

First record of Grey Nightjar *Caprimulgus indicus jotaka/hazarae* from the Nicobar Islands, India

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The Grey Nightjar *Caprimulgus indicus* is either variously treated as a polytypic group with five subspecies (Dickinson & Remsen 2013), or is split into three species with the races *jotaka*, and *hazarae* treated under *C. jotaka* (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; del Hoyo *et al.* 2016). The subspecies *jotaka* is found in south-eastern Siberia, Japan, Korea, and much of China, wintering southwards upto Greater Sundas, and Philippines (del Hoyo *et al.* 2016). The subspecies *hazarae* occurs from north-eastern Pakistan, east across the Himalayas up to north-eastern India, Bangladesh, southern China, and south through Myanmar till Malay Peninsula (del Hoyo *et al.* 2016).

We, along with Garima Bhatia, Atul Jain, Alka Vaidya, Gururaj Moorching, and Sumathi Shekhar, conducted a birding expedition in Central, and Great Nicobar island Islands group between 11 and 26 of December 2015. While birding at Kamorta Island, Central Nicobars we came across multiple nightjars several times between the 20 and 24 of December 2015. Birds were recorded regularly on the road, between 1700–2000 hrs, and were seen close to human habitation (Table 1). During our initial sightings we tentatively identified these birds as Grey/Andaman Nightjars *C. andamanicus* since we couldn't get better views or photographs of the birds. As they were also silent, we were not able to use sound playback for vocal identification during our initial sightings.

Then, on 22 December 2015 we came upon a road-kill of a nightjar [160]. The bird was, overall, very dark [161]. It showed lighter buffy coloured ear coverts and lateral crown, and a dark grey forehead with distinct black blotches [162]; its hind-crown was lighter grey in colour with fine black streakings; wings were overall very dark with lighter coloured scapula; primaries were dark with white blotches restricted to three outermost primaries—and

thus the bird was identified as a male [163, 164]. All primaries were thinly barred rufous; the belly was overall rufous below with a more distinct rufous vent [163]; central tail feathers were dark with narrow subterminal band—these feathers were detached from the bird's body, but collected and kept separately [165].

JA procured permissions, and arranged for the frozen specimen to be sent to the Bombay Natural History Society (*henceforth*, BNHS) in Mumbai. MS carried the specimen to Mumbai where it was preserved (BNHS specimen #28997) by Vithoba Hegde of the BNHS. SD & VS compared the collected specimen with all other species of nightjars from India held in the BNHS collection. The Kamorta bird seemed much darker overall than any of the *hazarae* skins in the BNHS collection. However, all other morphological characters of the Kamorta bird matched with those of extant museum skins (166, 167; Table 2). Museum specimens showed lighter buffy coloured ear coverts and lateral crown, and a dark grey forehead with distinct black



160. Dead Grey Nightjar on the road.

Gaurav Kataria

Table 1. Grey Nightjar sightings from Kamorta, Central Nicobars.

Date	Time	Location	Latitude	Altitude	Habitat	Numbers
20 December	1800 hrs	~ 13 km from Kamorta Jetty	8.13°N, 93.51°E	26 msl	Next to small village with grassland and small forest patch	1
21 December	1700 hrs	Close to Piplilo village	8.17°N, 93.50°E	92 msl	Next to open area next to forest	1
22 December	1730 hrs	Close to Kakana village	8.17°N, 93.50°E	79 msl	Next to open area next to forest	2
23 December	1730 hrs	Close to Piplilo village	8.17°N, 93.50°E	79 msl	Next to open area next to forest	2
24 December	1700 hrs	Close to Piplilo village	8.13°N, 93.51°E	26 msl	Next to small village with grassland and small forest patch	2



161. Upper wing with wing closed.



162. Head pattern.



163. Underwing and belly.



164. Upperwing and back.



165. Central tail feathers.

Pics. Gaurav Kataria

Shashank Dalvi

blotches. They also showed some morphological measurements of *jotaka* group (Table 2). All Grey Nightjar skins, in the BNHS collection, showed thinly barred primaries, and also that the central tail feathers were dark with narrow white subterminal band, just like the Kamorta specimen. The tail of the Nicobar specimen was 8 mm shorter than the shortest tail on record amongst the BNHS specimen. However this is mainly due to the detached central tail feathers in the Kamorta bird that were not used in the measurements.

We have scrutinised all museum collection records of nightjars from the Indian Subcontinent (Deomurari *et al.* 2014), as well as the field observation data available on eBird (eBird 2016). There are only two species of nightjars recorded earlier from the Andaman & Nicobar Islands—the Grey, and the Andaman Nightjar. However not a single nightjar species was reported from the Nicobar Islands before our records in December 2015 (Kazmierczak 2000; Grimmett *et al.* 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Two photographs taken subsequently, in February 2016,

Table 2. Comparison of the morphometrics (in mm) of the Kamorta specimen with published literature.

	Length	Tarsus	Wing	Tail
del Hoyo <i>et al.</i> (2016) <i>hazarae</i> ♂♂	240–270	–	197–209	–
del Hoyo <i>et al.</i> (2016) <i>hazarae</i> ♀♀	–	–	–	–
del Hoyo <i>et al.</i> (2016) <i>jotaka</i> ♂♂	–	–	216–225	–
del Hoyo <i>et al.</i> (2016) <i>jotaka</i> ♀♀	–	–	–	–
Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) <i>hazarae</i> ♂♀	242–270	–	196–210	133–151
Ali & Ripley (1987) <i>hazarae</i> ♂♂	–	–	200–215	124–146
Ali & Ripley (1987) <i>hazarae</i> ♀♀	–	–	187–203	126–137
Abdulali (1972) <i>hazarae</i> ♂♂ (n=7)	–	15–17 (av. 15.5)	198–206 (av. 203)	120–143 (av. 132)
Abdulali (1972) <i>hazarae</i> ♀♀ (n=4)	–	–	200–214 [†]	128–137
Abdulali (1972) <i>jotaka</i> ♂ (n=1)	–	14	213	130
Vaurie (1965)* <i>hazarae</i> ♂♂	–	–	196–213 (av. 205.9)	–
Vaurie (1965)* <i>hazarae</i> ♀♀	–	–	195–216 (av. 201)	–
Vaurie (1965) <i>jotaka</i> ♂♂	–	–	208–218 (av. 215)	–
Vaurie (1965) <i>jotaka</i> ♀♀	–	–	203–217 (av. 210)	–
Kamorta specimen	250	13	210	125 [‡]

* Obtained from Abdulali (1970)

[†] Abdulali (1970) mentions a specimen he treats as ♀ *hazarae* on plumage has an exceptionally long wing (214mm). Discounting that, the range would be 200–207mm (n=3).

[‡] Central rectrices broken in this specimen and hence tail length unreliable.

exist on the Oriental Bird Images website (Kuriakose 2016); labelled *C. j. jotaka*. Thus, ours is the first record of a Grey Nightjar from the Nicobar group of islands. It is not surprising that the bird was missed by earlier collectors, as Kamorta lacked a road network within the island during the pre-tsunami era.

The Grey Nightjar is partially resident in its range. However the local and migratory movements of this species are poorly understood. *C. i. hazarae* has been recorded as far south as the Malay Peninsula. *C. i. jotaka* is highly migratory, sometimes moving in small groups: it leaves its breeding grounds between September and November, and moves south through eastern China, and possibly across the South China Sea, to winter in southern China, Indochina, and Malaysia (recorded until early May), to Sumatra (where recorded from late September till March), Java, Borneo (Sabah, Sarawak, Brunei, and Kalimantan, from early September till late March), and the Philippines. This race occasionally also reaches north-eastern India (del Hoyo *et*



166. Grey Nightjars dorsal view: Top from Central Nicobars, bottom from India.



167. Grey Nightjars ventral view: Top from Central Nicobars, bottom from India.

al. 2016). There have been couple of specimens of this subspecies collected from Andamans (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). However the birds that we observed in Central Nicobars were much darker than both these races. The wing length of *jotaka* is on an average longer than *hazarae*, though considerable overlap exists (Table 2), and our value (210 mm) is closer to the upper limit of a male *hazarae* than within the lower limits of male *jotaka*. We leave the subspecies identity as unconfirmed until more supporting material builds up. It would be interesting to study this population genetically, as well as ecologically, to ascertain if it is a migratory bird, or whether there is a resident population of nightjars

on these islands.

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