

An observational report on the common birds of Darjeeling & Kalimpong Districts, West Bengal

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Bird diversity studies are of utmost importance in understanding the global conservation needs of avian communities. Birds, with their feathers, wings, and specialized adaptations for an aerial lifestyle, are renowned for their beauty and captivating features. They are adored for their vibrant colours, melodious calls, and easily recognizable characteristics. The richness, abundance, and community composition of birds are frequently employed by ecologists to comprehend species diversity in the natural habitats. While conservation efforts have traditionally focused on natural and protected ecosystems, urban biodiversity, despite its importance, has received relatively little attention from conservation biologists.

Many cities in India, including Darjeeling, harbour significant biodiversity of flora and fauna. Unfortunately, rapid urbanization has led to a concerning reduction in biodiversity in these areas (Dapkeet *et al.*, 2015).

This study aims to prepare a list of common birds observed during the educational tour to Darjeeling, evaluating their occurrence and conservation status. By doing so, the study seeks to raise awareness about the importance of conserving avian species. Moreover, it aims to provide fundamental information about the avifauna that can serve as a foundation for future studies as baseline data. The study recognizes the significance of maintaining the only large green spot in the city, which serves as a refuge for birds. Therefore, it advocates for the responsible utilization of this area without disturbing the natural activities of the birds and, instead, promoting the presence of diverse bird species.

Darjeeling is renowned for its rich and diverse ecosystems, which not only contribute significantly to India's economy but also attract ecotourism. This region serves as a

crucial habitat for a wide variety of valuable bird species, making it an important area for avian conservation. Gaining a comprehensive understanding of the composition and structure of avian communities in Darjeeling is essential for assessing the overall ecology and health of the local ecosystems and the larger regional landscapes. Recent publication by Bera (2022)

has provided valuable insights into the local avifauna of Darjeeling by listing 80 different bird species found in various areas of the district. This documentation serves as a valuable resource for studying and appreciating the diversity of bird species in the region.

The study was done in the month of March, 2023 around Lava Monastery, Rishop and Darjeeling Zoo (Fig. 1) with the help of Binoculars and Camera like Nikon D5600 (70 – 300mm). Bird species were identified and described using the handbook of birds by Grimmett *et al.*, (2016).

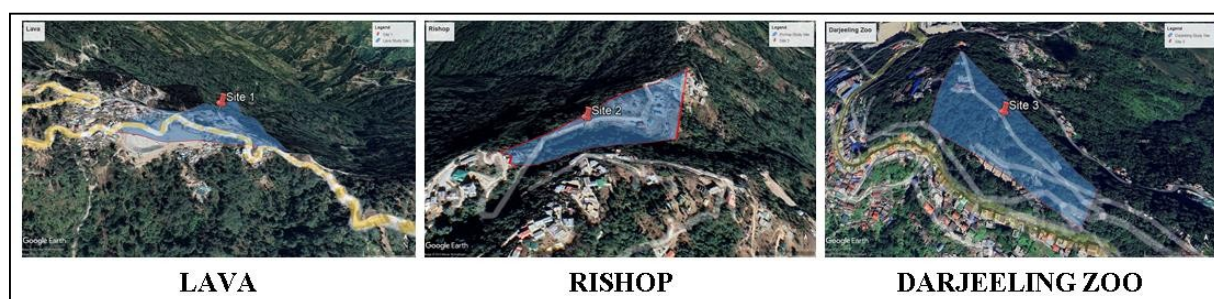


Fig.1: Study area for Bird observation

Table 1: List of birds observed in Darjeeling and Kalimpong districts:

Sl. No.	Common Name	Scientific name	Family	Order	IUCN Status
1.	House Sparrow	<i>Passer domesticus</i> (Linnaeus, 1758)	Passeridae	Passeriformes	LC
2.	Rufous sibia	<i>Heterophasian capistrata</i> (Vigors, 1831)	Leiothrichidae	Passeriformes	LC
3.	White throated laughing thrush	<i>Pterorhinus albobularis</i> (Gould, 1836)	Leiothrichidae	Passeriformes	LC
4.	Chestnut-crowned laughing thrush	<i>Trochalopteron erythrocephalum</i> (Vigors, 1832)	Leiothrichidae	Passeriformes	LC
5.	Blue whistling thrush	<i>Myophonus caeruleus</i> (Scopoli, 1786)	Muscicapidae	Passeriformes	LC

6.	Hodgson's redstart	<i>Phoenicurus hodgsoni</i> (Moore, 1854)	Muscicapidae	Passeriformes	LC
7.	Grey Bushchat	<i>Saxicola ferreus</i> Gray & Gray, 1847	Muscicapidae	Passeriformes	LC

8.	VerditerFlycatcher	<i>Eumyiasthalassinus</i> (Swainson,1838)	Muscicapidae	Passeriformes	LC
9.	PlumbeousWater Redstart	<i>Phoenicurusfuliginosus</i> (Vigors,1831)	Muscicapidae	Passeriformes	LC
10.	White- Capped Water Redstart	<i>Phoenicurusleucocephalus</i> (Vigors,1831)	Muscicapidae	Passeriformes	LC
11.	Blue- FrontedRed start	<i>Phoenicurus frontalis</i> Vigors,1832	Muscicapidae	Passeriformes	LC
12.	Barnswallow	<i>Hirundorustica</i> Linnaeus,1758	Hirundinidae	Passeriformes	LC
13.	Western YellowWagt ail	<i>Motacillaflava</i> Linnaeus,17 58	Motacillidae	Passeriformes	LC
14.	HimalayanBulbul	<i>Pycnonotusleucogenys</i> (Gra y, 1835)	Pycnonotidae	Passeriformes	LC
15.	Green-Tailed Sunbird	<i>Aethopyganipalensis</i> (Hodgson,1837)	Nectariniidae	Passeriformes	LC
16.	Green-Backed Tit	<i>Parusmonticolus</i> Vigors,18 31	Paridae	Passeriformes	LC
17.	Ashy -Throated Warbler	<i>Phylloscopusmaculipennis</i> Blyth,1867	Phylloscopid ae	Passeriformes	LC
18.	Fire-TailedSunbird	<i>Aethopygaignicauda</i> (Hodgson,1837)	Nectariniidae	Passeriformes	LC
19.	Orientalturtledove	<i>Streptopeliaorientalis</i> (Lat ham,1790)	Columbidae	Columbiform es	LC
20.	Blue- ThroatedBar bet	<i>Psilopogonasiaticus</i> (Lat ham,1790)	Megalaimida e	Piciformes	LC
21.	ScarletFinch	<i>Carpodacussipahi</i> (Hodg son,1836)	Fringillidae	Passeriformes	LC
22.	LargeNiltava	<i>Niltavangrandis</i> (Blyth,184 2)	Muscicapidae	Passeriformes	LC

Description of observed birds in Darjeeling and Kalimpong districts:

1. House Sparrow:

House Sparrow or *Passer domesticus* (Fig. 2) is a resident bird found in India, except in parts of the North East and North West. Size of this bird is about 15 cm. Male are with grey

colour crown. Nape and sides of neck are chestnut in colour. White colour ear coverts. Black colour chin. Female are dull grey in colour. Black chin and chestnut colour nape are missing in female. Usually found in a small to large flock. Found both rural and urban areas. Feed on grain, sometimes nectar. Although population has been decrease but they are available over

all over West Bengal. It was observed alone at Lava sitting at the top of the lamppost with twigs in the beak (Table 1).

2. Rufous Sibia:

Rufous Sibia or *Heterophasiacapistrata* (Fig. 3) is a bird is a permanent resident of India and can be found in the Himalayan range. It has a size of approximately 21 cm. Both male and female birds have a similar appearance, featuring a rufous plumage with a black crown and a slightly bushy crest. They also have a black sub terminal tail. These birds are often observed in small flocks within hilly forests and forest edges. Their diet primarily consists of small insects, small berries, and occasionally nectar. It was observed while searching for insects to feed inside a hole in a tree, eating barberry and resting on a branch of a tree around Lava and Darjeeling area (Table 1).

3. White-Throated Laughingthrush:

White – Throated Laughingthrush or *Pterorhinus albobularis* (Fig. 4) is a bird is a permanent resident of India and can be found in the Himalayan range. It has an approximate size of 28 cm. Both male and female birds have a similar appearance, featuring an olive brown upper part. The tail feathers are olive brown in colour with white tips. They have a distinct black mark in front of their eyes. The under parts are rufous, with a white throat. These birds are commonly seen in flocks, often alongside other Laughingthrush species, in dense forests, scrub areas, and areas covered in dry leaves. Their diet primarily consists of insects and berries. A group of approximately 10 to 15 individuals were observed foraging around Darjeeling area (Table 1).

4. Chestnut-Crowned Laughingthrush:

Chestnut – Crowned Laughingthrush or *Trochalopteron erythrocephalum* (Fig. 5) is a bird is a permanent resident of India, specifically found in the Himalayan range. It has a size of approximately 28 cm. Both male and female birds have a similar appearance, displaying a golden brown plumage. The wings and tail panels are adorned with a golden yellow colour. They have a dark face, chestnut crown, and scaly patterns on their breast. These birds are often found in flocks, alongside other Laughingthrush species, in the ground and undergrowth of hilly forests. They have a diet that includes small insects, berries, and other food sources. The bird was seen perched alone on a branch near Lava Monastery (Table 1).

5. Blue Whistling Thrush:

Blue Whistling Thrush or *Myophonus caeruleus* (Fig. 6) is a native species in India and can be found in the Himalayan range and north-eastern parts of the country. It has a size of approximately 33 cm. Both male and female birds have a similar appearance, displaying a dark blue plumage with varying shades of blue. One distinguishing feature is the shiny spangling present on the tips of their body feathers, specifically on the lores. They are primarily found in forested areas near streams. Their diet primarily consists of insects. The bird was spotted alone perched at the highest point of the enclosure within Darjeeling Zoo (Table 1).

6. Hodgson's Redstart:

During the winter season, this bird, Hodgson's Redstart or *Phoenicurus hodgsoni* (Fig. 7), visits the Himalayan range and the north-eastern parts of India. It measures around 15 cm in size. The males exhibit a blackish-blue hue on their upper parts, with a silver-colour forehead and a prominent white patch on their wings. Their under parts are orange, while their chin and throat display a black-blue coloration. The females, on the other hand, are dusky brown in colour with a rusty-colour tail panel. They are commonly found in pairs or alone along stony river banks surrounded by trees and bushes. Their diet primarily consists of small insects. The bird was seen searching for food alone in the vicinity of Lava Monastery (Table 1).

7. Grey Bush chat:

This bird, Grey Bush chat or *Saxicola ferreus* (Fig. 8), is a permanent resident of India, primarily found in the Himalayan range and north-eastern regions. However, it migrates to nearby plains during the winter season. It measures approximately 15 cm in size. The males have dark grey upper parts and white under parts, along with a white supercilium. On the other hand, females display a rufous brown coloration with a white throat and pale brown under parts. They are typically observed alone or in pairs in cultivated areas and forest edges. Their diet consists mainly of small insects. The bird was seen perched on a wire in the vicinity of Lava with its mating pair (Table 1).

8. Verditer Flycatcher:

Verditer Flycatcher or *Eumyias thalassinus* (Fig. 9) are migratory, visiting the Himalayas and north-eastern regions of India during the summer. However, they have a wide distribution during the winter season. With a size of around 16 cm, the male exhibits a vibrant sky blue

plumage, while the females have a comparatively duller appearance. They can be found alone or in pairs in both rural and urban landscapes, particularly in areas with large trees. Their diet primarily consists of small insects. The bird was spotted alone taking a rest on a branch in the vicinity of Rishop (Table 1).

9. Plumbeous Water Redstart:

Plumbeous Water Redstart or *Phoenicurus fuliginosus* (Fig. 10) is a resident species in India, commonly found in the Himalayan range and north-eastern parts of the country. It measures approximately 12 cm in size. The males display a slaty blue coloration with a chestnut-colour tail, while the females are grey with a white tail. They are typically seen either in pairs or alone near mountain streams and rivers. Their diet consists mainly of small aquatic insects, worms, and similar prey. The bird was sighted in the vicinity of the Lava region, perched on a rock alone and engaging in self-preening activities (Table 1).

10. White-capped Water Redstart:

White – capped Water Redstart or *Phoenicurus leucocephalus* (Fig. 11) is a resident bird in India that can be found in the Himalayan range and north-eastern parts of the country, approximately 19 cm in size. Both male and female birds have a similar appearance. They have black wings, head, chin, and throat, with a white crown. The under parts of these birds are chestnut in colour. They are usually spotted alone or in pairs along the rocky rivers of the Himalayan range. Their diet primarily consists of small insects. The bird was spotted perching on a rock alone in the Lava region (Table 1).

11. Blue-fronted Redstart:

Blue – fronted Redstart or *Phoenicurus frontalis* (Fig. 12) is a resident species in India and can be found in the Himalayan range. During the winter, it migrates to nearby plains. It has a size of approximately 15 cm. The males have a bright blue forehead and dark blue upper parts, with orange under parts. However, the blue coloration is absent in females. Females, on the other hand, have olive-brown upper parts and pale orange under parts. These birds are often spotted alone or in pairs at the edges of forests and open gardens. They primarily feed on small insects on the ground. It was observed foraging around Darjeeling alone (Table 1).

12. Barn Swallow:

Barn Swallow or *Hirundo rustica* (Fig. 13) is a permanent resident in India, primarily breeding in the Himalayan range and north-eastern parts of the country. However, it migrates to the plains during the winter season. It has an approximate size of 18 cm. Both male and female birds share a similar appearance, with a dark blue upper body and a white lower body. They have brick-red foreheads and throats. Their tails feature large sub-terminal spots and streamers. These birds are often found in flocks near water bodies, such as large lakes and canals. They feed on flying insects or insects found on the surface of the water. They are also known to gather on overhead wires. Two individuals were observed perching on the wire around Lava Monastery. They were probably the mating pair (Table 1).

13. Western Yellow Wagtail:

Western Yellow Wagtail or *Motacilla flava* (Fig. 14) is a winter visitor to India and has a wide distribution. It measures approximately 17 cm in size. It has greenish-yellow upper parts with two wing bars, along with a grey head and a white supercilium. The under parts are yellow in colour. These birds are often observed in flocks, both in rural and urban landscapes, particularly in marshy areas, open fields, and near water bodies such as lakes and rivers. One notable behaviour of this bird is its continuous tail wagging. They primarily feed on small insects. A single individual was spotted perching on a rock around Lava area (Table 1).

14. Himalayan Bulbul:

Himalayan Bulbul or *Pycnonotus leucogenys* (Fig. 15) is a permanent resident of India and can be found in the Himalayan range. It has a size of approximately 20 cm. Both male and female birds have a similar appearance, with light brown upper parts in an olive green shade. They have brown heads with crests and a white superciliary stripe. Around their eyes, chin, and throat, they display black markings. Their vent is yellow, and they have a blackish tail. These birds are often observed alone, in pairs, or in loose flocks, sometimes alongside other bird species like bulbuls, mynas, and starlings. They are commonly found at the edges of forests. Their diet primarily consists of small insects, small berries, and occasionally flower nectar. One single individual was observed around Darjeeling region (Table 1).

15. Green-tailed Sunbird:

Green-tailed Sunbird or *Aethopygia nipalensis* (Fig. 16) is a native species in India and can be found in the Himalayan range and north-eastern regions. It measures approximately 11 cm in size. The males are known for their vibrant colours, featuring a glossy blue head and nape,

with a maroon shoulder bordering the chin. Their wings have an olive green hue, while the under parts are bright yellow. The tail displays a metallic blue-green colour. Females, on the other hand, are olive green in colour and have a slightly smaller tail compared to males. These birds are often observed near flowering trees, either in loose flocks or in pairs, in locations such as scrublands and gardens. They primarily feed on nectar. It was observed collecting nectar alone around Darjeeling Zoo (Table 1).

16. Green-backed Tit:

This bird, Green – backed Tit or *Parus monticolus* (Fig. 17), is a permanent resident of India and can be found in the Himalayan range and north-eastern regions. It has a size of approximately 12.5 cm. Both male and female birds share a similar appearance, featuring a black head and chin. There is a narrow black patch that extends from the chin to the end of the under parts. The belly is bright yellow, while the upper body has a greenish coloration with two narrow white wing bars. There is a white spot located under the eyes. These birds are often observed in flocks alongside other warbler or tit species in forested areas. They primarily feed on small insects and tiny berries. The bird was seen alone gathering grasses to construct its nest around Darjeeling (Table 1).

17. Ashy-throated Warbler:

This bird, Ashy – throated Warbler or *Phylloscopus maculipennis* (Fig. 18), is a permanent resident of India, commonly found in the Himalayan range and north-eastern regions. It has a size of approximately 9 cm. Both male and female birds have a similar appearance, displaying a greenish-yellow body with an ashy-coloured head and throat. They also have a white supercilium and a thin black line across the eyes. A distinct yellow bar can be seen on their wings. These birds are often found in forest trees, accompanying flocks of other small bird species. They primarily feed on small insects and small berries. It was spotted foraging alone around Darjeeling area (Table 1).

18. Fire-tailed Sunbird:

Fire-tailed Sunbird or *Aethopyga ignicauda* (Fig. 19) is a resident species in India and can be found in the Himalayan range and north-eastern parts of the country. It has a size of approximately 12 cm. The males have a long, bright red tail and upper body. Their wings are dark olive green, and they have a dark face with a metallic purple forehead. The under parts are yellowish, with a noticeable lemon yellow breast and a bright red spot. Females, on the

other hand, are yellow green with a greyish head and a rusty-colour tail. These birds are often observed in pairs or loose flocks near hilly areas with flowering trees. They primarily feed on flower nectar. Only one individual was observed collecting nectar around Darjeeling (Table 1).

19. Oriental Turtle Dove:

Oriental Turtle Dove or *Streptopelia orientalis* (Fig. 20) is a resident species in India, primarily found in the Himalayan range and north-eastern regions. It may occasionally migrate to the adjoining plains during winter. It has a size of approximately 33 cm. Both male and female birds have a similar appearance, with wings coverts adorned in rufous-coloured scaled scapulars. The under parts of the bird are light pink in colour. There are distinct black and white barring on the sides of the neck. These birds are often observed in small flocks within open forests and cultivation areas in the hills. Their diet primarily consists of grains. About 3 to 5 individuals were observed foraging around Lava Monastery (Table 1).

20. Blue-throated Barbet:

Blue – throated Barbet or *Psilopogon asiaticus* (Fig. 21) is a permanent resident in India, specifically found in the Himalayan range and north-eastern regions, including West Bengal. It has a size of approximately 23 cm. The body coloration is grass green, while the chin and throat display a sky blue hue. On both sides of the throat, there is a crimson spot. The forehead and crown exhibit a crimson colour, separated by a black line. Both male and female birds have a similar appearance. They can be found in both rural and urban areas where there are large trees, either in solitary or in pairs. In West Bengal, they are year-round residents. These birds are particularly active during the spring season and can be observed in both villages and cities. It was spotted perching alone on a branch around Darjeeling area (Table 1).

21. Scarlet Finch:

Scarlet Finch or *Carpodacus sipahi* (Fig. 22) is a native species in India and can be found in the Himalayan range and north-eastern regions. It has a size of approximately 18 cm. The males display a striking plumage in brilliant red, while the females have a dirty greenish-yellow coloration. They often move around in small flocks within hilly forests. Their diet primarily consists of small berries. The bird was seen searching for food alone in the vicinity of Lava Monastery (Table 1).

22. Large Niltava:

Large Niltava or *Niltava grandis* (Fig. 23) is a native species in India and can be found in the Himalayan range and north-eastern regions. It has a size of approximately 18 cm. The males display a striking plumage in brilliant red, while the females have a dirty greenish-yellow coloration. They often move around in small flocks within hilly forests. Their diet primarily consists of small berries. The bird was seen searching for food alone around Darjeeling district (Table 1).

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Fig. 2: House Sparrow



Fig. 3: Rufous Sibia



Fig. 4: White – Throated Laughingthrush



Fig. 5: Chestnut – Crowned Laughingthrush

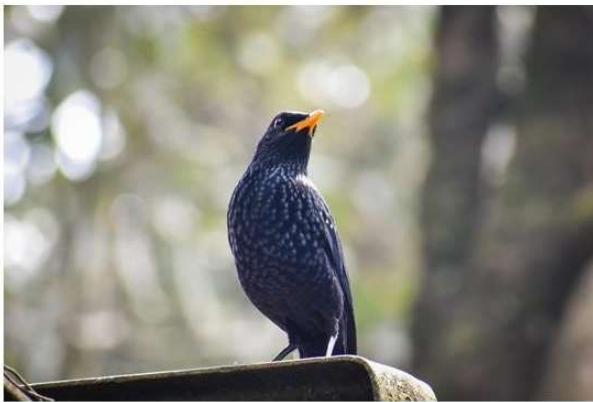


Fig. 6: Blue Whistling Thrush



Fig. 7: Hodgson's Redstart



Fig. 8: Grey Bush chat (male)



Fig. 9: Verditer Flycatcher



Fig. 10: Plumbeous Water Redstart (male)



Fig. 11: White - capped Water Redstart



Fig. 12: Blue - fronted Redstart (male)



Fig. 13: Barn Swallow



Fig. 14: Western Yellow Wagtail



Fig. 15: Himalayan Bulbul



Fig. 16: Green-tailed Sunbird (male)



Fig. 17: Green-backed Tit



Fig. 18: Ashy-throated Warbler



Fig. 19: Fire-tailed Sunbird



Fig. 20: Oriental Turtle Dove



Fig. 21: Blue-throated Barbet



Fig. 22: Scarlet Finch



Fig. 23: Large Niltava