This trip was my fourth in Ladakh after family trekking holidays in 2001, 02 and 04. The purpose of my 2015 trip was to mix birding and visiting new places, including the Dah and Spiti valleys, and some 8 trekking days into the valleys of Karnakh, all of which are near-tourist free (and rarely birded), although they offer exceptionally scenic landscapes, diverse habitats and unforgettable time with local people. I have tried to keep a track of all bird records of this trip on a day-per-day basis, except for the most abundant species. This report is bird-focused but a non-bird report is available upon request.

Practical details

**Flights:** Paris – Delhi via Zurich on Jul. 14 and Aug. 10; ~7h from Zurich, 652€ (04 February, can be booked for less than 500 in early January). All international flights land by midnight in Delhi and depart from Delhi by 1am. This leaves enough time to reach the domestic airport well on time for a domestic flight to Leh – but beware of restlessness when arriving in high altitudes.

**Delhi – Leh:** via GoAir, Rs6600 (04 February, can be found for Rs5000 earlier), t/o 06:40am, landed 07:30, 2 other flights / day. Also flights by Air India and Jet Airways.

**Visa:** for visits up to 30 days an electronic visa facility is now available for most european countries (50 euros). Additional permits are needed to visit some areas in Ladakh including Dah-Hanu, Tsomo Riri and Pangong Tso. The costs of these permits vary from year to year in an unpredictable manner according to taxes and commissions, in 2015 travelling agencies charged Rs1000 (bargain to save Rs100-200). A permit is delivered for a minimum of 2 people but there’s always a trick to get one if travelling alone. Permits are only delivered through agencies.

**Taxis and buses:** rates for standard trips in Ladakh are fixed (in principle) and updated annually. They can be found at [http://leh.nic.in/](http://leh.nic.in/) or [http://ladak.free.fr](http://ladak.free.fr). If travelling in a group the easiest way to move around is to rent taxis that can be easily booked by phone or email with one of the numerous travelling agencies that occur in Leh. Shared taxis from Leh to Choglamsar (Rs20), Choglamser to Shey (Rs40) and Karu (Rs60) are an easy way to move between localities in the Indus valley. Hitch hiking takes time but is a reasonable alternative in areas where shared taxis are scarce. Royal Enfield motorbikes can be envisioned for complete freedom, cost is by Rs400-500 per day + oil (Rs70/liter).
**Trekking:** I chose Sky High Trek and Tour for my trekking period on the basis of reasonable fare and better, more flexible itinerary than any other. [http://www.skyhightreks.com/](http://www.skyhightreks.com/) The owner appeared very open minded and answered quickly to all emails. Definitely recommended. Note that prices depend on the number of involved people, such that the per-day rate for 1 single trekker is at least 40% higher than for a group of 5.

**Housing:** Guesthouses and homestays are easy to find everywhere in Ladakh and there is no need to book except in Leh. In 2015 a reasonable price for a double room was Rs500, Rs800 for higher-standard accommodation with private bathroom. My choice in the Indus valley is the Besthang Guesthouse in Shey (09419177775 for booking), which offers an excellent accommodation by a very welcoming family, and happens to settle in the middle of Shey marshes (20km, Rs40 from Leh by shared taxi), one of the best birding spots in Ladakh less than 2km from a pair of Ibisbills. If this one is full, a few other guesthouses in Shey and Thiksey are better choices than the hostels of Leh, which are far from birding places, crowded with tourists and embedded in an ever developing, noisy and dusty town which has now little to do with Ladakh.

**Food:** In homestays and guesthouses excellent breakfasts and dinners cost Rs 100. A 3-courses meal in a restaurant in Leh costs approx. Rs 300. In dhabas, a decent lunch (usually parantha) costs Rs40 + Rs20 for some tea. Every single village has at least a small shop with snacks (a pack of biscuits usually costs around Rs50). Drinking tap or stream water should be avoided. Boiled water is the cheapest and sanest solution as what they call “mineral water” is standard water purified with doubtful chemical stuff rather than true spring water.

**Health:** See recommendations about mountain sickness in generalist guidebooks. A 3-days acclimatization period in the Indus valley is a very minimum before heading to high altitude.

**General environment:** The Wildlife center of Ladakh and a few NGOs make huge efforts to preserve the environment in Ladakh and make local people aware of ecological concerns, but mentalities are long to change as anywhere else. Roadsides are full of a variety of rubbish, although the situation has improved (not in Leh, unfortunately). Demand that your taxi driver, trekking guide or cook, or any other staff brings all the garbage back, and check that they actually do. Most often they burn what can burn and leave the rest on campsites, which should never happen...

**Wildlife:** Few local people actually know anything about wildlife, which is unsurprising. Again the local environmental organizations make some efforts to change it. Field guides of the birds, plants and mammals of Ladakh (in English and Ladakhi) are now distributed for free to local people in small villages and nomad camps to increase their environmental awareness; the bird booklet can be found in pdf here: [http://awsassets.wwfindia.org/downloads/field_guide_birds_of_ladakh.pdf](http://awsassets.wwfindia.org/downloads/field_guide_birds_of_ladakh.pdf). Do not hesitate to talk about birds and other wildlife with local people: even if they feel unconcerned, it will give a pretext for a conversation, and they love it.

**Bird literature**

I used only one field guide for this trip:

The only satisfactory fieldguide to the region. A look at Helm’s Birds of Central Asia by Schweizer et al is useful as a complement especially for rosefinches and warblers.

**Sounds:** I did not used any sound records during the trip, but most species have recordings in the Xeno Canto database.

**Non-bird literature**

Lonely Planet “Northern India” offers general information, but unfortunately not as accurate, up to date and extensive as needs to be. The “Ladakh – Zanskar” guidebook by Jean-Louis Taillefer is the best reference I found for all practical and cultural materials, however it is in French only (but the information is easy to grasp). This book is supplemented by the excellent website [http://ladak.free.fr](http://ladak.free.fr)

**Maps:** The best available maps are Abram Pointet’s maps published by the swiss editor Olizane. The Nelles map of Northern India is too coarse to be actually useful.

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**Annotated itinerary**

_Temperatures are approximate. All place names in Ladakh refer to Abram Pointet’s maps published by Ollizane unless otherwise stated. Refer to the annotated bird list for details on species locations. Altitudes are averaged from GPS and pressure altimeter records._

**15/07 sunny, 35°C**

Landed in Delhi on 14/07 11:50pm. On 15 morning I rented a taxi for the day (Rs2000) to visit Asola Wildlife Sanctuary and Okhla Barrage. Expectedly nobody knew about Asola (including my driver and people living 1km around), so better to use a GPS. Birding in the park was quite disappointing due to the late timing. Then I tried to reach Okhla Sanctuary (first lane left after the barrage, again with 1h wasting time on roads to search for it), but the entrance costs Rs350 per non-indian visitor + a crazy Rs1000 fee for cameras (this is official). I considered it was not worth it per the time it was (5pm, the park closes at 6pm), so headed to Lodhi Gardens (rickshaw Rs100, do not agree for more, should be 80) for the end of the day. Birding thoroughly this latter place and a couple of other parks eventually looks a better idea than wasting time in a car if only one day to spend in Delhi.

**Directions to Asola sanctuary:** head to Tuklajabad tumb. Once in front of the tumb on Badarpur Rd check for the airforce station and take the road left (coming from the East, right if coming the other side). It passes through a hunting park (“Dr Karni Singh Shooting Range”) on the left side. The entrance of the wildlife sanctuary is a few hundred meters afterwards on the right, and is indicated
by old signs. The entrance is free of charge but the waiter pretends about a Rs300 charge that is completely undue even under intimidation (do not pay for it). Several paths leave from the car park, I tried those that go towards the southern fence (there's an observation tower a few hundred meters from the car park when first heading south, then taking the right branch: 28°29'28.09"N, 77°15'55.83"E). Also went to the track which leads along the outside road, which could be more interesting than the previous one as vegetation is less dense. Beware of unfriendly dogs.

Acc: Namaskar Hotel, Paharganj (Rs400/ single non AC, lowest price I found, clean)

16/07
Sunny, 25-30°C

Took my flight to Leh early morning, landed by 7:30am and headed to Shey (Rs400 for a private taxi from the airport). The Shey marshes have known better days and some areas are now dried and/or fenced; the road built in 2004 right in the middle of the marshes is virtually unfrequented but might have been somewhat harmful to local habitats. Few birding that day due to acclimatization, but still one pale Booted Eagle and good sightings of a Lesser Whitethroat by the bridge on the Indus, 2km from Shey monastery towards Thiksey.

Acc: Besthang Guesthouse, Shey (double w/ bathroom Rs 800, single Rs 500, breakf/dinner Rs100)

17/07
Sunny then clouds in late afternoon, 20-30°C

Walked to Choglamsar in the prospect of finding a decent viewpoint over the Indus in search of Ibisbill, which appeared unmanageable on the northern side. There are a few ponds and canals with some waders in them, but most of the area is fenced and/or covered with dense thickets. I therefore crossed the Indus at Choglamsar and went back on the southern side. Headed left towards the Indus by taking the first path after the mosque, walking along a mosaic of riparian woods and grassy open areas. There’s an iron footbridge after a few hundred meters on this path, which allowed me getting on the Indus bank just in front of an obliging pair of Ibisbills standing on a stony islet (34° 4'54.83"N, 77°36'20.79"E). Also a number of waders and insectivore passerines on surrounding grasslands. Back to Choglamsar I headed to Leh for administrative stuff (spend no more time than you need to there) then headed to Thiksey (shared taxi: Rs50 through Choglamsar) under strong pre-rain wind which ended into deceiving birding on my walk back to Shey. Could not manage to do this walk again later in the trip but definitely worth it on a sunny, wind-less day as the path crosses a nice mosaics of fields, marshes and woods.

Acc: Besthang Guesthouse, Shey

18/07
Sunny with some clouds and light showers in late afternoon, 20-25°C

Headed to the Chemre and Taktok valleys (Rs230 from Shey to Setchi through Karu, then walk for 1h or hitch-hike to Taktok) which offer a nice mosaic of fields and woods with all the associated bird community. To get the best of it walk down from Taktok to Chemre (2h) off the roads as soon as
possible wandering along small paths in fields and through pastures or woods – fences between fields may be opened as they only serve to prevent cows and cattle to wander where they should not.

Acc: Homestay down Chemre monastery, Rs500 incl. dinner, definitely recommended

19/07

Cloudy with heavy showers, 20-25°C; some thunder and rain in late afternoon

Bired around Chemre monastery early morning with good numbers of Chukar and my only sighting of Golden Eagle of the trip. Then went down by walk towards Karu (2h, then end by hitch-hiking from the main road) through fields and pastures – can be hard to find a way among dense bushes and lots of fences but worth it as habitat diversity is high and bird diversity in accordance. A long-tailed Shrike near the river was my only sighting of the species in this part of Ladakh. Ended hitch-hiking to Karu, then Hemis (shared taxi from Karu to Hemis cost Rs20, but scarce) where I fled from the tourist crowed by taking the small path which leads up to Gotsang (1h walk, starts from a gate just above the new school in construction in 2015, then heads up on a good concrete path – ask any monk for the way, highly recommended). This small hike through woods and barren hills provided loads of Chukars, a dark Booted Eagle and my first sightings of Sulphur-bellied Warblers of this trip, singing on the first buildings of Gotsang monastery. Probably the easiest spot for the species in Ladakh. Also a few Rock Buntings. Back walking towards Hemis, then Karu, under heavy rain that prevented any kind of further birding (yet a very brief view of a Siberian Stonechat down Hemis village).

Acc: Besthang Guesthouse, Shey

20/07

sunny in spite of heavy clouds, showers at noon and late afternoon, 20°C in Tso Kar

A full day car driving towards Tso Kar, hence with few interesting sightings. A Blue-whistling Thrush briefly seen near the road above the Upshi bridge was my only sighting in Ladakh outside Dah-Hanu (also seen by the dutch fellows here). First Tibetan Snowfinches and Horned Larks in Rumtse, then both species common along the road. Set camp for the night in Kanangur (33°19’27.36”N, 78° 2’18.76”E; only place with drinking water after Thukje), North side of Tso Kar – obviously a good place to spot the numerous wader flocks on the lake, although a scope would have been welcome here. Also excellent sightings of a pair of Black-necked Crane 2km back towards Thukje above the muddy rias that end in Tso Kar (33°20’16.73”N, 78° 1’56.47”Ean usual place for the species – note that the rias are good for waders as well but hard to explore). Was a bit upset to see European tourists walking disturbingly towards the Cranes, making them move away unnecessarily – although they are not especially defiant it’s a better idea not to bother them. One more Crane a few km before Thukje, feeding in grasslands (33°22’0.71”N, 78° 0’43.04”E). Also two Upland Buzzards, some Lesser Sand Plovers and all the common species of high altitude plains.

Acc: camp in Kanangur

21/07

Mostly sunny with showers from time to time, 15 to 20°C
A day spent walking from Kanangur to Ryiul through the Startsapuk Tso (also called Tasabuk Tso, which seems more commonly understood by local people). The wide stony plain between Tso Kar and Startsapuk Tso is dominated by 3 Lark species (Horned, Hume’s, Greater short-toed, great for direct comparison of the two latter) and a few Snowfinches / Rosefinches / Twites here and there. Had to make it until the immediate banks of Startsapuk Tso to see more birds, including a nice diversity of migrating waders (my only Terek’s Sandpiper of the trip) in far better viewing conditions than in Tso Kar due to proximity and good light. The Brown-headed Gull colony on the SE bank (33°14'57.74"N, 78° 3'11.21"Ewas still active with a good number of fledging and approx 70 pairs. Then headed for the three villages that border the South end of the lake in successful search of Blandford’s Snowfinch (in Lanakmo, 33°14'28.51"N, 78° 2'59.74"E; first village coming from Thukje) and Groundpecker – the latter found easily in Gugale (33°14'40.09"N, 78° 1'54.40"E; a family in the walls near the small chörten) and less easily in Phuk (33°14'56.62"N, 78° 1'20.65"E; a single bird) due to heavy rain. Also worth of notice an adult Saker with juveniles and a Peregrine in Gugale, and an Himalayan (Common) Buzzard in Phuk. Overall, the Gugale and Phuk villages were the most productive. Other fauna around included a few kiangs, hares and foxes. The next part of the hike from the Startsapuk Tso and Tso Kar was uneventful on a wide uniform stony plain until greeted by an obliging company of Tibetan Sandgrouses arriving from the Gia area and landing right in place for some photo shooting (by 4pm, 33°17'12"N, 77°59'56"E). Last part crossed some small juniper bushes with many Redstarts, more Blandford’s Snowfinches and a few migrant waders. Note: this is a plain 7-hours hike, plus time for birding, involving one river crossing and some long periods in arid stony deserts – hence although it is completely flat water and energetic food is really needed. Note 2: all the area around Startsapuk Tso is crowded by small bees that don’t bite but are particularly annoying – repellant necessary.

Acc: camp in Ryiul (33°19'12.50"N, 77°57'9.65"E, 4650m)

22/07

Cloudy morning then sunny, and thunderstorm with heavy rain in the first hours of night – up to 20°C

An uneventful trekking day mostly spent along the Leh – Manali road to join the Kharnak region through the Narbuk plain. Of interest still was an unexpected Pied Wheatear on the pass above Ryiul (4850m) – the species then proved to be uncommon but regular on most hills of the Kharnak. Narbuk (33°14'20.27"N, 77°45'57.13"E, 4600-4800m depending on actual place) is located just above a river bed in a large valley with grassy sides and dwarf juniper, and can be reached by car turning right on a good path about 20km before Pang village (junction 33°13'19.78"N, 77°48'11.68"E). Non-bird fauna there included numerous Pikas and a few Kiangs.

Acc: camp in Narbuk

23/07

Cloudy early morning then sunny and thunderstorm at night, up to 30°C in midday, down to 15°C

A scenic short trekking day outside any kind of path, leading to the banks of the Potsay Chu. Some ups and downs and a rather difficult river crossing at the end (not to be tried without assistance). The highlight of the day was a Steppe Eagle flying over cliffs above the river; also one more Pied
Wheatear together with common Desert Wheatears and all the usual set of high altitude birds, with
the notable exception of Güldensdäts’ Redstart which should be common in this habitat.

Acc: camp on the Potsay Chu bank (33°12'52.22"N, 77°42'21.48"E, 4400m) – note: several camps on
both sides of the river but advisable to cross as early as possible in the day (crossing point
33°12'28.86"N, 77°42'42.01"E, other places unsafe due to unstable floor and high flow) and camp on
the western side. The only water supply is the muddy river which offers a few clear flakes on its sides.

24/07

Sunny with light clouds all over the day, 20 to 30°C

Crossing hills west towards winter nomad villages a few km after the junction between the Zara and
the Potsay Chu (local people call the resulting river the Lung Toksho, which does not appear in any
map). Large patches of grass with hippochae and willow bushes along the river (very good place at
33°13'7.97"N, 77°38'20.19"E), which proved excellent for warblers (mainly Sulphur-bellied and
Tickell’s), Twites, several rosefinch species and Brown Accentor.

Acc: camp in Lung Yogma (33°13'48.71"N, 77°38'49.85"E, 4300m)

25/07

Mostly sunny until mid-day, then a light thunderstorm with some rain and sun again, 20+°C

Crossing the Bong La (33°12'23.75"N, 77°37'18.34"E, ~4800m) through a cliff path broken here and
there. Better conditions after the pass but virtually not a single bird until reaching the next camp in
Tsatsago (33°11'6.49"N, 77°35'34.65"E, 4600m), with flocks of Brandt’s Rosefinch and several family
of Sulphur-bellied Warbler which appears to be especially common in the region. Also a confident
family of 5 blue sheep’s around.

Acc: camp in Tsatsago

26/07

Sunny, cloudy in late afternoon with showers, less than 20°C for most of the day

Most of this day spent crossing the Morang La (33° 9'11.24"N, 77°33'57.94"E, 5350m), a rocky hill
culminating reached after some 2 hours of easy walk from its base (3h30 from Tsatsago), wouldn’t it
be altitude (800m upwards from Tsatsago). Completely desertic once left the Tsatsago stream, with
not a single bird until back to 4600m on the other side in dry grasslands. There several Alpine
Choughs, a Bearded Vulture and my best sighting of Himalayan Snowcocks, with a (untame) company
wandering above the camp in late afternoon.

Acc: camp at the base of the Morang La (33° 8'9.61"N, 77°33'33.10"E)

27/07

Sunny with some clouds and a short shower in mid afternoon, 15 to 25°C

Only 2h trekking downwards along or into a stream to Tsokmesik along the Tsarap river. The footpath
was cut in several places so maybe next time better not to follow it at all and keep in with the stream
from the start. The walk is especially nice, in steep-sided gorges with old willows hosting numerous Sulphur-bellied Warblers, Redstarts and a few Great Tits. Tsokmesik is a large meadow shaded by willows, between the Tsarap and clay cliffs – certainly one of the richest places of the whole trek with a great opportunity for direct comparisons of numerous Sulphur-bellied and Tickell Warbler (showing overlap in several criteria mentioned by Grimmett and desperately puzzling juveniles), plus Rock Bunting, several species of Rosefinch, etc...

Acc: camp in Tsokmesik (33° 7'16.18"N, 77°31'55.88"E, 4200m)

28/07
Sunny with 25°C, then most of the afternoon under heavy rain and lower temperature, cloudy evening

Again a difficult walk along clay cliffs above the Tsarap, and some easier parts on flat dwarf juniper grasslands, ending in Brandinala (33° 1'37.66"N, 77°35'23.95"E, 4250m) just down Leh-Manali road’s Gata Loops. Once more better not to follow the footpath (or its remainders) and head upside where the terrain is easier. Himalayan Snowcocks singing early morning, then most of the day was dominated by Tickell’s and Sulphur-bellied Warblers, plus Rosefinches, corvids and quite a lot of Hill Pigeons. However the highlight was an exceptional (and close) 20-minutes vocal performance of a wolf pack by midnight.

Acc: camp in Brandinala (! Beware that it is a truck stop, do not let valuables in tents or cars)

29/07
Sunny up to the Taglang La, then thunderstorm, heavy rain, and sunny(ish) by the evening, 10 to 20°C

Mostly uneventful way back to Shey by car, still with my only decent sighting of Himalayan Vulture, one adult Steppe Eagle and a Bearded Vulture all in Taglangla. Back to the usual Indus birds in Shey with nothing more than ten days before.

Acc: Besthang Guesthouse, Shey

30/07
Sunny with some showers, up to 30°C

A necessary – yet tiresome day in Leh to get a permit for the Dah-Hanu region (arrive early in Leh or agencies may not accept to do it), especially as internet failure and the presence of the Dalai Lama made everything administrative-like slower and harder. Tried a bit of birding in Leh gardens without any novelty.

Acc: Besthang Guesthouse, Shey

31/07
A near-complete day of sun (!), up to 30°C

Headed to Dah (7 hours driving, Rs4000 bargained with a taxi driver, Rs5000 charged by agencies as per the official grid), with some sightings here and there. The area around Domkhar, with lots of
apricot groves mixed with some barney fields, would deserve more attention – I couldn’t spend time there however. From Domkhar the roadsides become dry and steep along the Indus. Here I found Variable Wheatears to be quite common (1♂ per 2-3km and locally more), while the species is absent from the rest of Ladakh as far as I know. Blue whistling Thrushes are common to abundant, especially in Dah along the Indus and the stream that runs from the Yaldor valley (any known name?). Dah (34°37’23.00"N, 76°28’48.96"E) is another mosaic of apricot groves and a nice variety of crops, definitely a place to stay for more birding. Highlight with a Long-tailed Shrike and a nice diversity of agro-forested landscapes. A nice 1h walk leads up to the bridge over the stream upstream Dah, then back through the bridge downstream and along the Indus (in principle forbidden to foreigner; there’s a checkpoint on the downstream bridge, policemen did not ask me anything but bear your passport and permit).

Acc: Dah, Skyabapa Guesthouse, the first large house of the village coming from the Leh road, Rs500 / double with breakfast, Rs100 for dinner, highly recommended. The owner knows much about his country and people and he’s willing to share all what he can. 2 other guesthouses in the village.

01/08

Sun again with 30°C

Went walking from Dah up the stream to Yaldor (2h, 34°40’40.18"N, 76°29’2.21"E), which is in principle forbidden to foreigners (the army clearly does not care, but dogs and villagers in Yaldor seem to – went back after being thrown stones as a welcome greeting). A great walk with several Pallas Dippers (which I missed elsewhere), numerous Blue whistling Thruses, Hume’s and Greenish Leaf Warblers, a probable Red-mantled Rosefinch (at an unacceptable distance). The only non-bird record was a resting Ibex on the top of a cliff above the stream.

Acc: Dah, Skyabapa Guesthouse

02/08

Cloudy, 20°C. Heavy storm by night (take local people’s pressing warnings seriously)

From Dah to Hanuthang by walk. Spent a lot of time on several families of Variable Wheatears with some strange plumages, until the bus to Leh (Rs230) took me for an uneventful 7h way back to Leh, then to Shey by night.

Acc: Besthang Guesthouse, Shey

03/08

Alternate rain and sun during all the day, all cloudy from the Rhotang sides, clouds without rain in Manali, from 5°C on the Taglangla to 25°C in Manali

An incredibly long day in a shared taxi, with a departure at 1am from Shey, to arrive by 8pm in Manali (these fast yet uncomfortable minibuses leave from the lower side of the new bus station in Leh and are called “shared taxis” there, Rs2000 with stops in Pang, Sarchu and Darcha – alternatively take buses that do the road in 2 days for Rs1600-1800 incl. accomodation). Hard rain between Shey and Rumtse, with several road cuts that forced the driver to go back to Choglamsar and take side
paths through Matho to join the main road back in Karu. A few sightings yet on the way, most worth to notice my only Gübdenstadt’s Redstart of the trip in Zingzingbar. White-capped Water-Redstarts become common from Darcha and remain so up to mid-slopes of the Rhotang on the Manali side. Down from the Rhotang into the forest, a Tibetan Blackbird, and nothing more due to falling night and felt clouds.

Acc: hotel Mountain Dew in Old Manali, double Rs400 (they ask for more, do bargain – good rooms and restaurant but location unpractical especially by night and owner quite doubtful)

04/08

All day alternating sun and clouds, ending in a great night sky in Spiti, 25°C, down to 15°C in Kii

I initially intended to spend a few days birding in forests around Manali and Shimla but couldn’t stand for more than three hours in Manali before feeling that I was not in the right place – which actually proved right few days afterwards as mountain sides were virtually inaccessible due to clouds and rain. Hence I managed to share a taxi with a few other people heading to Kaza, Spiti, through 10 hours on a filthy “road” along steep cliffs and through a number of streams (700Rs/pax, 8 people in the car, needs to be negotiated. Bus would be Rs320 but arrives full from Kullu). Worth it however as the Spiti valley is certainly one of the most scenic I have visited in the region. Bird-wise the route was dominated by Water-Redstarts, eventually rather common Plain mountain Finches and Roc Bunting which happen to be way more common in Lahaul and Spiti than they are in Ladakh. Ended in Kii monastery by late afternoon with no more bird sightings.

Acc: Kii monastery in a dormitory, 200Rs/night incl. dinner and breakfast, ask any monk inside the monastery. There’s a guesthouse just down the monastery for Rs500 but it would be a pity to miss the monks’ warm welcome and great food.

05/08

Sunny all day with some clouds on mountain tops, up to 25°C

Walked up from Kii to Gete (45’, 32°18'7.19"N, 78° 1'4.38"E, Google calls it Pinjoor but I have never heard that name anywhere else) where I explored the fields and stony hills above the village. A Sulphur-bellied Warbler, quite unexpected in this habitat, several Wheatear families including a probable Pied ♂ which I could not sight for long enough to ensure positive identification. However the highlights were 2 Snow Pigeons feeding by the hills surrounding the village NW, then flying over towards a yak pasture. The whole area could offer more species, however bird abundance was low overall maybe due to the rather late date and daytime (11am). I then walked NW to Kibbar (1h30) through stony hills, pastures, ending along a canal through barney fields in the lower plateau surrounding the village – for all the common species that can be found in this habitat but no surprise. An alternative way would be to follow the car track (dusty and probably longer). Unlike in Ladakh, Goldfinches, Rock Buntings and Plain Mountain Finches are quite common here, as they are throughout Spiti. Ended day in Kii monastery again.

Acc: Kii monastery

06/08
Sunny all day, then heavy thunderstorm with strong rain in the evening, 25°C

Went down through Kii village until reaching the Spiti river in the hope of an hypothetical Ibisbill. Did not find any but the habitat is suitable and worth further investigation (32°17'19.04"N, 78° 0'16.64"E; then upstream towards Kaza). The bushes along the river banks are full of Sulphur-bellied Warblers, Mountain Chiffchaffs, Wagtails and all common local species. I walked for a few km in this vegetation, then back to the road as the river did not allow going further. Hitch hiked to Kaza, then walked down to the river again upstream Kaza to explore bushes and stony beds which revealed again full of insectivore birds, plus 3 unexpected Temminck’s Stints and a family of Siberian Stonechat. Also a family of Long-tailed Shrike in a poplar grove just on the left side of Kaza stream (32°13'12.89"N, 78° 3'56.37"E). Heavy rain and thunderstorm at dusk ended my birding here.

Acc: Norboling guesthouse just in front of the monastery (looks old and slummy from outside but rooms are perfectly kept), Rs400 – the closest place for breakfast/dinner (also a very good choice) is Sakya Abode, walking 100m left outside Kaza, just near the oil station.

07/08

Sunny, 15°C at dawn, up to 25°C during the day

Took the bus that leaves to Manali at 07.00am (check the exact time the day before and only trust the employee at the road station; Rs305 or shared taxi for Rs800 to be booked the day before) with Himalayan Snowcocks singing on the cliffs above the road station in Kaza. Longish 10h way back along the weird “road” without any other sighting than a Snow Pigeon between Choota Dara and Chhatru, and a Wheatear that I have never managed to id (see bird list). Numerous Upland Pipits on the way up to the Rhotang (plus one or two on the slopes of the Kunzum La). The way down to Manali was quite uneventful but I managed to wander in the cedar groves once in town, adding Plumbeous Water-Redstart, Green-backed Tit and a few forest species to my list.

08/08

Cloudy and rainy, 25°C

Spent the whole day trying to reach meadows above the Hadimba Temple (32°14’53.52”N, 77°10’50.25”E) above Old Manali, which was only partly successful as I could not manage to climb up to the first one due to mud and rain (32°14’37.90”N, 77°10’9.22”E; supposed to be within Manali Wildlife Sanctuary, which is indicated nowhere and that nobody knows about). Managed to see a number of common local species including Grey Buschat (common), Whiskered Yuhina (several flocks), Slaty-headed Parakeet (numerous by Hadimba Temple), White-tailed Stonechat (which I did not expect here), and Ultramarine Flycatcher. Then had to go back through some kind of glide on the mud down to Old Manali for my bus to Delhi at 5pm (Rs800, 10+h, book on the evening before, departs 15mn walking from the Tibetan monastery downstream, only one stop for dinner in a random place). Few sightings from the bus but several flocks of Himalayan Swiflet in the Kullu valley, incredibly common Plumbeous Water Redstarts and an unexpected Little Egret on the Beas.

Acc: Snow Mountain Hotel, Manali, just in front of the Tibetan gonpa. Rs500, good location and correct price, but bargain if asked for more.
09/08

Heavy rain until 12am, then cloudy, 35°C

Reached Delhi under monsoon rain by 7am after a bus night. Once the rain was off, managed to reach Budha Jayanti Park (rickshaw Rs150 from Paharganj, don’t accept for more) for a few hours birding in large trees and flowered bushes (nothing but common species, yet some additions to my triplist including Oriental White-eye, Rufous Treepie...). Then headed for the end of the day in Lodhi Garden (Rs100 from Budha Jayanti Park, then Rs100 to Paharganj or Connaught Place) as I did not want to leave Delhi without a sighting of Coppersmith’s Barbet (managed with 2 eventually).

Acc: rented a room for half a day in Vivek Hotel, Paharganj, for Rs650 (Rs700 for a night... try to bargain better next time or head elsewhere, yet the hostel is well kept and worth it for a full night stay)

10/08

Flight back to Paris via Zurich at 1am. Note: the easiest way to reach the airport is the metro from Connaught Place or the railway station, Rs130, 30’ plus time to find the way in the corridors, ask any people.

Annotated bird list

*The species order follows Grimmett et al, 2014 with a few exceptions*

**Himalayan Snowcock** *Tetraogallus himalayensis*

A group of 3 plus at least 2 other birds near Morang La base camp (26/07), at least 3 singing birds in Tsokmesik early morning (28/07), at least 1 singer on the cliff above Kaza bus station (07/08).

*Proved to be hard to find this year, possibly due to rather unsuitable habitat and / or periodically bad weather. In Morang La, fed in meadows with patches of dwarf junipers close to steep cliffs. The white primaries are easy to sight in flight. Heard only in darkness, especially early morning.*

**Chukar Partridge** *Alectoris chukar*

Numerous around Chemre monastery (18-19/07) and Gotsang, above Hemis (19/07). Also odd birds along the Leh to Manali road especially near Rumtse (29/07). 1 on Shey palace (29/07)

**Indian Peafowl** *Pavo cristatus*

Several individuals calling in the dense shrubs surrounding Asola Wildlife Sanctuary (15/07)

**Bar-headed Goose** *Anser indicus*

4 families on Startsapuk Tso (21/07)

**Ruddy Shelduck** *Tadorna ferruginea*
Abundant in Tso Kar (20-21/07), at least some birds breed on the cliffs West to the lake

**Gadwall** *Anas strepera*

1 pair in Shey (19/07)

**Eurasian Wigeon** *Anas penelope*

1 pair between Shey and Choglamsar on shallow flakes along the Manali road (17/07)

**Goosander** *Mergus merganser*

1 family on the Indus in Choglamsar (17/07)

**Great-crested Grebe** *Podiceps cristatus*

Over 30 pairs on Startsapuk Tso (21/07)

**Black-necked Grebe** *Podiceps nigricollis*

2 pairs on Startsapuk Tso (21/07)

**Black-crowned Night Heron** *Nycticorax nycticorax*

A flock of 5-6 birds flying over Bunthar, Kullu valley, at dusk (08/08)

**Indian Pond Heron** *Ardeola grayii*

2 in Shey marshes just near the gonpa (19/07). Also 1 in Okhla Barrage (15/07)

**Purple Heron** *Ardea purpurea*

2-5 birds on the Yamuna near Okhla Barrage (15/07)

**Cattle Egret** *Bubulcus ibis*

Numerous in the plains north to Delhi (09/08) and in Asola Wildlife Sanctuary (15/07)

**Little Egret** *Egretta garzetta*

1 fishing on the Beas near Bhuntar (08/08)

**Little Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax niger*

1 flying over Budha Jayanti Park, Delhi (09/08)

**Common Kestrel** *Falco tinnunculus*

1 in Lung Yogma (25/07), 1 ♀ in Tsokmesik (28/07), 1 near Hanuthang (02/08).

*Less common than it was 10 years back especially in the Indus valley*

**Eurasian Hobby** *Falco subbuteo*
A pair in Shey (16/07)

**Saker Falcon** *Falco cherrug*

1 adult flying over Gugale on the South end of Startsapuk Tso (21/07)

**Peregrine Falcon** *Falco peregrinus peregrinator*

1 in Gugale on the South end of Startsapuk Tso (21/07)

**Black Kite** *Milvus migrans govena*

Seen mainly in the Lodhi gardens in Delhi (15/07 and 09/08), yet not a single bird elsewhere in the town during my visit.

*Subspecies attribution based on unconspicuous white underwing patch and low contrast on head (lacking clear pale crown and neck). However I did check only a few birds and my experience of variability in asian Black Kites is limited.*

**Black Kite** *Milvus (migrans) lineatus*

Numerous in Manali (08/08)

*I attributed the numerous Kites seen in Manali area to lineatus based on the (sub)species’ distribution and on the underwing and head pattern of a few birds decently seen, yet I did not check every single one.*

**Bearded Vulture** *Gypaetus barbatus*

2 adults flying over Taglangla (20/07) and 1 at the same place a week later (29/07), then one again at the same place (03/08), 1 adult flying over the Morang La base (26/07), 1 adult in Gete (05/08).

*Adults in Ladakh had white bodies with no orange wash, while the adult seen in Spiti was bright orange.*

**Egyptian Vulture** *Neophron percnopterus*

1 flying over New Delhi (15/07)

**Himalayan Vulture** *Gyps himalayensis*

1 flying over Taglangla (29/07), 3 perched on a dead tree on the Rhotang La slope (07/08)

**Vulture sp** *Gyps sp*

2-3 Vultures seen in bad light and large distance in Spiti (05/08), 1 in Dah-Hanu (01/08) during the whole trip, which won’t raise the total vulture count of the trip to more than 10 sightings at a very maximum.

*Unstable weather and lack of livestock in Kharnak during summer could account for this weak score, yet Himalayan Vultures were far more common in these regions 10 years back.*
Shikra *Accipiter badius*

1 in Asola Wildlife Sanctuary (15/07)

Himalayan Buzzard *Buteo (buteo) burmanicus*

1 adult in Phuk village, East to Startsapuk Tso (21/07).

Upland Buzzard *Buteo hemilasius*

2 along the East side of Tso Kar (21/07)

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*

An adult above Chemre monastery (19/07). Also calls from the cliffs South-East from Chemre suggesting a nest around.

Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis*

1 ad above the Potsay Chu (23/07), 1 flying over Taglangla (29/07)

Booted Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus*

A white morph adult flying over Thiksey (16/07), 1 dark morph in Gotsang above Hemis (19/07)

White-breasted Waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus*

3 in Budha Jayanti Park, Delhi (09/08)

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

2 in Shey marshes (17/07)

Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*

1-5 birds in Shey marshes (16/07), also 2 near Choglamsar (17/07) and 1 pair on Startsapuk Tso (21/07)

Black-necked Crane *Grus nigricollis*

Only seen on the Eastern side of the Tso Kar: 1 single adult in the marshes North to Thukje, 2 between Thukje and the lake, and 2 between Tso Kar and Startsapuk Tso (20-21/07).

Ibisbill *Ibidorhyncha struthersii*

A pair between Choglamsar and Shey on a stony islet of the Indus (16/07). *

Certainly my most wanted bird for this trip. From Choglamsar Bridge, take the road which follows the south bank of the Indus (just left after the bridge), pass through the new mosque, and take a drivable path left just before a large house (in construction in 2015). Go on for a few hundred meters along a fenced property and cross the small canal on an iron footbridge. Walk along the fence and reach the Indus on a dyke after 100m or so to get a good view on the numerous sandy and stony islets on the Indus. During my visit Ibisbills were settling on the first islet, at a decent camera distance.
Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*

>50 in Kanangur, Tso Kar (20/07), 1-5 on Startsapuk Tso (21/07)

Pied Avocet *Recurvirostra avosetta*

>2 in Kanangur, Tso Kar (20/07)

Red-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus indicus*

2-5 noisy birds in Budha Jayanti Park, Delhi (09/08)

Lesser Sand Plover *Lesser Sand Plover*

Families and post-breeding flocks (up to 100 individuals) seen in Tso Kar, Startsapuck Tso and Narbuk (21-22/07)

Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*

10 on Startsapuk Tso (21/07)

Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus*

2 on Startsapuk Tso (21/07)

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*

1 on Startsapuk Tso (21/07)

Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*

Numerous around Kanangur (Tso Kar) and on Startsapuk Tso (20-21/07)

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*

3 in Choglamsar (17/07), up to 5 on Startsapuk Tso (21/07)

Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*

4 in Choglamsar and 1 in Shey (17/07), 1 in Chemre (19/07), 1 at Kanangur (Tso Kar, 20/07), 2 in Ryiul (Tso Kar, 21/07)

Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola*

1 at Kanangur, Tso Kar (21/07), 1 in Startsapuk Tso (21/07)

Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus*

1 in Startsapuck Tso (21/07)

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

>3 on Startsapuk Tso (21/07), 1 in Darcha (03/08)
Temminck’s Stint *Calidris temminckii*

3 adults along the Spiti river near Kaza (06/08)

**Curlew Sandpiper** *Calidris ferruginea*

30-50 at Kanangur, Tso Kar (21/07)

**Brown-headed Gull** *Chroicocephalus brunnicephalus*

Seen only around Startsapuk Tso (colony of >70 pairs with numerous flying juveniles at the South-East end of the lake); also a few individuals in the South of Tso Kar (21/07)

**Common Tern** *Sterna hirundo*

1 adult in Startsapuck Tso (21/07)

**Tibetan Sandgrouse** *Syrrhaptes tibetanus*

9 individuals fly from the West and land in the plain between Tso Kar and Startsapuk Tso in late afternoon (21/07).

**Common Pigeon** *Columba livia*

Seen in Delhi, Indus valley, Dah-Hanu and in various locations even far from human settlements in Ladakh, below 4000m.

**Hill Pigeon** *Columba rupestris*

Replaces Common Pigeon above 4000m in Ladakh, absent from lower altitudes (except one sighting in Chemre with Common Pigeons, 19/07).

*Seen in many occasion, most usually along shallow slopes or flat areas in dry, rocky places close to camps or nomad villages. A few isolated individuals but generally in small groups of 3-5 individuals.*

**Snow Pigeon** *Columba leuconota*

2 on the grassy slopes of Gete, just above Kii monastery (Spiti, 05/08); 1 near Battal (Lahaul, 06/08).

*Duck-like noise when beating wings in flight. A definitive highlight of this trip.*

**Oriental Turtle Dove** *Streptopelia orientalis meena*

Common in every wooded area of Ladakh and Manali.

*Birds in Ladakh attributed to meena. In Manali birds there are darker, with dark purple underparts, more conspicuous streaked white patch on neck sides, darker rufous fringes and larger dark brown centers on scapulars and covers; also less white on tail feathers: ssp agricola or some kind of intergrade? Comments welcome.*

**Eurasian Collared Dove** *Streptopelia decaocto*

Several in Budhaya Jayanti Park, Delhi (09/08)
Red-collared Dove *Streptopelia tranquebarica*
Numerous in Asola Wildlife Sanctuary (15/07)

Laughing Dove *Stigmatopelia senegalensis*
A few individuals in Asola Wildlife Sanctuary and random locations around Delhi (15/07 and 09/08)

Yellow-footed Green Pigeon *Treron phoenicopterus*
A flock of approx. 10 individuals flying over Akshardham Temple, Delhi (15/07)

Alexandrine Parakeet *Psittacula eupatria*
A dorm of over 50 individuals on a tree facing the entrance of Sheesh Gumbad, Lodhi Gardens, Delhi (15/07 and 08/08); also some isolated individuals in the same place.

Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri*
Common in Delhi (15/07 and 09/08)

Slaty-headed Parakeet *Psittacula himalayana*
Numerous around the Hadimba temple in Manali (08/08)

Jacobin Cuckoo *Clamator jacobinus*
1 in Asola Wildlife Sanctuary (15/07)

Eurasian Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus*
1 singer in Shey and 1 in Thiksey (17/07), 1♀ in Chemre (19/07), 1 red ♀ in Shey (20/07), 1 pair in Startsapuk Tso (21/07)

Asian Koel *Eudynamys scolopaceus*
1 in Lodhi Gardens, Delhi (15/07), calling owl-like; also 2 in Budhaya Jayanti Park (09/08)

Asian Barred Owlet *Glaucidium cuculoides*
A pair along the fence of Hadimba Temple in Manali (08/08)

Himalayan Swiflet *Collocalia brevirostris*
2-5 flyovers in Manali (07/08) and seen in small numbers above every village between Manali and Kullu (08/08).

*The stocky, short-tailed appearance permits separation from Common Swift even in bad light.*

Common Swift *Apus apus*
1 in Choglamsar (17/07), 4 in Chemre (19/07), 1 in Nimmu (31/07), 2 in Yaldor (01/08), 3 between Kii and Kaza (06/08)
Little Swift *Apus affinis*

2 at dawn in Lodhi Gardens, Delhi (15/07), numerous at the same place in mid-afternoon (09/08)

Common Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

Common in the Indus valley; not seen around Chemre, Dah-Hanu and Spiti. Also 1 in Asola Wildlife Sanctuary (15/07), 1 in Lung (24/07), 1 in Tsokmesik (27/07), 1 in Darcha (03/08), 6 between Kii and Kaza bridge along the Spiti river (06/08)

White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*

2 in Asola Wildlife Sanctuary (15/07), 1 ♀ in an apple grove near Hadimba Temple, Manali (08/08)

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

1 flyover in Shey marshes (19/07)

Green Bee-Eater *Merops orientalis*

3+ in Asola Wildlife Sanctuary (15/07)

Indian Grey Hornbill *Indian Grey Hornbill*

1 in Lodhi Gardens, Delhi (15/07)

Brown-headed Barbet *Megalaima zeylanica*

1 in Budha Jayanti Park and 1 in Lodhi Gardens, Delhi (09/08). Calls high in dense foliage

Coppersmith’s Barbet *Megalaima haemacephala*

2 in Lodhi Gardens, Delhi (09/08)

Lesser Goldenback *Dinopium benghalense*

1 in Budhaya Jayanti Park, Delhi (09/08)

Streak-throated Woodpecker *Picus xanthopigaeus*

1 along the Beas in the Manali park (07/08)

Long-tailed Shrike *Lanius schach*

1 singing ♂ in Chemre along the river 1-2km below the monastery (19/07), 1 singer in Dah (31/07), 1 family with 2 flying juveniles in a grove below Kaza (06/08).

*No sign of any Shrike in Shey marshes where it was relatively easy to find in the early 2000’s.*

Black Drongo *Dicrurus macrocercus*

3 in Asola Wildlife Sanctuary (15/07), also 1 with moulting tail feathers (hence short-tailed appearance) in Budha Jayanti Park, Delhi (09/08)
Ashy Drongo *Dicrurus leucophaeus*

~10 in the cedars above Hadimba temple in Manali (08/08)

Indian Golden Oriole *Oriolus (oriolus) kundoo*

At least a pair near Shey monastery; 1 in Chemre (19/07), common all along the Indus valley, also seen in Dah (01/08) and a few around Kaza.

Rufous Treepie *Dendrocitta vagabunda*

1 in Budhaya Jayanti Park, Delhi (09/08)

Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica*

Common in the Indus valley, Dah-Hanu and Manali. Not seen at higher altitudes.

Carrion Crow *Corvus corone*

Odd individuals seen in the Indus valley especially in Shey marshes

Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos*

Up to 10 between Dah and Yaldor (01/08), numerous on the wooded slopes of the Rhotang La and in Manali (08/08)

Indian Jungle Crow *Corvus (macrorhynchos) culminatus*

A few individuals in Asola Wildlife Sanctuary (15/07), also seen in small numbers in the plains North to Delhi (09/08)

*Not as common as House Crow.*

Northern Raven *Corvus corax*

1 pair at Kanangur, Tso Kar (21/07), 1 in Narbuk (22/07), 2 on the Potsay Chu (23/07)

House Crow *Corvus splendens*

Common in Delhi (15/07 and 09/08)

Red-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*

5 in Chemre (18/07), 3 in Shey (19/07), 1 in Lung Yogma (25/07), 3 in Brandinala (28/07)

Alpine Chough *Pyrrhocorax graculus*

2 along the Potsay Chu near Lung (24/07), 5 in Lung Yogma (24/07), >3 on the slopes of Morang La (26/07), 3 in Tsokmesik (27/07), numerous between Tsokmesik and Brandinala (28/07), a colony in Kibbar village (05/08)

Groundpecker *Pseudopodoces humilis*
1 family nesting in a ruin in Gugale, South end of Startsapuk Tso. Also 1 individual in Phuk, a few km westwards (21/07).

*The call strikingly recalls Great Tit’s.*

**Cinereous Tit** *Parus (major) cinereus*

Common in Ladakh and Dah-Hanu in all well-wooded areas along the Indus and side valleys. Absent from areas above 3800m. Also a few birds in Manali

**Green-backed Tit** *Parus monticolus*

Common in conifer forests around Manali (07-08/08)

**Coal Tit** *Periparus ater melanolophus*

Abundant in conifers around Manali (07/08); numerous flocks feeding high in trees

**Black-throated Tit** *Aegithalos concinnus*

A flock of 4-6 birds near the Manaslu river bridge in Manali (08/08)

**Eurasian Crag Martin** *Ptyonoprogne rupestris*

4 in Chemre (18/07), 1 along the Gyamar river towards Rumtse (20/07), 1 in Lung Yogma (25/07), 2 in Tsokmesik (27/07), 1 close to Likir (31/07), 1 in Yaldor (01/08), 4-5 in Gete and a few more in Kibbar (05/08), 1 between Kii and Kaza (06/08)

**Plain Martin** *Riparia paludicola*

2 in Asola Wildlife Sanctuary (15/07)

**Common House Martin** *Delichon urbicum*

1 in Domkhar (with a nest on the banks of the Indus, 31/07), 2 in Darcha (03/08), 3 on the Spiti river between Kii and Kaza (06/08)

**Asian House Martin** *Delichon dasypus*

~15 hunting along the higher slopes of Rhotang La on the Manali side (07/08)

*Dark underwing is easy to grasp even at a distance.*

**Barn Swallow** *Hirundo rustica*

A few flyovers above Asola Wildlife Sanctuary (15/07)

**Red-rumped Swallow** *Cecropis daurica*

A colony of >2 pairs on the junction of Manali and Sabu roads in Choglamsar (17/07)

**Greater Short-toed Lark** *Calandrella brachydactyla dukunensis*
5-10 individuals between Tso Kar and Startsapuk Tso.

*Reddish-grey, stocky birds, nothing like European tiny pale birds...*

**Hume’s Short-toed Lark** *Calandrella acutirostris tibetana*

1 in Debringt, at the end of the Taglangla descent towards Manali (20/07), 5-10 birds between Tso Kar and Startsapuk Tso

*I did not detail every single Lark but Hume’s appeared distinctively greyer than Greater Short-toed, lacking reddish tones, call also different. Without any count Greater Short-toed seems to be more abundant than Hume’s). Subspecies attribution based on location and diffuse supercilium, ill-defined dark loral stripe and greyish general coloration.*

**Oriental Skylark** *Alauda gulgula*

2 singers in the fields near Chemre (18/07).

*Not seen in Shey marshes.*

**Horned Lark** *Eremophila alpestris longirostris*

2 in Rumtse (20/07), then common to abundant locally around Tso Kar and in the Kharnak, especially near camps

**Himalayan Bulbul** *Pycnonotus leucogenys*

Numerous in Manali (08/08)

**Red-whiskered Bulbul** *Pycnonotus jocosus*

>3 in Budhaya Jayanti park, Delhi (09/08)

**Red-vented Bulbul** *Pycnonotus cafer*

Numerous in parks around Delhi, incl. Asola Wildlife Sanctuary (15/07 and 09/08)

**Plain Prinia** *Prinia inornata*

A few birds seen in Delhi, even in trees along main streets (15/07)

**Ashy Prinia** *Prinia socialis*

>2 singers in small dense shrubs in Asola Wildlife Sanctuary (15/07)

*The song recalls a Dartford’s Warbler*

**Rufous-fronted Prinia** *Prinia buchanani*

Numerous singers high in trees in Asola Wildlife Sanctuary (15/07)

**Common Tailorbird** *Orthotomus sutorius*
Over 10 in Budha Jayanti Park, Delhi (09/08), also a few in trees along main streets

**Brown-flanked Bush Warbler** *Cettia fortipes*

Numerous singers above Hadimba temple in Manali (08/08)

**Mountain Chiffchaff** *Phylloscopus sindianus*

Probably the most abundant bird species in the Indus valley. Many singing birds in spite of the late period. Also seen, albeit in lower numbers, in Dah-Hanu (1 in Yaldor, 01/08) and Spiti (2 singers along the Spiti river in Kii and more around Kaza, 06/08). A few sightings in Kharnak (1 in Lung Yogma, 24/07, 4 in Tsokmesik, 27-28/07)

*Produces 2 types of calls – 1 recalling Citrine Wagtail with a thrilled “chip”, and one closely resembling Eurasian Chiffchaff’s.*

**Tickell’s Leaf-Warbler** *Phylloscopus affinis*

2 families in Lung Yogma (24/07), at least 1 more the day after, up to 6 families in Tsokmesik (27/07) and others in the willows along the river farther away in the same area.

*Took a bit of time to get the stable criteria separating dark Tickell’s and Sulphur-bellied W.; both species often mixed on river banks at the edge of willows and on surrounding rocky slopes – however contrary to Sulphur, Tickell’s did not appear to wander far outside the vegetation bed (yet seen in a few occasions on rocks).* Tickell’s gives a general smaller, paler impression recalling a Willow Warbler, with yellow cheeks (albeit a few Sulphur-bellied W. also exhibited some yellow on cheeks). Tickell’s olive shade are not obvious on all individuals especially in strong daylight. The heavy contrast between yellow supercilium and white throat in Sulphur-bellied does not appear systematically (while I did not see any Tickell’s with this kind of contrast). Songs are quite similar (Sulphur’s is lower pitched and slower) but calls differ; Tickell’s W. tend to produce a weak “zeep” or a liquid “tchip”, less rough than Sulphur bellied’s chaffinch-like call. Young Tickell’s recall a Eurasian Chiffchaff, while young Sulphur-bellied recall Dusky Warbler.

**Sulphur-bellied Warbler** *Phylloscopus griseolus*

2 singers in Gotsang (above Hemis), either in the river or on the buildings of the small monastery itself (19/07). Common along river banks in Kharnak, never far from water, especially along the Potsay Chu and on the way to the Morang La (e.g. >3ch and 2-3 families in Lung Yogma, 24-25/07, 1 in Tsatsago on 25/07, 3-5 families between Morang La and Toskmesik on 27/07, 3 in Tsokmesik immediate surroundings on 27/07), 1 in Gete (05/08), 2 along the Spiti river in Kii (06/08).

*Call recalls a Chaffinch with a more liquid tone and higher pitch. See Tickell’s for further notes*

**Hume’s Leaf-Warbler** *Phylloscopus humei*

1 in Yaldor (01/08)

**Greenish Warbler** *Phylloscopus trochiloides*

1 singer and 2 adult-like birds along the stream in Yaldor (01/08).
All birds displayed only a small, barely noticeable trace of wing bar.

**Grey-hooded Warbler** *Phylloscopus xantoschistos*

>3 in Manali, and a few more above Hadimba temple (08/08). More heard than seen at the top of large cedars (with interfering clouds)

**Lesser Whitethroat** *Sylvia curruca*

1 singer in Chemre (19/07), 1 in Shey (19/07). Nothing very specific to distinguish it from European ones.

**Hume’s Whitethroat** *Sylvia althaea*

A minimum of 3 singers between Shey and Choglamsar on the north bank of the Indus (17/07) plus a few odd birds between Shey and Thiksey, most of them in Hippophae bushes. Also several in Chemre (18-19/07).

Slightly smaller than an Orphean Warbler but clearly larger than a Lesser Whitethroat, with paler head with low contrast between the crown and ear covers. Underparts are white without grey wash; palish brown-grey upperparts. The song recalls an Orphean Warbler (slow and low-pitched), but warbles like a Lesser W.

**Large Grey Babbler** *Turdoides malcomi*

Several groups (up to 10 birds) in Asola Wildlife Sanctuary (15/07)

**Jungle Babbler** *Turdoides striata*

Numerous in Delhi parks (15/07 and 09/08)

**Streaked Laughingthrush** *Garrulax lineatus*

1 above the Manaslu river in Manali, then several families in the meadows above Hadimba temple (08/08)

**Whiskered Yuhina** *Yuhina flavicollis*

Several flocks in old Manali and in the meadows above Hadimba temple (08/08)

**Oriental White-eye** *Zosterops palpebrosus*

A pair in Budha Jayanti Park, Delhi (09/08)

**Winter Wren** *Troglodytes troglodytes*

1 in Taktok (18/07)

**Goldcrest** *Regulus regulus*

Several individuals heard in cedars in Manali (08/08)

**Brown Dipper** *Cinclus pallasii*
2 between Dah and Yaldor (01/08)

**Bank Myna** *Acridotheres gingeinianus*

A few individuals in Delhi along the Yamuna near Okhla Barrage (15/07) and along the canal in Rajiv Nagar, North to Delhi (09/08)

**Common Myna** *Acridotheres tristis*

Common everywhere below the tree limit near humans (incl. Manali from 2600m and Delhi)

**Blue Whistling Thrush** *Myiophonus caeruleus*

1 in Upshi above the bridge (20/07), common in Dah and along the Indus between Dah and Domkhar (31/07), also common in Manali (07-08/08)

**Tibetan Blackbird** *Turdus (merula) maximus*

1 while climbing the Rhotang La from Manali, at the very upper limit of trees (04/08), one a few hundred meters below, and one along the Beas in Manali (07/08).

**Bluethroat** *Luscinia svecica*

2 juveniles in Chemre (19/07), a few other unrecorded individuals in the Indus valley around Shey

**Oriental Magpie Robin** *Copsychus saularis*

several in Budhaya Jayanti Park, Delhi (09/08)

**Indian Robin** *Saxicoloides fulicatus*

1♂ and a family in Asola Wildlife Sanctuary (15/07)

**Plumbeous Water Redstart** *Rhyacornis fuliginosa*

Common along the Beas from Manali to Kullu (07-08/08), with up to 1♂ per 100m river

**White-capped Water Redstart** *Chaimarrornis leucocephalus*

1 in Darcha, then common all along the road to Manali until the slopes of the Rhotang La; then replaced by Plumbeous Redstart in the lower Manali valley (03/08). Also common in Lahaul from Battal to Rhotang La (07/08)

**Black Redstart** *Phoenicurus ochruros*

Numerous families near human settlements everywhere in the Indus valley and Dah Hanu. Also seen every day in Kharnak above 4500m (especially around Lung and Tsokmesik) even far from villages or water.

**[Common Redstart** *Phoenicurus phoenicurus]*

1♂ redstart with longish wings, pale red-orange belly and pale brown upperpart, calling a softer, higher-pitched sound in direct comparison to surrounding Black Redstart, probably belongs to this
species. However variability in observed Black Redstart phoenicuroideos plumages makes this identification uncertain.

**Güldensztat’s Redstart Phoenicurus erythrogaster**

1♂ flying in Zingzingbar along the Leh-Manali road was the only sighting of the trip in spite of many suitable habitats at the right altitude between Narbuk and the Morang La during 7 hiking days.

10 years back this species was common in the Kharnak. It is unclear to me whether the species only settles around summer nomad settlements (while I only went to winter camps), or whether it has actually disappeared for any reason from the region. Other observers in the Tsomo Riri, Tso Kar and Rumtse area were not more successful (M. Picard comm. pers.). Comments welcome.

**Siberian Stonechat Saxicola maurus**

1 family on the banks of the Spiti river near Kaza (06/08), also 1♂ near the top of the Rhotang La (07/08)

**White-tailed Stonechat Saxicola leucurus**

1 juv. in a meadow above Manali (08/08)

**Grey Buschat Saxicola ferreus**

Common in Manali, even in the town itself (08/08)

**Desert Wheatear Oenanthe deserti**

Numerous (>10) along the Tso Kar banks between Kanangur and Thukje (20/07), also many birds on the west side of Startsapuk Tso and Tso Kar (21/07). Then individuals or families seen every day in Kharnak, in low densities (approx. 2-5 sightings per day, e.g. 2 while climbing Bong La on 25/07). Over 3 families between Gete and Kibbar (05/08), 2 families along the Spiti river in Kii (06/08)

**Pied Wheatear Oenante pleschanka**

1♂ above Ryiul (22/07), 1 juv and 1♀ along the Potsay Chu near Lung (24/07). A ♀ had characteristics of this species (especially a narrow, broken terminal black band on tail with black on external tail feathers, and some rufous fringes on covers and remiges) between Dah and Hanuthang (02/08) but see note below in Variable Wheatear.

**Variable Wheatear Oenanthe picata picata**

Up to 10♂♂ along the Indus between Domkhar and Dah, all with picata plumages.

Some juveniles and ♀ had strange plumages with intermediate criteria between Pied and Variable, and I gave up with identification. In one family (between Dah and Hanuthang, 02/08), juveniles had uniform dark grey upperparts with covers and remiges without obvious fringes, a large and even black terminal band on tail (hence Variable-like), but ¼ of external tail feathers were black (hence Pied-like). The ♂ feeding these youngs had a typical Variable Wheatear-like plumage except that the crown was dark grey (not black), as were scapulars (like very worn black feathers). All these birds turned out to be Variable Wheatears after photo id (thanks are due to M. Schweizer).
Wheatear sp *Oenanthe sp*

1 bird seen from the bus Chhatruur, Lahaul (07/08). Head, belly and back all black; white crown; external tail feathers mostly white, broad black terminal tail band.

*Left unidentified on the basis of intermediate criteria between Pied and Variable yet completely out of range for both. Short (a few seconds) but close sighting. Could not stop the bus for further description... Any idea welcome.*

Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius*

1 in Choglamsar near Sabu road (17/07), >1 in Chemre (19/07), 1 in Domkhar (31/07), at least 2 families between Dah and Hanuthang (02/08), 2 in Gete (05/08)

Dark-sided Flycatcher *Muscicapa sibirica*

2-3 in apple groves around Hadimba temple in Manali (08/08)

Ultramarine Flycatcher *Ficedula superciliaris*

1♂ in cedar undergrowth above Hadimba temple in Manali (08/08)

Purple Sunbird *Cinnyris asiaticus*

2 pairs and isolated individuals (most in non-breeding plumage) in Asola Wildlife Sanctuary (15/07)

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Seen in every inhabited human settlement below 4000m, absent above. Not seen in Delhi.

Chestnut-shouldered Petronia *Gymnoris xanthocollis*

1 pair and a few odd individuals in Asola Wildlife Sanctuary (15/07)

Tibetan Snowfinch *Montifringilla adamsi*

2 in Rumtse (20/07), then common around Tso Kar and in Kharnak, from 4000m upwards

Blanford’s Snowfinch *Pyrgilauda blanfordi*

Over 30 birds spread between Lanakmo and Phuk along the south end of Startsapuk Tso (21/07), especially in the three villages and close to ruins.

Robin Accentor *Prunella rubeculoides*

1 Lanakmo, 1 Gugale (South end of Startsapuk Tso, 21/07) were the two only birds of this trip, while the species was abundant ten years back in Kharnak.

*Need to check whether they settle only around camps used in summer by nomads (which I did not visit) or whether the species has actually declined from the area.*

Brown Accentor *Prunella fulvescens*
1 above Ryiul (Tso Kar, 22/07), >2 families in Lung Yogma (24/07), 1 on Taglangla (29/07)

**Citrine Wagtail** *Motacilla citreola calcarata*

Common on all grassy river sides, marshes, and field patches, in Ladakh, Dah-Hanu and Spiti. All birds seen were attributable to calcarata.

*A few adults (1 in Shey marshes, 1 in Lung Yogma and 1 in Kaza) display no yellow but an all near-white belly and head, together with standard other plumage features and normal call and song.*

**Grey Wagtail** *Motacilla cinerea*

3 in Dah (31/07), 3 more near Yaldor (01/08), 3-5 on the lower slopes of Rhotang La towards Manali (07/08)

**White Wagtail** *Motacilla alba alboides / personata*

Common along the Indus and Spiti. Most of birds in Ladakh displayed the characteristics of alboides, but some ♂ were clearly personata

*(I gave up with ♀, juvs and some intermediate ♀ plumages). A ♂ seen along the Spiti river had the characteristics of personata (06/08)*

**Upland Pipit** *Anthus sylvanus*

1 on the Kunzum La slopes, then several on the Rhotang La (07/08).

*Rather indistinct Pipit with a stocky appearance. External tail feathers not especially white or even pale, brownish wash on mantle, covers and remiges, whitish underparts, and heavy streaking in both upper parts and flanks.*

**Yellow-breasted Greenfinch** *Carduelis spinoides*

3 in meadows above Hadimba temple, Manali (08/08)

**European “Grey-headed” Goldfinch** *Carduelis carduelis caniceps*

2 between Shey and Thiksey (17/07) were the only birds for Ladakh. It is however common around Kaza, Kii and Kibbar in Spiti.

**Twite** *Carduelis flavirostris*

Numerous on the Eastern banks of Tso Kar (20/07) and groups in the Kharnak, especially in willows around Lung (24/07)

**Plain Mountain Finch** *Leucosticte nemoricola*

2-5 along the Potsay Chu (24/07), 1 in Lung Yogma (24/07), ~10 on the slopes of the Rhotang La (04/08), >7 in Kibbar (05/08), 2 in Kii along the Spiti river (06/08). Odd individuals here and there in Kharnak but never in large number, not seen every day.
Another species that occurred commonly (even abundant here and there) in Kharnak 10 years back and was this year especially hard to find. I’d advise incoming visitors to try keep a track of all birds or flocks sighted (as I mistakenly did not).

**Brandt’s Mountain Finch** *Leucosticte brandti*

1 on the top of Taglangla (20/07), 2 at Kanangur, Tso Kar (21/07).

*The most common finch in remote valleys of Kharnak, seen every day in that region (yet never abundant), usually in flocks of 3-15 individuals on rocky slopes close to streams (e.g. 10 in Tsatsago, 26/07).*

**Mongolian Finch** *Eremopsaltria mongolica*

A minimum of 10 individuals in Lanakmo and surroundings (south end of Startsapuk Tso, 21/07)

**Common Rosefinch** *Carpodacus erythrinus*

Seen in Ladakh and Dah-Hanu in virtually every patch of willow or cultivated land, even in the high valleys of Kharnak along the Potsay Chu, above 4500m. Less abundant in Spiti.

**Streaked Rosefinch** *Carpodacus rubicilloides*

1 above Ryiul, Tso Kar (22/07)

**Great Rosefinch** *Carpodacus rubicilla*

1 pair on the top of Taglangla (20/07), 1 pair above the Potsay Chu (23/07), 1 in Lung Yogma (25/07), 1 in Tsatsago (26/07), 1 in Brandinala (28/07)

[**Red-mantled Rosefinch** *Carpodacus rhodochlamys*]

1♂ in Yaldor (01/08) could belong to this species but sightings at a distance could not permit definitive identification.

**Red-fronted Serin** *Serinus pusillus*

>4 between Chemre and Taktok (18/07), common around Hemis and Gotsang (19/07), >3 in Lung Yogma (25/07), >10 in Tsokmesik (27/07), 3 in Yaldor (01/08), numerous in Kii and Gete (05/08)

**Rock Bunting** *Emberiza cia*

1 singer in Gotsang above Hemis (19/07), 1 in Lung Yogma (24/07), 1 family in Tsokmesik (27/07), >4 singers between Tsokmesik and Brandinala (28/07). Common in Lahaul and Spiti from the slopes of the Rhotang La (03-04-05/08). Seen as low as Manali (07-08/08)

**Bunting sp** *Emberiza sp*

2 buntings with yellow-green rump, grey head, brown back and whitish external remiges were probably juvenile Rock Bunting but could not be confirmed (down the Rhotang La, 04/08)
**Mammals (non exhaustive)**

**Blue sheep *Pseudois nayaur***

A herd in Tsatsago, and singles between the Morang La and Tsokmesik.

**Ibex *Capra ibex***

A single female-type individual in Yaldor, Dah-Hanu

**Himalayan Marmot *Marmota himalayana***

Not as numerous as expected; mainly seen around Targlang La. No more than 1-2 individuals in Kharnak during my 8 days trek.

**Ladakh/Plateau Pika *Ochotona ladacensis / curzoniae***

Undifferenciated by lack of identification guide or photos for posterior id. Tracks or individuals seen in good number around Ryiul (Tso Kar) and in the Narbuk valley.

**Tibetan Sand Fox *Vulpes ferrilata***

2 individuals near Ryiul, Tso Kar.

**Kiang *Equus kiang***

A few single individuals around Tso Kar; singles seen daily in Kharnak (average 5 sightings / day during 8 days)

**Wooly Hare *Lepus oiostolus***

Numerous along the northern bank of Tso Kar, not seen elsewhere.