

PAKISTAN'S HIMALAYAS TOUR REPORT

2024

5 - 15 June 2024

by Dave Farrow

This was the first Birdquest tour to Pakistan to run since 2005, and also my first return since then, and what an exciting adventure it was! From the hot foothills at Islamabad to the forested mountain valleys and high passes, in addition to the birds nothing quite prepares one for the sheer abundance of jaw-dropping spectacular scenery. We focussed on three main areas with different elevations, habitats and specialities; the Margalla Hills on the outskirts of the capital, the forests of Shogran in the Kaghan Valley, and the Naltar Valley tucked away among the mountains of Gilgit Baltistan, split by the mighty Indus and the Karakorum Highway that bisect the Karakorum and Himalayan ranges. Our main targets were the White-cheeked Bushtit, Orange Bullfinch and the Long-billed Bush Warbler, all of which were seen well despite their scarcity and high chance of missing them. In addition, we saw other Western Himalayan specialities such as Black-headed Jay, Scaly-bellied, Brown-fronted and Himalayan Woodpeckers, Slaty-headed Parakeet, Kashmir and White-cheeked Nuthatch, Western Crowned, Tytler's and Brook's Leaf Warblers, Variegated and Streaked Laughingthrushes, Rufous-naped Tit, White-throated Bushtit, Rusty-tailed Flycatcher, Black and Yellow Grosbeak, Pink-browed and Blyth's Rosefinch.

We began our tour in baking hot Islamabad with a splendid lunch at a Kabuli restaurant selected by our guide Abdul. As we stepped outside, we were met by torrential rain! We headed up to our first birding site, and once the rain had stopped, we enjoyed a nice temperate walk, along a trail at the foot of the Margalla Hills. We found Grey-winged Blackbirds singing in competition, a Blue-throated Blue Flycatcher in fine voice, and a confiding Black-chinned Babbler. A Peregrine sat in a clifftop bush, plus we saw Eurasian Hobby, Purple Sunbird, Grey-hooded Warblers, Indian White-eye, Black-rumped Flameback and Pied Bushchat.

Stepping up a gear, the next morning we drove up to the ridge of the Margalla Hills at 1200m. Pausing on the top we saw Scaly-bellied Woodpecker, and a vocal Jacobin Cuckoo flew by. Further along the ridge we stopped to walk down a nice trail, and almost the first bird we met was our main target here – White-cheeked Bushtit! We spent a while watching a pair of them here as they gave obligingly close views. Often a tricky bird to find, they were the only ones we found all morning. Next, we found a pair of Chestnut-bellied Nuthatches, then a lovely lemon-headed Brown-fronted Woodpecker with two juveniles in attendance. Along the trail we also found a quartet of Black-headed Jays lurking in the pines, vocal Himalayan and Grey-breasted Prinias, Blue-capped Rock Thrushes carrying food to unseen nests, Yellow-breasted Greenfinch, a curious Rusty-cheeked Scimitar Babbler, Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker, Common Woodshrike and Long-tailed Minivets. This filled our morning nicely, and as the heat built up, we paused for lunch in a well-

positioned restaurant, with a panorama of the urban plain of Islamabad and Rawalpindi stretched out below us. We sat in the shade of the ridge-top pines and watched Yellow-throated Sparrows and Indian White-eyes, and a Crested Honey Buzzard flew by,

Next, we headed down to Rawal Lake, a large reservoir on the edge of town. A walk around the scrubby shores yielded Indian Robins, a Common Babbler and a Long-tailed Shrike, and from a different viewpoint we could study the shores of the lake itself. We found Clamorous Reed Warbler, Blue-tailed Bee-eaters, Indian Pied Myna, Brahminy Starlings, White-browed Wagtail, Streak-throated and Wire-tailed Swallows, Pied and Common Kingfishers, scores of Glossy Ibis, Little Egrets, a single Eurasian Spoonbill, Northern Shoveler and Northern Pintail, Common Greenshank and Black-winged Stilts.

Another hour or two on the lower slopes of the Margalla Hills in the early morning produced a flock of five White-cheeked Bushtits that sat up nicely in a bare tree, plus we had more good views of Blue-throated Blue Flycatcher, and another flyby Jacobin Cuckoo. After breakfast we hit the 6-lane highway (a new addition since my last visit!) that quickly and smoothly took us to Mansehra and from there we followed minor roads up into the Kaghan Valley. We stopped for lunch overlooking the rushing Kunhar river, and a couple of roadside birding stops along the way produced a White-eyed Buzzard, some showy White-capped Buntings and a very lively Grey-bellied Cuckoo. We ascended the road out of the valley up towards Shogran and made a short walk along a forested track where we saw Himalayan Woodpecker drumming on a large dead tree, Yellow-billed Magpie and Verditer Flycatcher, before a thunderstorm rolled in and we scuttled back to the bus. The rain dampened any birding for the rest of the afternoon, though our collective efforts around the hotel yielded Russet Sparrow, Grey Bushchat, Streaked Laughingthrush and some Slaty-headed Parakeets.

We boarded jeeps in the early morning and bounced our way up a truly horrendous rutted muddy track through coniferous forest, to reach the higher elevation forests of Seri Paya. A beautiful mountain vista surrounded us from our position at 3100m, and birds filled the roadside bushes. Variegated Laughingthrush, Spot-winged Tits (now lumped in Coal Tit!), a pair of Fire-capped Tits, a single White-throated Bushtit, Rock Bunting and Black and Yellow Grosbeak, and a range of *Phylloscopus* Warblers that included Lemon-rumped, Hume's, Western Crowned, Brook's and Tytler's. Along a trail to a clearing, we found Ultramarine Flycatcher, Indian Blue Robin, a pair of Pink-browed Rosefinch, plus White-throated Needletail, Asian House Martin and Common Swift overhead. Back up on the track we slowly ambled along, dodging the numerous jeeps loaded with local tourists that were coming up and down, and eventually found a pair of Orange Bullfinch perched up, long enough for us to get a good look before they flew back to the steep forest. Hurrah! We ate a packed lunch overlooking a small lake, and worked our way back to Shogran where in the late afternoon we circled the village trying to find more birds. The busy nature of this once tranquil settlement rather thwarted our efforts, until we bumped into a male Orange Bullfinch close to our hotel! It disappeared fairly quickly, and further attempts to relocate it were unsuccessful, but we found Green-backed and Cinereous Tits together, Verditer Flycatchers, Yellow-breasted Greenfinch, Russet Sparrows, Ashy Drongo, Streaked Laughingthrush, and a friendly Kashmir Nuthatch.

Back up the bumpy track once more, we began our day birding around the meadow topped ridge. We found Golden Bush Robin, several Pink-browed Rosefinch, Black and Yellow Grosbeak, Hodgson's Treecreeper and several White-throated Bushtits. Dropping onto the jeep track we found it to be quieter than the previous day, but we found Rufous-naped tit, Ultramarine

Flycatcher, and the full suite of *Phylloscopus* Warblers. It was hot and bright, and soon the jeep traffic became unbearable so we headed back downhill for lunch. In the afternoon we explored some excellent forest habitat below the town however it was remarkably quiet, though we had an excellent view of Brown-flanked Bush Warbler, plus a couple of Alpine Swifts with the Common Swifts.

Another go up the jeep track on our last morning, once we had persuaded the reluctant gatekeeper to let us through. The lead jeep surprised a male Kalij Pheasant off the track, which disappeared quickly uphill. Starting at the top we walked down, enjoying the peace before the jeeps appeared. We found Bar-tailed and Hodgson's Treecreepers, Fire-capped Tit, Green Shrike Babbler, Greenish Warbler, Himalayan Griffon, Booted Eagle and a whole suite of good birds that we enjoyed second and third looks at. Returning at midday, it was time to move on and head up the valley to our night stop at Naran, with stops on the way providing Brown Dipper, Plumbeous and White-capped Redstarts, Blue Whistling Thrush and Masked Wagtail. We reached our hotel set on a steep forested slope, and a short walk in the late afternoon provided some excellent birding, with Rusty-tailed Flycatcher singing his melancholy melody, a pair of Red-billed Leiothrix and a superbly showy White-bellied Redstart.

A long travelling day followed, and one that took me into terra nova. The Babusar Pass had just opened for the summer, and we made an early start to head up there. Driving through endless vistas of mountain scenery, through snow canyons where the road had been dug through five-metre-high winter accumulations, along the roadsides were smart black-backed *calcarata* Citrine Wagtails, Plain Mountain Finches, dapper looking Horned Larks, and a Long-tailed Marmot sat on a rock. We reached the pass at 4170m, with stunning snowy views all around, then dropping steeply through mountain villages until we met the Karakoram Highway along the mighty Indus at Chilas. A very different habitat here, in the hot and dry rain-shadow desert along the Indus gorge. Little stirred except our first Variable Wheatear on a roadside wire, then a nice Hume's Wheatear that sat panting among the rocks. We headed upriver through a vast mountain landscape, pausing for photos of great mountains and rivers, and ate lunch in a roadside oasis where a Tickell's Thrush sang from a neighbouring garden. Onwards past Gilgit via a new road bypassing the sprawl of the town, a vastly different place to that which I once knew! We drove beside the Hunza river to Nomal, followed by a steep climb up to the Naltar valley. A couple of roadside stops provided Hume's Lesser Whitethroat, Indian Golden Oriole, a female Pied Wheatear and two Golden Eagles. Reaching our hotel in Naltar, we settled in to this scenic and peaceful mountain valley, and a pre-dinner foray around the hotel met Mountain Chiffchaff and Common Rosefinches, Red-fronted Serin and Grey-headed Goldfinch.

We went for a pre-breakfast walk around our hotel, finding Himalayan Rubythroat and Tickell's Leaf Warbler, and at the very edge of our hearing range a distant clicking sound drew our attention. Long-billed Bush Warbler! We headed towards the sound and found the bird some 300m away singing from the tops of buckthorn on a scrubby bank. The only problem was it was across the Naltar river, about 80m away! It was very showy nevertheless, moving song perches along the length of its territory. A Birdquest lifer! Lost between my own sightings here in 1996 and being re-found here in 2022, this a rare bird indeed. And audible from our well-appointed hotel! You lucky people! It is clearly in trouble, and it will be interesting to find out how a wider survey by Pakistani ornithologists later on this summer progresses.

Thrilled to have acquired our main target, we were free to enjoy the bright Common Rosefinches and Siberian Stonechats that were common here, Red-fronted Serins and Streaked

Laughingthrushes that bounded around the fields. After breakfast we crossed the river to try and find more Bush Warblers, but scouring an area of fields drew a blank. We found two pairs of Blyth's Rosefinch that were lurking around the forest edge, a pallid Mountain Weasel appeared among the fields, plus we saw a male Blue-capped Redstart, White-cheeked Nuthatch and Bar-tailed Treecreeper. We found our way to where 'our' Long-billed Bush Warbler was and had some brief looks before he hid himself away from the midday sun, plus a vocal Eurasian Wryneck appeared in nearby pines.

Later on, we explored further up this scenic valley, finding singing Tytler's Leaf Warbler, and in scrubby areas Tickell's Warblers sang and Himalayan Rubythroats were incredibly showy. A Mistle Thrush sang from a treetop, a reminder of home here at the furthest extremity of its range.

The next day we began with the star bird, the Long-billed Bush Warbler. He was already singing away from the tops of the bushes when we arrived at the spot, and we enjoyed a relaxed hour watching this mega rarity. After breakfast we took another bumpy jeep ride up the valley, to the head of the valley at 3250m where small lakes nestled among the drumlins and glacial debris. Stopping on the way up we had a great look at a male Blyth's Rosefinch, plus some showy Hume's Leaf Warblers. At the end of the road, we walked through ancient birches along the shallow river. The birds were not in abundance up here, but we enjoyed a stunning Citrine Wagtail (the lovely *calcarata* race), a fine vocal Greenish Warbler or two and some Western House Martins. We ate our packed lunch surrounded by stupendous mountain scenery, then worked our way back down the valley, seeing some much-appreciated Snow Pigeons as we went. A last search among the conifers produced a Eurasian Wryneck and a Scaly-bellied Woodpecker, and a final check of the fields failed to produce any more Long-billed Bush Warblers. A Lammergeier cruised along a distant mountain slope, along with a swirling flock of Alpine Chough.

A long journey awaited us, though with a late change to enhance our birding and shorten our travelling time. We said goodbye to our friendly hosts at Naltar, and headed downhill to the Hunza river valley, with stops on the way producing some gorgeous Indian Golden Orioles and a pair of Tickell's Thrush around some village cultivation, plus our first Blue Rock Thrush of the trip. Joining the Karakoram highway near Gilgit, we sped along the good road, making stops to view the Gilgit river joining the Indus, and to take group photos against a backdrop of Nanga Parbat, ninth highest mountain in the world. We found a pair of European Bee-eaters (at the south-eastern limit of their range) in the dry zone along the Indus, before we turned off the KKH and headed back up to the Babusar Pass. We ate a picnic near the top just as it started raining and sleeting, but it quickly cleared and we slowly birded our way down the other side. We found a splendid *cashmieriensis* white-bellied race of White-throated Dipper, the only Sulphur-bellied Warbler of the trip, plenty of *calcarata* Citrine Wagtails, Plain Mountain Finch, Rufous-breasted Accentor and Asian House Martins. A Rosy Pipit entertained us as it sang and made parachuting songflights from a roadside slope, and big woolly Long-tailed Marmots ran about on the slopes wagging their tails. We rolled into Naran and our accommodation in the early evening, content with a great day of birds and mountain vistas.

Last day birding always has extra potency for me, when the impending return home seems very close, and every bird is studied and appreciated. On our last morning, we ascended the steep and partly snow-covered gully behind our hotel, until our aching legs and panting breath brought us to a halt among the flowering bushes and ancient conifers. Chestnut Thrushes hopped around, Lemon-rumped and Hume's Warblers zipped about in the Vibernum, and a lively Variegated Laughingthrush sang strongly at the forest edge. Indian Blue Robins were loud but mostly unseen,

unlike a male White-bellied Redstart that seemed so curious for just a few tongue clicks. A Koklass Pheasant male called once from the thick forest above, Rusty-tailed and Slaty-backed Flycatchers sang from the bushes. Even from the hotel yard we watched Russet Sparrows, Grey-faced Goldfinch, Masked Wagtail and Rock Bunting. Then it was time to head for the capital, winding our way down the Kunhar river valley, with White-capped Redstart giving way to White-capped Bunting and Himalayan Prinia, finishing up with a pair of European Roller that gave us a terrific show as they sat on wires and treetops *below* us, glowing in the mid-morning Himalayan sun.

Hello to hot Islamabad, we paused in comfort here for a few hours before heading our separate ways, happy with a thrilling trip to a spectacular part of the world that is home to some really great birds. A special thanks to Abdul for guiding us effortlessly on this trouble-free trip. Improved roads and accommodation make for a comfortable tour, and as long as you don't mind hopping up and down a few steep Himalayan slopes, it's a great destination for the mountain-loving birder!

SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED DURING THE TOUR

Species marked with the diamond symbol (◊) are either endemic to the country or local region or considered 'special' birds for some other reason (e.g., it is only seen on one or two Birdquest tours; it is difficult to see across all or most of its range; the local form is endemic or restricted-range and may in future be treated as a full species).

The species names and taxonomy used in the bird list follows Gill, F., Donsker, D., & Rasmussen, P. (Eds). **2024. IOC World Bird List (v14.1)**.

Where the subspecies seen is/are known, these are often given in parentheses at the end of the species comment.

BIRDS

Northern Shoveler *Spatula clypeata* A few at Rawal Lake.

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta* Three with the above.

Koklass Pheasant ◊ *Pucrasia macrolopha* Heard only, at Naran on our final morning.

Kalij Pheasant *Lophura leucomelanos* Two males shot off the track at Shogran.

Black Francolin *Francolinus francolinus* A calling bird at Margalla was seen flying off downhill.

White-throated Needletail *Hirundapus caudacutus* Four seen at Shogran, passing at some speed.

Alpine Swift *Tachymarpis melba* A couple at Shogran, a larger flock further along the Kaghan valley

Common Swift *Apus apus* Nice to see plenty of these over the mountains and valleys.

Little Swift *Apus affinis* Seen over Islamabad.

Greater Coucal *Centropus sinensis* A single at Rawal Lake.

Jacobin Cuckoo (Pied C) *Clamator jacobinus* A couple seen in the Margalla Hills.

Asian Koel *Eudynamis scolopaceus* A few seen in Islamabad.

Grey-bellied Cuckoo ♦ ***Cacomantis passerinus*** Great views of a lively male in the Kaghan Valley.

Common Hawk-Cuckoo *Hierococcyx varius* Heard only, at Margalla Hills.

Lesser Cuckoo *Cuculus poliocephalus* Heard only, near Shogran.

Himalayan Cuckoo *Cuculus saturatus* Heard only, near Shogran.

Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* Heard only, near Shogran.

Rock Dove *Columba livia*

Snow Pigeon ♦ ***Columba leuconota*** A quartet of birds flew over in the Naltar Valley.

Oriental Turtle Dove *Streptopelia orientalis*

Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*

Spotted Dove *Spilopelia chinensis*

Laughing Dove *Spilopelia senegalensis*

Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*

White-breasted Waterhen *Amaurornis phoenicurus*

Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*

Red-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus indicus*

Common Sandpiper *Actitis hypoleucos*

Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* At Rawal Lake.

Steppe Gull (Lesser Black-backed G) *Larus (fuscus) barabensis* A poorly looking bird at Rawal Lake.

Little Cormorant *Microcarbo niger*

Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* 73 counted at Rawal Lake.

Eurasian Spoonbill *Platalea leucorodia* A single at Rawal Lake.

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*

Indian Pond Heron *Ardeola grayii*

Eastern Cattle Egret *Bubulcus coromandus*

Great Egret *Ardea alba*

Black-winged Kite *Elanus caeruleus* Non-leader.

Bearded Vulture (Lammergeier) *Gypaetus barbatus* A single distant bird patrolling a vast rockface at Naltar.

Crested Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus* Singles seen at Margalla and Shogran.

Himalayan Vulture (H Griffon) *Gyps himalayensis* A few fine examples seen near Shogran.

Booted Eagle *Hieraetus pennatus* About five in all seen around Shogran.

Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* Two seen soaring high over the mountains as we ascended the Naltar Valley.

Shikra *Accipiter badius* Several singles seen along our route.

Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* A single seen near Naran.

Black Kite *Milvus migrans* Common around Islamabad, a single in the Kaghan Valley.

White-eyed Buzzard ♠ *Butastur teesa* One or more near Balakot in the Kaghan Valley.

Collared Owlet *Taenioptynx brodiei* Heard only.

Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops* Seen on five days of the tour.

Indian Roller *Coracias benghalensis* Two seen at Rawal Lake.

European Roller *Coracias garrulus* Superb views of these gorgeous birds at the roadside on our last morning.

White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis*

Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis*

Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis* A couple at Rawal Lake.

Blue-tailed Bee-eater *Merops philippinus* A few seen at Rawal Lake.

European Bee-eater *Merops apiaster* A pair in the Indus valley dry-zone near Chilas, at the very edge of their breeding range.

Great Barbet *Psilopogon virens* Seen in the Margalla Hills and also at Shogran.

Blue-throated Barbet *Psilopogon asiaticus* Fairly common by voice around the Margalla Hills.

Eurasian Wryneck *Jynx torquilla* Two singing birds in the conifers in the Naltar Valley, also heard as we passed close to Gilgit.

Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker *Yungipicus canicapillus* Two seen in the Margalla Hills were a write-in.

Brown-fronted Woodpecker *Dendrocoptes auriceps* Several seen in the Margalla Hills included some attendant juveniles.

Himalayan Woodpecker ♦ ***Dendrocopos himalayensis*** A few sightings around Shogran, with one nest found in the town with begging juveniles audible within.

Scaly-bellied Woodpecker ♦ ***Picus squamatus*** Several seen in the Margalla Hills, also found at Nomal and Naltar.

Black-rumped Flameback *Dinopium benghalense* A single in the Margalla Hills.

Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*

Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo* A single in the Margalla Hills, two sightings at Shogran.

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* A perched bird on our first afternoon at Margalla Hills.

Slaty-headed Parakeet ♦ ***Psittacula himalayana*** Non-leader, four birds flew over Shogran village.

Common Woodshrike *Tephrodornis pondicerianus* A vocal bird seen in the Margalla Hills.

Long-tailed Minivet *Pericrocotus ethologus*

Green Shrike-babbler *Pteruthius xanthochlorus* A pair seen well at Seri Paya.

Indian Golden Oriole *Oriolus kundoo* Some lovely examples in the northern valleys, particularly around Nomal.

Ashy Drongo *Dicrurus leucophaeus*

Black Drongo *Dicrurus macrocercus*

White-throated Fantail *Rhipidura albicollis* A few seen in the Margalla Hills.

Indian Paradise Flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradisi* Non-leader, a male at Margalla Hills.

Long-tailed Shrike *Lanius schach*

Black-headed Jay ♦ ***Garrulus lanceolatus*** A quartet lurking in the pines in the Margalla Hills.

Yellow-billed Blue Magpie *Urocissa flavirostris* Regular sightings in the forests around Shogran.

Rufous Treepie *Dendrocitta vagabunda*

Grey Treepie *Dendrocitta formosae* A couple of brief sightings in the Margalla Hills.

Eurasian Magpie *Pica pica* Seen from Naran northwards, plenty in the Naltar valley. Race *bactriana*.

Red-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax* Just two seen, in the Naltar Valley.

Alpine Chough *Pyrrhocorax graculus* Flocks of 25+ swirling around the high crags in the Naltar Valley.

House Crow *Corvus splendens*

Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos* Many seen, race *intermedius* here.

Northern Raven *Corvus corax* A pair at Babusar, race *tibetanus*.

Fire-capped Tit ♦ ***Cephalopyrus flammiceps*** A pair seen on our first morning at Seri Paya, also on our third morning.

Rufous-naped Tit ♦ ***Periparus rufonuchalis*** Quite a few seen from Shogran to Naltar, a Western Himalayan and Central Asian speciality.

Spot-winged Tit ♦ ***Periparus [ater] melanolophus*** Common in the Shogran forests. Hard to see how this is a Coal Tit!

Cinereous Tit *Parus cinereus*

Green-backed Tit *Parus monticolus* A single at Shogran.

Crested Lark *Galerida cristata* A couple of leader-only sightings from the bus.

Horned Lark *Eremophila alpestris* A few seen around the Babusar Pass on our first crossing, race *longirostris*.

Black Bulbul *Hypsipetes leucocephalus*

Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer*

Himalayan Bulbul *Pycnonotus leucogenys* Very common in the Margalla Hills.

Eurasian Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne rupestris* A single seen along the KKH near Gilgit.

Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*

Wire-tailed Swallow *Hirundo smithii* A pair attending a nest at Rawal Lake.

Western House Martin *Delichon urbicum* At least five by Satrangi Lake, Naltar, a good ID exercise to discern it from the following species.

Asian House Martin *Delichon dasypus* A couple at Seri Paya, and a sizable flock seen close to the Babusar Pass.

Red-rumped Swallow *Cecropis daurica* Several in the Margalla Hills, a few in the Kaghan Valley.

Streak-throated Swallow *Petrochelidon fluvicola* Nice to see these swirling around our Islamabad hotel, perched views acquired at a service area near Mansehra.

Brown-flanked Bush Warbler *Horornis fortipes* We had good looks at a lively songster at Shogran.

White-cheeked Bushtit ♦ *Aegithalos leucogenys* Definitely a missable bird, we were successful in finding it in two areas in the Margalla Hills, with a confiding pair on the ridge top, and a flock of five close to the city on 'Trail 3'. A bird with a range restricted to northern Pakistan and adjacent Afghanistan.

Black-throated Bushtit *Aegithalos concinnus* Just one seen, near Shogran.

White-throated Bushtit ♦ *Aegithalos niveogularis* Another western Himalayan endemic, we saw many in the high forests at Seri Paya.

Hume's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus humei* Good looks at these in several locations.

Brooks's Leaf Warbler ♦ *Phylloscopus subviridis* A bit hard to pick out as they weren't vocal, a small number at Shogran.

Lemon-rumped Warbler *Phylloscopus chloronotus* Numerous in the high forests at Shogran, also by our Naran hotel.

Tytler's Leaf Warbler ♦ *Phylloscopus tytleri* A few individuals seen at Shogran; a singing bird found at Naltar.

Sulphur-bellied Warbler *Phylloscopus griseolus* After not being able to find this at Naltar, we had a good look at one on a bare rocky slope near Babusar.

Tickell's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus affinis* Quite common in the Naltar Valley, singing from scattered bushes.

Mountain Chiffchaff ♦ *Phylloscopus sindianus* A few in the Naltar valley, looking and sounding rather different to its European cousin.

Whistler's Warbler *Phylloscopus whistleri* A bird at the very western edge of its range, we saw a couple of these in the Shogran area.

Greenish Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides* Two or three found in the Naltar Valley and another at Shogran, quite big and dapper looking.

Western Crowned Warbler ♦ *Phylloscopus occipitalis* Our constant companion in the hill forests.

Grey-hooded Warbler *Phylloscopus xanthoschistos*

Clamorous Reed Warbler (Indian R W) *Acrocephalus [stentoreus] brunnescens*

Long-billed Bush Warbler ♦ *Locustella major* What a great bird! Demure in plumage but quite lively and showy as it sang from a scrubby bank by the Naltar river, and what a song! So loud we could hear it from 300m distance! It seems that last year it was recorded near K2 basecamp, so hopefully they persist in remote mountain valleys. A survey later this summer by Pakistani ornithologists will try to locate more.

Himalayan Prinia *Prinia crinigera* Quite noisy in the Margalla Hills and also in parts of the Kaghan Valley. Used to be called Striated Prinia, now split between this and Striped Prinia of China.

Grey-breasted Prinia *Prinia hodgsonii*

Plain Prinia *Prinia inornata*

Common Tailorbird *Orthotomus sutorius* Heard only.

Hume's Lesser Whitethroat *Curruca [curruca] althaea* Only seen in one place on our way up to the Naltar valley.

Indian White-eye *Zosterops palpebrosus*

Black-chinned Babbler *Cyanoderma pyrrhops* A few in the bushes in the Margalla Hills.

Rusty-cheeked Scimitar Babbler *Erythrogenys erythrogenys* Great looks at one in the Margalla Hills.

Streaked Laughingthrush *Trochalopteron lineatum* An endearing addition to the avifauna, we found plenty in the mountain valleys, bounding about like big Dunnocks!

Variiegated Laughingthrush ♦ ***Trochalopteron variegatum*** A fine looking bird, vocal and showy in the Shogran forests and also at Naran.

Red-billed Leiothrix *Leiothrix lutea* A scolding pair near our Naran hotel.

Jungle Babbler *Argya striata*

Common Babbler *Argya caudata* A single in the scrub around Rawal Lake.

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*

Eurasian Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*

White-cheeked Nuthatch ♦ ***Sitta leucopsis*** Quite a few seen in the high forests around Shogran and also in the Naltar Valley, restless and almost comical in its manner. This has a range restricted to the mountains between Northern Pakistan and western Nepal.

Kashmir Nuthatch ♦ ***Sitta cashmirensis*** An obliging example in the conifers near our Shogran hotel.

Chestnut-bellied Nuthatch *Sitta cinnamoventris* A pair found in the Margalla Hills were a write-in.

Hodgson's Treecreeper *Certhia hodgsoni* Good looks at this species at Seri Paya.

Bar-tailed Treecreeper ♦ ***Certhia himalayana*** A few up around the Shogran forests, with one nest site found. Also, one at Naltar.

Bank Myna *Acridotheres ginginianus* A few in the Islamabad area.

Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*

Indian Pied Myna *Gracupica contra* A couple seen at Rawal Lake.

Brahminy Starling *Sturnia pagodarum* A few around Islamabad.

Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus* Singing from a treetop in the Naltar Valley.

Grey-winged Blackbird *Turdus boulboul* At least three males found having a sing-off in the Margalla Hills.

Tickell's Thrush ♦ *Turdus unicolor* A male and a female seen at Nomal, with others heard singing there and by the KKH.

Chestnut Thrush ♦ *Turdus rubrocanus* Lovely songsters at Shogran and by our Naran hotel where we had some excellent views.

Oriental Magpie-Robin *Copsychus saularis*

Indian Robin *Copsychus fulicatus* A few examples around Rawal Lake.

Dark-sided Flycatcher *Muscicapa sibirica*

Verditer Flycatcher *Eumyias thalassinus*

Blue-throated Blue Flycatcher *Cyornis rubeculoides* Some nice examples around the Margalla Hills.

White-bellied Redstart *Luscinia phaenicuroides* Stunning close views by our Naran hotel.

Himalayan Rubythroat (White-tailed R) *Calliope pectoralis* Not uncommon in the Naltar Valley, we had some superb close views of them there.

Blue Whistling Thrush *Myophonus caeruleus*

Indian Blue Robin *Larvivora brunnea* A loud song usually betrayed this fellows whereabouts in the undergrowth, not uncommon at Shogran and also seen at Naran.

Slaty-blue Flycatcher *Ficedula tricolor*

Ultramarine Flycatcher *Ficedula superciliaris* Not uncommon in the high forests around Shogran.

Rusty-tailed Flycatcher ♦ *Ficedula ruficauda* Only found by our hotel at Naran, one seen of at least three singing.

Golden Bush Robin *Tarsiger chrysaeus* A single female seen at Seri Paya.

Himalayan Bluetail ♦ *Tarsiger rufilatus* Fairly common around Seri Paya and Shogran.

Blue-capped Redstart ♦ *Phoenicurus coeruleocephala* A single male showed well at Naltar.

Plumbeous Water Redstart *Phoenicurus fuliginosus*

White-capped Redstart (River-Chat) *Phoenicurus leucocephalus*

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros* Common at higher elevations and in the Naltar Valley, race *phaenicuroides*.

Blue-capped Rock Thrush *Monticola cinclorhyncha* Some nice examples of both sexes seen in the Margalla Hills.

Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius* One at Nomal and a couple on the slopes of the Babusar Pass.

Grey Bush Chat *Saxicola ferreus*

Pied Bush Chat *Saxicola caprata*

Siberian Stonechat *Saxicola maurus*

Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka* A female carrying food was seen on our way up the Naltar Valley.

Variable Wheatear ♦ ***Oenanthe picata*** A few sightings between Chilas and Nomal, in the hot rocky valley bottoms.

Hume's Wheatear ♦ ***Oenanthe albonigra*** A single bird seen in the dry zone near Chilas.

White-throated Dipper *Cinclus cinclus* One, probably two white-bellied birds at Babusar, race *cashmiriensis*.

Brown Dipper *Cinclus pallasii* A few seen on the rivers in high country.

Purple Sunbird *Cinnyris asiaticus*

Yellow-throated Sparrow *Gymnoris xanthocollis* Common and vocal in the Margalla Hills.

Russet Sparrow *Passer cinnamomeus* Plenty around Shogran town, also at Naran.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*

Rufous-breasted Accentor *Prunella strophiate* A handsome addition to the high forests, seen at Shogran and the Naltar Valley and also on the Babusar Pass.

Citrine Wagtail *Motacilla citreola* Rather common along the roadsides above 3000m and up around the approaches to the Babusar Pass. Also, on the lakes in the Naltar Valley.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*

White Wagtail (Masked W) *Motacilla [alba] personata* Seen fairly often around the north, with an intergrade with *M. a. alboides* seen by our Naran hotel.

White-browed Wagtail *Motacilla maderaspatensis* A single at Rawal Lake.

Rosy Pipit *Anthus roseatus* A nice pink example singing from a roadside slope near the Babusar Pass.

Black-and-yellow Grosbeak ♦ ***Mycerobas icteroides*** Often heard from the tall conifers and occasionally seen, at Shogran and Seri Paya.

Orange Bullfinch ♦ ***Pyrrhula aurantiaca*** A huge relief to find a pair in the forest at Seri Paya, with a good look that only left us wanting more. Remarkably we found a male close to our hotel that

same afternoon, but he didn't hang around for long either. Despite another two mornings spent searching we could not find any more. A rare bird indeed.

Spectacled Finch ♦ *Callacanthis burtoni* Heard only, on one occasion at Seri Paya.

Plain Mountain Finch *Leucosticte nemoricola*

Common Rosefinch *Carpodacus erythrinus* Common at Naltar, of the brightly coloured *ferganensis* race.

Blyth's Rosefinch ♦ *Carpodacus grandis* Some excellent looks at these big-headed birds, with a couple of males that posed well in all their pinkness. A distinctive chap.

Pink-browed Rosefinch ♦ *Carpodacus rodochroa* Not uncommon around the high meadow and forest at Seri Paya.

Yellow-breasted Greenfinch *Chloris spinoides*

Grey-capped Goldfinch *Carduelis [carduelis] caniceps* Same same but different, these birds are strikingly different to our birds at home. We found them from Naran northwards.

Red-fronted Serin ♦ *Serinus pusillus* Numerous and quite tame around the village fields in the Naltar Valley.

Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia*

White-capped Bunting ♦ *Emberiza stewarti* Good looks at males singing from wires along the Kunhar river valley.

MAMMALS

Small Indian Mongoose *Urva auropunctata* A couple at Rawal Lake, also another in the Margalla Hills that may have been this species.

Yellow-throated Marten *Martes flavigula* A quick look at one that crossed the track while we were having a group photo!

Mountain Weasel (Pale W) *Mustela altaica* A splendid little fellow in the Naltar Valley that posed just long enough for a photo to help with ID. Probably the only 'bird-or-mammal' lifer for the leader!

Rhesus Macaque *Macaca mulatta*

Northern Palm Squirrel *Funambulus pennantii*

Long-tailed Marmot *Marmota caudata* Some real big beasts romping about on the slopes of the Babusar Pass on our return, wagging their tails like friendly dogs.