

Birding Trip Report

North Bengal, India; November 2002



Sunrise over Kanchenjunga, as seen from Rishyap; © Mike Prince.

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INTRODUCTION

This is a report on a birding trip to North Bengal. The participants were Delhi-based Alpana Khare, Bikram Grewal, Bill Harvey, Mike Prince and Sunita Chaudhry, plus Kolkata-based Sujan Chatterjee and Sumit Sen.

We spent nine days there in total, our itinerary involving three main areas: the lowland Gorumara National Park and nearby Chapramari Wildlife Sanctuary, the hill areas of Lolaygaon, Lava, Rishyap and Neora Valley National Park, and the Sandakphu trek (Singalila National Park) on the Nepal border.

Logistics regarding sites visited, travel and accommodation were organised largely by Sujan and Sumit in conjunction with Raj from Help Tourism, and we are all very grateful to them for a superb job done.

ITINERARY

- Thursday 21 November 2002: Alpana, Bikram, Bill, Mike and Sunita flew from Delhi to Bagdogra, Sujan from Kolkata, met by Raj from Help Tourism and Sumit who had taken the overnight train from Kolkata. After lunch at airport, drove to Gorumara Jungle Camp, birding nearby in the late afternoon. Stayed at Jungle Camp.
- 22 November: Morning in Gorumara National Park, afternoon at nearby Chapramari Wildlife Sanctuary. Stayed at Jungle Camp.
- 23 November: Morning birding near the Mahakal Trail, Gorumara; then drive to Lolaygaon, birding en-route and at Lolaygaon late afternoon. Stayed at Lolaygaon.
- 24 November: Morning birding same area at Lolaygaon, afternoon spent at Rishyap. Stayed at Rishyap.
- 25 November: Whole day spent at Neora Valley National Park, morning birding the upper trails and afternoon the lower. Stayed at Rishyap.
- 26 November: Morning birding from road near Lava. Drove to Darjeeling, afternoon spent at Darjeeling Zoo. Stayed at Cedar Inn, Darjeeling.
- 27 November: Morning drove to Manebhanjang where transferred to two jeeps. Then drove Sandakphu trek to summit, birding at various stops along the way. Afternoon birding near summit. Stayed at Sandakphu.
- 28 November: Early morning birding around summit, (and enjoying sunrise over Everest and Kanchenjunga), then drove down to Gairibans, stopping frequently, for late morning birding. Afternoon continued driving and

- birding down to Tunling. Stayed at Tunling.
- 29 November: Early morning birding at Tunling, then drove to Bagdogra airport, stopping occasionally where we saw birds and passed spare time before flight at Bamunpokhri. Alpana, Bikram, Bill, Mike and Sunita flew to Delhi, Sumit to Kolkata.
- 30 November: Sujan birded at Phulbari Barrage before taking train back to Kolkata.

SITE DETAILS

Site information is generally well described in Kazmierczak & Singh [3]. However, this does not include the lowland reserves of Gorumara National Park and Chapramari Wildlife Sanctuary.

SYSTEMATIC LIST

The taxonomy, sequence and nomenclature in this report follow Grimmett, Inskipp & Inskipp.

Note that where estimates of numbers of birds seen are given, these are largely based on personal observations. Hence the actual numbers seen on the trip by the group is likely to be greater in many instances. In addition, where a species was only seen by one member of the group (which, typically for forest birding, happened on a number of times) this is usually indicated in the text below.

Species included in brackets were not confirmed, but have been included in the list as probables, or (in the case of Barn Swallow) on the basis of an interesting observation.

1. **Hill Partridge *Arborophila torqueola***
Calling birds heard at both Lodaygaon and on the Sandakphu trek.
2. **Red Junglefowl *Gallus gallus***
One male seen from the Gorumara viewpoint.
3. **Kalij Pheasant *Lophura leucomelana***
Seen on two occasions at Lodaygaon and once on the Sandakphu trek. Unfortunately not seen well enough to determine the subspecies but likely to have been *lathamii* based on range.
4. **Indian Peafowl *Pavo cristatus***
Only recorded in the Gorumara area where small numbers (up to about 20) were common.
5. **Lesser Whistling-duck *Dendrocygna javanica***
One seen on a small pond en-route from Bagdogra airport to Gorumara and also recorded at Phulbari Barrage.
6. **Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea***
Three seen in flight at Gorumara, also recorded at Phulbari Barrage.
7. **Gadwall *Anas strepera***
Phulbari Barrage.
8. **Northern Pintail *Anas acuta***
Phulbari Barrage.
9. **Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker *Dendrocopos canicapillus***
Two recorded in the Gorumara National Park and also seen on the nearby Mahakal trail, plus at Lodaygaon. A male seen at Gorumara showed considerable red at the sides of the crown and was presumably of the subspecies *semicoronatus*.
10. **Fulvous-breasted Woodpecker *Dendrocopos macei***
Two or three seen at Gorumara and on the Mahakal trail.
11. **[Darjeeling Woodpecker *Dendrocopos darjellensis*]**
A woodpecker seen briefly in flight over the village of Manebhanjang showed large white oval wing patches and can only really have been this species.

12. **Lesser Yellownape *Picus chlorolophus***
About four seen at Gorumara and also seen on the Mahakal trail nearby. Subspecies not determinable between the nominate and *simlae*.
13. **Greater Yellownape *Picus flavinucha***
Singles in the lowlands at Gorumara, the Mahakal trail and Bamunpokhri.
14. **Himalayan Flameback *Dinopium shorii***
Seen at Gorumara with two on the Mahakal trail and two at Bamunpokhri. Difficult to distinguish from Common Flameback *D. javanense* (which is not likely to occur in the area) other than the fact that they appeared fairly large-billed and to approach Greater Flameback in size.
15. **Greater Flameback *Chrysocolaptes lucidus***
Four seen at Gorumara and also recorded on the Mahakal Trail.
16. **Great Barbet *Megalaima virens***
Common in the hill areas: recorded at Lolaygaon (where about 100 seen), Rishyap, Neora Valley NP, Lava, Darjeeling (about 50 at Darjeeling Zoo) and Sandakphu.
17. **Lineated Barbet *Megalaima lineate***
Only seen at Gorumara and Chapramari, with four at the latter site.
18. **Golden-throated Barbet *Megalaima franklinii***
At least five seen very well at Lolaygaon on 23/11 with a few also seen there the following day.
19. **Blue-throated Barbet *Megalaima asiatica***
Singles at Gorumara and on the Mahakal Trail.
20. **Oriental Pied Hornbill *Anthracoceros albirostris***
A few (about six) noted at both Gorumara, where they often sat in the open enjoying the early morning sun, and Chapramari.
21. **Indian Roller *Coracias benghalensis***
Apart from a few seen en-route in the agricultural lowlands, one was seen at Gorumara.
22. **Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis***
Singles near Gorumara Jungle Camp, at Gorumara and at Chapramari.
23. **Stork-billed Kingfisher *Halcyon capensis***
One seen by the river at Gorumara.
24. **White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis***
Only recorded near Gorumara where relatively common.
25. **Green Bee-eater *Merops orientalis***
Seen en-route in the lowlands and at Gorumara.
26. **Green-billed Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus tristis***
Three seen at Gorumara and one at Chapramari. Good views were eventually had: although the birds were generally very close they usually kept obscured deep in the foliage.

27. **Vernal Hanging Parrot *Loriculus vernalis***
Small numbers seen and heard flying over at Gorumara: unfortunately only the typical views of this species!
28. **Alexandrine Parakeet *Psittacula eupatria***
Small numbers recorded daily in the Gorumara area.
29. **Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri***
Only seen in the lowlands, where common in the Gorumara and Chapramari areas.
30. **Red-breasted Parakeet *Psittacula alexandri***
Common around Gorumara where at least 100 seen near Gorumara Jungle Camp at dusk on 21/11 and similar numbers in a large, mixed species, feeding flock of parakeets nearby on 23/11. Also seen at Chapramari.
31. **White-rumped Needletail *Zoonavena sylvatica***
About five seen clearly in flight at Gorumara on 22/11. The spines at the tip of the tail were unsurprisingly not visible.
32. **Asian Palm Swift *Cypsiurus batasiensis***
A flock over palms at Gorumara on 22/11 and also seen at Phulbari Barrage.
33. **House Swift *Apus affinis***
Four seen at Kalimpong on 26/11 were of the *nipalensis* subspecies, showing a slightly more forked tail than the "Little Swift" found over most of the subcontinent.
34. **Brown Wood Owl *Strix leptogrammica***
Two separate birds were seen briefly (one of which was first heard calling) after dark at Lodaygaon on 23/11 and one seen at a similar time in the Neora Valley National Park on 26/11. Although not seen well enough to determine this, these birds would have been of the Himalayan subspecies *newarensis* which is sometimes considered a separate species.
35. **Asian Barred Owlet *Glaucidium cuculoides***
One presumed calling at Gorumara Jungle Camp during the night of 21-22/11 and one seen well at Gorumara the following morning, being heavily mobbed by passerines (including Ruby-cheeked Sunbirds).
36. **Spotted Owlet *Athene brama***
One heard calling near Gorumara Jungle Camp at dusk on 21/11.
37. **Large-tailed Nightjar *Caprimulgus macrurus***
A male was sat on the road to Gorumara National Park pre-dawn on the 22/11. The white tips to the outer tail feathers were visible whilst it was on the ground as well as in flight.
38. **Savanna Nightjar *Caprimulgus affinis***
One flew past in the twilight on 21/11 over agricultural feeds at Gorumara Jungle Camp; the fully white outer tail feathers could just be seen.
39. **Rock Pigeon *Columba livia***
Common, recorded on all but two dates.
40. **Speckled Wood Pigeon *Columba hodgsonii***
Although never seen well, a flock of about 15 flew over at Lava on the morning of the 26/11 and there were other fly-over sightings on the Sandakphu trek on two occasions.

41. **Ashy Wood Pigeon *Columba pulchricollis***
One was seen well in flight at Gorumara and also recorded in flight at Lava. Very noticeable white head in flight, contrasting with dark upperparts: quite difficult to distinguish from Speckled Wood Pigeon without good views.
42. **Oriental Turtle Dove *Streptopelia orientalis***
Common, recorded nearly every day with the greatest numbers in the lowlands. The grey sides and tip to the tail eliminate the subspecies *meena* and the obvious pinkish colour of the head, neck and underparts suggest the more easterly *agricola*.
43. **Spotted Dove *Streptopelia chinensis***
Common in the Gorumara area but not noted elsewhere.
44. **Red Collared Dove *Streptopelia tranquebarica***
Small numbers at Gorumara on 22/11 were the only sightings of the trip.
45. **Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto***
Very common in the lowlands but not noted at higher elevations.
46. **[Barred Cuckoo Dove *Macropygia unchall*]**
A dove with an obvious long tail that was seen briefly as it flew over the jeep on the lower part of the Sandakphu trek was in all probability this species. Recorded as common by several other trip reports but it surprisingly eluded us since it is presumably resident in the area.
47. **Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps indica***
Singles were seen en-route in the lowlands on 21/11 and on each of the next two days at Gorumara and Mahakal Trail.
48. **Yellow-footed Green Pigeon *Treron phoenicoptera***
About 200 were seen flying over in small flocks in the late afternoon near Gorumara Jungle Camp on 21/11 and several were seen at Gorumara the following day. In the early morning birds were coming to salt in front of the watchpoint there. The obvious separation between the grey belly and the mustard-yellow breast is indicative of the northern subspecies *phoenicoptera* and is very different from the smooth colour below of the peninsular subspecies.
49. **Pin-tailed Green Pigeon *Treron apicauda***
Three were seen with the Yellow-footed Green Pigeons at Gorumara.
50. **Green Imperial Pigeon *Ducula aenea***
Very good views of several with other pigeons at the Gorumara watchpoint.
51. **White-breasted Waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus***
A single at Chapramari was the only sighting.
52. **Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus***
A single at Chapramari and some also at Phulbari Barrage.
53. **Pintail Snipe *Gallinago stenura***
A snipe that flew up from beside the road en-route from Bagdogra to Gorumara did not show a clear white trailing edge to the wing and was almost certainly this species.
54. **Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia***
Six were seen beside the river at Gorumara and there was an intriguing record of a

wader, probably a Greenshank, seen briefly at Neora Valley, probably disorientated by the fog. Also recorded from Phulbari Barrage.

55. **Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus***
One seen at Gorumara.
56. **Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos***
Recorded from Phulbari Barrage.
57. **Bronze-winged Jacana *Metopidius indicus***
Seen at Phulbari Barrage.
58. **Red-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus indicus***
Seen en-route in the lowlands and at Gorumara, even heard calling during the night there.
59. **Osprey *Pandion haliaetus***
Seen at Phulbari Barrage.
60. **Oriental Honey-buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus***
Two were seen en-route between Bagdogra and Gorumara, one at Chapramari and interestingly two on the Sandakphu trek which were likely to have been passage birds.
61. **Black Kite *Milvus migrans***
Common in the lowlands but not seen at higher elevations.
62. **Pallas's Fish Eagle *Haliaeetus leucoryphus***
A big surprise was of a fine adult soaring with a few vultures and Steppe Eagles a few kilometres below Mirik on the journey back to Bagdogra from Sandakphu on 29/11. Although still quite high in the hills the Teesta river was in view and it seems likely it had drifted up from somewhere along the river.
63. **Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus***
One immature seen near Mirik on 29/11.
64. **White-rumped Vulture *Gyps bengalensis***
Singles at Gorumara and on the Mahakal Trail, and seen on the Sandakphu trek. A few also with the other raptors seen near Mirik on 29/11.
65. **Slender-billed Vulture *Gyps tenuirostris***
One seen at Lolaygaon on 24/11 and one on the Sandakphu trek at GAR on 28/11 were presumed to be this species as opposed to Indian Vulture *Gyps indicus*.
66. **Eurasian Griffon *Gyps fulvus***
Six seen on the Mahakal Trail and other sightings from Sandakphu, including 16 on 28/11, mostly at the summit in the early morning.
67. **Crested Serpent Eagle *Spilornis cheela***
Singles of the nominate race recorded at Gorumara, Chapramari and Bamunpokhri.
68. **Eurasian Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus***
Seen at Phulbari Barrage.
69. **Hen Harrier *Circus cyaneus***
A migrating ring-tail was seen at the Sandakphu summit in the early evening of 27/11.

70. **Shikra *Accipiter badius***
Just single sightings en-route in the lowlands on two occasions.
71. **Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus***
A typically dark above *melaschistos* bird was seen in the valley from Rishyap.
72. **Northern Goshawk *Accipiter gentiles***
One bird, presumably the same, seen near Lodaygaon on both 23/11 and 24/11.
73. **White-eyed Buzzard *Butastur teesa***
One seen en-route, not far from Gorumara, on 23/11.
74. **Common Buzzard *Buteo buteo***
One at Gorumara and one at Sandakphu summit, which spent several minutes in a hovering hunting flight.
75. **Black Eagle *Ictinaetus malayensis***
Two different birds were seen at, or near, Lodaygaon, one in the valley from Rishyap and one in the nearby Neora Valley National Park.
76. **Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis***
Late migrating birds seen at Lodaygaon on both 23/11 and 24/11 and on the Sandakphu trek, where there were 21 on 28/11, with another six in the hills below Mirik
77. **Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos***
After hearing an unexpected report of seven at Sandakphu on 27/11 we saw four birds (two adults and two juveniles) there the following day. There are very few, at least recent, records for West Bengal and these sightings suggest a small migration.
78. **Bonelli's Eagle *Hieraetus fasciatus***
One immature seen at Gorumara on 22/11.
79. **Mountain Hawk Eagle *Spizaetus nipalensis***
Singles seen at Lodaygaon on both 23/11 and 24/11 and at Neora Valley on 25/11. The Neora Valley bird was seen in flight and perched briefly before 6 am.
80. **Collared Falconet *Microhierax caerulescens***
Good views of one at Gorumara and one at nearby Chapramari later the same day.
81. **Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus***
Single birds were seen en-route in the lowlands on two occasions, with one also seen on the Sandakphu trek.
82. **Little Cormorant *Phalacrocorax niger***
Records en-route from Bagdogra, at Gorumara and the Mahakal Trail and at Phulbari Barrage.
83. **Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo***
Two seen at Gorumara on 22/11.
84. **Little Egret *Egretta garzetta***
Small numbers seen in the Gorumara area and en-route in the lowlands.
85. **Great Egret *Casmerodius albus***
Seen at Phulbari Barrage.

86. **Intermediate Egret *Egretta intermedia***
One in the Gorumara National Park on 22/11 was the only sighting.
 87. **Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis***
Common in the lowlands but not recorded at higher levels.
 88. **Indian Pond Heron *Ardeola grayii***
Common in the lowlands but not recorded at higher levels.
 89. **Black Stork *Ciconia nigra***
Four were seen in the Gorumara National Park on 22/11.
 90. **Lesser Adjutant *Leptoptilos javanicus***
Two birds seen in flight at Gorumara and one at Chapramari.
 91. **Long-tailed Broadbill *Psarisomus dalhousiae***
Very good views of these spectacular birds in Gorumara on 22/11 and at least 12 on the Mahakal Trail on 23/11. They are presumably relatively common here.
 92. **Golden-fronted Leafbird *Chloropsis aurifrons***
Birds, of the nominate subspecies, seen at Gorumara and the Mahakal Trail, with one singing bird also in the hills below Mirik.
 93. **Brown Shrike *Lanius cristatus***
All the sightings were of birds seen en-route, on 21/11, 23/11 and 29/11.
 94. **Long-tailed Shrike *Lanius schach***
Birds of the black-headed subspecies *tricolor* were seen en-route and in the Gorumara area.
 95. **Grey-backed Shrike *Lanius excubitoroides***
The most frequent shrike species encountered, with small numbers at Gorumara, Chapramari, Mahakal Trail and Phulbari Barrage, and one also in the hills at Lodaygaon.
 96. **Yellow-billed Blue Magpie *Urocissa flavirostris***
Small numbers seen at Neora Valley (eight here), Lava and on the Sandakphu trek. These were the nominate subspecies, with pale yellow underparts and a greyer mantle than the western subspecies *cucullata*.
 97. **Rufous Treepie *Dendrocitta vagabunda***
Fairly common in the lowlands, but replaced by Grey Treepie in the hills.
 98. **Grey Treepie *Dendrocitta formosae***
One was seen at Gorumara but otherwise all the sightings were in the hills, with birds seen at all the main sites visited.
 99. **Spotted Nutcracker *Nucifraga caryocatactes***
A bird seen and heard on the Sandakphu trek on 27/11 was also heard on the subsequent two days. It would have been of either of the eastern subspecies *hemispila* or *macella*.
 100. **House Crow *Corvus splendens***
Common, records from most sites including around habitation in the hills.
 101. **Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos***
Just two birds seen in the lowlands, at Mahakal Trail but quite common in the hills with
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records from Neora Valley, Lava and the Sandakphu trek where 40 were estimated near the summit on 28/11. Those birds seen well were very raven-like with powerful bills and a slightly wedge-shaped tail, and a deep call. These were presumably *tibetosinensis*. The two birds at Mahakal Trail may well have been "Jungle Crows", i.e. *culminates* or *levaillantii*.

102. **Ashy Woodswallow *Artamus fuscus***
Two seen near Gorumara Jungle Camp on 21/11 and one in the Gorumara National Park the following morning.
103. **Black-hooded Oriole *Oriolus xanthornus***
A few seen at Gorumara and the Mahakal Trail, with two also at Lolaygaon.
104. **Maroon Oriole *Oriolus traillii***
Excellent views of birds at Gorumara, Chapramari and especially the Mahakal Trail where at least six were seen on 23/11.
105. **Large Cuckooshrike *Coracina macei***
One seen at Chapramari and three at Mahakal Trail, all presumably of the Himalayan foothills subspecies *nipalensis*.
106. **Black-winged Cuckooshrike *Coracina melaschistos***
About four seen on both 22/11 and 23/11 in the areas of Gorumara National Park, the Mahakal Trail and Gorumara Jungle Camp.
107. **Grey-chinned Minivet *Pericrocotus solaris***
Small groups noted at Lolaygaon on both 23/11 and 24/11.
108. **Short-billed Minivet *Pericrocotus brevirostris***
Good views of about ten on the Mahakal Trail with large numbers of Scarlet Minivets.
109. **Scarlet Minivet *Pericrocotus flammeus***
Some relatively large flocks seen in the areas of Gorumara (e.g. about 70 in total), Chapramari and Mahakal Trail, with smaller numbers at Lolaygaon.
110. **Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike *Hemipus picatus***
One at Chapramari on 22/11 was presumably of the subspecies *capitalis* but seen too briefly to confirm this.
111. **Yellow-bellied Fantail *Rhipidura hypoxantha***
One at Chapramari was the only sighting.
112. **White-throated Fantail *Rhipidura albicollis***
One at Chapramari and two at Lava, both of one the dark-breasted races.
113. **White-browed Fantail *Rhipidura aureola***
Recorded at Gorumara and Phulbari Barrage.
114. **Black Drongo *Dicrurus macrocercus***
Common in the lowlands, for example several seen daily in the Gorumara, area but not recorded anywhere in the hills.
115. **Ashy Drongo *Dicrurus leucophaeus***
Small numbers seen in the Gorumara area and also two at Bamunpokhri. These were quite obviously grey birds, easily separable from Black Drongo, and were therefore probably of the *hopwoodi* subspecies.

116. **White-bellied Drongo *Dicrurus caerulescens***
At least four were seen at Gorumara on 22/11 but these were the only sightings.
117. **Crow-billed Drongo *Dicrurus annectans***
Two were seen well on the Mahakal Trail on 23/11, the seventh species of drongo that morning!
118. **Bronzed Drongo *Dicrurus aeneus***
A few seen at Gorumara and on the Mahakal Trail, for example at least six at the former site.
119. **Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus remifer***
Very good views of as many as 12 on the Mahakal Trail.
120. **Spangled Drongo *Dicrurus hottentottus***
Seen at most lowland sites, including about six at Gorumara with others at Chapramari, the Mahakal Trail and Bamunpokhri.
121. **Greater Racket-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus paradiseus***
Small numbers at Gorumara and the Mahakal Trail, plus two at Bamunpokhri.
122. **Common Iora *Aegithina tiphia***
One was seen by one observer at Gorumara.
123. **Large Woodshrike *Tephrodornis gularis***
Excellent views of a feeding flock of 25 birds, subspecies *pelvica*, that moved together through the forest on the Mahakal Trail.
124. **Chestnut-bellied Rock Thrush *Monticola rufiventris***
After a female was seen at Gorumara, single males were seen at Rishyap, Lava and near the summit of Sandakphu.
125. **Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius***
One or two were regularly on the old factory buildings at Gorumara Jungle Camp.
126. **Blue Whistling Thrush *Myophonus caeruleus***
Common. Records from Gorumara, the Mahakal Trail, Neora Valley, Lava, central Darjeeling and Sandakphu as well as a few en-route sightings.
127. **Plain-backed Thrush *Zoothera mollissima***
Brief, sometimes roadside, sightings of birds at Gorumara, Lodaygaon, Rishyap (where there were two) and Lava.
128. **Scaly Thrush *Zoothera dauma***
Good views were had of about five nominate race birds fairly high in the canopy of trees at Bamunpokhri.
129. **Tickell's Thrush *Turdus unicolor***
One immature seen on a track at Gorumara on 22/11.
130. **White-collared Blackbird *Turdus albocinctus***
One seen by one observer on the Sandakphu Trek.
131. **Grey-winged Blackbird *Turdus bouboul***
One female seen at Gorumara.

132. **Dark-throated Thrush *Turdus ruficollis***
 First seen at Rishyap where a spectacular 1000+ were estimated in the valley in the late afternoon, many of them roosting in the area. Thereafter good numbers seen at Neora Valley, Lava, the Darjeeling area and Sandakphu. All seen well were 'Black-throated', *T. r. atrogularis*.
133. **Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus***
 Three were heard and then seen by one observer on the Sandakphu Trek on 29/11.
134. **Asian Brown Flycatcher *Muscicapa dauurica***
 One was seen by one observer and photographed at Lodaygaon. A good sighting for the time of year since they normally only winter further south.
135. **Rufous-gorgetted Flycatcher *Ficedula strophilata***
 One seen by one observer at Lodaygaon.
136. **Red-throated Flycatcher *Ficedula parva***
 About four were seen at Gorumara with others on the Mahakal Trail, but no further sightings away from the Gorumara area. None of these birds were assigned to a particular subspecies.
137. **Little Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula westermanni***
 Two males seen at Gorumara.
138. **Slaty-blue Flycatcher *Ficedula tricolour***
 Seen at Lodaygaon on both 23/11 and 24/11 but not recorded elsewhere.
139. **Sapphire Flycatcher *Ficedula sapphire***
 One first-winter male at Gorumara on 22/11.
140. **Verditer Flycatcher *Eumyias thalassina***
 One bird was photographed at Rhino Point, Gorumara.
141. **Small Niltava *Niltava macgregoriae***
 Two were seen at Chapramari.
142. **Rufous-bellied Niltava *Niltava sundara***
 One seen by one observer at Gorumara.
143. **Pale-chinned Flycatcher *Cyornis poliogenys***
 One seen at Chapramari.
144. **[Pale Blue Flycatcher *Cyornis unicolor*]**
 One bird was seen at Rhino Point, although photographs clearly showed a Verditer at the same place. Since no-one can recall two different birds it is safest to consider the Pale Blue a possible – may well have been the case of none of us paying close attention to the flycatcher because there were too many other birds around at the same time!
145. **Pygmy Blue Flycatcher *Muscicapella hodgsoni***
 One male seen well, low down in bamboo, when we stopped en-route from Sandakphu to Bagdogra (not far past the village of Mirik).
146. **Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher *Culicicapa ceylonensis***
 Up to two seen at Gorumara Jungle Camp, Gorumara, Chapramari and the Mahakal Trail.

147. **Orange-flanked Bush Robin *Tarsiger cyanurus***
Brief sightings of one at Lolaygaon and two or three in the Neora Valley.
148. **White-browed Bush Robin *Tarsiger indicus***
A pair were seen well in the Neora Valley on 25/11.
149. **Oriental Magpie Robin *Copsychus saularis***
One at Gorumara Jungle Camp and two on the Mahakal Trail were the only sightings.
150. **White-rumped Shama *Copsychus malabaricus***
Seen and heard singing at Gorumara and the nearby Mahakal Trail.
151. **Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros***
One female at Lolaygaon was the only sighting. Very similar to female Blue-fronted Redstart in plumage, although not showing such an obvious white eye-ring and without the black tip to the tail. The subspecies was presumably *rufiventris* based on range.
152. **White-throated Redstart *Phoenicurus schisticeps***
Somewhat of a surprise since other reports do not seem to mention this species, but we saw several near the Sandakphu summit. Both males and females were quite striking birds, often perching prominently on the top of bushes but equally could be quite unobtrusive.
153. **Blue-fronted Redstart *Phoenicurus frontalis***
Common in the hill areas, birds were recorded at Lolaygaon, Rishyap, Lava, Darjeeling and Sandakphu.
154. **White-capped Water Redstart *Phoenicurus leucocephalus***
One bird was seen en-route near the Teesta river on 21/11 and two along the river on the way to Lava from Gorumara on 23/11.
155. **Plumbeous Water Redstart *Phoenicurus fuliginosus***
Two along the river on the way to Lava from Gorumara on 23/11 were the only ones seen.
156. **White-tailed Robin *Cinclidium leucurum***
One pair and another male nearby were seen at Lava, in the area between Km4 and Km6, on 26/11.
157. **Black-backed Forktail *Enicurus immaculatus***
One bird was seen, and photographed, by one observer near a small stream on the Mahakal Trail.
158. **Common Stonechat *Saxicola torquata***
Two birds at Gorumara and one at Bamunpokhri.
159. **Pied Bushchat *Saxicola caprata***
One seen en-route from Gorumara to Lava on 23/11 was the only sighting of the trip.
160. **Grey Bushchat *Saxicola ferrea***
A pair at Lolaygaon on 24/11 and one on the Sandakphu trek on 29/11 were the only ones seen.
161. **Chestnut-tailed Starling *Sturnus malabaricus***
Common at Gorumara where a maximum of about 60 was recorded on 22/11.

162. **Asian Pied Starling *Sturnus contra***
Very common in lowland areas, including Gorumara, Mahakal Trail and Phulbari Barrage.
163. **Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis***
Very common in lowland areas, with records from Gorumara and Mahakal Trail, and also seen at Sandakphu.
164. **Jungle Myna *Acridotheres fuscus***
Two seen near Gorumara Jungle Camp on 21/11 and two en-route from there to Lava on 23/11.
165. **Hill Myna *Gracula religiosa***
First seen were 12 at Gorumara Jungle Camp on 21/11 with sightings also from Gorumara National Park and Chapramari the following day. A most spectacular sighting was of a flock, estimated at about 600, between Lava and Lolaygaon on 23/11. They were feeding in a heavily-forested valley and were seen together in flight on a number of occasions, their calls echoing against the hills. A flock of this size may be unprecedented in India? Large numbers were also present there the following day. The only other sighting was of one near Darjeeling Zoo.
- Note that Hill Myna *G. religiosa* has been split from Southern Hill Myna *G. indica*. Those birds seen would have been *G. r. intermedia*.
166. **Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch *Sitta castanea***
Two seen at Gorumara, two at Chapramari and two on the Mahakal Trail. Two also seen at Sandakphu on 28/11.
167. **White-tailed Nuthatch *Sitta himalayensis***
Several at Lolaygaon, with 10 estimated there on 24/11, and smaller numbers at Neora Valley and Lava, with one also at Sandakphu.
168. **Velvet-fronted Nuthatch *Sitta frontalis***
Only recorded from Gorumara with two there on 22/11.
169. **Eurasian Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris***
Two or three seen at various places on the Sandakphu trek, including in trees at the summit, on both 27/11 and 28/11.
170. **Winter Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes***
Seen or heard daily from 27/11 to 29/11 at various places on the Sandakphu trek. Those birds seen were very dark all over, typical of the *nipalensis* subspecies.
171. **Fire-capped Tit *Cephalopyrus flammiceps***
Brief views of one at Lolaygaon on 23/11 and two at Neora Valley on 25/11.
172. **Rufous-vented Tit *Parus rubidiventris***
One on the Sandakphu trek on 28/11 showed a greyish belly typical of the East Himalayan subspecies *beavani*.
173. **Coal Tit *Parus ater***
Two or three were seen in conifers at the summit of Sandakphu on 27/11, with two also in deciduous trees nearby at Gairibans the following day.
174. **Green-backed Tit *Parus monticolus***
Small numbers seen regularly in the hills, with records from Lolaygaon, Rishyap, Lava and Sandakphu.
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175. **Yellow-cheeked Tit *Parus spilonotus***
Two (of the nominate race) at Rishyap were the only ones seen.
176. **Yellow-browed Tit *Sylviparus modestus***
After four at Neora Valley and a few at Lava, a group of about 15 were seen at Sandakphu. All were of the nominate subspecies.
177. **Sultan Tit *Melanochlora sultanea***
Probably the surprise sighting of the whole trip, a feeding flock of at least 12 were seen at Chapramari Wildlife Sanctuary on 22/11. They were conspicuous as they fed for several minutes in the middle storey, before we were warned back by forest guards since there had been a lone elephant seen in the area a little earlier! None of the trip reports we had seen mentioned Sultan Tit, although it's such a striking bird that it certainly could not be overlooked!
178. **Black-throated Tit *Aegithalos concinnus***
Fast-moving flocks, typically of 30 birds or more, were seen at Neora Valley, Lava and Sandakphu.
179. **Plain Martin *Riparia paludicola***
Seen near the river at Gorumara only.
180. **[Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*]**
Three old nests were seen inside a shop doorway in Lava village.
181. **Red-rumped Swallow *Hirundo daurica***
The only sightings were of birds seen en-route: at Kalimpong on 26/11 and in the hills below Mirik on 29/11. No attempt was made to assign a subspecies.
182. **Asian House Martin *Delichon dasypus***
Seen at Kalimpong on 26/11.
183. **Nepal House Martin *Delichon nipalensis***
Four seen with Red-rumped Swallows in the hills below Mirik on 29/11.
184. **Striated Bulbul *Pycnonotus striatus***
Small flocks of 10 to 20 birds seen in the treetops at Lolaygaon on both 23/11 and 24/11, plus at Neora Valley on 25/11.
185. **Black-crested Bulbul *Pycnonotus melanicterus***
The *flaviventris* subspecies was fairly common in the Gorumara area (with a maximum of 40 in the National Park) and also seen on both days at Lolaygaon.
186. **Red-whiskered Bulbul *Pycnonotus jocusus***
Small numbers seen at Gorumara and on the Mahakal Trail.
187. **Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer***
One of the darker subspecies, probably *bengalensis*, was fairly common in the lowlands, the maximum recorded being 15 at Gorumara Jungle Camp.
188. **Black Bulbul *Hypsipetes leucocephalus***
Pale grey birds of the subspecies *psaroides* were relatively common in the hills with sightings from Lolaygaon, Neora Valley, Lava and Sandakphu.
189. **Hill Prinia *Prinia atrogularis***
One bird was seen briefly in a tea plantation in the hills below Mirik on 29/11.
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190. **Oriental White-eye *Zosterops palpebrosa***
A flock of about 20 seen on the Mahakal Trail was the only sighting of the trip.
191. **Yellowish-bellied Bush Warbler *Cettia robustipes***
Very good views had of one at close range at Neora Valley on 25/11.
192. **Common Tailorbird *Orthotomus sutorius***
Recorded from Gorumara and the Mahakal Trail, then two birds in a tea plantation in the hills below Mirik.
193. **Common Chiffchaff *Phylloscopus collybitus***
Only one was seen: on the lower parts of the Sandakphu trek on 27/11; a bird clearly of the *tristis* subspecies.
194. **Buff-barred Warbler *Phylloscopus pulcher***
One seen at Gorumara National Park, then further records from Lolaygaon, Rishyap and Neora Valley, although small numbers at each site.
195. **Ashy-throated Warbler *Phylloscopus maculipennis***
One seen at Gorumara National Park, then seen also at Lolaygaon, Neora Valley and Sandakphu. The commonest warbler seen on the trip.
196. **Yellow-browed Warbler *Phylloscopus inornatus***
One bird was seen and heard well at Gorumara Jungle Camp on both 22/11 and 23/11.
197. **Hume's Warbler *Phylloscopus humei***
A few seen and heard at Gorumara, on the Mahakal Trail and on a couple of occasions en-route in the lowlands.
198. **Eastern Crowned Warbler *Phylloscopus coronatus***
One bird was seen well at Lolaygaon on 24/11.
199. **Blyth's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus reguloides***
Two were seen at Rishyap on 24/11 with other sightings (about three) from Neora Valley the following day.
200. **[Yellow-vented Warbler *Phylloscopus cantator*]**
Two birds seen at Neora Valley showed bold head markings and a bright yellow supercilium and throat. Initially thought at the time to have maybe been Black-faced Warblers we immediately realised our mistake shortly afterwards when we found a flock of undoubted Black-faced Warblers. With hindsight it seems likely that these two birds were Yellow-vented Warblers, but they were not seen again.
201. **Golden-spectacled Warbler *Seicercus burkii***
After two at Gorumara on 22/11, five were seen at Chapramari and small numbers at Lolaygaon.
202. **Grey-hooded Warbler *Seicercus xanthoschista***
Only seen at Lolaygaon where there were several on 24/11.
203. **Chestnut-crowned Warbler *Seicercus castaneiceps***
Two singles at Neora Valley on 25/11.

204. **Black-faced Warbler *Abroscopus schisticeps***
At least 10 of these attractive small birds were in a fast-moving flock at Neora Valley on 25/11 with a few also at Lava the following day.
205. **Striated Laughingthrush *Garrulax striatus***
Flocks of up to 30 seen at Lolaygaon, Neora Valley and Lava.
206. **Blue-winged Laughingthrush *Garrulax squamatus***
One seen briefly by one observer in a small flock of Black-faced Laughingthrushes on the Sandakphu trek on 28/11.
207. **Scaly Laughingthrush *Garrulax subunicolor***
A small flock was seen very well at Rishyap on 24/11 with more seen at Neora Valley the following day.
208. **Black-faced Laughingthrush *Garrulax affinis***
Relatively common, with about 50 in total seen at Neora Valley and several small flocks encountered at various points along the Sandakphu trek.
209. **Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrush *Garrulax erythrocephalus***
The most widespread of the laughingthrushes, with sightings from Lolaygaon, Neora Valley, Lava and Sandakphu.
210. **Streak-breasted Scimitar Babbler *Pomatorhinus ruficollis***
Excellent close views were had of three birds at Neora Valley. One seen later at Sandakphu.
211. **Pygmy Wren Babbler *Pnoepyga pusilla***
One was seen by one observer at Lolaygaon and another fed unconcerned at extremely close range (binoculars would not focus!) at Neora Valley.
212. **Rufous-throated Wren Babbler *Spelaornis caudatus***
One seen by a single observer at Lolaygaon on 24/11.
213. **Rufous-capped Babbler *Stachyris ruficeps***
Small numbers seen, especially in flocks with Rufous-winged Fulvettas, at Lolaygaon, Lava and Sandakphu.
214. **Golden Babbler *Stachyris chrysaea***
These stunning birds were seen at Neora Valley (about eight) and Lava.
215. **Slender-billed Babbler *Turdoides longirostris***
One was seen from the river watchpoint at Gorumara National Park. It showed a few times in the tall grassy undergrowth, moving quite slowly and generally staying hidden inside. A little known species, with no known recent records outside Assam, it will be very interesting to know whether Gorumara is a regular site.
216. **Jungle Babbler *Turdoides striatus***
Only recorded from the Gorumara area.
217. **Red-billed Leiothrix *Leiothrix lutea***
Flocks, of several birds each time, were seen at Lolaygaon, Rishyap and on the Sandakphu trek. The central and eastern Himalaya birds are of the subspecies *calipyga*.

218. **Black-headed Shrike Babbler *Pteruthius rufiventer***
Superb views were had of two males and a female at Neora Valley. Very quiet and unobtrusive, they showed the benefit of stopping to wait in a promising looking area.
219. **White-browed Shrike Babbler *Pteruthius flaviscapis***
One briefly at Neora Valley and another, equally briefly, at Gairibans on the Sandakphu trek.
220. **Black-eared Shrike Babbler *Pteruthius melanotis***
The only sighting was of one, seen by a single observer, on the Sandakphu trek.
221. **Rusty-fronted Barwing *Actinodura egertoni***
At least three were present in an impressive flock together with many Hoary-throated Barwings at Neora Valley on 25/11.
222. **Hoary-throated Barwing *Actinodura nipalensis***
A feeding flock containing about 20, together with three Rusty-fronted Barwings, was an impressive sight at Neora Valley on 25/11. Other than this, a few were recorded from the Sandakphu trek on 28/11.
223. **Chestnut-tailed Minla *Minla strigula***
Small flocks were recorded from Lolaygaon on consecutive days and from Neora Valley, Lava and Sandakphu.
224. **Red-tailed Minla *Minla ignotincta***
The only sighting was of about five at Neora Valley which moved quickly through the forest and were only seen well by one or two observers.
225. **Golden-breasted Fulvetta *Alcippe chrysotis***
One of the most stunningly beautiful birds seen; we recorded them from Neora Valley and from Gairibans on the Sandakphu trek.
226. **Rufous-winged Fulvetta *Alcippe castaneiceps***
Common, and in quite large numbers, in the middle hills. Sightings were from Lolaygaon, Rishyap, Neora Valley and Lava.
227. **White-browed Fulvetta *Alcippe vinipectus***
Quite common, but often difficult to get good views of, at Neora Valley and Sandakphu. The lightly streaked throat of these birds is indicative of the *chumbiensis* subspecies, and different from the two western subspecies.
228. **Rufous Sibia *Heterophasia capistrata***
One of the most common birds in places in the middle hills, where it was seen at Lolaygaon, Rishyap and Neora Valley. A few also seen on 28/11 at Sandakphu. These birds would have been of one of the central and eastern Himalayan subspecies, either *nigriceps* or *bayleyi*, although the mantle colour was not noted sufficiently to distinguish between these.
229. **Whiskered Yuhina *Yuhina flavicollis***
Very common in the hills. Seen at Lolaygaon on both days there and at Rishyap, Neora Valley, Lava and daily at Sandakphu. The hindcollar of the birds seen had a rufous tinge which suggests *flavicollis*, although there did appear to be some variation.
230. **Stripe-throated Yuhina *Yuhina gularis***
First recorded from Neora Valley and thereafter seen at Lava and Sandakphu, although in smaller numbers than the other two common yuhinas.

231. **Rufous-vented Yuhina *Yuhina occipitalis***
A common bird in the hills, with sightings from Lolaygaon, Rishyap, Neora Valley, Lava and Sandakphu.
232. **Black-chinned Yuhina *Yuhina nigrimenta***
Singles at Lolaygaon on both 23/11 and 24/11, were only seen well by one observer on each occasion.
233. **Brown Parrotbill *Paradoxornis unicolor***
One was seen briefly at Gairibans, Sandakphu, in a stand of bamboo, on 28/11.
234. **Fulvous Parrotbill *Paradoxornis fulvifrons***
A flock of about 40 fed in bamboo at Tunling, Sandakphu on the morning of the 29/11.
235. **Black-throated Parrotbill *Paradoxornis nipalensis***
Two large flocks, totalling 80 birds altogether, were seen feeding actively in bamboo at Neora Valley, on 25/11. There is considerable variation between subspecies; these birds showed the brown crown and cheeks of *humii*.
236. **Yellow-vented Flowerpecker *Dicaeum chrysorrheum***
One bird was seen by one observer on 23/11 at Lolaygaon. A scarce bird in the area, although the streaked underparts make identification relatively easy compared with the other flowerpeckers.
237. **Yellow-bellied Flowerpecker *Dicaeum melanoxanthum***
A single bird was seen at Lava on 26/11.
238. **Fire-breasted Flowerpecker *Dicaeum ignipectus***
Three males were seen at Lolaygaon on 23/11 with sightings there also the following day. The only other record came from Rishyap.
239. **Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker *Dicaeum cruentatum***
Two males were seen at Gorumara on 22/11 and another from the nearby Mahakal Trail the following day.
240. **Ruby-cheeked Sunbird *Anthreptes singalensis***
A pair at Gorumara on 22/11 was the only sighting.
241. **Purple Sunbird *Nectarinia asiatica***
One bird at Gorumara on 23/11 was the only one of the trip.
242. **Mrs Gould's Sunbird *Aethopyga gouldiae***
A singing male and a female were seen at Lava on the morning of the 26/11.
243. **Green-tailed Sunbird *Aethopyga nipalensis***
Recorded on consecutive days at Lolaygaon, about eight were seen at Neora Valley, about six at Lava and three at Darjeeling Zoo.
244. **Crimson Sunbird *Aethopyga siparaja***
We had fantastic views of a male at close range at the Mahakal Trail on 23/11. Distinguishing features of the two Himalayan subspecies, *seheriae* and *labecula*, are apparently quite subtle.
245. **Fire-tailed Sunbird *Aethopyga ignicauda***
Just the one brief sighting at Lolaygaon on 23/11.

246. **Little Spiderhunter *Arachnothera longirostra***
One was seen briefly at Lodaygaon on 23/11.
247. **Streaked Spiderhunter *Arachnothera magna***
Singles were seen at Gorumara, Chapramari and Mahakal Trail, pleasingly with very good views each time.
248. **House Sparrow *Passer domesticus***
Recorded in habitation en-route and near Gorumara.
249. **Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus***
Replaced the House Sparrow at higher elevations, but similarly seen around human habitation. Records from Lodaygaon, Lava and villages on the Sandakphu trek.
250. **White Wagtail *Motacilla alba***
One bird at Gorumara Jungle Camp and two at Chapramari, with further records from Phulbari Barrage. None of these were racially assigned.
251. **White-browed Wagtail *Motacilla maderaspatensis***
One was seen by the river at Gorumara.
252. **Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola***
Only recorded from Phulbari Barrage.
253. **Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea***
One seen near Lava on 26/11 was the only sighting away from Phulbari Barrage.
254. **Olive-backed Pipit *Anthus hodgsoni***
Recorded on both dates at Lodaygaon (up to 25 birds), from Rishyap and at Sandakphu on 27/11. The relatively unstreaked upperparts of those birds seen well at Sandakphu meant that these birds were clearly of the *yunnanensis* subspecies.
255. **Rufous-breasted Accentor *Prunella strophiata***
Four were seen on the Sandakphu trek on 27/11 and as many as ten there the following day, mostly relatively close to the summit.
256. **Brown Accentor *Prunella fulvescens***
One bird was seen with Rufous-breasted Accentors on 28/11 near the Sandakphu summit.
257. **Yellow-breasted Greenfinch *Carduelis spinoides***
A single bird in flight near Lodaygaon on 24/11 was the only sighting of the trip.
258. **Plain Mountain Finch *Leucosticte nemoricola***
Two or three large flocks, totalling at least 200 birds altogether, were seen at the Sandakphu summit on 28/11.
259. **Dark-breasted Rosefinch *Carpodacus nipalensis***
Seen at Neora Valley and Sandakphu, usually feeding quite deep into the vegetation.
260. **Beautiful Rosefinch *Carpodacus pulcherrimus***
One male and two females nearby were seen at the Sandakphu summit on 28/11.
261. **Dark-rumped Rosefinch *Carpodacus edwardsii***
Seen on three occasions, at Neora Valley and Sandakphu twice, with at least 12 birds at Sandakphu. Only females or immatures were seen.

262. **White-browed Rosefinch** *Carpodacus thura*
About 12 were seen at the Sandakphu summit on 28/11, including singing males.
263. **White-winged Grosbeak** *Coccothraustes carnipes*
The only sighting was of three females at Neora Valley.
264. **Little Bunting** *Emberiza pusilla*
On both 27/11 and 29/11 small numbers (about eight each time) were seen in the lower reaches of the Sandakphu trek.

A total of 259 confirmed species were seen.

OTHER WILDLIFE

1. **Assamese Macaque *Macaca assamensis***
Seen quite frequently by the roadside.
2. **Jungle Cat *Felis chaus***
One seen sat in the middle of the road near the Mahakal Trail in the early morning.
3. **Red Panda *Ailurus fulgens***
Three of us were incredibly lucky to see one bounding along the track in front of our jeep in the Neora Valley National Park. We saw it for a few seconds before it disappeared into some bamboo. Unfortunately (especially for those travelling in the second jeep not far behind) we were not able to see it again.
4. **Himalyan Yellow-throated Marten *Martes flavigula***
One seen at Lolaygaon and one at Rishyap.
5. **Hoary-bellied Himalayan Squirrel *Callosciurus pygerythrus***
Small numbers seen at Gorumara and at Darjeeling Zoo.
6. **Mouse sp**
One in the bathroom at the Gorumara Jungle Camp restaurant on consecutive evenings!
7. **Great Indian One-horned Rhinoceros *Rhinoceros unicornis***
One glimpsed from the watchpoint at Gorumara, but it disappeared into the long grass before most people could see it.
8. **Gaur *Bos gaurus***
A herd of about 20, with newly-born calves, at the pond at Chapramari Wildlife Sanctuary.

REFERENCES

Field Guides

- [1] Birds of the Indian Subcontinent; Richard Grimmett, Carol Inskipp & Tim Inskipp; Christopher Helm; 1998. *The main, very useful, reference guide although not without some inaccuracies!*
- [2] A Field Guide to the Birds of the Indian Subcontinent; Krys Kazmierczak & Ber van Perlo; Pica Press; 2000; *Not such good plates, but good supplementary information and better distribution maps.*

Site Guides

- [3] A Birdwatchers' Guide to India; Krys Kazmierczak & Raj Singh; Birdwatchers' Guides, Prion; 1998. *Very good detailed site information for all sites except Gorumara National Park and Chapramari Wildlife Sanctuary.*

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