



DAANGEER

Issue 3 • Fall 2024



Updates
Bird Artist
National Firsts
Mountain Hawk-Eagle

A Quarterly Analysis of Pakistan's Birds

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:

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 and if our readers may come across any inaccuracies, we motivate them to get in touch with us so we may aspire to identify, address and learn accordingly.

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NEW TO BIRDWATCHING?

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

Facebook:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/672890519498797>

X/Formerly Twitter:

@OrnithoPakistan

eBird:

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

Rewilding Indus Library

<https://rewildinginduslibrary.org/archives/>

Pakistan Rarities and 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 to explorers, we would expect you to follow them strictly. We understand not all of these guidelines can be followed in certain situations, but failing to fulfill most of the necessary guidelines will deem the record pending until more evidence is presented or rejected, independently. 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. We strongly advise photographers and birders to strictly avoid disturbing actively breeding birds, e.g. approaching a nest with eggs, nestlings or a parent, using loud playbacks in breeding season and discourage others from doing so in respectful manner.
2. We recommend activating coordinates recording settings in your camera, which should be embedded in EXIF or use eBird Mobile App (record track) option.
3. Observations must have a complete date (DD/MM/YY), specific location of observation (preferably coordinates) and observer (s) full name.
4. Written or digital documentation of the events surrounding the observation, e.g. clear photos or videos of habitat and surroundings.
5. Identification of species in question with reasons, e.g. personal identification, taking help from online ID forums or an expert. It will go through critical scrutiny and review by PRDC.
6. We recommend good quality photographs from various angles, clips, and adding sound recordings (if necessary).
7. Supporting evidence from co-observers, if any. Co-observers can be contacted independently.
8. We advise birders to use the eBird Mobile App with (record track) option activated and location settings on in smartphone when bird watching in the field.
9. English is a recommended language to submit observations, otherwise Urdu and major provincial languages are also accepted. The records, however, will be published solely in English.

Any supporting evidence in the form of photos, video clips, vocal recordings, are for the purpose of record evaluation and publication in the newsletter. They will not be used otherwise unless approved by the observer.

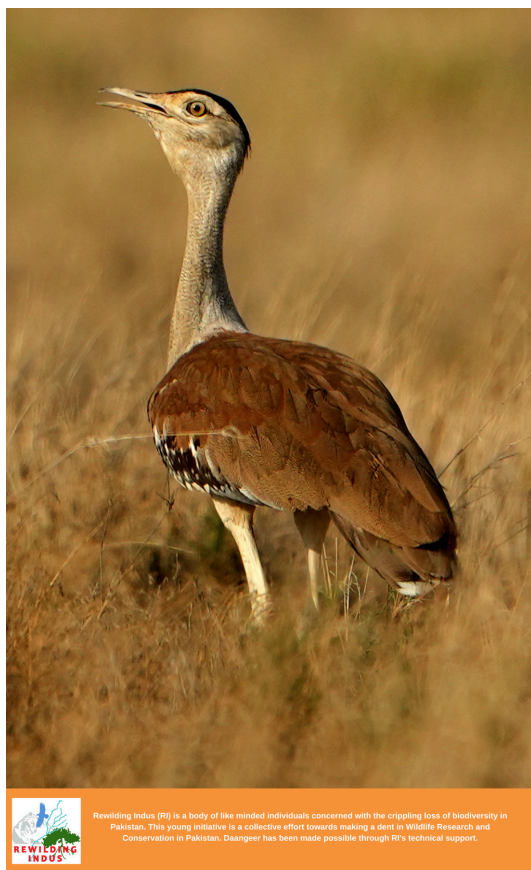
Note: We value published historical data (books, articles, field notes) to cross-check validity of personal claims, such as "first record for Pakistan". We understand that most of the historical data is based on sightings, descriptions, sketches and museum specimens. Lack of digital documentation does not mean the old data is all wrong. Any relevant records of further queries can be emailed to iazankhan4@gmail.com.

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BACK COVER:

Featuring the Critically Endangered Great Indian Bustard *Ardeotis nigriceps* from the Cholistan Desert, Punjab. © Babar Bukhari Photography. Courtesy Badar Munir.

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White-throated Tit
Aegithalos niveogularis
from Siri Paye, Khyber
Pakhtunkhwa - 27 July
2024.

Rarities Review

July to September 2024

Azan Karam

The following observations are open to critical questioning after publication. If any record was found weak or questionable post-publication, it will be re-published as erratum in the proceeding issue. The symbol (Δ) with a record shows that supporting digital media was shared with PRDC.

In the last three months, three new additions and four historically recorded species with no photos till now were finally documented in Pakistan. Additionally, five belated records of regional rarities were also reported. We urge the readers to go out in winter as much as possible, as it is the time most species migrate and has potentially good chances for vagrancies.

At least five Wilson's Storm-Petrel *Oceanites oceanicus* (Δ) were seen on 20 July, approximately 500m from the coast of Mubarak Village, Sindh on a windy day over a rough sea (ZAS). Later, on 1 September, they were reported again from the same site (ZAS, SB, MSB, ZA). This seabird is reported from Pakistan in historical accounts but remained unclicked until now. On the same day, the national first Lesser Noddy *Anous tenuirostris* (Δ) was also documented by the team from the coast. Its closer and recorded relative, the Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus* remains poorly documented.



White-throated Laughingthrush *Pterorhinus albobularis whistleri*



Lesser Noddy *Anous tenuirostris*

A pair of White-throated Laughingthrush *Pterorhinus albobularis whistleri* (Δ) was another species with no photos from Pakistan, seen after a missing period of nearly six decades. They were observed in a company of Variegated Laughingthrush *Trochaloxyron variegatum simile* in a coniferous forest around Green's Hotel, Nathia Gali, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa on 21 July (OA).

A single Mountain Hawk-Eagle *Nisaetus nipalensis nipalensis* (Δ) was documented on 27 August at Banjosa, Rawlakot, Azad Jammu & Kashmir (MB). The last time this species was reported in Pakistan was in June 1986 at the summit of Mukshpuri. (See Page. 12-13).



(Left-to-Right) Red-footed Booby *Sula sula*, Jouanin's Petrel *Bulweria fallax* and a Red-billed Tropicbird *Phaethon aethereus*

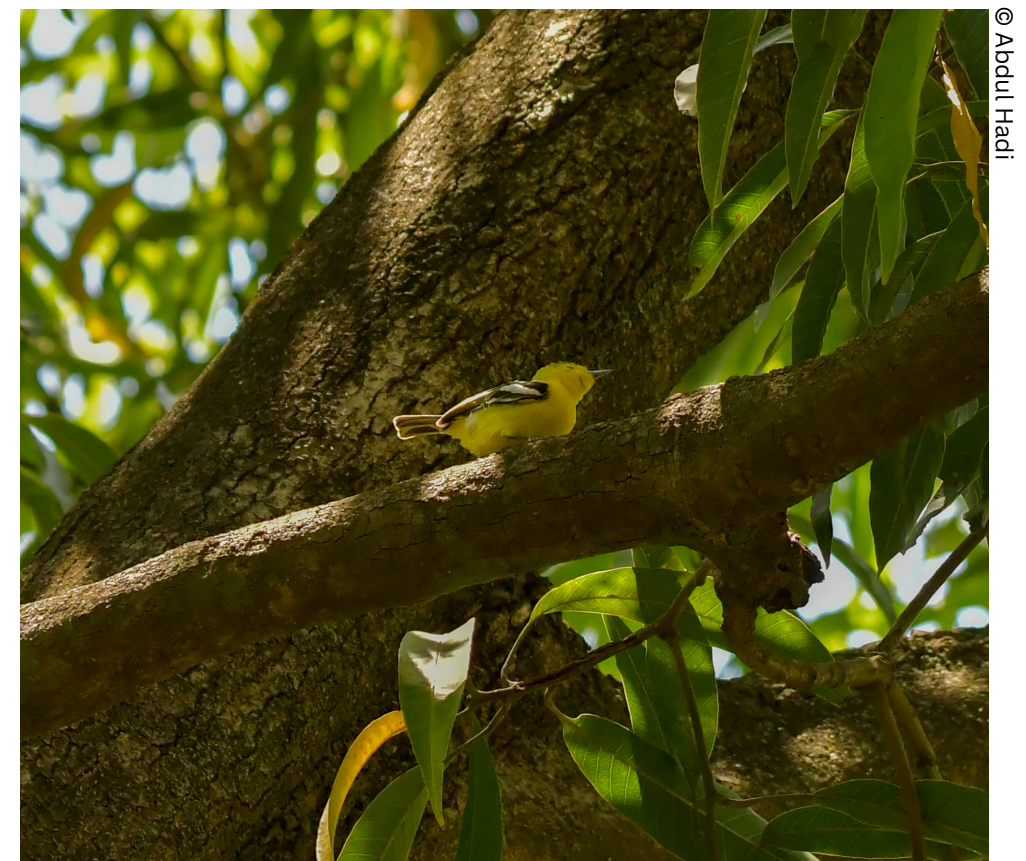
Two new seabirds from the Arabian Sea, Baluchistan were added to Pakistan's checklist. On 13 September, at least six Jouanin's Petrel *Bulweria fallax* (Δ) were reported, a species previously considered "possible" based on anecdotal but unconfirmed sightings (Roberts, 1991). The historically known Red-billed Tropicbird *Phaethon aethereus* (Δ) was also photographed for the first time on the same day. A single Red-footed Booby *Sula sula* (Δ) was a new species recorded on 20 September, respectively (SK).

Belated Records

Rufous-tailed Lark *Ammomanes phoenicurus phoenicurus* (Δ) is one of the least documented larks in Pakistan despite its common status in the subcontinent. On 25 July 2023, a pair was recorded at Suhrian, Rahim Yar Khan, Punjab (OA), followed by four at Kharsar Hills and five at Sankar Dam, Karoonjhar, Sindh on 7 September 2024, respectively (ZAS, SB, MSB, ZA).

An interesting checklist was created on 28 May 2024 from Killa Saifullah, Balochistan. A Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes* (Δ), a male Blyth's Rosefinch *Carpodacus grandis* (Δ) and a singing Pale Rockfinch *Carpodacus brachydactyla* (Δ). For the latter species, it indicates a potential breeding range extension (AM).

Pakistan's second Common Iora *Aegithina tiphia* (Δ) was recorded on 9 June 2024 at District Bhimber, Tehsil Barnala, Kayani Wala Kass, Deva Vatala National Park, Azad Jammu & Kashmir (AH).



Common Iora *Aegithina tiphia*

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Abdul Hadi (AH), Ali Mosvi (AM), Muhammad Sadiq Baloch (MSB), Muhammad Babar (MB), Omar Arshad (OA), Salman Baloch (SA), Sushil Kumar (SK), Zafeer Ahmed Shaikh (ZAS) and Zohaib Ahmed (ZA).

Hotspot Review

Uchhali Wetland Complex (Soon Valley Lakes)

Akram Awan

The Salt Range extends through the districts of Jehlum, Chakwal, Khushab, and Mianwali in Punjab province. The Salt Range wetland complex consists of 5 lakes, namely Kallar Kahar, Nammal, Uchhali, Khabeki and Jahlar, of which the former 2 lie in Chakwal and Mianwali districts respectively, while the later 3 lakes, situated in the Soon valley (Naushera tehsil of Khushab district) form the Uchhali Wetland Complex (UWC). Khabeki Lake gained Ramsar site status in 1976, but all 3 lakes of UWC were declared as a Ramsar sites in 1996 due to their rich and important avifauna. The wetland complex —named after the biggest wetland, Uchhali lake (located 220km from Islamabad) —is among the most prominent birding hotspots of Punjab.



© Tahir Abbas Awan

Migratory ducks and Eurasian Coots *Fulica atra* in abundance on Khabeki Lake's waters (December 2014)

The Uchhali Wetland Complex consists of lakes with brackish to saline water, covering a total area of 12.43 square kilometers. The lakes are surrounded by moderately elevated hills, with Uchhali lake lying at the base of Sakesar, the highest point in the Salt Range, which rises to 1,522m. This is why the variety of non-aquatic birds in the Soon Valley is also remarkable. Among the resident birds, Chukar *Alectoris chukar*, See-see Partridge *Ammoperdix griseogularis*, Brown Crake *Zapornia akool*, Short-toed Snake-Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*, Sind Woodpecker *Dendrocopos assimilis*, Yellow-crowned Woodpecker *Leiopicus mahrattensis*, Punjab Raven *Corvus corax laurencei*, Brahminy Starling *Sturnia pagodarum*, Common Woodshrike *Tephrodornis pondicerianus*, Small Minivet *Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*, Rufous-fronted Prinia *Prinia buchanani*, and Himalayan Prinia *Prinia crinigera* are worth mentioning.

Notable wintering and passage migrant birds in the hills and villages near the lakes include Common Wood-Pigeon *Columba palumbus*, Eurasian Griffon *Gyps fulvus*, Shaheen Falcon *Falco peregrinus peregrinator*, Bimaculated Lark *Melanocorypha bimaculata*, Long-tailed Minivet *Pericrocotus ethologus*, Rufous-tailed *Monticola saxatilis* and Blue Rock-Thrushes *Monticola solitarius*, Rufous-backed Redstart *Phoenicurus erythronotus*, Bar-tailed Treecreeper *Certhia himalayana*, Black-throated Accentor *Prunella atrogularis*, Hawfinch *Coccothraustes coccothraustes*, White-capped Bunting *Emberiza stewarti*, Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia*, and Striolated Bunting *Emberiza striolata*.

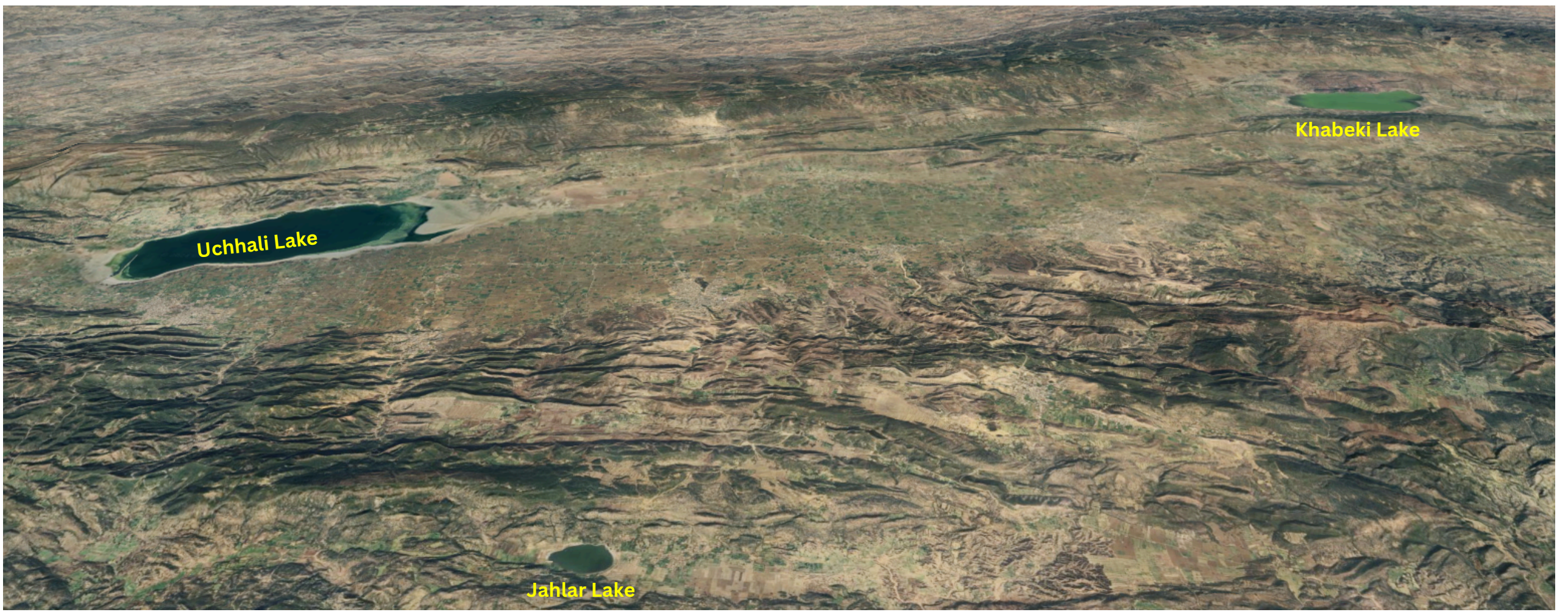
Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*, Black-crowned Night-Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*, Indian Pond-Heron *Ardeola grayii*, Little Egret *Egretta garzetta* and Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* are resident birds of UWC lakes. None of the resident ducks have been recorded in the complex but the lakes of Salt Range provide refuge to great numbers and diversity of wintering waterfowl. Some of the most frequent ducks include Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*, Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*, Common Teal *Anas crecca*, Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*, Garganey *Spatula querquedula*, Northern Shoveler *Spatula clypeata* and Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*.

Other wintering aquatic birds of the complex are Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*, Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis*, Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*, Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*, Ruff *Calidris pugnax*, Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*, Temminck's Stint *Calidris temminckii*, Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*, Little Ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius* and Black-headed Gull *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*.



© Muhammad Babar

Sind Woodpecker *Dendrocopos assimilis*



Map showing Uchhali Wetland Complex and its lakes (©Google Earth)

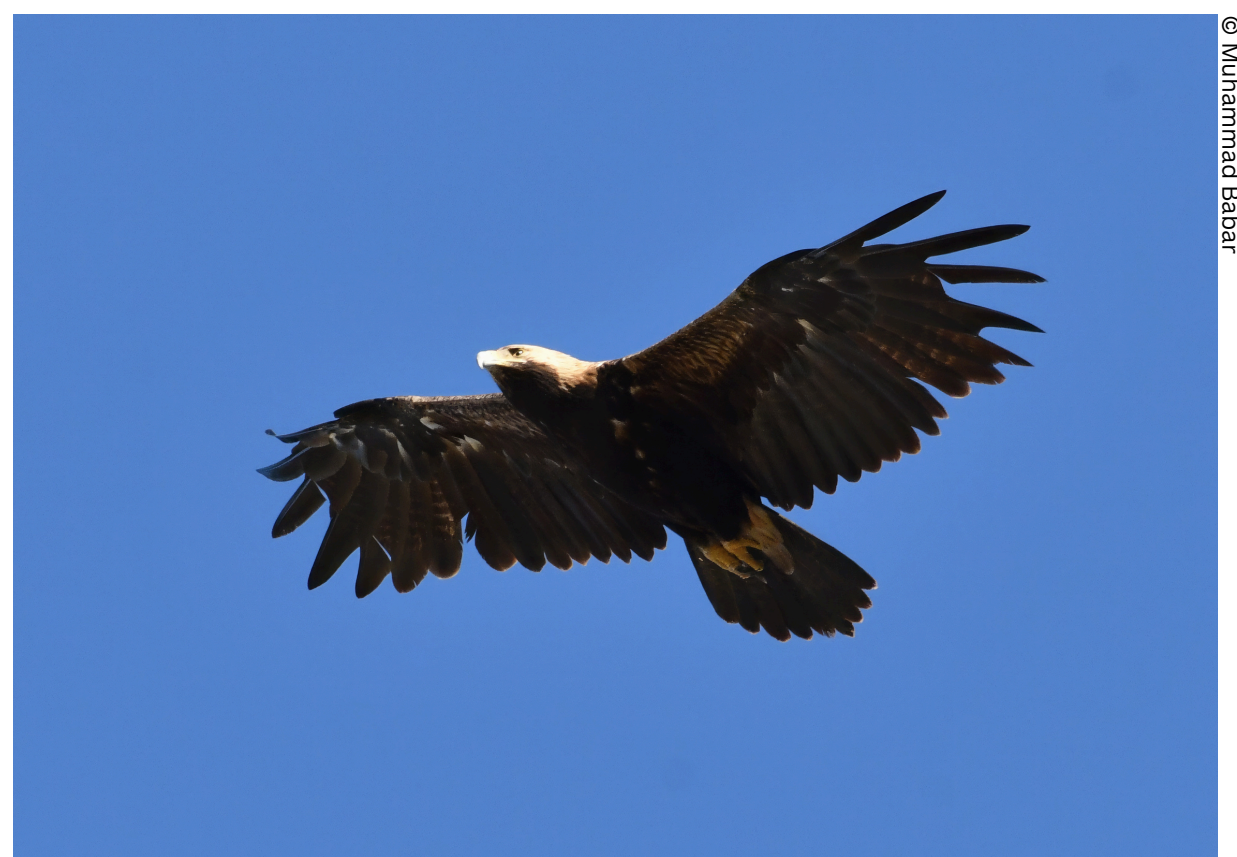
The presence of the largest population of Greater Flamingos *Phoenicopterus roseus* in Punjab makes Uchhali Lake famous for this iconic species. The only known national record of Pied Harrier *Circus melanoleucos* by Mark Mallalieu in December 1985 also came from from Uchhali lake. UWC is also known for wintering of critically endangered White-headed Duck *Oxyura leucocephala*.

Various globally threatened birds, red-listed by IUCN, visit UWC in winter, e.g. Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*, Ferruginous Duck *Aythya nyroca*, Cinereous Vulture *Aegypius monachus*, Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca*, Greater Spotted Eagle *Clanga clanga*, Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis*, Tawny Eagle *Aquila rapax*, Northern Lapwing *Vanellus vanellus* and Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius*.



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Greater Flamingos *Phoenicopterus roseus*



© Muhammad Babar

Imperial Eagle *Aquila heliaca*



© Ali Usman Baig

Brown Crake *Zapornia akool*



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Short-toed Snake-Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*

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Status of Chestnut-tailed Starling *Sturnia malabarica* in Pakistan

Akbar Ali Asif

Chestnut-tailed Starling *Sturnia malabarica* is one of the smallest starling species in Pakistan, reaching 18.5-21cm in length. The name, 'Chestnut-tailed' refers to the outermost pair of tail feathers (retrices) which are completely chestnut, followed by decreasing amount of chestnut in inner feathers till reaching a silvery-grey central pair which is situated on top and covering the chestnut color of a folded tail. All retrices are chestnut-tipped, visible when the bird spreads its tail. This shy and mostly arboreal starling, resembling a slender and washed-up version of the Brahminy Starling *Sturnia pagodarum*, has a silvery-grey head with long, hackled feathers that form an erectable crest. Its upperparts are dark silvery-grey, while its underparts are warm cinnamon-brown. Bill has bluish base and tipped with light-yellow. The sexes are similar, with females appearing slightly duller. Juveniles have greyish heads and upperparts and ashy-grey to whitish underparts, the wings and tail are brownish-black and irises are bluish (see Fig.1 for adult individuals).



Figure 1. (Left-to-Right) Frontal, lateral and backside views of adult birds showing rich chestnut underparts and bluish base to yellow-tipped bills.

Distribution in Pakistan: Its status is Least Concern (IUCN) and has a common and widespread presence with globally two recognized subspecies. The nominate subspecies (Western) *S. m. malabarica* is found in northeastern parts of Pakistan and irregularly in southeast, parts of Pakistani and Indian-administered Kashmir, most parts of India (excluding the southwest and northeast), Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal. The other subspecies, (Eastern) *S. m. nemoricola* is found in northeastern India (southern Assam), southern parts of China, Myanmar, parts of Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, and Cambodia.

In Pakistan, it has a confined and patchy distribution range. It is considered as "vagrant" in southeastern areas of the country (Rasmussen & Anderton, 2012; Roberts, 1992). Its migratory biology is poorly understood throughout the Subcontinent. It is presumably a winter visitor as well as an established summer breeder in different parts of Pakistan. Their breeding population in Islamabad and adjacent areas is a global range extension towards the west. Breeding records have been collected from surroundings of Mangla, Jhelum city, and various localities in Islamabad and Rawalpindi. Birds are sporadically recorded in Islamabad, Rawalpindi and from associated low foothills and plains in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. Birds around Islamabad and its outskirts usually start showing up from March. It has also been recorded from Rawalakot and from the surroundings of Mangla reservoir in Azad Kashmir. Like many other birds, foothills and associated plains south of Himalayas hold a great potential for recording this species, especially from the northern rim of Punjab and adjoining areas in the south; Sialkot, Kharian, Jhelum and to the east in bordering areas with India. In southern parts of the country, scattered, small populations are found in Kirthar National Park and further south in outskirts of Karachi city where breeding is not recorded. Based on anecdotal sightings in Thatta, Sujawal, Jati, both in winters and early summers, there are several other potential sites, especially in southern parts of Sindh and adjacent bordering areas in Baluchistan where it can potentially occur. Apart from northern and southern parts of the country, birds are also sporadically sighted in-between, such as parts of south Punjab and adjoining southeastern areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (see Fig.2).

Habitat, Foraging, Behaviours and Diet:

Open woodlands, plantations, groves in parks, and around cultivated lands. It is also found in semi-arid stretches of land with sparse, thorny bushes and flowering trees, often around water reservoirs. Like several other Sturnids, this is a gregarious species which can be seen in small to large flocks, while pairs are typically seen in the breeding season. In Pakistan, it is uncommon to find large flocks. Pairs or smaller groups of eight to ten birds can, however, be seen in winters as well as close to the breeding season in summers. Chestnut-tailed Starling is highly arboreal and can be seen foraging in flowering Silk-cotton Tree *Bombax ceiba*, Indian Coral Tree *Erythrina variegata* and sometimes in the Bottlebrush Tree *Callistemon sp.*, for their nectar. In Lantana *Lantana camara* and other bushes for berries and seeds whereas in several fruiting trees for fruits like Mulberry *Morus sp.*, Fig *Ficus sp.*, Mango *Mangifera indica* and Papaya *Carica papaya*. They occasionally forage on the ground. Their common foraging style in trees is gleaning which also involves brief hovers. Sometimes, these starlings catch the insects on the wing like flycatchers and some chats. Open bill probing on the ground, like that of the European Starling *Sturnus vulgaris*, is also occasionally observed. While looking for insects in the trees, small, loose flocks explore the tree trunks and main branches on the move, involving all sorts of stretching, upside down postures, and tit-like agility (see Fig.3). This restless feeding campaign, that involves hopping from one tree to another is usually seen at dawn or in the early morning hours and is not a commonly observed feeding technique in the other species of mynas and starlings in Pakistan. Chestnut-tailed Starling, like the other species of mynas and starlings is omnivorous, feeding on a variety of insects and their larvae, worms, berries, fruits, leafy vegetables, flower-nectar, and human food scraps. It also feeds occasionally on small lizards and frogs. Calls of a Chestnut-tailed Starling *Sturnia malabarica* are neither musical, nor as loud as those of other starlings in its range in Pakistan. The uttered calls are a complex mixture of low to sharp squeaks, short whistles, buzzes, infrequent short chirps, and dull sounding incoherent notes.

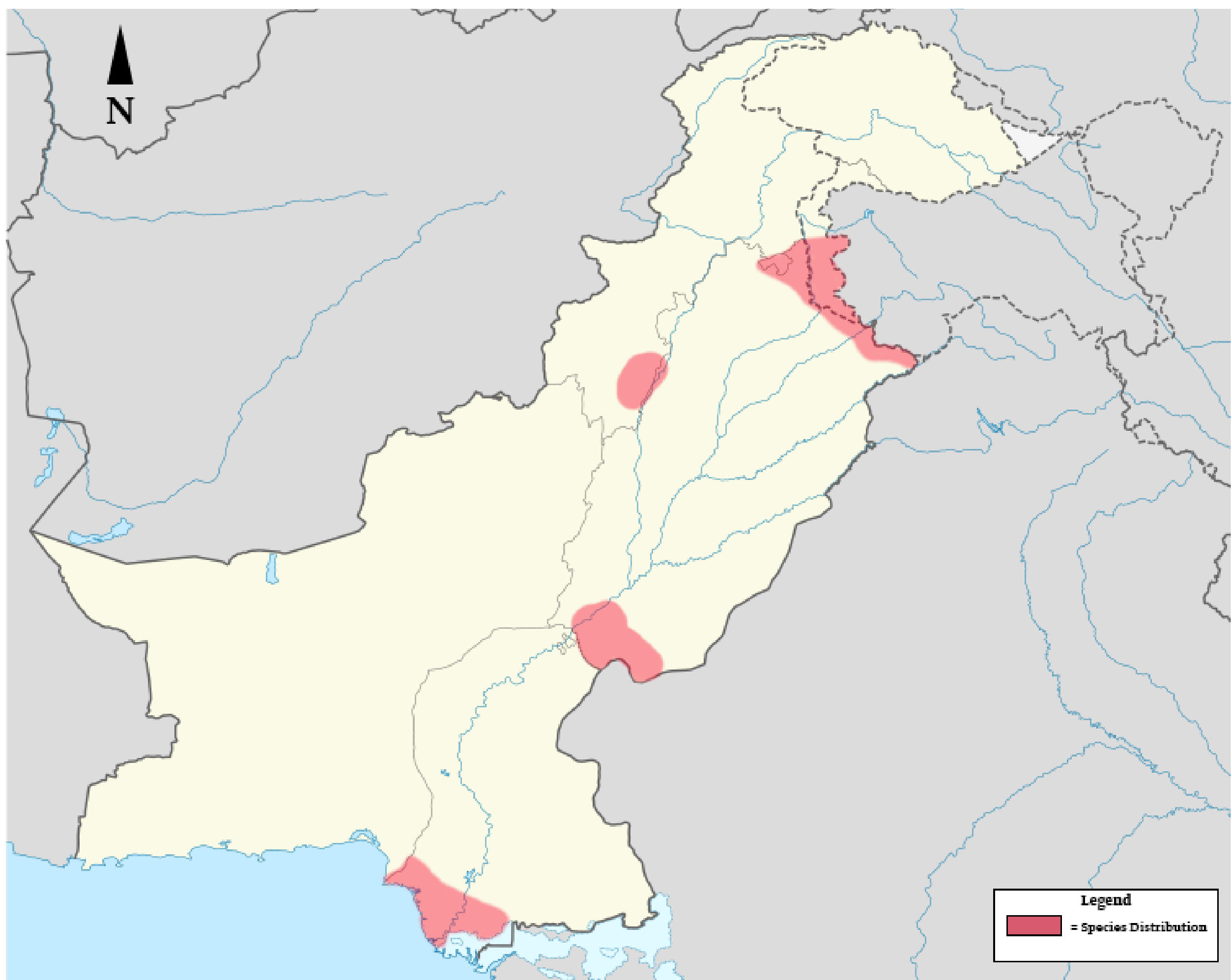


Figure 2. Map showing Chestnut-tailed Starling *Sturnia malabarica* distribution range in Pakistan.

Chestnut-tailed Starling *Sturnia malabarica* is similar in habits to the other related species in its range but is overall shyer than many of its close relatives. These starlings move quickly on the ground, sometimes in quick hops to keep pace with the foraging group. They roost communally in bushes and trees in small parties often with other Sturnids like Brahminy Starling *Sturnia pagodarum*, Indian Pied Starling *Gracupica contra*, Common *Acridotheres tristis*, Bank *A. ginginianus* and Jungle Mynas *A. fuscus*. In hot summer days and sometimes in winters, quick baths in water puddles, flat earthen pots (kept for birds) or around shallow lake margins are common. Intraspecific territorial fights in the pre-breeding and breeding season are common, however it usually does not indulge in fights with the more aggressive and the bigger counterpart, the Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*.

Common Mynas are often seen with intimidating moves, uttering harsh calls, around the nesting holes of the Chestnut-tailed Starlings. Much of the feeding campaign on the ground is usually in the early morning hours. In breeding season, it is surprisingly tolerant to human presence, as nesting holes in trees are often found in the busy public areas, within parks and along walkways. Birds can be seen picking seeds, berries, and grains or probing for insects in and around public areas, although with a cautious approach, to cater for the dietary requirements of the hungry chicks. Sometimes they also explore the garbage bins in the public areas, especially in the early morning hours, when the human activities are limited.

Breeding: Breeding season in Pakistan is usually from March to June but a second clutch of eggs can be laid till late July when the food is ample and nesting conditions are conducive. They form monogamous pairs. During courtship displays, males typically sing or call from high branches and the ground, adopting an upright posture with their long crest and neck feathers erect. They perform quick body movements, often hopping between branches around the female. Birds are also seen allopreening as a potential courtship ritual strategy. Males are also observed bringing food for the female after the chicks have hatched. Nests are often seen in natural tree cavities (see Fig.4) usually around Rawal Lake, and in the outskirts of the city around other smaller water bodies and nullahs. These starlings nest in natural tree cavities, both in decaying and living trees. Sometimes two or more pairs are seen nesting in the naturally occurring holes in the same tree or in different trees in close vicinity.

They are surprisingly tolerant to nearby nesting cavities of Brahminy Starlings *Sturnia pagodarum* and Common Mynas *Acridotheres tristis*. They usually prefer isolated trees or thin clusters in open patches, avoiding dense groves. Nests, which are made of thin twigs, rootlets, dried grass, and leaves can be found in holes of tree trunks or main branches from around 6 to 30 feet above the ground. Sometimes, abandoned nesting holes of barbets and woodpeckers are also used. Female lays 3-5 pale turquoise-blue unmarked eggs. Both sexes take part in incubation of eggs, and later feeding and raising the chicks. Information on nestling periods and duration of incubation are still unknown. Chicks leave the nest in about 3 weeks after hatching. Predation of chicks by House Crow *Corvus splendens* and Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* is quite common.



Figure 3. Chestnut-tailed Starling *Sturnia malabarica* showing Parus-like agility.



Figure 4. A juvenile Chestnut-tailed Starling *Sturnia malabarica* in a nest hole.



A foraging party of Chestnut-tailed Starling *Sturnia malabarica* and a single Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer* in bottom-left branches. Rawal Lake environs, Islamabad - 5 July 2023

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Opportunistic Scavenging in Cinereous Tit *Parus cinereus* And its Other Dietary Matters in Pakistan

Azan Karam

There are two *Parus* tits in Pakistan; Cinereous Tit *Parus cinereus* and Green-backed Tit *Parus monticolus*, both usually share similar niches. The former species is represented by arguably four subspecies in Pakistan, occurring from 1,800m in plains to 2,400m in the forested mountainous terrain (Rasmussen & Anderton, 2005).

- *Parus cinereus caschmirensis* – distributed in northern Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Gilgit-Baltistan, and east till Azad Jammu & Kashmir.
- *Parus cinereus ziaratensis* – found in western Baluchistan and presumably Sindh.
- *Parus cinereus decolorans* is found in northwest Pakistan.
- The fourth subspecies, *Parus cinereus planorum* was described from a specimen collected in south Punjab, in modern-day Pakistan (Dickinson et al., 2006; LeCroy, 2010) but its contemporary status in Pakistan is debatable.

The diet and foraging methods of the omnivorous Cinereous Tit *Parus cinereus* are not fully understood but are presumed to be similar to a formerly conspecific and related species, Great Tit *Parus major* (unrecorded in Pakistan). A few noteworthy reports exist on unusual dietary preferences and habits within the Paridae. Such as Eurasian Blue Tit *Cyanistes caeruleus* and Great Tit *Parus major* pierce the tops of milk bottles on doorsteps to consume cream (Aplin et al., 2013) in Britain and other parts of Europe, respectively. Apart from that, there is a predatory behaviour of Great Tit *Parus major*, on hibernating Common Pipistrelle *Pipistrellus pipistrellus* in Hungary (Estók et al., 2010). The use of conifer needle held in the beak, to extract larvae from holes has also been studied. In addition to that, a smart strategy to pursue food-hoarders like Coal Tit *Parus ater*, to steal from their food storage (cache) is also a documented behaviour in this species. In Pakistan's Gilgit-Baltistan, one other unique behaviour was photo-documented by 'Wakhan Wildlife' in winter. Two Cinereous Tit *Parus cinereus* were observed pecking at meat scraps of a Himalayan Ibex *Capra sibirica sakeen* carcass, potentially preyed on by a Snow Leopard *Panthera uncia*, a behaviour previously unreported in this species (see Fig.1).



Figure 1. Two Cinereous Tit *Parus cinereus* feeding on meat scraps from an Ibex carcass in Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan.

In times of food scarcity, its related Great Tit *Parus major* has the physiological capacity to drop their body temperature from 41.8° C to as low as 32° C overnight (Harrap, 1996). Although it has not been proven, it is very possible the Cinereous Tit *Parus cinereus* can likewise display similar physiological alterations to momentarily overcome nutrient requirements in harsh conditions. Scavenging is an important foraging strategy to overcome food fluctuations and resources in the environment, when the usual food is unavailable (Castilla et al., 2011). It is well-known that carcass or carrion act as a central food point to attract different species, which is atypical in normal situations. Small birds like Cinereous Tit *Parus cinereus* may face potential competitors on carrion, from aggressive corvids, hungry raptors to carnivores. Cinereous Tit *Parus cinereus* is not seen as scavengers at first impression due to their foraging behaviour of pursuing live prey and plant matter, but as winter approaches they may join mix-species foraging flocks or form intraspecific groups comprising pairs to small parties, (Ali, 1998) to increase chances of finding food resources, including carcasses.

In summer, when food opportunities are abundant, they mostly feed on small invertebrates and their larvae (usually up to 1 cm). It is also a time when they raise the next brood with the availability of ample resources. In the Murree Hills, it has been observed to prey on adult butterflies, such as Large White *Pieris brassicae*, and in Ziarat, Baluchistan they were noted to bring hairy caterpillars to their active nest (Roberts, 1992). The plant diet consists mainly of fruits, buds and seeds. Tough seeds or nuts can be opened by their strong bill with hammer-like blows while large prey can be grasped in toes for stability and eaten piece by piece.

Based on images from Pakistan at Macaulay Library and Birds of Pakistan/Facebook, their pollen-stained forehead indicates they also feed on nectar resources as well as spiders, diptera and caterpillars – foraging at all levels of their niche, from canopies of trees to their bases, floor and surrounding shrubberies. Among plant diet, the following items were recorded in Pakistan; corn, ripe cherry, and attempts on pine nuts.

© Usama Tabani



Cinereous Tit *Parus cinereus* tightly holding a caterpillar in its foot. Bahrain, Swat Valley, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa - 21 May 2021.



Note the pollen-stained forehead of this individual, indicating foraging at flowers for arthropods or nectar. Talhaar Village, Islamabad - 25 March 2018.

© Khawar Mehmood



Cinereous Tit *Parus cinereus* potentially feeding on corns. Khuiratta, Kotli, Azad Jammu & Kashmir - 15 August 2016.



Cinereous Tit *Parus cinereus* feeding on ripe cherries. Hunza, Gilgit-Baltistan - 29 May 2021

Finding food during the winter months is extremely difficult in Gilgit-Baltistan because of the region's predominantly mountainous terrain, which is influenced by the meeting points of the world's most famous mountain ranges—the Hindukush, Himalayas, and Karakorum. This creates a harsh environment across an elevation gradient for biodiversity, where only species that have evolved to withstand extreme abiotic factors survive. Scavenging on carcasses draws the line between life and death in these areas. Cinereous Tit *Parus cinereus* opportunistic scavenging on meat in winter provides them with a protein-rich diet when live prey is scarce to locate. This species is also known to feed on human food, such as household food scraps. Nonetheless, its overall feeding and diet biology lacks information, such as food selection and storage behaviour (as in Coal Tit *Periparus ater*), nutrition and energetics, metabolism and temperature regulation, drinking, pellet casting, and defecation (Gosler, 2024). The newly discovered opportunistic scavenging behaviour opens up new possibilities to further study the basic foraging biology in-depth and fill grey areas surrounding their diet preferences according to seasonal factors.

Acknowledgement:

The author is sincerely grateful to Wakhan Wildlife Tourism for the scavenging behaviour photo and other respected photographers (Abbas Rizvi, Usama Tabani, Khawar Mehmood and Zeenat Bayat) for granting permission to use their photos as supporting media in the article.

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Estuary Connexions: Whimbrels wintering in western Indian Ocean islands stage at Pakistani estuaries for refuelling, while en route to Siberian breeding grounds.

Matthieu Le Corre, Florinah Razafimandimby, Audrey Jaeger
UMR ENTROPIE, University of Réunion Island.

The Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* is a long-distance migrant breeding at high latitudes in Arctic and subarctic wetlands from June to August and wintering in tropical coastal habitats. Although the migration routes and strategies of the species have been extensively studied along the Atlantic and Pacific migration flyways, the flyway crossing the Middle East, the western Indian Ocean and East Africa (the so-called West Asia – East Africa Flyway) is by far the least known.

To fill this gap, a group of researchers from the University of Réunion Island is currently tagging whimbrels and other wader species (notably Greater Sand-Plover *Anarhynchus leschenaultii*, Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*, Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres*, Black-bellied Plover *Pluvialis squatarola* and Crab-Plover *Dromas ardeola*). Birds are banded (with metal and color rings) and some are also equipped with miniaturized GPS.

This note describes the journey of one of the studied whimbrels, which did several stopovers during its migration, including two stops in Pakistani estuaries.



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Figure 1. Tagged Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* showing its tag (back) and color ring (leg). (Note: Photo is not from Pakistan)

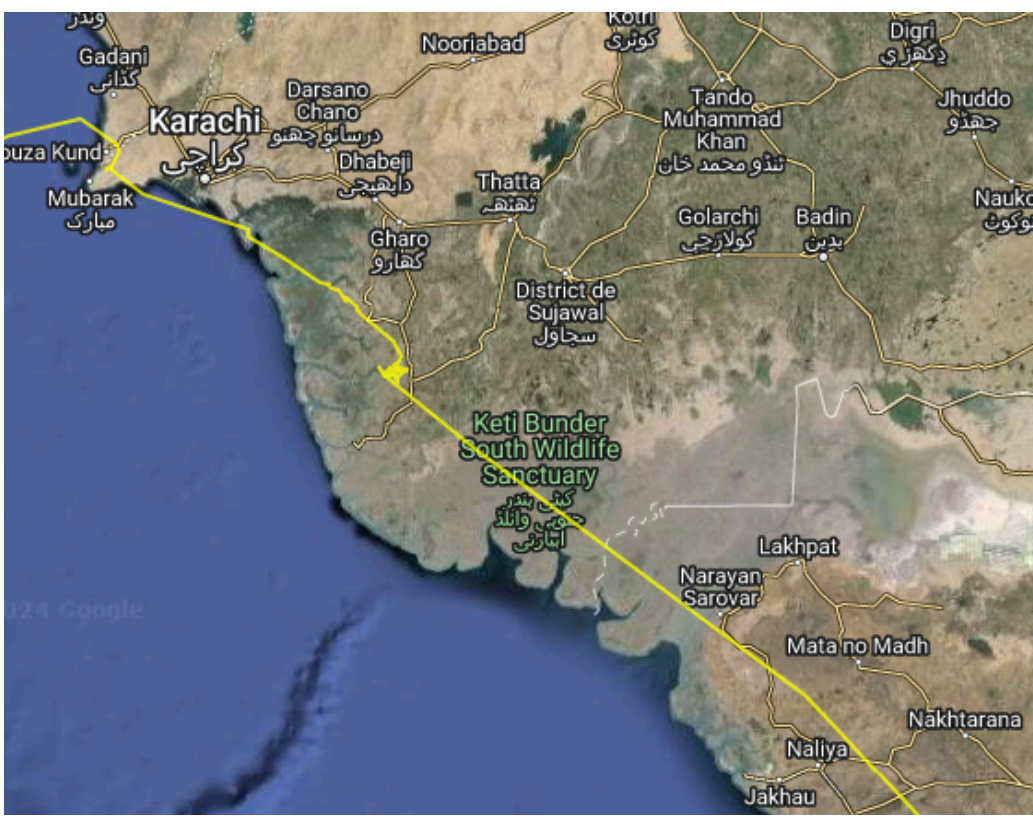
The bird was caught on 7 March 2024 at the estuary of Rivière des Pluies, Réunion Island (a French inhabited volcanic island, west of Madagascar), banded and equipped with a GPS (see Fig.1). The bird departed from Réunion on 22 March to finish its wintering at nearby Mauritius Island, just 200 km east of Réunion Island. It then left Mauritius on 13 April to start its northward migration. It crossed the entire Indian Ocean in only 3 days to reach Socotra Island, where it did a 2-week stopover to refuel.

It then continued northward to reach Pakistani coasts on 4 May 2024. It first wandered a few hours at the estuary of the Hub River and then flew eastward to reach the massive Delta of the Indus River where it stayed for 10 days. During this stay at the Indus Delta, it spent most of its time at a place named Kundjo (see maps at Fig.2).

It then departed again, toward India, where it stayed until 4 June (with several stopovers, including a long one near Chilika Lake, the largest wetland of Odisha State), before reaching the Ganges Delta, in Bangladesh. When it crossed India from West to East, the bird was searched, observed and photographed several times by enthusiastic and dedicated ornithologists and birders, which amazingly contributed to the knowledge of the behaviour of the bird.

For some reason, this bird “decided” to stop its prebreeding (or pre-breeding) migration in Bangladesh. The very last position was obtained on 4 August 2024 and the bird was still in Bangladesh.

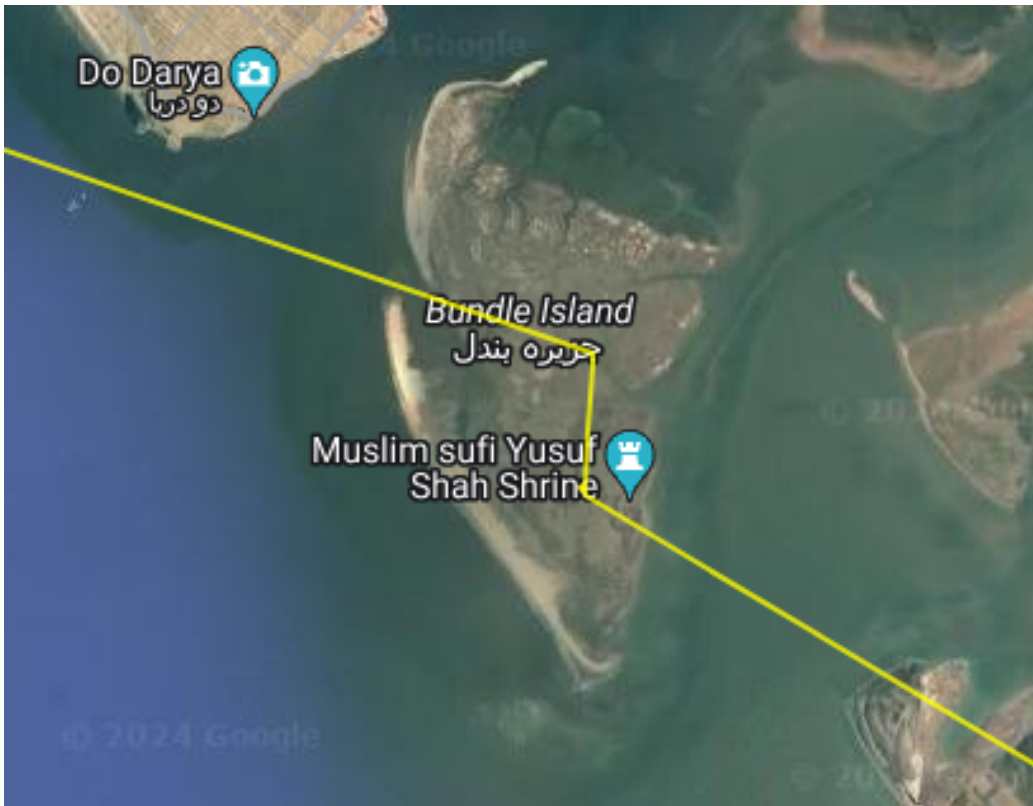
These very preliminary results show the importance of coastal wetlands as important staging and refuelling sites for long-distance migrants such as the whimbrel (and probably many other species) along the West Asia–East Africa flyway. It is possible that other birds that we have banded (including some with color rings) may stop in Pakistan. Local ornithologists are kindly invited to keep their eyes wide open and send us any observations of color-banded birds (with a photo, in an ideal world, see Fig. 1).



Map. 1



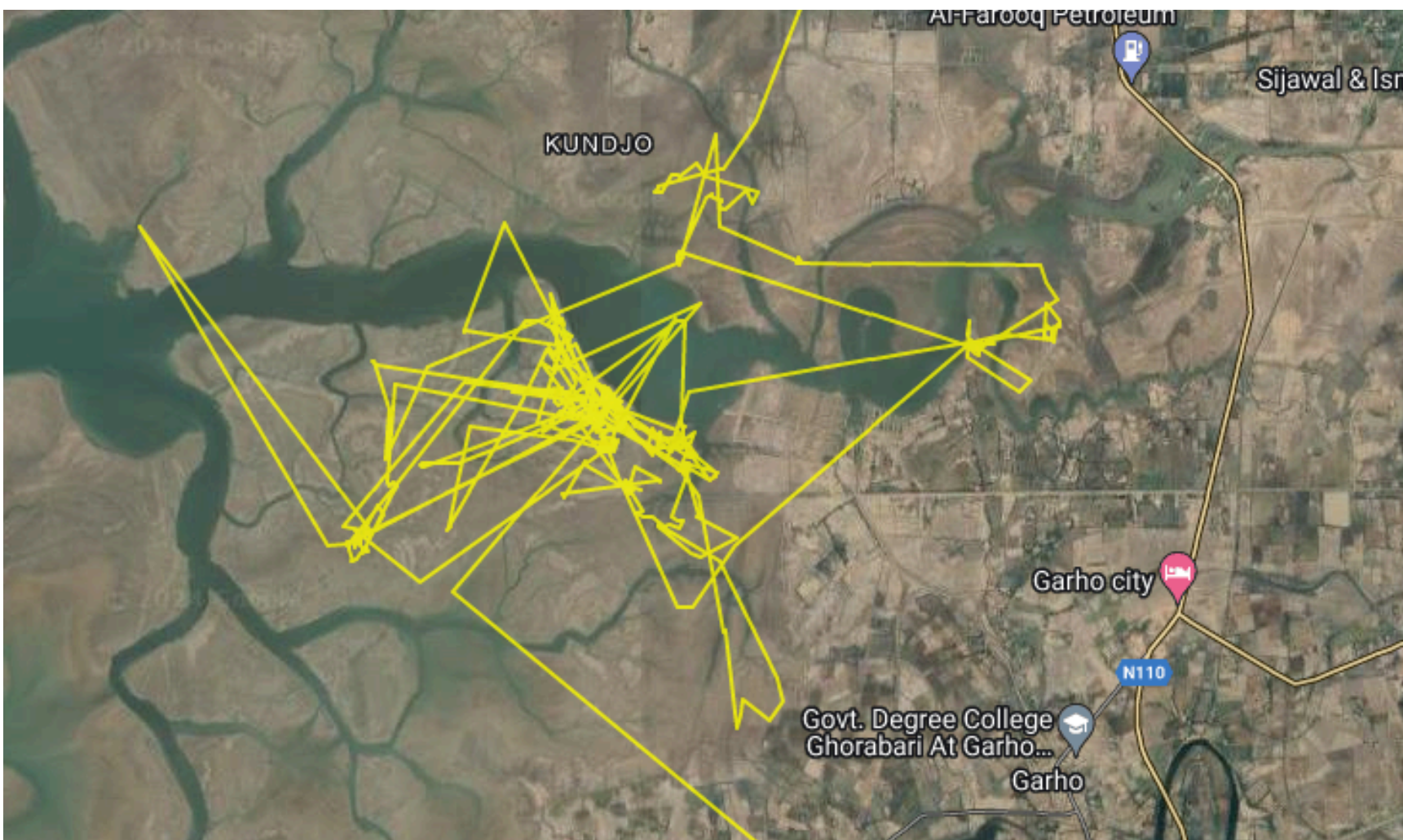
Map. 2



Map. 3



Map. 4



Map. 5

Figure 2. Maps showing different sites of the GPS-tagged Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* activity in Sindh coastal areas and estuaries. Whimbrels are winter and passage migrants to the coastal areas of Pakistan. They prefer the Indus Delta mangroves in particular.

Acknowledgement:

A great thanks to Zafeer Ahmed Shaikh, who invited us to write this note for the journal *Daangeer: A Quarterly Analysis of Pakistan's Birds*. Gratitude to the group of eBirders, ornithologists, photographers, and colleagues who tracked the bird during its stopovers in India (notably Himanshu Gupta, Jageshwar Verma and Avinash Bhoi, Rabindra Nath Sahu, Panchami Manoo Ukil), and to Praveen J for making the connexion.

This work is part of the LMI-OIO Project, a research project conducted by the University of Réunion Island and the French Office for Biodiversity (OFB) and funded by OFB.



Rediscovery of a Rare Raptor: Mountain Hawk-Eagle *Nisaetus nipalensis*

Muhammad Babar

The Mountain Hawk-Eagle *Nisaetus nipalensis* is a formidable raptor with striking appearance and powerful hunting abilities. The eagle is easily recognizable by its prominent crest and feathered tarsi (hence another name for this species is “Feather-toed Eagle”). It is one of the top predators in its range where it preys on medium-sized mammals, birds, and reptiles. The bird's plumage is predominantly brown, with streaked underparts and a barred tail, making it well-adapted to its forested habitats.

The Mountain Hawk-Eagle *Nisaetus nipalensis* is widely distributed across South and Southeast Asia, China, Japan (Ferguson-Lees & Christie, 2001) and even Far East Russia (Karyakin, 2007). It thrives in montane and submontane forests, often at elevations ranging from 300 to 3,000m. The species is well-adapted to various forest types, from tropical to temperate, and is usually found in areas with dense canopy cover. It often hunts from a perch or in flight. The species is also known for its distinctive calls, which echo through the forest.



© Muhammad Babar

Figure 1. A potential subadult Mountain Hawk-Eagle *Nisaetus nipalensis*. District Poonch, Azad Jammu & Kashmir - 26 August 2024

Old Records from Pakistan

In Pakistan, the Mountain Hawk-Eagle is considered rare, with few documented sightings. It has historically been reported from the northern mountainous regions, including parts of the Himalayas and adjacent areas. Confirmed records have been from the Galyat region around Murree, Changla Gali and Mukshpuri Peak. H. Waite collected a specimen near Murree on 14 June 1947 at an elevation of 1,800m (specimen in Natural History Museum, London). Nest of this species was recorded from Changla Gali by Lt. Col. Buchanan on 26th of August, 1990, who also collected the female. T.J Roberts observed this species twice, once on ridges below Mukshpuri Peak on 23 May 1979 and once on 2nd and 3rd of June, 1986 on the summit of Mukshpuri Peak (Roberts, 1991).

Z.B Mirza mentions its distribution as: Lower Kaghan Valley, Murree Hills, Lower Neelum Valley, Jhelum Valley and Dhirkot (Mirza, 2007).

The bird's elusive nature and preference for remote, high-altitude forests make it a challenging species to observe, contributing to the scarcity of records.

Sighting

On the 26 August 2024, at precisely 1202, I had the extraordinary opportunity to observe a Mountain Hawk-Eagle *Nisaetus nipalensis* in Toli Peer, situated in Tehsil Rawalakot, District Poonch of Azad Kashmir. This location, with an elevation of approximately 2,300m, is part of a typical Himalayan deciduous forest, characterized by its lush vegetation and diverse wildlife.

As I was scanning the horizon, the majestic silhouette of the Mountain Hawk-Eagle *Nisaetus nipalensis* appeared, gracefully soaring over a hill. Initially I was not sure about the identity of the bird but later observed the key markings and identification pointers in my photograph and figured out that it was a dream sighting of a bird I was looking for a long time (see Fig.1).

The sight was nothing short of mesmerizing as the bird of prey soared effortlessly, using the thermals to stay aloft. Its presence commanded attention, a testament to its role as a top predator in this rugged environment. However, the encounter was fleeting; within moments, the eagle disappeared, gliding smoothly behind the hill, leaving me in awe of its power and grace.

This sighting is not only a personal milestone but also a significant addition to the sparse records of this species in Pakistan. The encounter highlights the importance of preserving the delicate ecosystems of regions like Toli Peer, where such rare and magnificent species continue to thrive. Birdwatchers and conservationists alike should remain vigilant and committed to protecting these habitats, ensuring that future generations can also experience the thrill of witnessing such incredible wildlife in its natural environment.

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Forgotten Birds: Rufous-chinned Laughingthrush

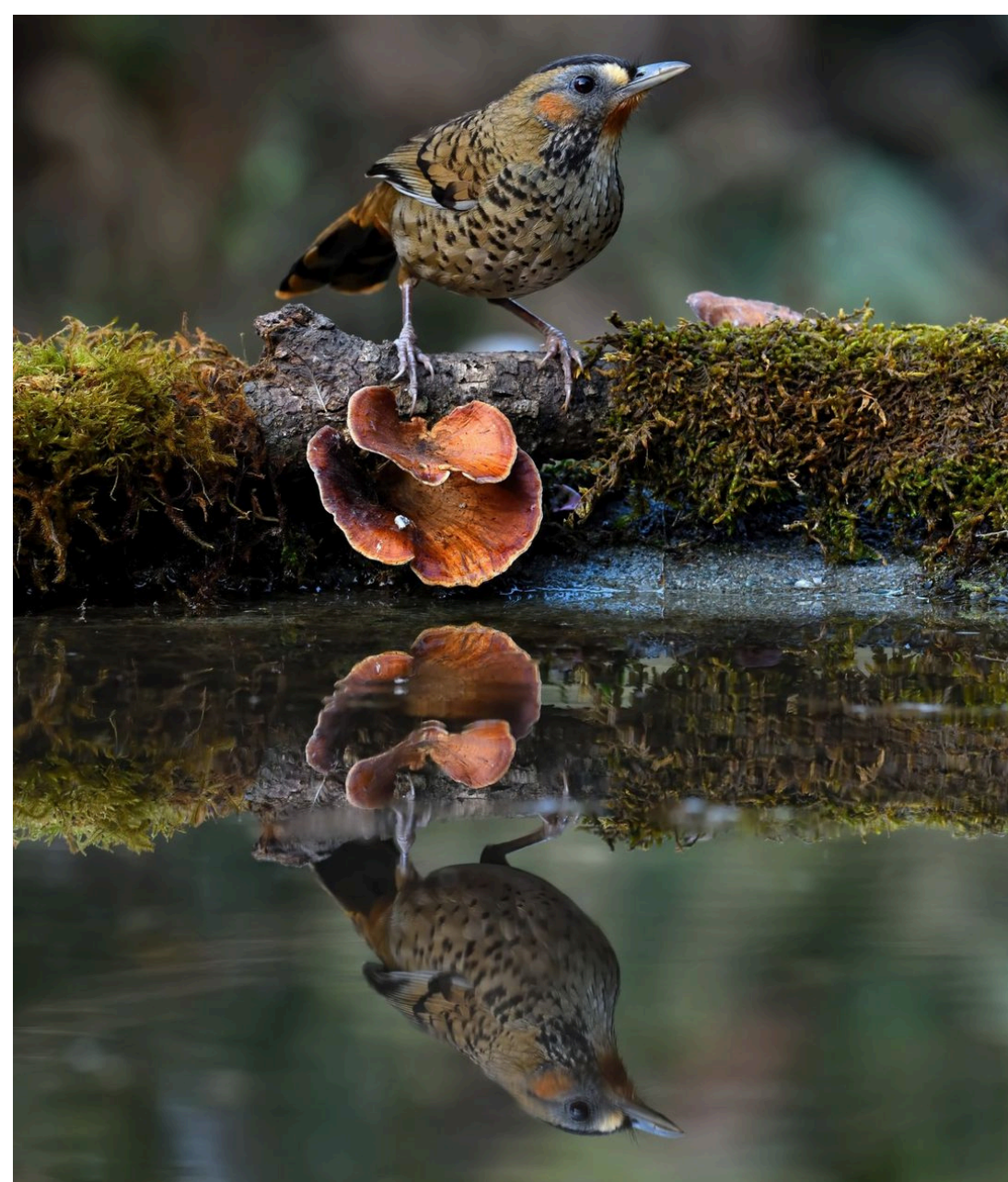
Ianthocincla rufogularis

Akram Awan

There are 5 species of laughingthrushes in Pakistan: Streaked Laughingthrush *Trochalopteron lineatum*, Variegated Laughingthrush *Trochalopteron variegatum*, Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrush *Trochalopteron erythrocephalum*, White-throated Laughingthrush *Pterorhinus albogularis* and Rufous-chinned Laughingthrush *Ianthocincla rufogularis*.

The first two species are fairly common and widespread across Pakistan, while the Chestnut-crowned and White-throated Laughingthrushes are rare but have been recently rediscovered in Rawlakot, Azad Jammu and Kashmir (AJK), and Nathiagali, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), respectively.

The Rufous-chinned Laughingthrush *Ianthocincla rufogularis*, however, is extremely rare. In fact, Roberts (1992) considered it “recently extinct” in Pakistan. Its global range spans the Northern parts of the Indian Subcontinent (Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh) and extends to Burma, Vietnam, and southern China. The West Himalayan (rufous-eared) subspecies, *occidentalis*, is known only from four specimens in Pakistan, collected by Major John Biddulph. Only one specimen has a date of collection “January 1873” (H. Van Grouw, pers. comm.) from Murree, Punjab, now housed at the Natural History Museum, London. Since they all are collected at the same locality, it can be presumed the time of collection is almost same for all. Except one, three specimens have register numbers: (NHMUK1881.12.29.20, NHMUK1888.4.20.583 and NHMUK1897.12.10.821), respectively (see Fig. 1)



Rufous-chinned Laughingthrush *Ianthocincla rufogularis* at Bhimtal, Uttarakhand, India.

© Devki Nandan



© Hein Van Grouw/NHM-UK

Figure 1. The four Rufous-chinned Laughingthrush *Ianthocincla rufogularis* specimens collected from the present-day Pakistan in January 1873 by J. Biddulph.

Roberts speculated that these birds may have been collected from the Jehlum Valley side of Murree, while Grimmett et al. (2008) suggested they were from the Kashmir side of the valley. The bird was also documented in Kashmir (India) once in 1906, from the Lolab Valley in Kupwara District, although it is more frequently found in Simla Valley, Himachal Pradesh, and further east.

There may still be surviving population(s) of the Rufous-chinned Laughingthrush *Ianthocincla rufogularis* in the Murree Hills and Azad Kashmir. It inhabits the dense undergrowth of subtropical moist forests and thickets along forest edges, at altitudes between 600 and 2,100 meters. Though typically shy and elusive, it can sometimes be seen feeding in low bushes or on the ground, either in pairs or small groups.

This bird is easily distinguishable from its cousins by its black-scaled, pale olive-brown upperparts, black-spotted paler underparts, and the distinctive rufous coloring on its chin, ear coverts, undertail coverts (vent), and tail tip. It also has a black cap, a sub-terminal tail band, a buff-white loreal patch, and a black-and-white spotted moustachial stripe.

Acknowledgement:

The editorial team of Daangeer is grateful to Devki Nandan for providing the picture of Rufous-chinned Laughingthrush for this note. We are also sincerely thankful to Hein Van Grouw for specimens photographs and additional information.

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Bird Artist Profile

Ghulam Abbas Khaskheli

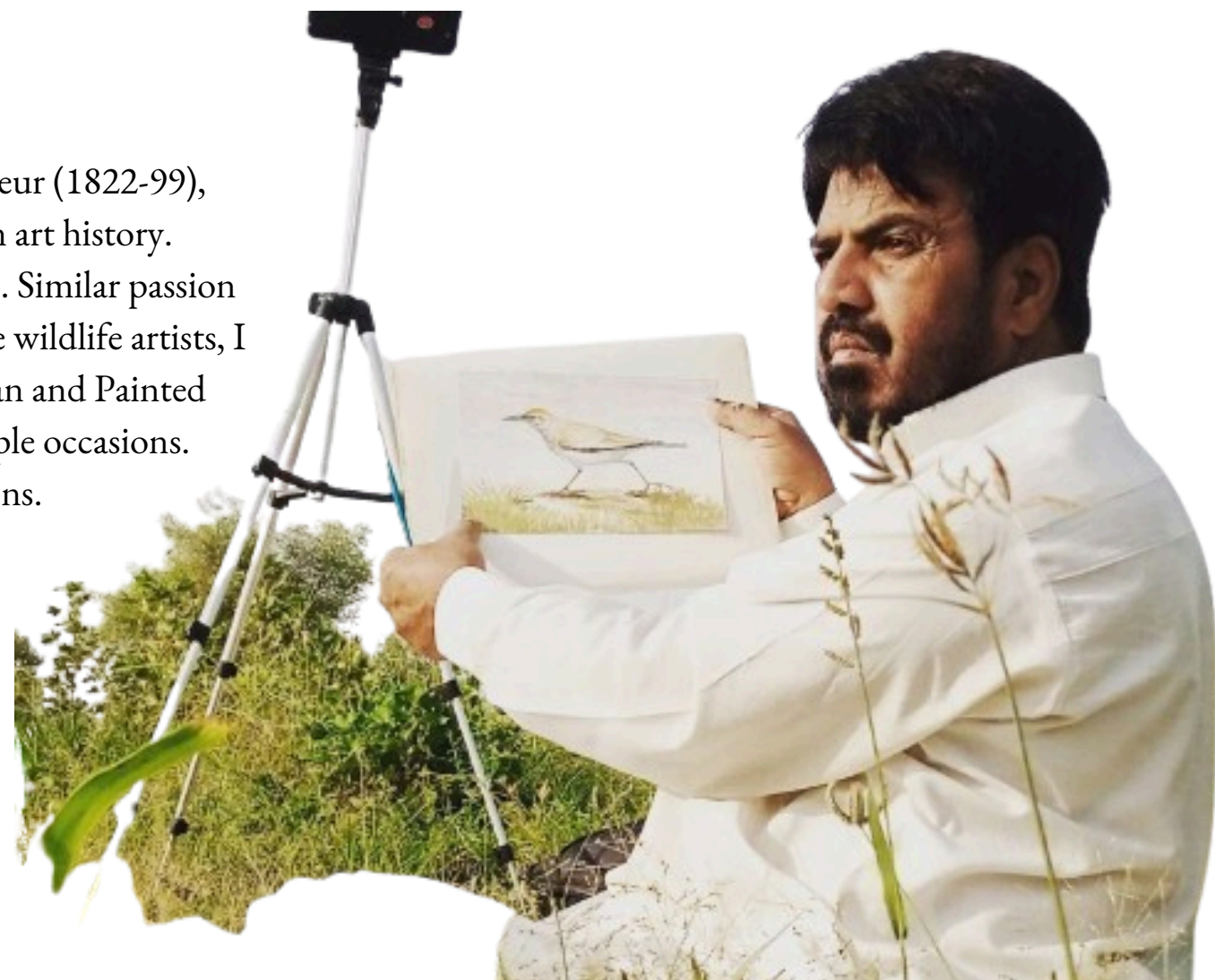
Tamgha-e-Imtiaz

The Work And Artist Extraordinaire:

Wildlife embodies the essence of nature—beauty, truth, and balance. They share our planet and have the right to thrive, undisturbed, in their natural habitats. In this entry, I will focus on the relationship between wildlife, particularly birds, and the art. Many of us find inspiration in flora—painting plants, flowers, and landscapes—we often overlook the fauna. Yet, fauna is just as integral to the ecosystem as flora. Literature across cultures is rich with tales and poems about animals, capturing our imagination from childhood into adulthood. We remember Rudyard Kipling's *Jungle Book*, the enchanting French fairy tale *L'Oiseau bleu* by Madame d'Aulnoy, and the timeless lessons of Aesop's Fables, where animals convey truths often lost on humans. Jack London's *Call of the Wild* further illustrates the purity and simplicity of nature.

In Europe, wildlife has captivated artists for centuries, with names like Rosa Bonheur (1822-99), Franz Snider (1597-1657) and Sir Edwin Landseer (1802-73) leaving their mark on art history. Today, many artists focus on animal illustrations, especially in children's literature. Similar passion is also gradually growing in our part of the world. Taking inspiration from notable wildlife artists, I have published few books showing my artwork. Among them, the *Birds of Pakistan* and *Painted Eggs* are noteworthy. My work has been displayed in various exhibitions on multiple occasions. Additional to that, I have also painted government issued stamps on many occasions.

Now, I take great pride in my collection of wildlife paintings—a tribute not just to art, but to nature, conservation, and the profound connection we share with the environment. This journey has become more than a career; it is a lifelong passion that continually draws me closer to the wonders of nature and its creator. On behalf of my work painting on eggshells, I was honored with the civilian award of *Tamgha-e-Imtiaz* from the Government of Pakistan.



I would also like to highlight that my art serves both as a study tool and a means for outdoor exploration. My work was enriched by resources such as *Book of British Birds* and *The Birds of Britain & Europe*, alongside various online materials.

In addition, I have several upcoming publications in the pipeline, including *Birds of Langh Lake and Digh Lake*, *Birds of Haleji Lake*, *Birds of Khirthar National Park*, *A Pocket Guide to Birds of Sindh*, *Game Birds of Pakistan*, *Song Birds of Pakistan*, *Birds of Pakistan*, and a playing card set featuring different bird species.



Painting on eggshells featuring (Left-to-Right): males of Western Tragopan *Tragopan melanocephalus*, Indian Peafowl *Pavo cristatus* and Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*. Paintings by the author.



NORTHERN PINTAIL
Anas acuta

80



NORTHERN SHOVELER
Anas clypeata

74

(Left-to-Right) Northern Pintail *Anas acuta* and Northern Shoveler *Spatula clypeata*. Paintings by the author.



Furnished by G.A. Khaskheli

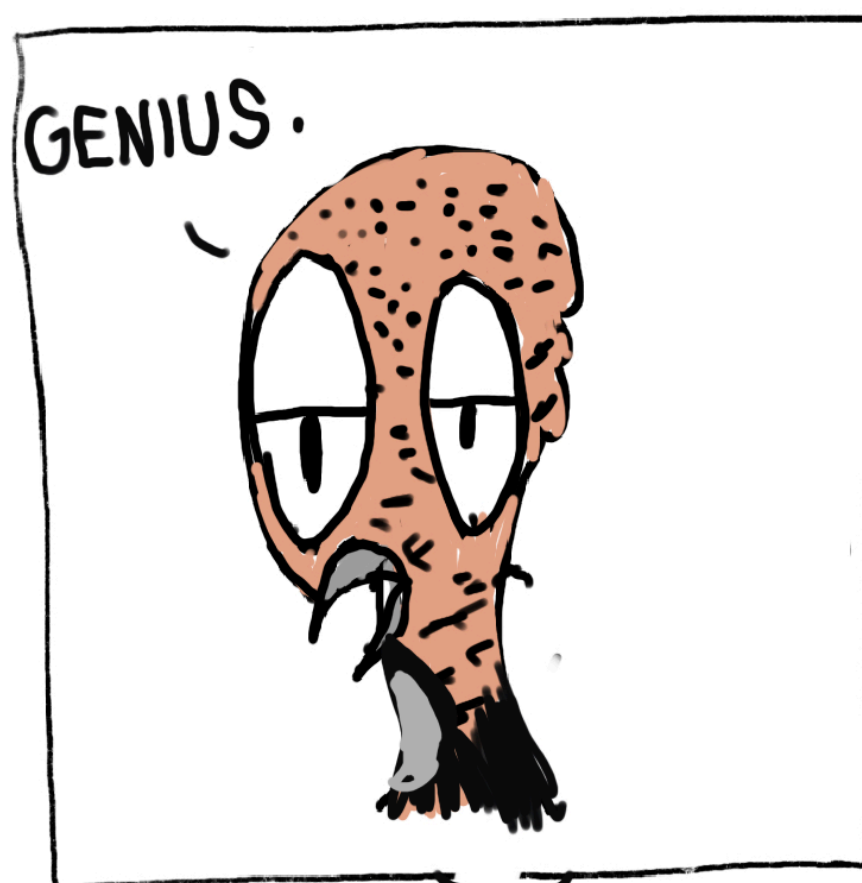
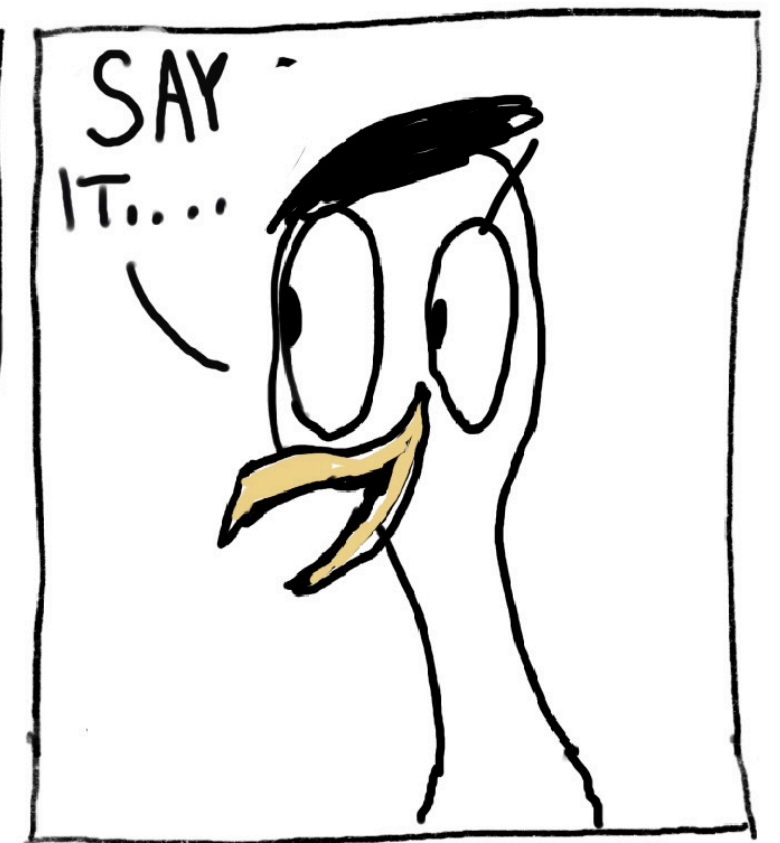
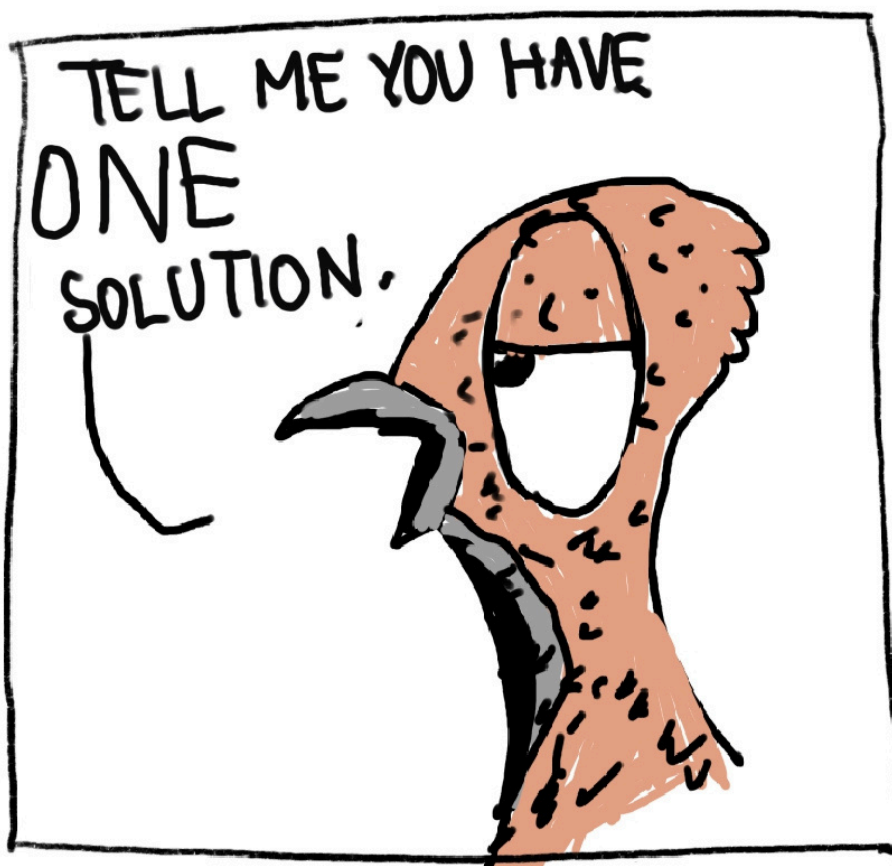
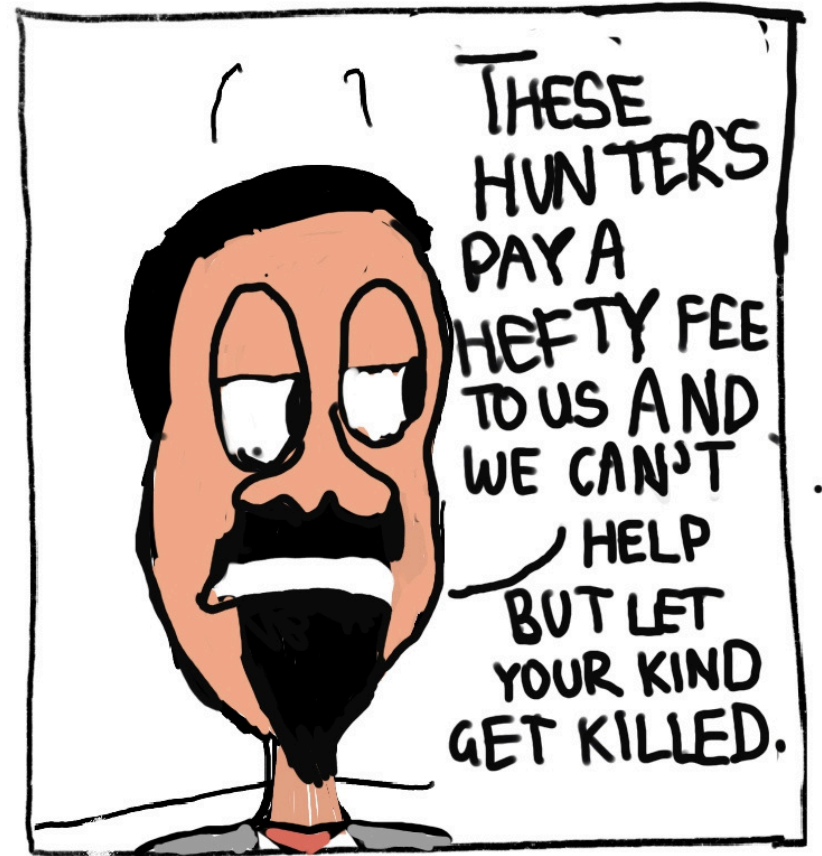
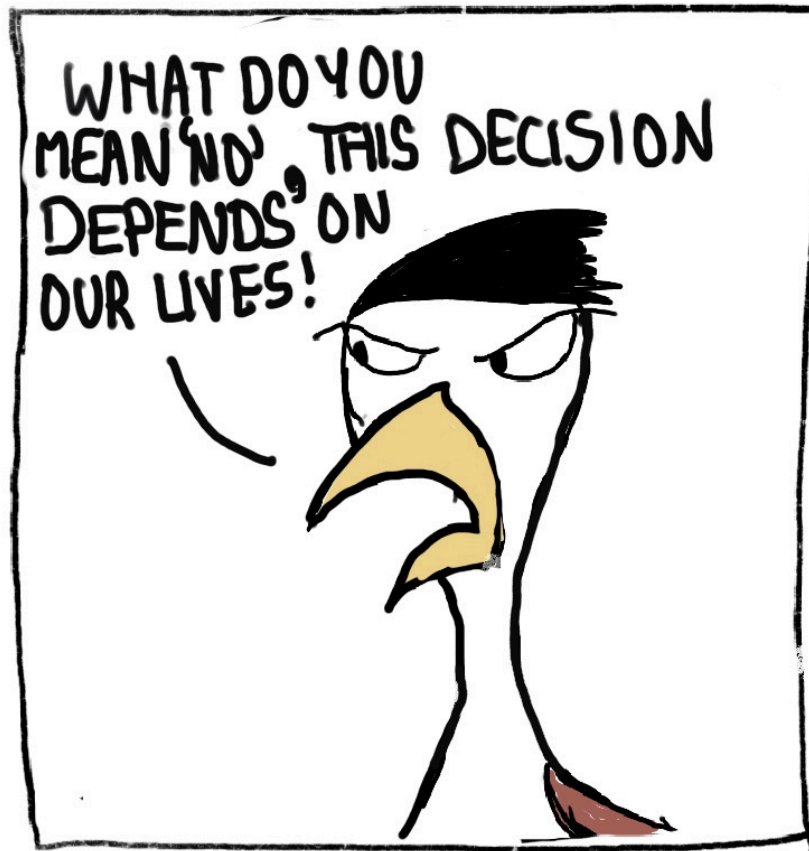
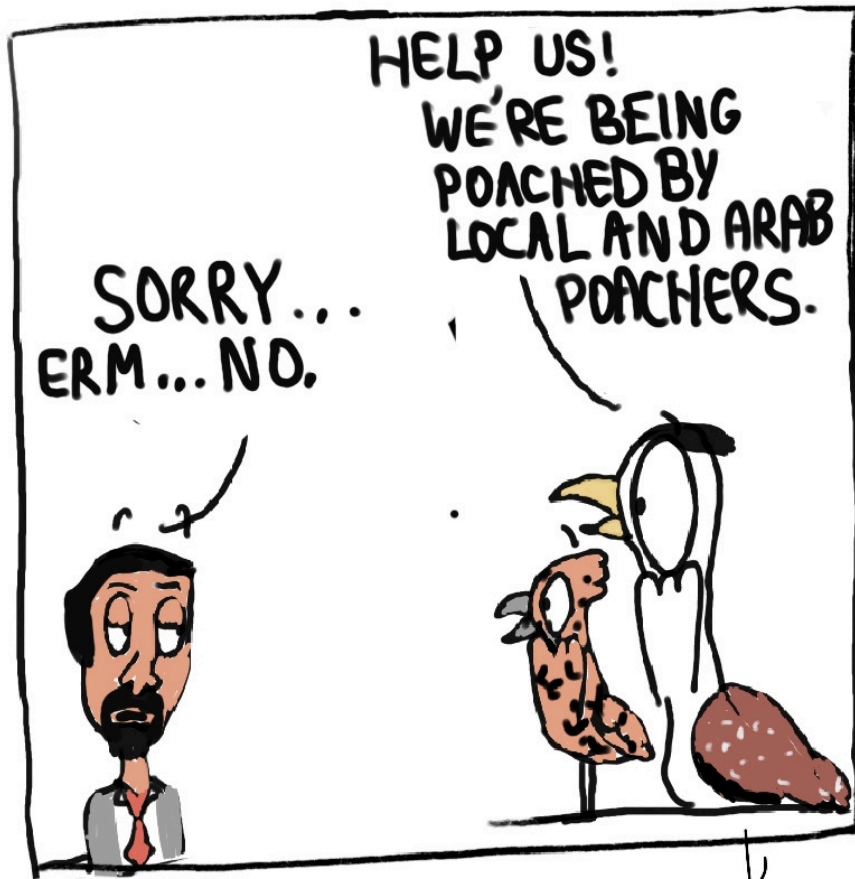


Government issued stamps featuring different species of birds and a waterfowler, furnished by Ghulam Abbas Khaskheli

Comic Section

Shibil Alizada

COMIC - GREAT INDIAN & MACQUEENS BUSTARDS



Shibil Alizada



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. *Daangeer: A Quarterly Analysis of Pakistan's Birds* has been made possible through RI's technical support.