

BIRDS OF
**ARAVALI
BIODIVERSITY
PARK**
GURGAON



SOURAJIT GHOSAL



iamgurgaon
Work Together. Make a Difference

Text
Sourajit Ghosal

Photos courtesy
Nitin Kumar, Pankaj Gupta, Pankaj Sharma,
Pritpal Panjeta & Vijay Dhasmana

Cover photograph and all landscape images
Vijay Dhasmana

Layout & illustrations
Aniruddha Ghosh

Aravali Biodiversity Park map
Golak Khandual

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Aravali Biodiversity Park has become a popular destination for birdwatching in the National Capital Region. *Birds of Aravali Biodiversity Park* by Sourajit Ghosal would enhance birding experience in the park.

We at iamgurgaon would like to thank Sourajit for putting together this booklet and, Aniruddha Ghosh, who has patiently designed it – thank you, Ani. The bird photographs are just stunning, and we would like to thank each photographer for their contribution: Nitin Kumar, Pankaj Gupta, Pankaj Sharma, Pritpal Panjeta and Vijay Dhasmana.

This park has been in the making for the last seven years, and needless to say, it has evolved with the support of innumerable people and corporates of Gurugram. We would like to thank the Commissioners of Municipal Corporation of Gurugram, especially Rajesh Khullar and Sudhir Rajpal, who supported the vision of the park and its development. Subsequent Commissioners, Vikas Gupta, Vikas Yadav and V.Umashankar, gave immense strength to us in converting this dream into a reality. Pradip Krishen advised and encouraged us, when we needed it most. Chetan Aggarwal, Perna Bindra, Lima Rosalind, Vinita Singh, Nisha Singh and Darshan Singh, among several others, also stood by us during our toughest times.

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Disclaimer: While every effort has been made to ensure that this booklet is free of factual errors, we would really appreciate it if you bring to our notice any inadvertent errors.



BIRDS OF ARAVALI BIODIVERSITY PARK GURGAON

SOURAJIT GHOSAL

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PREFACE

My first visit to the Aravali Biodiversity Park, Gurgaon, was in the winter of 2012. A fledgling birder, I had taken to birdwatching seriously just about then. Someone in our birding group had spotted a new habitat on the Mehrauli-Gurgaon Road, and before you could say ashycrownedsparrowlark, we had landed up at the park on a cold Sunday morning. It was a perfect day for birding – bright and crisp, with winter migrants and resident birds active in every corner. We spent the better part of that day exploring the park, amazed at the diversity of habitats it offered – large expanses of scrubland, grasses, reeds, mature trees, and rocky outcrops fencing it on two sides. This wonderful diversity naturally attracted birdlife that was just as diverse, including a few uncommon species for Delhi-NCR like, Sirkeer Malkoha, Yellow-eyed Babbler, Rufous-fronted Prinia, Indian Eagle Owl and Jungle Prinia. As introductions go, this was clearly extraordinary... And so began my love affair with the park.

An ode to the native plants of our region, nurtured painstakingly under the watchful eyes of my friend Vijay Dhasmana, the park is a credit to iamgurgaon and its vision. Over the years, this abandoned stone quarry, nestled between Gurgaon and Delhi, has become an oasis for myriads of insects, butterflies, snakes, mammals, and of course, birds.

Since that first visit, the park has become my favourite patch for birdwatching in Delhi-NCR, and I often spend long hours here just to enjoy the solitude it offers. At last count, 170 species of birds were sighted in this landscape, of which 80 of the most visible ones have been featured in these pages.

This booklet is not a field guide. It's merely an effort to introduce you to the joy of watching birds. Welcome to the flock.

Sourajit Ghosal
New Delhi
sourajit.ghosal@gmail.com

ARAVALI BIODIVERSITY PARK: A BRIEF INTRODUCTION

The Aravali Biodiversity Park (ABDP) is a city forest developed by the Municipal Corporation of Gurgaon (MCG) and Iamgurgaon (IAG), a non-profit, citizen movement. Until recently, this 380-acre rocky land in the Aravalis was mined for quartzite. Today, there are eight stone crushers lying silent in the park after the Supreme Court banned mining and stone crushing in Delhi and Gurgaon in 2004.

In the new millennium, Gurgaon was developing fast, and any open, unclaimed land was either being encroached upon or used for dumping. The area earmarked for the park faced a similar fate. It was littered with all kinds of waste – construction and development, industrial and domestic waste. The IAG team spotted this degraded land and proposed to the MCG, in 2009, to convert it into a park. The then MCG Commissioner, Rajesh Khullar, liked the idea and asked IAG to submit drawings to develop the park's infrastructure. Beautiful designs of the boundary wall, pathways, amphitheatre and parking lot were handed over to the Corporation. Soon after, MCG began the civil works under IAG's supervision.

ABDP started taking baby steps towards the nascent idea of a park. MCG, IAG, HFDC and the NGO Uthaan came forward to plant in this derelict landscape, bereft of any soil cover and infested with an exotic invasive plant, Vilayati keekar (*Prosopis juliflora*). Indiscriminate, if well-intentioned, planting began, without sparing enough thought for the character of the land.

Sudhir Rajpal, the MCG Commissioner in 2010, suggested that the corporates of Gurgaon be engaged in the planting and upkeep of the park. IAG and Uthaan came up with proposals to engage corporates and citizens in this initiative. The members of IAG were very clear that they wanted to grow native plants, so they met Pradip Krishen, author of *Trees of Delhi*, to envision and build an urban forest. Krishen, in turn, directed them to Vijay Dhasmana, an eco-restoration practitioner, who immediately set about to create a wireframe of ideas, and began to give shape and form to a park that – even in those early years – stood at a defiant distance from the standard definitions of a public 'garden'.

The vision was to bring in the forests of the Aravalis into the cityscape and to showcase them before they were lost. Haryana is rapidly losing its native species of trees to mining, encroachment, urbanisation and mindless afforestation with the invasive, exotic plant Vilayati keekar (*Prosopis juliflora*). And yet, Vijay knew fully well that together with the IAG team, he would have to cover a considerable ecological distance – from the drawing board to directing the transformation of the park into a bona fide jungle.

To begin with, all wanton planting stopped. Work began in earnest and plant lists were drawn up. The plan was to introduce a total of 200 forest species found in the northern Aravalis into the park. Unfortunately, most of these plants are not found at any nurseries; even the nurseries of the forest departments don't bother to source or grow them. Such an ambitious project therefore demanded that entire nurseries dedicated to native plants be created from scratch: eventually, the nurseries Vanja and Aranya were built with corporate support. A massive hunt for plants, seeds and cuttings was launched, and over

the years, several seed collection trips tracing the length and breadth of the Aravalis were made during the fruiting seasons.

Meanwhile, planting plans were drawn, inspired by the best forests of the northern Aravalis, such as the forests of Dhok (*Anogeissus pendula*), Salai (*Boswellia serrata*) and Babool (*Acacia nilotica*). The idea though was not just to turn the park into a woodland, but to also create diverse habitats, including grasslands, conducive to varied life forms. Year on year, the nurseries started adding species that were until then unknown to the city, to the park. Many of these seeds had travelled hundreds of kilometers to make this park a home.

Some corporates, such as Genpact, KPMG and Sentis, became champion 'doers and believers', who helped rewild ABDP after IAG took over its maintenance and development in 2012. Once the park gained popularity as a place for planting, engaging corporates employees, citizens and children, more support started pouring in. KPMG supported drip irrigation, which greatly reduced water wastage and

drudgery. DLF provided Sewage Treatment Plant (STP) water for irrigation. In the last 7 years, 53 corporates, more than 50 schools, thousands of children, citizens from all walks of life, planted about hundred thousand plants in the park. In effect, they became the main stakeholders of the park and its development.

ABDP became a large groundwater recharge zone as well, a wonderful catchment area for rainwater. In a city like Gurgaon, where the water table has receded to alarming levels, below recoupable limits, ABDP seeks to make amends.

Today, the park showcases over 400 plant species, 200 of which are rare, endangered flora of the northern Aravalis. It has also become a haven for birds thanks to its diverse habitats. Ebird.com, a globally accepted online database created by the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, where bird sightings are reported and tracked across continents in real time, has recorded 170 species in ABDP, making it one of the richest birding habitats in Delhi-NCR. Animals, such as neelgais, jackals, common palm civets, porcupines, hares, snakes, lizards and skunks, are also

thriving in the park. Most animals and birds depend heavily on insects, and the park attracts all kinds of butterflies, moths, beetles, bugs, aphids, ants and spiders.

Even as the park's landscape comes into its own as a city forest, it is thronged by hundreds of visitors every day. Naturally, ABDP has to do little to keep joggers, walkers, nature enthusiasts and photographers busy. In an effort to further enrich the visitor experience though, proper signage and interpretation panels will soon be installed.

More and more programmes to engage the city with this wilderness are taking shape. Nature walks are now common at ABDP, of course, and an active programme to engage schoolchildren in nature awareness has also been well received. Corporates too find enough opportunities at the park for team building or pure volunteering; you can often spot corporate teams cleaning the garbage, composting the leaf litter of the city, or even helping in the nursery. Held at the amphitheatre at the park, Gurgaon Utsav, a celebration of performing arts organised

by the Arts & Literature Foundation, has also become a prominent pushpin in the Millennium City's annual cultural calendar.

Even as we turn the pages of this booklet, ABDP is inching towards becoming an ecological heritage site. Of course, it may be a while before

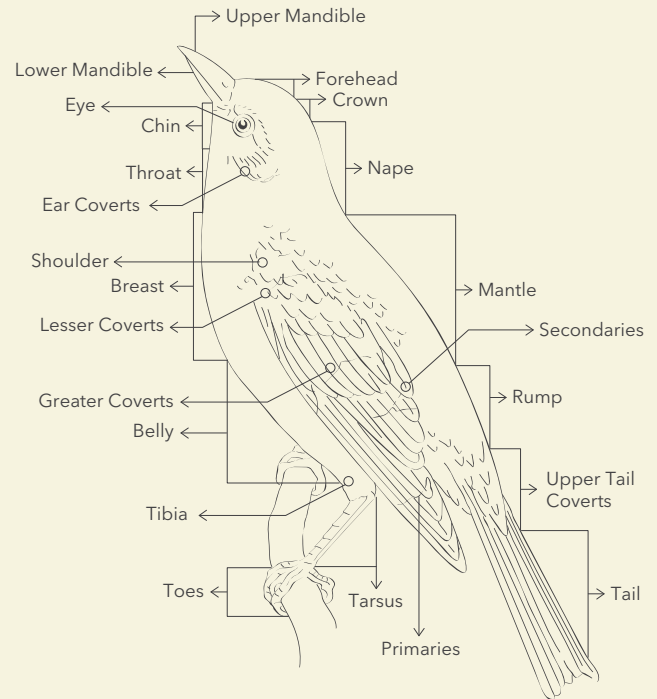
the trees and habitats reveal themselves in their full glory, and the original vision finds its natural expression. Until then though, the park will continue to spread happiness merely by existing – by being one of the few eco-restoration stories where citizens took up the challenge of bringing the forest back to the city, and succeeded.

BIRDING BASICS

“The well-being of a bird should always come first” – this is the guiding principle for all sensible birdwatchers in the field. Often, when we watch a bird, it’s busy feeding itself, looking for a companion, collecting nesting material or food for its chicks. In many cases, the bird is a breeding visitor, a rarity, or a critically endangered species, and the habitat is probably among the few that support the bird in that particular geography. Keeping this in mind, we would do well to not disturb the bird or the habitat, and observe it from a respectful distance.

1. *Go in small groups:* To ensure that there’s minimal disturbance to the habitat, and the birds display their natural behaviour, avoid birding in large flocks. A group of 3 to 4 birdwatchers is ideal.
2. *Be as quiet as possible:* Often a bird is first noticed and identified by its call. Unless you are attentive and your ears are pricked, you are likely to miss many birds. Also, rather than playing or imitating birdcalls to attract certain species, be patient and wait for the birds to make an appearance.
3. *See the birds from a distance:* You’re likely to see more if you maintain a distance, as the birds will not be alarmed or threatened by your presence. If there is a nest, please move on.
4. *Dress appropriately:* Wear earthy colours to blend in with the habitat. Choose clothing and shoes that are appropriate to the season and habitat, and carry a cap and a backpack with a water bottle, snacks and a small first-aid kit.
5. *Birding gear:* All you need are a good pair of binoculars and a field guide to help you identify the birds correctly. A camera with a decent zoom will help you take pictures of the birds for the record or for later discussions.
6. *Photograph responsibly:* The best shots are also the most unexpected, so be patient and alert. Using a flash or a noisy camera, moving as close as possible to the subject, or chasing and flushing out birds, are not the best practices.

BIRD TOPOLOGY



Oriental Honey-buzzard

Pernis ptilorhynchus



The easiest way to identify this bird of prey – pretty much the same size as a Black Kite – is by looking at its head carefully. With a head that looks oddly like a pigeon's with a small, often invisible crest, all balanced on a longish neck, it looks greyish-brown when perched on the crown of a tree. In flight, however, it can vary from dark brown to pale white. The good thing though, is that you can look for another telltale feature when it's in flight – a long and broad tail that looks like a fan, marked by two black bands in males, three in females and up to five in juveniles. And if you're still wondering where the honey in its name comes from, know that it mainly feeds on honey and the larvae of bees. What helps it brave their collective wrath? Scale-like feathers on the head to protect against their stings!

Black Kite

Milvus migrans



Once you know how to identify it, you can't go wrong with this one – certainly not when it's in flight. For it has an easily identifiable fork in its wedge-shaped tail – almost like a fishtail. Also remember that Black Kite is a misnomer, really – dark brown overall, it's not black at all. The commonest bird of prey in our region, mostly seen soaring in the sky alone or in a group, it sometimes rests in open fields and loves to stay close to human habitation, feeding on waste, mice, insects and smaller birds. A majestic flier, it's prone to gliding for long stretches of time by effortlessly maneuvering its wings and tail – a fascinating ballet in the air.

Black-winged Kite

Elanus caeruleus



This bird of prey is easy to spot. Grey and white overall with black patches on the shoulders, you're likely to find it alone on a tree, a pole or perched on electric wires. If you are carrying your binoculars, try to focus on its eyes, which are red and have a thin black line passing through them. Happy to stay put in its own territory, it hunts on mice, lizards and other reptiles. Often seen hovering with its wings arched, before swooping down on its unsuspecting prey, this predator is a delight to watch when it's hunting.

Shikra

Accipiter badius



Don't go by its size. It may appear nearly as small as a pigeon, but it's an aggressive bird of prey! Quietly perched on a branch at one moment, it swiftly attacks its kill in the next – think lizard, squirrel and smaller birds. With bluish-grey upperparts, Shikras have a pale grey stripe on the throat and fine horizontal barrings in brown on the underparts. In juveniles, this barring is more pronounced. A female Shikra's upperparts appear darker, and feminist birders will like this titbit, it's decidedly larger than the male.

White-eyed Buzzard

Butastur teesa



Size 43 cm



Pankaj Gupta

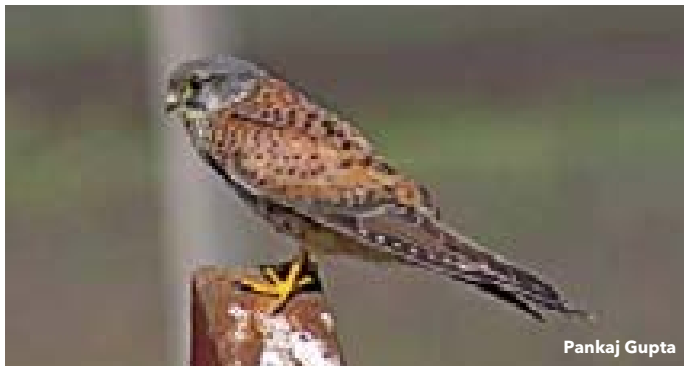
If you're lucky, you might catch this relatively small bird swooping down deftly on its prey to make a kill. Otherwise, you're likely to find it flying close to the ground with rapid wingbeats and short glides, or perched lazily on treetops, electric poles or mounds. As its name suggests, the white iris (in adults) in this greyish-brown bird (upperparts) is a key ID feature. But you must also look out for a black vertical stripe on its white throat, a white patch on the nape of its neck and barred underparts. The base of its upper bill and its legs are both orangish-yellow.

Common Kestrel

Falco tinnunculus



Size 35 cm



Pankaj Gupta

A remarkable flier, this small falcon is a winter visitor to our region. The male bird has a grey head and a reddish-brown upperbody marked with black spots. The female bird has a rufous head and nape with streakings, and the upperpart is heavily barred and spotted with black. If you are observant enough, you might also see that the male has a grey tail with a black band, whereas the female has a rufous tail with dark barrings. A true predator, this bird of prey may suddenly pause in flight, hover for a while, before it spots its prey on the ground below, swoops down on it and picks it up effortlessly.

Egyptian Vulture

Neophron percnopterus



Size 65 cm



Pankaj Gupta

Majestic in flight, this white vulture has a yellow face and beak, and distinctive black flight feathers – you can see the black underneath the wings when it's soaring and gliding in the sky in search of food. Also look carefully at its tail in flight; it resembles a small paper kite! On ground, it may not look half as handsome, but you're most likely to spot it near human habitation and garbage dumps. The young, immature birds are brownish in colour with grey faces.

Cattle Egret

Bubulcus ibis



Size 51 cm



Pankaj Sharma

Pankaj Sharma

As its name suggests, you'll probably see it with or even on cattle, unless of course it's roosting on trees, especially in the evenings, to protect itself from predators. White overall with a yellow bill in non-breeding plumage, it's easiest to identify in the breeding season (July-September in North India) when its head, neck and back turns a telltale orange. This is particularly helpful when its in the company of other egrets also commonly seen in our region, such as Little Egret, Intermediate Egret and Great Egret; they all vary in size and colour of the bill and feet. Cattle Egrets usually feed on insects, grasshoppers, frogs, lizards and fish.

Black Francolin

Francolinus francolinus



A plump ground-dwelling bird, it's often seen standing alone on a brick wall or on concrete stumps at a distance, calling in a metallic high-pitched voice – check-check-check kreyachek. The male bird has a black face, white cheek, brown collar and a body beautifully speckled with white and brown. The female is paler with a brown patch on the neck. Black Francolins love to potter about and feed in cultivated fields and forested areas close to a water source. Feeding on grains, seeds and insects, it's a superfast runner, and can disappear from sight within seconds!

Grey Francolin

Francolinus pondicerianus



Can you hear its call? Katila-katila-katila-katila or keela-keela-keela in quick, rhythmic succession? Heard more often than seen, this shy, plump, greyish brown ground-dwelling bird was called a Grey Partridge earlier. Nesting in grass-lined scrapes hidden under a bush or a rock, it moves in pairs or small groups. And when flushed out of 'hiding', it starts running away. Pursue it some more and it will take flight with rapid wing flaps followed by a short glide. You can also tell a male Grey Francolin apart from a female by its spurs or spikes at the back of its legs.

Barred Buttonquail

Turnix suscitator



If you are patient, you will see these small and extremely shy birds briskly move along the edge of the walkways only to vanish in the scrubs at the slightest hint of your presence. As the name suggests, these birds have bold black barrings on their upperbody, neck and breast, while the underbelly is orangish-brown. Often seen in pairs or in small groups, they love to stay in grassland and scrubs, feeding on seeds and insects. They make a small depression on the ground lined with grass to lay their eggs.

Indian Peafowl

Pavo cristatus



Who doesn't know what our national bird looks like? But you're probably thinking only of the male bird with its gorgeous blue neck and breast and a long train of glossy, speckled green feathers. The female appears dull in comparison with a whitish face and throat, a greenish neck, brown upperparts, a whitish belly, and tellingly, no train of feathers. Both, however, have a prominent crest. A rather shy bird, it moves away quickly when it senses a threat and sends out a loud call – mee-aaw, mee-aaw, mee-aaw. A typical flock comprises of a male with 3-4 female birds. Often seen flying across riverbeds or ravines, it feeds on grains, insects, lizards and so on. The males puts up a brilliant courtship display of erect feathers to attract females. Apparently, the Peafowl owes its name – *mor* or *mayura* – to the Maurya dynasty, of which it was a symbol!

GRASSLANDS

The park is in transition, and the grasses have been a very important part of its ecological restoration. They have helped in the creation of soil and encouraged diversity. Insect life thrives in these open grasslands, supporting bird and animal life.



Red-wattled Lapwing

Vanellus indicus



Size 33 cm



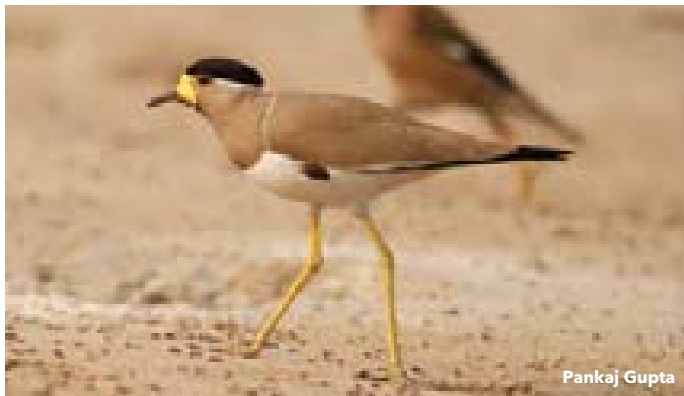
This is a bird whose loud alarm call is hard to forget. Usually described as tee-tee-teu tee-tee-teu, many birders remember it better as – did-he-do-it? did-he-do-it? Tall and leggy, it's commonly sighted in this region, and known for its red face-wattles – two fleshy skin patches near each eye. Its black head and breast, brown upperparts, and a prominent red bill and yellow legs also make it easy to identify. Ever wary of humans and predators, it sends out alarm calls on sensing a threat, whether it's day or night.

Yellow-wattled Lapwing

Vanellus malabaricus



Size 27 cm



A leggy bird with a black cap, sandy brown upper body and breast, this lapwing is easily identified by the yellow wattles on both sides of its face. You are likely to see this quiet, shy bird in pairs or small groups in dry, stony habitats. And if it spots you from afar, it will walk away slowly as you approach it, only to fly away, if you get too close for comfort.

Eurasian Collared Dove

Streptopelia decaocto



Size 32 cm



Can you see two love birds – or dove (birds) – on the Babool tree? Or hear their took-too-took? Often found in pairs or groups in dry open fields, look carefully at the nape of their neck. Greyish-brown overall, they have a pretty black collar (hence the name!). If you're lucky, they might even pay you an occasional visit in your garden or at home in search of food. Or better still, enact their beautiful courtship display, consisting of a vertical flight with a spread out tail followed by a slow glide to the ground.

Laughing Dove

Streptopelia senegalensis



Size 27 cm



Slightly smaller than its Eurasian cousin, it's a beautiful dove with pale brown upperparts, a pinkish head, slaty patches on the shoulders and a longish tail. But what sets it apart is a rufous checkerboard pattern on the upper-breast – almost like a bib. And of course, true to its name, expect its soft call of coo-roo-roo-rororoo, especially the last few hurried notes, to ring like laughter in the air.

Common Pigeon

Columba livia



Size 33 cm



Abundant in towns and cities, it hardly needs an introduction. But have you noticed that the slaty grey Common Pigeon has a metallic sheen on its neck and breast? Regular feeding by kind city folk has only resulted in huge populations of these once wild birds that adapt easily to all kinds of environments, and relentlessly keep up their gooter-gu, gooter-gu all afternoon.

Yellow-footed Green Pigeon

Treron phoenicoptera



Size 33 cm



Most people who don't know about it, do a double take when they first see it. It's a pigeon, but a beautiful yellowish-green one, with a greyish head and yellow feet. Usually seen perched on the top of trees, it feeds on fruits and berries. Seen in small groups, it has a soft whistling call – peeu-peeu-eee-eeu – well worthy of the word birdsong!

Alexandrine Parakeet

Psittacula eupatria



Size 53 cm



A relatively large, if slim parakeet, it has a maroon patch on each of its shoulders. The male has a black chin that merges with the pink-and-black collar – a feature missing in females and juveniles. Less visible than the Rose-ringed Parakeet, it moves in large flocks through orchards, fruiting trees and cultivated fields, and roosts on leafy trees. You've probably heard its loud kreea-kreea-kreea call while it swiftly flies overhead with leisurely wingbeats.

Rose-ringed Parakeet

Psittacula krameri



Size 42 cm



The most common parakeet of our region, it moves in large noisy flocks, renting the air with a loud keeaa-keeeaa-keeeaa call. Overall green with a bluish edge to the tail, it gets its name from the pink-and-black ring around its neck. Interestingly, the female doesn't have this collar at all! Known to cause damage to fruit orchards, it pecks and pulls at more fruit than it consumes.

Asian Koel

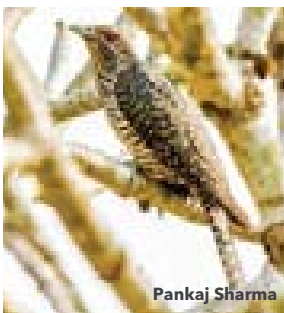
Eudynamys scolopaceus



Size 43 cm



Pankaj Sharma



Pankaj Sharma

Easily identified by its repetitive kuu-kuu-kuu calls in the summer, it is another bird that is heard more often than seen. The male bird is shiny black with a red eye and a pale green bill. The female has brown upperparts speckled with white spots, and white underparts with heavy brown barring. It loves to stay in foliage and sometimes suns itself early in the morning. It's also a commonly known fact that it's a parasitic breeder, which lays its eggs in the nest of crows who raise its chicks as their own.

Indian Thick-knee

Burhinus indicus



Size 41 cm



Pankaj Sharma

An unmistakable bird with long yellow legs – and you guessed it – thick knees, it has streaked brown upperparts, pale underparts, large yellow eyes and a black bill with a yellow base. Very shy in nature, it is usually seen resting under a shady tree or bush, and camouflages itself by squatting on the ground and remaining very still. Quick to run or take flight in case of a threat, it's usually found alone or in small groups. It prefers stony country and dry scrub areas.

Common Hawk Cuckoo

Hierococcyx varius



Size 34 cm



Pankaj Sharma

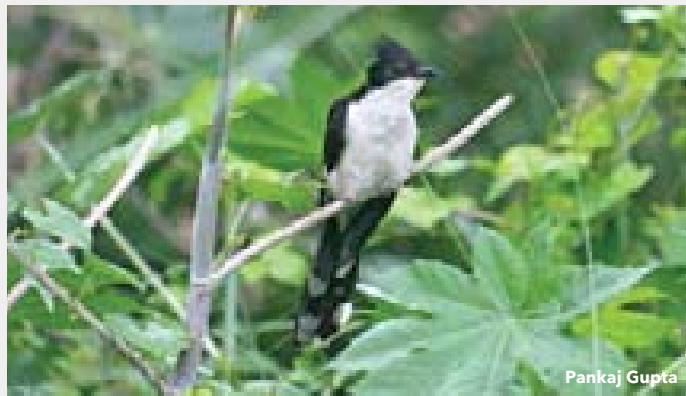
Also known as the brain-fever bird because of its repetitive brainfever-brainfever-brainfever call that reaches a crescendo before coming to an abrupt halt, in Hindi, the call is described romantically as pee-kahan-pee-kahan-pee-kahan. A uniformly grey bird with a whitish throat and barred pale brown underparts, its tail has prominent black bands. It mostly remains silent during the winter, becoming more and more vocal in the hot summer months. It likes to stay in lightly wooded forests and orchards, and leaves its egg in the nests of babblers!

Pied Cuckoo

Clamator jacobinus



Size 33 cm



Pankaj Gupta

A gorgeous, migratory black-and-white cuckoo with a handsome crest, it arrives in our region just around the onset of the monsoons, renting the air with its melodious peeu-pee-pee. Often seen sitting on branches or merrily chasing each other from tree to tree, it is still revered as the harbinger of rain. In fact, legends of chataka (one of its two names in Hindi) still abound, describing how the bird pleads with the rain-laden clouds to quench its thirst as it cannot drink water on earth. Kalidasa and Adi Shankaracharya are said to have given currency to such tales.

Greater Coucal

Centropus sinensis



Size 48 cm



Pankaj Gupta

A large, clumsy bird, it has a glossy black body, a long tail and prominent chestnut-coloured wings, which should help you identify it even from a distance. Moving through undergrowth and dense scrubs constantly, it makes sudden, short flights. A non-parasitic bird from the cuckoo family, it builds an untidy nest in dense scrub, slightly above the ground. You may have even heard its booming and distinctive hoop-hoop-hoop call.

Sirkeer Malkoha

Phaenicophaeus leschenaultii



Size 42 cm



Pankaj Sharma

Believe it or not, this brown bird that mostly moves through undergrowth and sometimes forages in rocky areas is the star bird of this park. Why? Well, because there aren't too many places where you can see it, and because it is a beautiful bird in its own right: with a striking yellow-tipped red bill and a black mask around the eye that is lined with white. Not a good flier, it is, however, easier to spot when it moves because otherwise its brown plumage acts as a great camouflage against the ground.

Indian Eagle Owl

Bubo bengalensis



Size 56 cm



Vijay Dhasmana

A large owl with ear tufts, if you'd like to meet this predator you'll have to go looking for its rocky perch. Brown overall with bold streakings on its breast and bright orange eyes, it's a very special resident of this park. However, it is a nocturnal hunter and mainly visible during sunset and sunrise. And just as well, because it's best not to disturb it.

Spotted Owlet

Athene brama



Size 21 cm



Pankaj Gupta

A small greyish-brown owl, it has white spotting on its head, upperbody and wings, and light brown spotting and barring on its underparts. It also has a large round head and large yellow eyes to stare you down. Often seen huddled in pairs on a shady branch during the day, it hunts and feeds at night on mice, lizards and insects, and build nest in hollows of mature trees and burrows on mudbanks. An adorable creature, it stares back at the watcher from a distance and flies away when it perceives a threat.

Indian Roller

Coracias benghalensis



Size 33 cm



Pankaj Gupta

Often perched alone on electrical wires or dry branches, it is a rufous-brown bird with blue head and wings and dark blue flight feathers. But you'd do well to watch out for it in flight... when it presents a spectacular flash of pale and dark blue colours. It also has an interesting courtship display, when it rolls and dives in air and calls out loudly. It feeds on lizards, frogs and other insects, picked up swiftly and then battered to death before being eaten.

White-throated Kingfisher

Halcyon smyrnensis



Size 28 cm



Pankaj Sharma

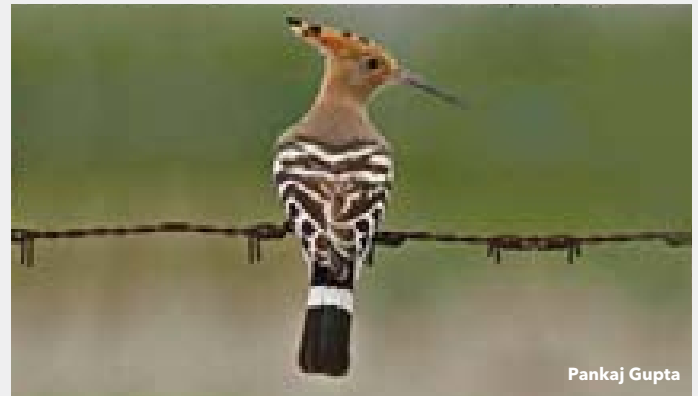
The commonest kingfisher in our region, it's found near a waterbody, and sometimes, a fair distance away as well, perched on a dry branch, a stump or even on electric wires. A bird with a brown head and underparts, brilliant blue upperparts extending upto its tail, it has a red bill and a white patch on the throat extending upto the breast. Feeding on small fish, tadpoles, mice, lizzards and small insects, it's known to batter its prey till death before swallowing it.

Common Hoopoe

Upupa epops



Size 31 cm



Pankaj Gupta

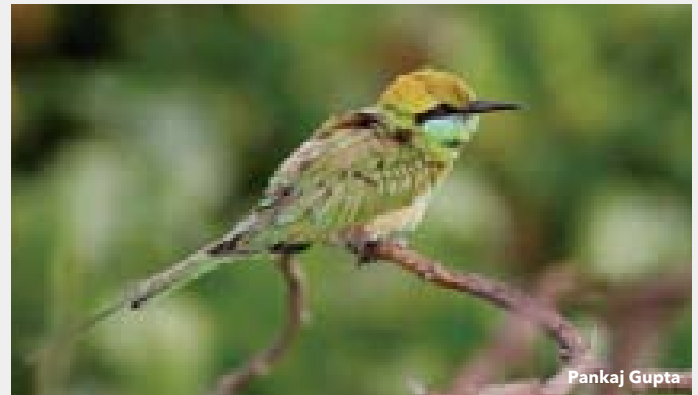
A hard-to-miss, majestic orange-brown bird with a fan-shaped crest, black-and-white barred tail and a long, down-curved bill, it is more often than not seen foraging in pairs on lawns and grassy patches, digging in the top soil for insects. The crest is gathered while feeding and spread out from time to time making for quite a sight. The call is a mellow hoo-poo that is repeated for longish stretches (therefore the name).

Green Bee-eater

Merops orientalis



Size 18 cm



Pankaj Gupta

A small green bird with a golden-brown head, a bluish-green throat with a black gorget (horizontal stripe), it has a rather long pointed tail. Often seen sitting in a neat row on barbed-wire fences or electrical wires, chiming trill-trill-trill, it suddenly takes off to catch a bee or a dragonfly mid-air, only to gracefully return later to its original perch. A great show is made of battering the catch and swallowing it swiftly.

SCRUBS

Scrublands are important habitats for open country birds, such as Warblers, Babblers, Larks and Bee-eaters. In the park, the scrublands are dominated by Karonda, Ber and Kair.

Brown-headed Barbet

Megalaima zeylanica



Size 27 cm



Pankaj Gupta

You can hardly ignore their persistent kuturr-kuturr-kuturr, even if you can't see them, hidden as they often are in the foliage. A pair of them can often call in chorus and become particularly vocal during the hot summer days. Note the brown head, neck and breast, a yellow patch around the eye, an orangish-red bill and the green lower body and tail. Fruit-loving birds, they are often spotted on peepal or banyan trees laden with ripe fruits.

Coppersmith Barbet

Megalaima haemacephala



Size 17 cm



Pankaj Gupta

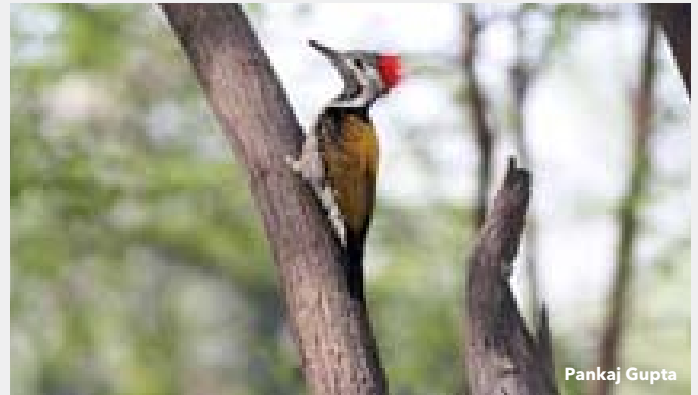
Ever heard a monotonous took-took-took on a hot summer's day? Like the persistent sound of a coppersmith's hammer? It's the call of this small green barbet, one of the most colourful birds of our region, with a brush of crimson on its forehead and breast, yellow on the sides of its face and throat, and a pair of bright red legs. Often seen basking in the sun on the topmost branch of a tree, it feeds on fruits, and sometimes, on insects.

Black-rumped Flameback

Dinopium benghalense



Size 29 cm



Pankaj Gupta

Listen carefully, if you are passing through a forested patch of fully grown trees. Can you hear a tap-tap-tap sound? If the answer to that is yes, it's very likely that this gorgeous woodpecker with golden yellow back and a crimson crest is around you. It is looking for insects in the cracks of the bark, while moving up, down or around the tree. One of only two resident woodpeckers in our city, it nests in the hollows of a tree, and can startle you with its loud ki-ki-ki-kee when it flits from one tree to the other.

Indian Grey Hornbill

Ocyeros birostris



Size 50 cm



Pankaj Gupta

The resident hornbill of our city, it can easily be spotted on fruit-bearing trees like banyan, mango, and tamarind, or flying from tree to tree, uttering its ke-ke-ke-kae territorial call. Look for its unmistakable long, curved bill with a black 'helmet-like' casque on it; the female is similar to the male, but with a smaller bill and casque. While nesting, the female is confined to the hollow of a tree, the entrance to which is sealed with droppings, and the male dutifully feeds her through an opening. She comes out only when the egg is hatched.

Indian Golden Oriole

Oriolus oriolus kundoo



Size 25 cm



Pankaj Sharma

If you are out walking on a balmy summer morning, and you hear a mellow, fluty call, scan the fully grown trees around you for a bright yellow bird. The male is a gorgeous golden yellow with a black patch through the eye and the female is greenish yellow with streakings on its breast. A summer visitor, it breeds in our region and builds a nest that looks like a small hammock of grass and fibres, plastered with cobwebs and hung in forked branches of a tree. Clearly, this is a bird on a summer holiday!

Plain Martin

Riparia paludicola



Size 12 cm



Pankaj Sharma

You are most likely to see a group of these tiny birds in air, continuously changing directions while flying rapidly but managing to steer clear of each other. If you manage to lock your binocular on any one of these birds, you will notice dark underwings, a grey throat that fades into a white belly and a small indent in its tail. When perched on electrical wires or a bare branch, the brown upper body with a long pointed tail and small bill becomes visible. They love to move and roost in very large groups, sometimes there can be more than a thousand active nests of these birds in mud or sand banks.

Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark

Eremopterix grisea



Size 12 cm



Pankaj Gupta

A well-built ground-dwelling lark, the male looks quite handsome with a black eye-stripe and lore, and a black underbody. Usually found in flocks, the female is rather plain and would require persistent effort to distinguish, unless accompanied by a male. These birds feed on seeds and insects picked off the ground, and sometimes, off bushes. During the breeding season, the male bird presents a display flight by quickly ascending in the air and gently gliding down to the ground, all the while whistling away to glory.

Indian Bushlark

Mirafra erythroptera



Size 14 cm



Pankaj Gupta

A small brown bird with a strong bill, with streaking throughout its upperparts and breast and a bright brown patch on the wings, it is often seen running on the ground or perched on a rock. But its most interesting characteristic is its 'song-flight' – an act of shooting high up in the air while whistling swee-swee-swee, before parachuting down, keeping its wing in a stretched V shape, and gently landing on its perch. This behaviour is most visible during its breeding season (usually between April and October), to attract the females of the species.

Black Drongo

Dicrurus macrocercus



Size 28 cm



Pankaj Gupta

If you see a long, forked tail of a slim black bird, you can be sure it's a Black Drongo. Perched on electrical wires, stumps or dry branches, it has a bluish-black tinge on the throat and breast. And if you peer harder still, you can see a tiny white spot between its eye and the bill that distinguishes it from other species of drongos. It keeps an eye out for insects flying by or disturbed by grazing cattle, and swoops down on them quite elegantly.

Common Woodshrike

Tephrodornis pondicerianus



Size 18 cm



Pankaj Sharma

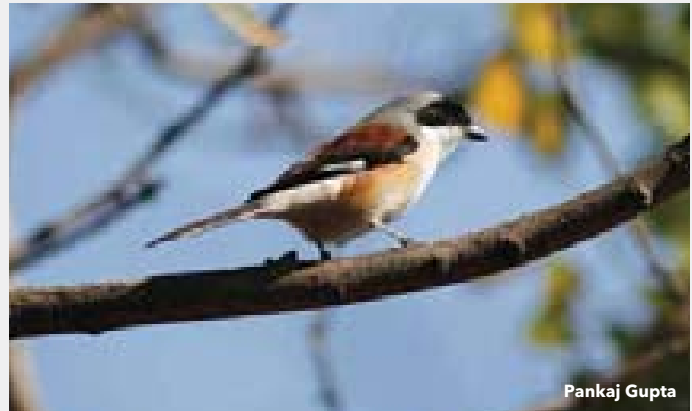
A rather plain, brown bird, except for a white stripe above the eye and white sides on its tail, you'll probably see it in a small group on top of a tree. A resident of scrub forests, it fills the air with a sweet peew-peew-pieew call.

Bay-backed Shrike

Lanius vittatus



Size 17 cm



Pankaj Gupta

Like the others in the family, this is a small shrike with a grey head and nape. It also has a black band on the forehead passing through the eyes, a deep maroon back, a white throat and a pale rufous wash on its underparts. Often seen alone in dry, sparsely wooded areas and cultivated lands, it has a harsh call through most of the year. But in the breeding season, it manages to sing a few mellifluous notes, mixing it with the imitation of other birdcalls.

Long-tailed Shrike

Lanius schach



Size 25 cm



Nitin Kumar

Often seen sitting alone on a dry branch or a stump appearing quite aloof, this bird is a feared hunter. Look for a black band on the forehead passing through the eyes on its grey head, and a pale rufous wash on its lower back and underparts. A strong hook-shaped bill helps it pick up large insects, lizards and even small mice with ease. It is a fantastic mimic of calls and other sounds it hears in its habitat, often of migrants birds that have long left the habitat.

Asian Pied Starling

Sturnus contra



Size 23 cm



Pankaj Gupta

You probably know it well already. And chances are, if you look out of your window right now, you'll see a group of these starlings on the branches of a tree, engaged as usual in casual banter. This black-and-white bird, with an orange skin around the eye and a long, pointy yellow bill, relies on a diet of insects, grains, berries and nectar.

Brahminy Starling

Sturnus pagodarum



Size 21 cm



Nitin Kumar

A rather striking bird, it has a glossy black head and a prominent crest that extends right up to its nape. But it's the rufous-orange neck and body (with greyish wings) of this Starling, reminiscent of a brahmin's robes, that lends it its name. Usually seen in a pair or small groups, it raises its crest when it's excited, or when it makes its short, complex call. For its nest, it chooses a tree hollow and lines it with grass and leaves.

Rosy Starling

Sturnus roseus



Size 21 cm



Pankaj Gupta

If its April and you hear a loud noisy chatter coming out of a mulberry or a fig tree, look carefully through the branches and leaves, you are likely to spot the Rosy Starlings feeding on the ripe fruits. Not easily mistaken for any other bird, they have a pink body, black head, wings and tail and orangish bill. They are a marvel of nature, arriving from the eastern parts of Europe to our country in July, travelling down all the way to Southern India during the winter months and then starting their reverse journey. They congregate in large numbers in Northern India during March/April to feed on abundant fruits and berries before leaving our country to breed in their homeland in Europe. If you visit the grounds around India Gate in April, you can also witness a phenomenon called murmuration, where thousands of Rosy Starlings fly together and make formations in the sky!

Common Myna

Acridotheres tristis



Size 25 cm



Pankaj Gupta

A gregarious bird that loves to stay close to human settlements, it reminds us of its presence with a wide variety of calls and chatter. While communicating loudly with its group, it keeps bobbing its head comically and its neck feathers stand up on end. This common brown bird has yellow skin around its eyes as well as yellow legs and bill. There is a white patch on its wings that is more prominently visible in flight. Not too discerning, it feeds on practically everything – insects, fruits, even kitchen waste.

Bank Myna

Acridotheres ginginianus



Size 23 cm



Pankaj Gupta

Similar to Common Myna, but with a bluish-grey body, its most noticeable features are an orange patch around the eye, a yellow bill, dark head and a small tuft of hair near the forehead. An omnivorous bird, it is often spotted at train stations and bus depots, eagerly foraging for crumbs left behind by the passengers.

Rufous Treepie

Dendocitta vagabunda



Size 46 - 50 cm



Pankaj Gupta

It's hard to believe that this distinctive rufous-coloured bird, with a long grey tail tipped with black, is a relative of the crow. Its slaty-grey head and neck, brown upperparts and buff underparts, and its wings with contrasting grey and black colours, makes it stand out among the common birds in this region. Other than the neighbourhood parks and gardens, it moves through well-wooded areas and scrub forrests to feed on, well, practically anything – lizards, frogs, insects, fruits; anything that is available. Expect to hear a variety of calls, some soft and melodious, others harsh and grating, as it jumps from branch to branch.

Red-vented Bulbul

Pycnonotus cafer



Size 20 cm



Pankaj Gupta

This is the bulbul you're most likely to have seen before. Common in these parts, it has a black crested head, a brown body with scaly markings on the back and breast, and most importantly, a bright red vent or patch under its tail. Seen flitting about in our gardens, it fills the air with its joyful notes – calls that often sound like be-care-ful! Moving in pairs or groups, it feeds on fruits and insects.

Red-whiskered Bulbul

Pycnonotus jocosus



Size 20 cm



Pankaj Gupta

A jolly bird, it has a shiny black crest, telltale red whiskers (which is a patch next to the eye, really) and another smidgen of red at the base of its tail. Usually seen alone or in pairs sitting on an open perch, curiously bobbing its head and belting out a short, melodious call, this bulbul prefers tree-covered areas.

White-eared Bulbul

Pycnonotus leucotis



Size 20 cm



Perhaps more distinguished looking than its red-vented friends, the White-eared Bulbul has a prominent white cheek. Brown overall, it has pale underparts and a bright yellow vent or patch under its tail. A bold and happy bird, it plants itself on the top branches of trees and belts out short gargling calls.

Common Babbler

Turdoides caudatus



Size 23 cm



You are likely to see this bird in a flock of 6 to 10, hopping about on dry ground, through scrub and clumps of grass, while feeding and calling out to each other, all at once! A vocal bird, its call is a rapid pitee-pitee-pitee-pitee-pee... And when it's not 'babbling', the leader of the group makes a low, short flight, followed by a gentle glide, and one by one, the rest of the flock follows suit. Notice the brown upperparts with long streaks, paler underparts, fine barrings on the tail and yellowish legs.

Jungle Babbler

Turdoides striatus



Size 25 cm



If you take a walk in the park, or a turn in your own garden, this is the babbler you are most likely to meet: hopping about and turning over leaves in search of insects. Called 'Saat Bhai' in Hindi, since they are always spotted in groups, these common birds are greyish-brown in colour with a strong yellow bill, paler underparts and a droopy tail. The call is a loud kae-kae-kae that can become a noisy chorus when they are excited.

Large Grey Babbler

Turdoides malcolmi



Size 28 cm



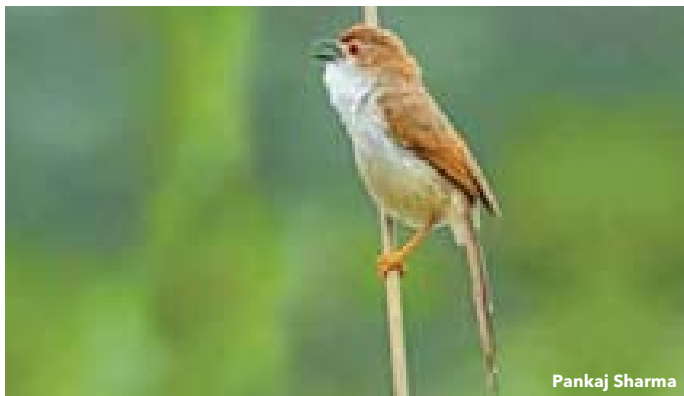
You might think it's just another Jungle Babbler, until you notice its tail in flight or when it's hopping about: the distinctive white outer feathers in the tail are a dead giveaway. Other than that, true to its name, the Large Grey Babbler has a grey forehead and an overall greyish brown appearance, not too different from its common cousin, the Jungle Babbler. In behaviour too, they share many similarities. But if you prick up your ears, you should be able to recognise the Large Grey's nasal kao-kao-kao, which can continue for minutes at a time.

REEDS

Saccharum grasslands create a beautiful habitat for the birds and animals of the park. They give cover to Neelgais, Jackals, Porcupines and Snakes, and are home to many bird species, such as Weavers, Silverbills, Munias and Sparrows.

Yellow-eyed Babbler

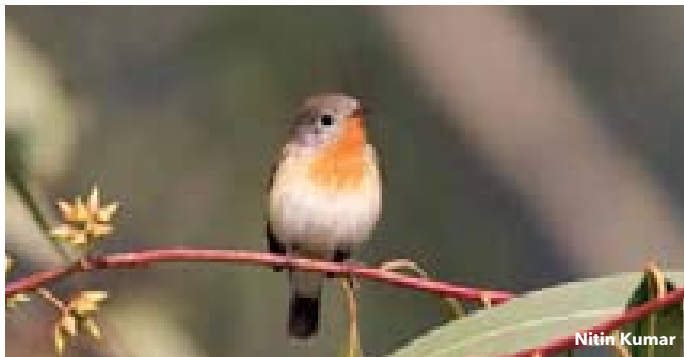
Chrysomma sinense



An orange ring around the eye and a yellow iris is what gives this dainty bird its name. When you follow a trail through tall grasses, or a scrub patch, keep an eye out for this babbler, with a longish tail, round head, brown upperparts and white underparts, calling out tirr-tirr-rit-rit-tiaw-tiaw. It is particularly vocal during the breeding season, when the male bird is often heard belting out melodious tunes from a prominent perch. Otherwise wary, and prone to diving into the undergrowth at a moment's notice, it usually moves in a small group to hunt for insects.

Red-breasted Flycatcher

Ficedula parva



While on a leisurely walk in park during the winter months, pay attention to the scrubs and tree branches below your eye-level. You might see this small brown bird with a patch of orangish red on its throat that extends till the breast and prominent white sides to its tail. Most often seen alone, the non-breeding males and the females lack this red colour and also the greyish head and face seen in a breeding male. True to its name, it makes short flights from its perch to catch the insects flying by and also includes the odd caterpillar and berry in its diet, while it merrily hops around among the branches. This restless bird is a common winter visitor to our region, and if you pay attention, you might hear an occasional Chrrrr... call.

Asian Paradise-flycatcher

Terpsiphone paradisi



One of the more spectacular birds of our subcontinent, it's a summer visitor to our region. It's a visual treat to see the white male bird with a glossy black-crested head and face flying merrily from branch to branch with a long white streamer floating in air. Remarkably, you can sometimes also see a male bird that has reddish-brown upperparts and tail streamers – its called a Rufous Morph. The female and immature birds have a shorter crest, reddish-brown upperparts, greyish-white underparts and a short square-ended tail. These birds like to stay in shady, moist areas under fully grown trees and are often seen putting up quite a show, while chasing each other or catching insects in flight.

Common Tailorbird

Orthotomus sutorius



You'll remember it from your school books, where it was lauded for its diligence, making a funnel-like nest by stitching two large leaves before placing plant fibre, cotton wool, etc, inside it to act as cushioning. A tiny and very active bird with a thin upright tail, it has a brown forehead, olive green upperparts and a pale buff underpart. When it's not 'tailoring' its nest to suit its needs, it keeps flitting from branch to branch of fully grown trees and shrubs looking for insects and nectar, often singing tweet-tweet-tweet.

Ashy Prinia

Prinia socialis



Size 13 cm



An energetic, lively bird, it has a slaty-grey forehead, dark brown upperparts and orange-buff underparts. If you look carefully, it has a red eye and sometimes a white stripe just above its eye (called a supercillium). Hopping through bushes and shrubs, it calls out excitedly – chiwee-chiwee-chiwee – from prominent perches during the breeding season.

Grey-breasted Prinia

Prinia hodgsonii



Size 11 cm



This prinia is slightly smaller than the Ashy Prinia, and is best spotted in the breeding season, when it has a grey head, grey upperparts and grey breast-band. In the non-breeding plumage, it appears olive-brown with pale underparts and a prominent white supercillium (like an eyebrow). Its habits are similar to other prinias, moving in pairs through tall grasses and open scrubs.

Plain Prinia

Prinia inornata



Size 13 cm



You will often see this Prinia perched almost improbably on a tall reed or grass, excitedly chirping tilick-tilick-tilick... A rather plain bird, it appears dark brown above with a pale underbody that has a buff hue to it. It likes to move about in pairs through tall grasses and open scrubs, feeding on ants, beetles and other insects; it also has a taste for nectar.

Rufous-fronted Prinia

Prinia buchanani



Size 12 cm



The Aravali Biodiversity Park, Gurgaon, is one of the few places in Delhi where this Prinia can be seen. As the name suggests, its forehead and crown are rufous-brown. Otherwise a pale brown bird with white tips on the outer tail feathers, it loves to move about in groups through bushes and scrub forests on dry land.

FULLY GROWN TREES

Someday, large parts of the park would be converted into woodlands – some on the high rocky outcrops and some in the valleys and mining pits. The dominant forest types here are Salai, Dhau and Babool.



Bluethroat

Luscinia svecica



A curious fellow, you will often see this bird running along the edges of scrubs and reeds, and suddenly stopping to look at you. The male has brown upperparts with blue, orange and black markings on its upper breast. The female is similar, except with dark spottings across a pale breast. A winter visitor to our parts, it makes long strides while looking for insects on the ground and loves to spend its days near sources of water.

Lesser Whitethroat

Sylvia curruca



A winter visitor to our region, you are first likely to notice it by its call – chek-chek-chek – as it moves through leaves and branches rapidly feeding on insects and caterpillars. A small brown bird, it has a slaty-grey head, dark lores (near the ear) and pale white underparts. When the weather changes, it returns to its breeding grounds, closest of which is Kashmir.

Black Redstart

Phoenicurus ochruros



It will be easier to identify this bird, if we analyse its name first. 'Start' meant tail in Old English, so a Black Redstart would mean a black bird with a red tail. A winter visitor to our region, the male of this bird has a dark grey upperbody, black breast, orange lower parts and a rufous-orange tail. The female bird is all brown with an orange wash on the sides and a tail similar to that of the male. Also, watch the tail closely – you'll notice that it shivers frequently. Often seen on top of a scrub or a rocky perch, it feeds on insects and berries.

Indian Robin

Saxicoloides fulicatus



Look for a black bird with a white shoulder patch merrily hopping through trees, bushes, rocks and open ground with its tail cocked, giving you a sneak peek at its rusty red vent (under the tail). The slaty-grey female is probably nearby keeping a watch on the surroundings. One of the most visible birds in this park, it feeds on spiders, insects and their eggs.

Oriental Magpie Robin

Copsychus saularis



Another common bird in our parks and gardens, the male Oriental Magpie Robin is black and white in colour, while the female is slaty and white. An expressive bird, it's a joy to watch it 'work' its tail, often cocked jauntily, but also fanned and drawn out with great show. A gifted singer, the male bird sings long, intricate melodies in the breeding season between April and June, usually perched on a high tree or pole.

Brown Rock-chat

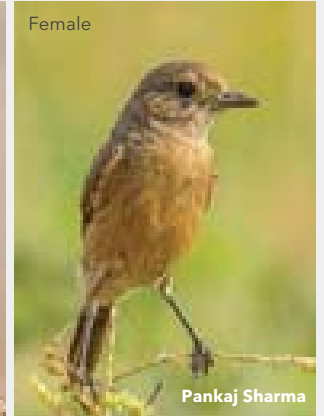
Cercomela fusca



Plain though it may be, this brown bird with darker wings and tail, is a joy to watch, especially when it cocks its tail slowly. At first, you might confuse it with a female Indian Robin, but remember that this doesn't have a rufous vent. A territorial bird, you'll encounter it in dry patches, rocky areas, abandoned houses and even in human dwellings.

Pied Bushchat

Saxicola caprata



This small black bird with patch of white on its sides and a white belly is usually seen sitting quietly on a stump in open country. The female is dark brown with a rufous-orange rump and a black tail. A territorial bird, it shows aggressive behaviour towards rival males. In the breeding season, you can hear its melodious call, resembling the whistling of an Indian Robin.

Common Stonechat

Saxicola torquata



This quiet bird, often seen perched alone on a dry branch or a pole, is also a winter visitor to our region. You can easily identify this bird by its dark head, white patch around the neck and an orange patch on the breast. The female bird is brown with streaking on the upperparts, an orange breast and an orange rump. While it may jump on the ground to pick up an odd insect or two, it always returns promptly to its original perch. It also has a habit of flicking its wings, as if it is trying to shake something off it, and fanning its tail.

Long-billed Pipit

Anthus similis



Pipits are a group of small, slender, terrestrial birds with long legs and upright stance with drab colours that make it difficult to distinguish between its various species. The Long-billed Pipit is a resident of our Western Himalayan foothills, visiting us during the winters. You are likely to see this plain looking bird with long legs and a long pointed bill mostly on the ground chasing and picking insects. If you pay closer attention, you will notice the white throat, very fine streaking on its upperparts, warm buff underparts and pink legs. It has a habit of briskly walking short distances if followed and taking a quick flight on persistent approach.

Oriental White-eye

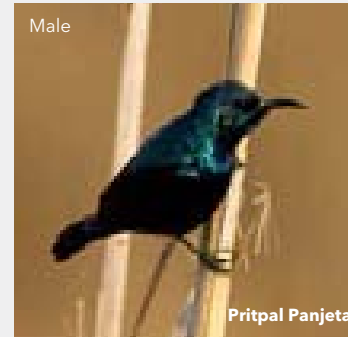
Zosterops palpebrosus



If you notice rapid flashes of yellowish green and white in a thicket or on a leafy tree, look carefully for a white ring of feathers around the eye of the bird: this is the Oriental White-eye's distinguishing feature. Energetic and chirpy, and fond of moving in groups, these birds help in pollination, when they flitter about in search of insects and nectar.

Purple Sunbird

Cynnyris asiaticus



Did you just catch a glimpse of something tiny and metallic blue on a flowering tree? Well, you've spotted the only sunbird species seen in our region (of the 12 in India). In its breeding season (April to June), a male bird magically changes into this beautiful vision in metallic purple-blue, later going back to its original olive brown hue, with yellow underparts and a black stripe running vertically down the breast. The olive-brown female looks similar to the male bird lacks the black stripe. Look for the thin curved bill that helps the Sunbird suck on nectar. Sometimes, if you train your lenses on it, you can even spot its tubular tongue. Moving in pairs while foraging for food, it makes a loud teecheew-teecheew-teecheew call.

Red Avadavat

Amandava amandava



You are likely to see this gorgeous little fellow perched on the reeds, in moist grasslands, busy pecking on seeds. During the breeding season, the males appear red with spots of white on the sides of the breast and flanks. However, through the rest of the year, the female as well as the male in non-breeding plumage appear brown with a red bill and rump.

Indian Silverbill

Euodice malabarica



Size 11 cm



Vijay Dhasmana

As you would imagine, its strong, short, conical silver bill is the most distinguishing feature of this plain brown bird, often seen swinging merrily on tall grasses or reeds and feeding on seeds. It has a black pointed tail, a white rump and pale underparts. Fond of drier habitats, it often moves in large flocks – in fact, you can see them huddled together on open branches or wires during cold winter mornings or while roosting in the evening.

Scaly-breasted Munia

Lonchura punctulata



Size 11 cm



Nitin Kumar

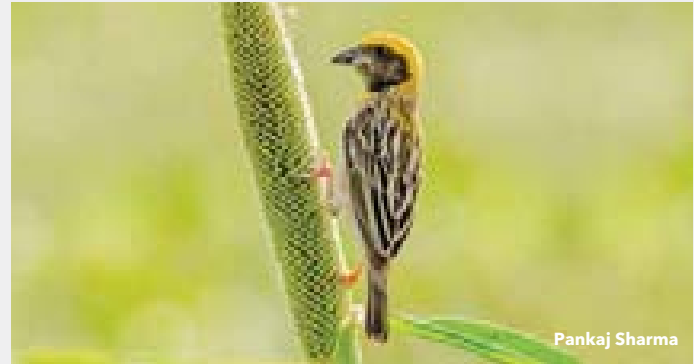
A rather striking Munia, it has a dark brown face, breast and upperparts, and black-and-white scale-like patterns throughout the underparts. The juvenile bird is paler brown with buffish underparts. These Munias also like to move in large flocks and build near-spherical nests with an entrance at the top.

Baya Weaver

Ploceus philippinus



Size 15 cm



Pankaj Sharma

True to its name, a Baya weaves a long tubular nest with strands of grass or paddy leaves, before reinforcing it with wet mud – the end result looks like a brown *surahi* hanging by its long neck. Several nests hang on trees that the Baya colonises. At first glance, the bird may appear similar to a female sparrow. But look closely and you'll see that the male and female Baya Weavers have dark streaking on the upperparts, lighter streaking on the underparts, a pale buff supercillium (like an 'eyebrow') and a strong conical bill. When in breeding, the male stands out in particular because of its yellow crown and breast, apart from its dark brown throat and ear coverts. Something of a rake, the male bird is known to build several nests in each breeding season to house different females, but the domestic duties are not shared - only the female incubates. Baya weavers move in large flocks in agricultural fields and roost on trees and reeds near waterbodies.

House Sparrow

Passer domesticus



Size 15 cm



Pankaj Gupta

Once as easy to spot in your backyard as pigeons or mynas, the state bird of Delhi has seen a rapid decline in its population over the last decade or so. But happily enough, a large flock is always present in the park to greet anyone who pays attention. Always found in pairs or flocks, the male bird has a grey head with chestnut colouring on the neck and sides, and a black throat extending right up to the upper breast. The female bird is much paler and doesn't have a black throat. It eats small fruits, grains and insects, and loves to roost in leafy trees in the evening in large groups.

ROCK FACES AND SEASONAL WATERBODIES

Mined rock faces are now home to trees, such as Salai, Kullu, Peepal, and many shrubs and climbers. They are also home to the Indian Eagle Owl and perching ground for migrating raptors. Seasonal waterbodies are well colonised by Babool and Kans grass, home to many small open forest bird species, such as Weavers, Silverbills and Warblers.




ARAVALI BIODIVERSITY PARK GURGAON



Sector 24

Underpur Ghosi

 Guru Dronacharya Metro Station


ENTRY

MEHRAULI GURGAON ROAD

The checklist

Here is a list of birds seen at Aravali Biodiversity Park, Gurgaon.

Tick as you spot them!

- 1 Lesser Whistling-Duck
- 2 Ruddy Shelduck
- 3 Indian Spot-billed Duck
- 4 Indian Peafowl
- 5 Black Francolin
- 6 Grey Francolin
- 7 Asian Openbill
- 8 Painted Stork
- 9 Little Cormorant
- 10 Great Cormorant
- 11 Indian Cormorant
- 12 Grey Heron
- 13 Purple Heron
- 14 Great Egret
- 15 Intermediate Egret
- 16 Little Egret
- 17 Cattle Egret
- 18 Indian Pond-Heron
- 19 Black-crowned Night-Heron
- 20 Glossy Ibis
- 21 Black-headed Ibis
- 22 Red-naped Ibis
- 23 Black-winged Kite
- 24 Egyptian Vulture
- 25 Oriental Honey-buzzard
- 26 Greater Spotted Eagle
- 27 Booted Eagle
- 28 Steppe Eagle
- 29 Imperial Eagle
- 30 White-eyed Buzzard
- 31 Shikra
- 32 Eurasian Sparrowhawk
- 33 Black Kite
- 34 White-breasted Waterhen
- 35 Eurasian Moorhen
- 36 Indian Thick-knee
- 37 Black-winged Stilt
- 38 Yellow-wattled Lapwing
- 39 Red-wattled Lapwing
- 40 Common Sandpiper
- 41 Green Sandpiper

- 42 Common Greenshank
- 43 Wood Sandpiper
- 44 Barred Buttonquail
- 45 Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse
- 46 Common Pigeon
- 47 Oriental Turtle-Dove
- 48 Eurasian Collared-Dove
- 49 Red Collared-Dove
- 50 Spotted Dove
- 51 Laughing Dove
- 52 Yellow-footed Green Pigeon
- 53 Greater Coucal
- 54 Sirkeer Malkoha
- 55 Pied Cuckoo
- 56 Asian Koel
- 57 Gray-bellied Cuckoo
- 58 Common Hawk Cuckoo
- 59 Indian Scops Owl
- 60 Indian Eagle Owl
- 61 Spotted Owlet
- 62 Savanna Nightjar
- 63 Little Swift
- 64 Eurasian Hoopoe
- 65 Indian Grey Hornbill
- 66 White-throated Kingfisher
- 67 Green Bee-eater
- 68 Blue-cheeked Bee-eater
- 69 Blue-tailed Bee-eater
- 70 European Roller
- 71 Indian Roller
- 72 Coppersmith Barbet
- 73 Brown-headed Barbet
- 74 Eurasian Wryneck
- 75 Yellow-crowned Woodpecker
- 76 Black-rumped Flameback
- 77 Common Kestrel
- 78 Peregrine Falcon
- 79 Alexandrine Parakeet
- 80 Rose-ringed Parakeet
- 81 Plum-headed Parakeet
- 82 Common Woodshrike
- 83 Isabelline Shrike
- 84 Bay-backed Shrike
- 85 Long-tailed Shrike

- 86 Southern Grey Shrike
 87 Indian Golden Oriole
 88 Black Drongo
 89 Asian Paradise-flycatcher
 90 Rufous Treepie
 91 House Crow
 92 Large-billed Crow
 93 Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark
 94 Bengal Bushlark
 95 Indian Bushlark
 96 Oriental Skylark
 97 Crested Lark
 98 Grey-throated Martin
 99 Pale Martin
 100 Dusky Crag-Martin
 101 Barn Swallow
 102 Wire-tailed Swallow
 103 Red-rumped Swallow
 104 Streak-throated Swallow
 105 Red-vented Bulbul
 106 Red-whiskered Bulbul
 107 White-eared Bulbul
 108 Common Chiffchaff
 109 Sulphur-bellied Warbler
 110 Hume's Warbler
 111 Greenish Warbler
 112 Booted Warbler
 113 Paddyfield Warbler
 114 Blyth's Reed-Warbler
 115 Zitting Cisticola
 116 Common Tailorbird
 117 Rufous-fronted Prinia
 118 Grey-breasted Prinia
 119 Jungle Prinia
 120 Yellow-bellied Prinia
 121 Ashy Prinia
 122 Plain Prinia
 123 Lesser Whitethroat
 124 Hume's Whitethroat
 125 Eastern Orphean Warbler
 126 Yellow-eyed Babbler
 127 Oriental White-eye
 128 Common Babbler

- 129 Large Grey Babbler
 130 Jungle Babbler
 131 Spotted Flycatcher
 132 Indian Robin
 133 Oriental Magpie-Robin
 134 Verditer Flycatcher
 135 Bluethroat
 136 Taiga Flycatcher
 137 Red-breasted Flycatcher
 138 Black Redstart
 139 Blue Rock-Thrush
 140 Siberian Stonechat
 141 Pied Bushchat
 142 Indian Chat
 143 Orange-headed Thrush
 144 European Starling
 145 Rosy Starling
 146 Asian Pied Starling
 147 Brahminy Starling
 148 Common Myna
 149 Bank Myna
 150 Purple Sunbird
 151 Western Yellow Wagtail
 152 Citrine Wagtail
 153 White Wagtail
 154 White-browed Wagtail
 155 Paddyfield Pipit
 156 Long-billed Pipit
 157 Tawny Pipit
 158 Tree Pipit
 159 Olive-backed Pipit
 160 White-capped Bunting
 161 Common Rosefinch
 162 House Sparrow
 163 Spanish Sparrow
 164 Chestnut-shouldered Petronia
 165 Streaked Weaver
 166 Baya Weaver
 167 Black-breasted Weaver
 168 Red Avadavat
 169 Indian Silverbill
 170 Scaly-breasted Munia



iamgurgaon
Work Together. Make a Difference

iamgurgaon is a citizens' initiative aimed at awakening a responsible, aware, and vigilant populace in order to make our city a better place to live in. iamgurgaon works with varied interests groups including residents, the administration, corporate, schools, NGO's, in a collaborative partnership to effect change and make Gurugram a true "millennium city".

The Aravali Biodiversity Park, in collaboration with the Municipal Corporation of Gurugram, is a unique example of a citizen-led effort to restore a denuded mining site into an Aravali forest. It showcases the finest forests of the Northern Aravali range with over 400 species of native plants and is a pristine habitat for birds and wild animals of this region.

The Bundh Rejuvenation Project, in partnership with Haryana Forest Department, is a pioneering urban renewal initiative to provide green, public space to the citizens of our rapidly urbanising city. Currently in its third phase, close to 1.5 km of the Bundh has been restored as a public space and the storm water drain running alongside has been cleaned and de-clogged into a smooth flowing water channel.

Raahgiri, a joint initiative with other groups in Gurugram, has played an important role in promoting non-motorised transport in the city.