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The Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher *Ficedula strophciata* and the Black-throated Accentor *Prunella atrogularis* from Punjab, India

Siswan (Sahibzada Ajit Singh Nagar District, Punjab, India) is a small village (30.87°N, 76.75°E), about 22 km from Mohali and 15 km from the state capital, Chandigarh, on the Chandigarh–Baddi road, and is located in the foothills of the Shivalik Range. There is a reservoir behind the village, formed due to construction of a check dam on a seasonal rivulet. Hill forests surrounds the reservoir. The Department of Forests & Wildlife Preservation, Punjab, in 2017 declared an area of c.1,295 HA as a community reserve which, along with the reservoir, is a unique blend of forest and wetland ecosystems.

On 26 January 2021, during a visit to the area, I spotted a small bird that seemed unfamiliar to me. It was perching on a low branch of a bush. It was catching insects in the air. Initially, I thought that it was a Bluethroat *Luscinia svecica*. However, examination of my photographs [76, 77] revealed a different bird. After consulting Gurpratap Singh, we identified it as a male Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher *Ficedula strophciata*. The identification of a male of the species is straightforward. The photographs showed a white forehead, olive-brown upperparts, white bases to black tail, orange-rufous patch below the blackish throat, ashy belly grading to white on vent (Ali & Ripley 1998: 158–159). Apparently, the nominate subspecies is what is expected in this region, but I did not attempt subspecies identification based on these photos.



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76. Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher showing white forehead, black throat with orange patch under it.



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77. Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher showing white tail bases to black tail.

On 14 February 2021, during a visit to the area, I spotted another small bird that I could not identify. Also, I didn't get a clear view as it kept within the branches of a bush. However, I managed to click a single photo. As I tried to get a better view by getting closer, it quickly disappeared in the thickets. I was fortunate to photograph this bird at same spot on 21 February 2021 [78], with the help of which Gurpartap Singh and I identified it as a Black-throated Accentor *Prunella atrogularis*. The photograph showed an accentor with a prominent white supercilium, a black line above it with black face and throat – a combination that is not shown by any other accentor species (Kazmierczak 2000: 298–299; Grimmett et al. 2011: 486–487). Other features like streaked flanks and yellowish neck-sides are also visible.



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78. Black-throated Accentor with white eye-brow, black face and black throat.

Two subspecies are mentioned in the extant literature; however, no attempt is being made here to identify subspecies. On both occasions, I immediately checked on eBird, and enquired with several birding groups of Punjab, about the birds' novelty. Apparently, nobody had earlier recorded these two species from Punjab, India. I retrieved relevant literature from (Pittie 2021). In a list of 233 species of birds recorded from four small natural wetlands, within a range of 10 km around Gurdaspur, Punjab, India, the Rufous-gorgeted Flycatcher has been mentioned by Bal & Dua (2010). In response to my e-mail, R. Bal confirmed that 'I have searched my database but didn't find any picture' and no further details could be obtained (*in litt.*, e-mail dated 27 February 2021). The nominate race is known to descend to lower altitudes after breeding (Clement 2020). Distribution maps in Grimmett et al. (2011) and Kazmierczak (2000) show

a solitary record of the Black-throated Accentor from extreme northern Punjab, bordering Himachal Pradesh. In an e-mail, Krys Kazmierczak mentioned that 'I'm afraid I do not recall the source of this record. I restricted my records to what were apparently reliable sources, but the time pressure I was under to produce the book did not allow me to keep details of all records' (*in litt.*, e-mail dated 25 February 2021). Tim Inskipp said that, 'I have tracked down the relevant reference but I am afraid it is not very helpful! Undeland, P. (1997) Checklist of birds seen in Punjab, 22 August 1993 to 30 June 1996. Unpublished. The species is marked as recorded during this period but without any further information except that it was not recorded at Harike' (*in litt.*, e-mail dated 24 February 2021). An e-mail from Per Undeland confirmed that 'Unfortunately I cannot give you the exact location and dates of my records of the species from Punjab, neither any photograph. I'm at least sure that the records were from Pathankot District along the road between Chakki and Dunera, probably in the region of Dhar. Black-throated Accentor is for sure a regular winter visitor to the Shivalik Hills in Punjab' (*in litt.*, e-mail 28 February 2021). Several records of these two species are available from the adjoining hill areas of Himachal Pradesh. Thus, they must be regular winter visitors in the lower altitudes in the contiguous areas in Punjab. But, these areas are not birded widely and regularly, hence the absence of photographic records. My records are possibly the first photographic documentation of either species from Punjab, India.

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The Rufous-tailed Rock-Thrush *Monticola saxatilis* from Bengaluru, Karnataka

On 25 December 2020, the Avian and Reptile Rehabilitation Centre (hereinafter, ARRC) received a bird-rescue SOS regarding an injured bird in HSR Layout, Bengaluru (12.91°N, 77.65°E). The bird was unable to stand, or open its eyes, possibly due to a collision injury. The bird appeared to be a female, or juvenile rock-thrush but the exact species was slightly ambiguous. Saikia, and Kumar, co-authors of Balar et al. (2016) confirmed that it was a Rufous-tailed Rock-Thrush *Monticola saxatilis*, which is an

uncommon visitor to southern India. This individual is likely to be a first winter bird based on its plumage characteristics: mainly prominent white tips on the greater covert feathers and worn-out feathers with dark centers (Grimmett et al. 2011).

The bird weighed 43 g when admitted to ARRC and after rehabilitation reached a weight of 46.5 g. It was able to perch and feed on its own after being treated for a few days [79]. On 09 January 2021, it was released in Ragihalli State Forest near Bannerghatta National Park, which was chosen as the ideal habitat for it to feed and continue its migratory journey when it was ready. Upon release, the bird's flight was strong, indicating a complete recovery.



Jayanthi Kallam

79. Rufous-tailed Rock-Thrush in its recovery box at ARRC, Bengaluru.

Although considered a regular passage migrant in northern India (Grimmett et al. 2011), there are limited records of the species southwards of Jammu and Kashmir, from other states of India, which include Gujarat, Himachal Pradesh, Karnataka, Kerala, and Rajasthan (Balar et al. 2016; eBird 2021). The Rufous-tailed Rock-Thrush possibly breeds in northern Kashmir as well (Zahler et al. 1998). This is the first record of a Rufous-tailed Rock-Thrush from Bengaluru, Karnataka. The nearest previous sighting was ~240 km away (aerial distance) south-eastwards from Bengaluru, at Bhagamandala, Karnataka, in late November 2013 (Balar et al. 2016). There is also a single record from Kerala, which is from November 2015 (Balar et al. 2016). This record suggests that juvenile birds of this species could be migrating even in December.

We are grateful to the residents of HSR Layout who alerted ARRC to the injured bird. We thank Pranjal J. Saikia and Prashant Kumar S.R. who helped confirm the bird's identity.