIR



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Below are some relevant links for you if you are interested in learning more about birds and the birdwatching scene in Pakistan:

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eBird:

<https://ebird.org/region/PK>

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Rewilding Indus (RI) is a body of like minded individuals concerned with the crippling loss of biodiversity in Pakistan. This young initiative is a collective effort towards making a dent in Wildlife Research and Conservation in Pakistan. This Bulletin has been made possible through RI's technical support.