

First record of Baillon's Crake *Porzana pusilla* from Tumariya Reservoir in the Corbett landscape of District Nainital, Uttarakhand

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Tumariya reservoir (29°18' N, 78°57' E) is a man-made reservoir extending across the Districts of Nainital and Udham Singh Nagar, in the State of Uttarakhand. This area falls within the jurisdiction of the Terai-West forest division, and forms part of the Corbett landscape. The Corbett Foundation (TCF) has been carrying out a regular waterfowl census programme in selected wetlands located in the Corbett landscape to estimate the population of migratory birds arriving every winter. As part of this programme, I was carrying out waterfowl census at Tumariya Reservoir on 17 February 2011, when I spotted a small crake, lightly tripping over the reeds growing near the banks of the reservoir at approximately 10:40 hrs. The observation was made in the part of the reservoir which falls within the District Nainital.

The bird was observed to have rufous-brown upperparts with extensive white markings, and buff underparts. Its beak and feet were completely green and the underparts had extensive barring, which extended down the flanks right up to the legs. The bird kept skulking among the reeds and it was extremely difficult to get a good photograph. It was after a lot of stealthy tracking that several good photographs were obtained (figure 1). It was a juvenile and kept twitching its stubby tail up from time to time. Although it was identified as a Baillon's Crake at first sight, there was still some doubt existing about whether it could also be a Little Crake. These doubts were however soon cleared up when it was observed that the projection of its primary was much shorter than that of a Little Crake. Additionally, there were no pale fringes to the tertials and scapulars. On consultation with several field guides (Grimmett *et al.* 1999, Kazmierczak 2000), as well as with experienced local naturalists, it was conclusively identified as the juvenile of a Baillon's Crake.

The Baillon's Crake is a very shy bird found in marshes, along the edges of lakes and ponds and among paddy fields (Ali 1941, Grimmett *et al.* 1999, Kazmierczak 2000). In sharp contrast to the African and Australasian populations of this species, which are non-migratory or make only local



Figure 1: Baillon's Crake in Tumariya Reservoir

movements in response to seasonal changes in their habitats, the European and Asian populations appear to be fully migratory (BirdLife International 2012). The bird is a solitary species, occurring either singly or in pairs (Ali 1941, BirdLife International 2012). It breeds in the Indian Himalayas (Grimmett *et al.* 1999). It is a passage migrant in the rest of the country during the winter (Kazmierczak 2000). There are mostly scattered individual records of sighting from the Indian mainland (Grimmett *et al.* 1999). This was the first record of the Baillon's Crake from the Corbett landscape (Sharma *et al.* 2004). Thus, this is an important sighting and will help in updating the bird checklist of Corbett. It would also hopefully influence the concerned policy makers and officers of the Terai-West forest division to extend stricter protection status to the wetland.

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