

10 March 2012 at Alibag, Maharashtra (Kawale 2012), but the photographs were not published with the note. As this note was published prior to the split made by Leader & Carey (2012), the status of *cumatilis* was also not discussed. The photographs of this Alibag bird published elsewhere (Sant *et al.* 2012) showed dark lores, cheeks, and frontal portions indicating that it was also a *C. cyanomelana* (and not *C. cumatilis*; Paul Leader, *pers. comm.*, March 2014). The second was a first winter male photographed by Andrew Foxall and others at Bandhavgarh in February 2013 (Jannes 2013); as per the trip report, the sighting was probably made on 09 February 2013. However, it is not possible to assign the Bandhavgarh bird to either *C. cyanomelana* or *C. cumatilis* on current knowledge (Paul Leader, *pers. comm.*, March 2014). A third for the Indian Subcontinent was a well-photographed male at Sinharaja Forest Reserve, Sri Lanka, just two days prior to our sighting (<http://www.ceylonbirdclub.org/>; [http://orientalbirdimages.org/search.php?Bird\\_ID=2657](http://orientalbirdimages.org/search.php?Bird_ID=2657)), which makes it three sightings in a span of three years, all of them within a month's window between 09 February and 10 March.

According to Clement & Taylor (2006) *C. cyanomelana* is a passage migrant through southern and south-eastern China between early- or mid-December to mid-February, returning to its breeding sites through Guangdong from mid- through late March, the timing matches with all the Indian Subcontinent's records. Probably, while on their return journey, a few birds take a sojourn in various islands of Andaman & Nicobar Islands complex or on the subcontinent's mainland before reaching their breeding grounds. This is the third instance, in recent years, that South-east Asian migrants have been recorded from the Andaman & Nicobar Islands during migration—the others being Mugimaki

Flycatcher *Ficedula mugimaki* (Das 2014), and Blue-winged Pitta *Pitta moluccensis* (Manchi & Kumar 2014). Perhaps regular observations during autumn and spring migration might uncover more such instances.

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## Yunnan Nuthatch *Sitta yunnanensis* from Walong, Arunachal Pradesh: A new species for South Asia

Chewang R. Bonpo & Jainy Kuriakose

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Chewang R Bonpo, Bonfarmhouse, Kewzing, South Sikkim, India. Email: [chewangrinchen@gmail.com](mailto:chewangrinchen@gmail.com)

Jainy Kuriakose, Flat 9175 Tower 9, Prestige Shantiniketan, Whitefield, Bengaluru, India. Email: [jainymaria@gmail.com](mailto:jainymaria@gmail.com)

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The Yunnan Nuthatch *Sitta yunnanensis* is a small nuthatch with a slender, slightly upturned bill, narrow supercilium, and a broad, long, black eye-stripe (del Hoyo 2008). It is endemic to China with its documented range including south-eastern Tibet, southern Sichuan, and northern Yunnan to the western extreme of Guizhou (BirdLife International 2012)—with no records from South Asia (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). The species is thought to have a very patchy distribution, and consequently, a small global population size and moderately narrow range distribution. Though locally common, numbers are declining due to habitat destruction, and therefore the species has been categorised as 'Near Threatened' by the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species (Birdlife International 2012). The unexplored hill tracts of extreme north-eastern Arunachal

Pradesh, around Walong, area have produced several new South Asian records, or confirmations of hypothetical records from the past, of bird species that are otherwise locally common across the border in China, including, Black-headed Greenfinch *Carduelis ambigua* (Dalvi 2013; Gode 2013; Singh 2013), Lord Derby's Parakeet *Psittacula derbiana* (Singh 2013), Elliot's Laughingthrush *Trochalopteron elliotii* (Dalvi 2013), Godlewski's Bunting *Emberiza godlewskii* (Gode 2013; Sharma *et al.* 2014), and Black-browed Tit *Aegithalos bonvaloti* (Sangha *et al.* 2012). Hence, it came as no surprise that we added one more species to South Asia from this tract by adding Yunnan Nuthatch.

On 13 March 2014, during our birding trip to Walong village (28°08'N, 97°01'E; Anjaw District, Arunachal Pradesh), we had a few good sightings of a nuthatch that looked entirely different

from the hitherto found nuthatches in India. It was photographed at Helmet Top (28°09'N, 97°01'E), which is 19 km away from Walong. Our first sighting was of a group of small birds calling high up in the pine trees while they moved in typical nuthatch-fashion. However, the views were mostly of silhouettes due to an overcast sky and the increasing distance. Later, as we walked down, a kilometer from the top, we came across a flock of these nuthatches, with some of them perching in front of us at eye-level, on a small tree, and giving us ample time to photograph them [139-141].

The identification of the bird was fairly straightforward, with several sharp images available in the Oriental Bird Images online database ([www.orientalbirdimages.org](http://www.orientalbirdimages.org)), with confirmation from Krys Kazmierczak (*pers. comm.*, March 2014). All the nuthatches that occur in South Asia show variable amounts of rufous or chestnut plumes with the exception of Velvet-fronted Nuthatch *S. frontalis*, and Eastern Rock Nuthatch *S. tephronota*. The former has a different upperpart plumage while the latter, extremely far from its range, and preferring a different habitat, is larger, and sports a heavier bill. The only other likely species, the Chinese Nuthatch *S. villosa*, has a dark cap which is absent in this bird. The broad black-mask, greyish-blue upper parts, small size, and whitish underparts conclusively prove that the species concerned is Yunnan Nuthatch.

The species seems to be locally common in Helmet Top. Some birds were also sighted in Tilam Top, which shares similar habitat. As there were no sightings of the species from the Walong village area, we assume the species requires a habitat defined by tall and mature pine trees with thick undergrowth of bushes, which we observed in both the hills. Probably, the entire hilly terrain of Anjaw District, lined by pine trees, may support the species. However, during our visit we noticed large areas of forest under fire, most likely due to human intervention, which might be a threat to the survival of the species. Since the species is Near Threatened, its occurrence in India is particularly significant. The new sighting record of the species in Walong area might be

an indicator of its westerly extension of its range into the state of Arunachal Pradesh and further studies of the species are required to establish its status, distribution, and range limits.

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139. Yunnan Nuthatch with its broad black mask and narrow white supercilium.

140. Yunnan Nuthatch showing the uniform white underparts.

141. Yunnan Nuthatch with greyish-blue upperparts from crown to tail.