

First record of Short-tailed Shearwater and first photographic record of White-Cheeked Partridge in Bhutan

Bhutan is one of the significant parts of the Eastern Himalaya Endemic Bird Area (Bishop 1999; Gyeltshen et al. 2020), and currently, 23 Important Bird Areas (IBA) are recognized in the country (Norbu et al. 2021). Birds of Bhutan and the eastern Himalaya (Grimmett et al. 2019), which is the most recent study of birds in the region, covers 814 species of which 753 species are recorded in Bhutan (Tshuthrim & Wangchuk 2021).

Of the 98 Shearwaters in the world (Birdlife International 2021), Short-tailed Shearwater *Ardenna tenuirostris* (Procellariidae) formerly known as *Puffinus tenuirostris* is one of the top and most abundant predators in the Pacific Ocean (Nishizawa et al. 2017). It migrates from southeastern Australia and Tasmania to spend its non-breeding seasons in the northern Pacific (Nishizawa et al. 2017). The bird spends May–August in the northern Pacific off Asia and in the Bering Sea and returns to south through the central



Short-tailed Shearwater on Sunkosh River. © Pema Dorji.

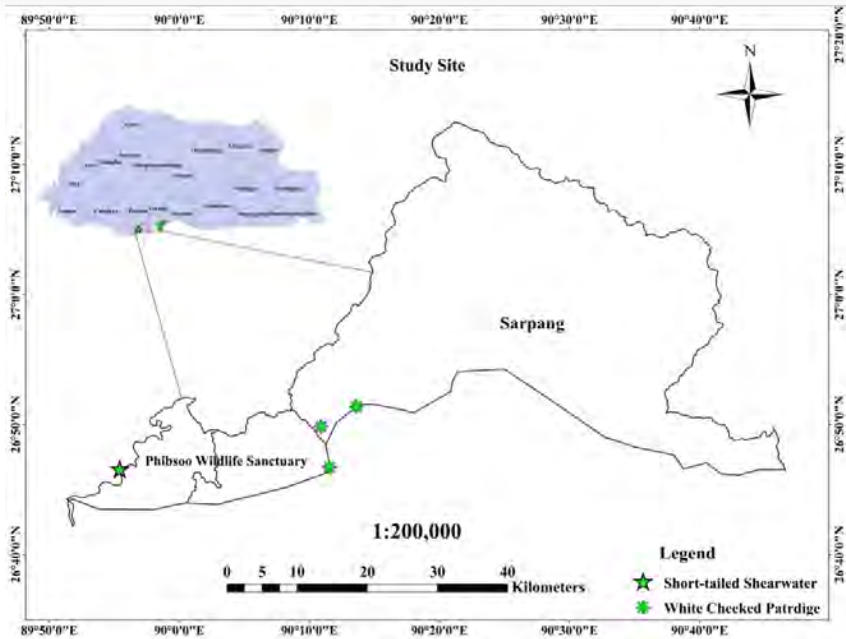


White-cheeked Partridge with distinct cheek pattern. © Tashi Phuntsho.

Pacific to nest off southern Australia in September, laying eggs in late November (Gillson 2008).

Short-tailed Shearwater is known to occur in Pakistan and Sri Lanka (Grimmett et al. 1998; Rasmussen & Anderton

2012), Bangladesh (Thompson et al. 2013), West Bengal (Giri et al. 2013), Arabian Sea, Kerala (Praveen et al. 2015) and India (Shah et al. 2018), but not been reported from Bhutan (Ludlow & Kinnear 1937; Clements 1992; Ali et al. 1996; Bishop 2009;



Location of new sightings.



Male and Female Partridge with reddish-orange legs. © Namgay Dorji.

Inskipp et al. 1999; Grimmett et al. 1998; Grimmett et al. 2019; Gyeltshen et al. 2020; Norbu et al. 2021; Tshuthrim & Wangchuk 2021). Here, we report the record of this species for the first time in Bhutan. A single Short-tailed Shearwater was observed swimming on Sunkosh River

(26.7547°N, 89.9094°E) of Bhutan on 20 January 2021 at elevation of 205 m. The bird was characterized by pale grey under wing coverts, shorter bill and deeper forehead, grayish feet extending in-flight beyond a short-rounded tail, and was reported as a vagrant to Pakistan and Sri Lanka. The observation was made in the

multiple use zone of PWS with cover of vegetation such as *Duabanga grandiflora*, *Terminalia* species, and *Tetrameles nudiflora*. Flood & Fisher (2019) defined its characteristics with greater maneuverability, faster flight, quicker wing-beats; shorter and narrower wings, shorter front-end projection, a lighter and more compact body, presence of dark hood, steep forehead, shorter neck and small size differentiating it from Sooty shearwater and Balearic Shearwater. Our record corresponds to the observation with presence of darker hood, short thick neck, and short bill.

The species record is very significant that the species' range extends from India to Bhutan. Outside Bhutan, the species is known by names like Tasmanian mutton bird, Yolla and moon bird. It breeds in Australia and migrates every year to north Pacific Ocean and reach Arctic Ocean. It also winters the north of Japan, near Aleutian Island (USA) being trans-equatorial migrant (Praveen et al. 2015). Thompson et al. 2013 also reported from Bangladesh. In India, it has been recorded thrice (Giri et al. 2013;

Praveen et al. 2015; Shah et al. 2018). Short-tailed Shearwater *Ardenna tenuirostris* has extremely large range and does not approach the thresholds for vulnerable range size criteria and also vulnerable population size criteria. Therefore, it is evaluated as Least Concern in International Union of Conservation and Nature (IUCN) Red List category.

White-cheeked Partridge (WCP) *Arborophila atrogularis* (Family Phasianida) is recorded from Singye Gewog (26.8561N, 90.2269E), Sarpang District, Bhutan at an elevation of 323 m observed in late winter on 25 March 2020. The sightings were further validated with sound record in Phibsoo (26.7776N, 90.1924E) at elevation of 232 m and in Singye top (top 26.8309N, 90.1816E) at elevation of 552 m. The species record not only provides the morphometric but also the first pictorial record from Bhutan. Outside Bhutan, it is resident in eastern Himalaya, northeastern India and Bangladesh (Grimmett et al. 1998, 2019), Myanmar, and China (Birdlife International 2022). WCP is known to inhabit dense undergrowth in broadleaved primary and secondary evergreen forest, and sometimes adjacent scrub, bamboo, grassland, and cultivation, most frequently below 750m in India, but usually at 610–1,220 m in southeastern Asia (Grewal et al. 2016; Birdlife International 2022). Two dead White-cheeked Partridge were observed from a scrub undergrowth of *Chromolaena odorata*, *Psilanthus bengalensis*, and regeneration of *Schima wallichii*.

Morphological measurements and photographs of the birds were taken by the first and fourth authors soon after the observation. Two medium-sized gray-brown partridge with beak length of 240–245 mm, white-cheeked, distinctive head, neck pattern and wing span of 135–135.5 mm, tail length of 40–40.5 mm and reddish-orange legs with tail length 40 mm. The species during measurement were dead which might have resulted in morphological shrinkages as reported by Winker (1996). The species weighed 277.53–278 g without much difference among the two species. Eleven months after the birds were found, the species was confirmed as White-cheeked Partridge *Arborophila atrogularis* by Dr. Sherub, Ugyen Wangchuk Institute for Conservation and Environmental Research, Bumthang, Department of Forest and Park Service.

White-cheeked partridge *Arborophila atrogularis* has been reported as decreasing population trend with moderately small, scarcer and declining population. Therefore, it has been evaluated as Near Threatened in IUCN Red list category (Birdlife international 2022). Bhutan might need to conserve and protect the species by adding it to Schedule I as protected species and give high conservation importance. Furthermore, surveys on its distribution, status and habitat information and its breeding status are direly needed.

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