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Sighting of Northern Long-eared Owl *Asio otus* in the Teesta grasslands, Jalpaiguri, West Bengal

On 16 February 2018, during the hot midday at the Teesta grasslands (26.52°N, 88.73°E) near Jalpaiguri, West Bengal, I found an owl roosting approximately one meter above the ground, on a branch of a small, almost naked, tree that stood under the shade of a three meter high *Zizyphus* tree surrounded by tall thick grasses and thorny bushes. As I had no camera with me, I returned to the spot on 18 February at 1615 hrs and found

the owl exactly at the same spot. Without disturbing it, I was able to take some photos of the bird [82]. On 25 February, I again visited the place with Biswapriya Rahut and at 1730 hrs found the owl perched about two and a half meters above the ground, on a branch of the *Zizyphus* tree. However, it flushed and disappeared into the tall thick 'kash' *Saccharum* sp., grasses c. 100 m away. I made no further visits to the area to avoid disturbing its roost.

On comparing the photograph with standard references (Grimmett *et al.* 2011) and photographs on websites like <http://orientalbirdimages.org/>, it was clear that this was a Northern Long-eared Owl *Asio otus*. Its long, slim, heavily streaked body, orange eyes, very long black ear tufts with pale edges, two black lines between the eyes and the white lines beside the bill eliminated all other species.

The Northern Long-eared Owl is a rare, and apparently erratic winter visitor to north-western India. It has rarely reached Gujarat, western Uttaranchal, the Delhi area, Nepal, and Bhutan (Ali & Ripley 1987; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). More recently, it has been photographed in Sikkim (Ash *et al.* 2017), and further eastwards in the Mishmi Hills, Arunachal Pradesh (Kalita & Bhuyan 2015). This is the first record of this species from West Bengal, though not unexpected, given the recent observations from the eastern parts of the country.

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Jerdon's Bushlark *Mirafra affinis* in Midnapore, West Bengal

On 09 February 2018 we were birding in the Salua forest range (22.23°N, 87.28°E), Paschim Midnapore District, West Bengal when, at 1536 hrs, we spotted a lark (Alaudidae) near some bushes. Initially we thought it was a Bengal Bushlark *Mirafra assamica*. But its continuous call was quite different from that bird—with which we were familiar. We shot some pictures [83, 84] and also video-graphed the bird calling <https://www.hbw.com/ibc/video/jerdons-bushlark-mirafra-affinis/jerdons-bushlark-west-bengal-video-graphic-record-sourav>. There were two to three birds in the vicinity, with the same set of field features.

Back from the field, we worked on the identification. The pointed thick bill, spotted breast, a comparatively smaller tail and, most important, a call that was a dry metallic rattle, helped us confirm it as a Jerdon's Bushlark *M. affinis*. Next day we visited the same area, and could locate more than ten individuals of the species.

We discussed this observation with several birders like Sujan Chatterjee, Kanad Baidya, and Santanu Manna, who agreed with our identification, and confirmed its rarity in West Bengal. Jerdon's Bushlark is considered a resident in southern India and Sri Lanka extending till eastern Odisha (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Its



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82. Northern Long-eared Owl in the Teesta grasslands, Jalpaiguri, West Bengal.