

# Correspondence

## Homeyer's Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor homeyeri* in Ladakh

In 2020 we documented the Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor*, on three separate occasions, near Leh (34.15°N, 77.57°E) and uploaded the photographs on eBird. Later, Prasad Ganpule, and Praveen J informed PG that not all our photographs were of the subspecies *pallidirostris*, as we had presumed. Some were of the much rarer *homeyeri*.

T. A. Stanba



88. Homeyer's Great Grey Shrike (30 October) showing white wing bars extending to secondaries and white outer tail feathers.



A&B: Padma Gyalpo



89, 90. Homeyer's Great Grey Shrike (15 November) showing reduced mask, pale lores, white wing bars extending to secondaries, and white outer tail feathers.



Both: Sonam Cholden Gasha

91, 92. Homeyer's Great Grey Shrike (21 November) showing reduced mask, pale lores, and white wing bars extending to secondaries.

PG compared the pictures with Svensson et al. (2020), as well as other works (Grimmett et al. 2021). Our birds had broad white wing-bars extending till secondaries, greyish-white fore crown, white upper tail coverts contrasting with a pale grey mantle, white outer tail feathers (though it had only a single white outer tail feather rather than two), rather pale lores compared to the black mask and white supercilium above the black mask. Compared to *lahtora* from the rest of India, our birds had a restricted mask and a very pale bill, like the migrant *pallidirostris*. In flight, *pallidirostris* usually has blackish lines through the white on secondaries, which latter does not form a solid patch in our birds (Ganpule 2016: 4–5; figs. 6 & 7). Extreme pale upperparts, white rump, and much white on tail and secondaries eliminate the extralimital nominate subspecies. Though *homeyeri* sometimes shows hints of underpart barring, this is not something present in all birds, and our birds also do not have that feature.

Ganpule (2016) quoted Ali & Ripley (2001: 82) who stated that *homeyeri* is a vagrant to India, with records from Kashmir (Avantipur near Srinagar), attributed to Frank Ludlow (specimens remain untraced), and Gilgit. Identification of the Srinagar bird(s) is not discussed in Ali & Ripley (2001). In a footnote about the Gilgit bird(s), they stated that it was 'originally identified, possibly quite correctly, as *homeyeri*', but Vaurie<sup>1</sup> (1959) treated them as

<sup>1</sup> Ali & Ripley (2001: 82) do not give the year of Vaurie's publication, but under 'References' (p. 274), list Vaurie's 1959 *Palaearctic fauna*. This was the first of his two-volume work, not the second ('2'), as erroneously mentioned therein.

Table 1. Homeyer's Great Grey Shrike sightings from Leh, Ladakh

No	Site	Date	Reference
1	Shey Manla	30 October 2020	Stanba 2020 [88]
2	Shey Holy Fishpond	15 November 2020	Gyalpo 2020 [89, 90]
3	Spituk	21 November 2020	Gasha 2020 [91, 92]

*leucopterus* (often treated as synonym of *homeyeri*). Biddulph (1881) mentioned collecting one bird on 4 March 1878 (or 1879), while Scully (1881) said that it is rare in Gilgit, having obtained one on 27 November 1881. Scully's specimen is apparently in the Zoological Survey of India's collection, but has not been examined recently (Praveen J., *pers. comm.*), while Biddulph's remains untraced. There are no records of the species from the Indian side of Ladakh (Pfister 2004).

We would like to thank Prasad Ganpule for corresponding on the identity and providing details and comments on this subspecies; Praveen J for further guiding and mentoring. Thanks to two anonymous referees who confirmed the subspecies identification.

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## Two consecutive records of Wedge-tailed Shearwater *Ardena pacifica* from Belghoria and Kolaghat, an addition to the avifauna of West Bengal, and review of past records from India

Pelagic birds are blown inland by strong winds of super cyclonic storms like Amphan, which hit the coastal region of West Bengal on 20 May 2020 (De et al. 2020). A similar incident was observed in the wake of the very severe cyclonic storm Yaas, which hit coastal West Bengal on 26 May 2021.

On 28 May 2021, while scanning for coastal or pelagic birds from the banks of River Rupnarayan, near Kolaghat Bridge, Howrah (West Bengal, India; 22.44°N, 87.88°E), we observed a Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* and then one shearwater at 0900 h. The latter was flying low over the water, with fluttering wing beats. Before it rapidly disappeared upstream, we managed to get some photographs that indicated a Short-tailed Shearwater *Ardena tenuirostris*. After about 30 m, we spotted another shearwater flying low over the water; but this one looked larger, because of its long tapering tail, and a larger wingspan. It had all dark upperparts, but underparts had a little whitish plumage. It flew down river, gliding over the water awhile, before returning upstream. We observed its activity for 30-40 s through binoculars, and got some distant photographs, which confirmed its identity as a Wedge-tailed Shearwater *A. pacifica*. We waited at that spot for around two hours, but did not see any other pelagic birds. In the meantime, the tide rose and bird activity stopped.

The points favouring a Wedge-tailed Shearwater, vis-à-vis the other closely related dark shearwaters are as below [93, 98-101]. Flesh-footed Shearwater *A. carneipes* was ruled out due as the photographed bird had a dark, thin, and seemingly longer bill (versus the bi-coloured and thick bill of *carneipes*), a much longer tail, and slim, elongated looking wings (versus relatively broader wings). Short-tailed- and Sooty Shearwaters *A. grisea* were ruled out due to long tapering tail (versus noticeably short tail). Though the pictures are poor, close observation shows whitish underwings, breast, and belly, and broad dark trailing



93. Wedge-tailed Shearwater showing whitish underwings, breast and belly. Photographed on 28.5.2021



94. Wedge-tailed Shearwater, showing pale scaly edging of its back feathers. Recovered on 26.5.2021

Both: Sandip Das