

This guide covers 138 birds found in Lahaul and Spiti district of Himachal Pradesh, which falls in the Indian Trans-Himalayan region. For ease of reference, the species have been sorted into the following 5 categories.

WETLAND BIRDS

High-altitude wetlands include lakes, ponds, streams, and marshy areas, and are used by birds for breeding, nesting, and feeding. Some important wetlands in Lahaul and Spiti are Chandra Tal and Suraj Tal Wetlands, some of which serve as important habitats for birds like Himalayan Snowcock, Brahminy Ducks, Choughs, etc. Several migratory ducks and waders may be seen in these areas in summer and in passage during spring and autumn.

BIRDS OF PREY

Birds of Prey or Raptors hunt and feed on other animals, including smaller birds. They have excellent eyesight, strong feet, sharp talons for hunting, and a hooked beak for tearing into flesh. A great diversity of raptors is found in the region, from huge Vultures (Lammergeier or Bearded Vultures and Griffons) to smaller and fast-moving Falcons (Eurasian Hobby and Eurasian Sparrowhawk).

GROUND FEEDING BIRDS

Ground feeders are a diverse group of birds that are primarily terrestrial and feed on the ground. Most of the birds found in the region fall into this category, from large birds like Pheasants, Pigeons and Crows to medium-sized Thrushes to small Wheatears, Accentors, and seed-eating Finches and Sparrows. This also includes birds like Redstarts, Chats, and Shrikes, which may perch low in a bush but find their prey (small insects and reptiles) on the ground, as well as birds found in scrub habitats like Larks and Pipits.

AERIAL FEEDING BIRDS

Aerial feeders like Swifts, Martins, and Swallows are insectivorous birds that hunt and feed in flight. They have pointed wings and can often be seen gliding gracefully through the air or performing acrobatics to catch insects. They are very fast in flight and prefer open areas and are sometimes seen near water.

ARBOREAL BIRDS

Arboreal birds are those whose life cycles are associated with trees and shrubs. Since the region is very sparsely wooded, most birds in this category are small Warblers, which feed on insects among the leaves of trees and shrubs. Orioles prefer the tops of trees, while flocks of White-eyes and Warblers can be seen in the bushes. Birds like Nuthatches, Woodpeckers, and Treecreepers can be seen in woody areas.

 Migratory birds that visit Lahaul and Spiti during winter (October-March), from their northern breeding grounds in Europe or Central/East/North Asia.

 Migratory birds that visit Lahaul and Spiti during summer (April-June) to breed.

 Migratory birds that stop for a short time during a seasonal migration.

 Gender symbols indicate where the male and female of the species look different. If no symbols are shown, it means that they look alike.

Size of each bird indicates the length from beak tip to tail tip.  indicates breeding plumage.

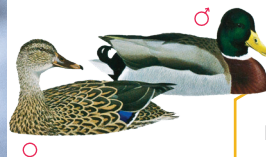
Bird illustrations used with permission from "Birds of the Indian Subcontinent" by Richard Grimmett, Carol Inskipp and Tim Inskipp.

Birds of Lahaul & Spiti

a pocket guide to 138 birds of the trans-Himalaya



WETLAND BIRDS



Mallard
60 cm

DUCKS
feed on aquatic plants, seeds and algae, by diving, surface feeding or grazing on land.

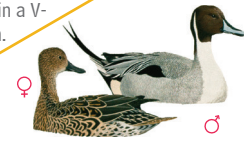


Common Pochard
46 cm

GEESE
breed at high-altitude wetlands. They migrate and feed in flocks, and fly in a V-formation.



Northern Shoveler
50 cm



Nothern Pintail
60 cm



Tufted Duck
44 cm



Ruddy Shelduck
59 cm



Bar-headed Goose
74 cm



Greylag Goose
75 cm



Great Crested Grebe
54 cm

GREBES
often dive below the surface for fish.

COOTS/MOORHENS
look like small ducks but lack webbed feet.



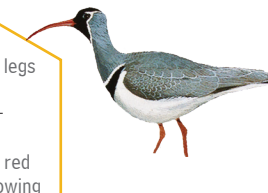
Eurasian Coot
38 cm



Eurasian Moorhen
34 cm



Black-winged Stilt
42 cm



Ibisbill
40 cm

STILTS
are birds with long legs and long bills.

IBISBILL
has a downcurved red bill and likes fast-flowing streams.



Common Sandpiper
20 cm

WADERS
like sandpipers, prefer marshy areas near the edges of waterbodies.



Green Sandpiper
23 cm



Common Kingfisher
16 cm



White-throated Dipper
20 cm

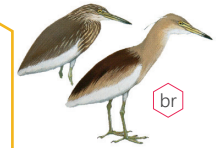


Brown Dipper
20 cm



KINGFISHERS
have large heads, strong bills and short legs.

DIPPERS
hunt underwater in fast flowing streams.



Indian Pond Heron
44 cm



Great Cormorant
90 cm



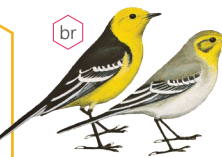
Whiskered Tern
24 cm



Gray Wagtail
19 cm

HERONS
have long legs and neck, and thick, sharp bills.

CORMORANTS
are seen perched on rocks or branches with outspread wings.



Citrine Wagtail
19 cm



Yellow Wagtail
18 cm

TERNs
have long, pointed wings and a graceful flight.

WAGTAILS
are slender birds which walk on the ground, often with their tail wagging.



White Wagtail
19 cm

BIRDS OF PREY



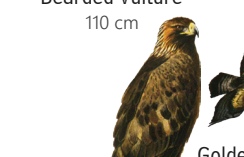
Bearded Vulture
110 cm

VULTURES
have a huge wing span; they feed on carcasses.



Himalayan Griffon
120 cm

EAGLES
have a powerful build while KITES have narrow wings.



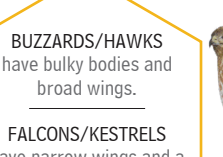
Golden Eagle
82 cm



Booted Eagle
49 cm



Black Kite
60 cm



Himalayan Buzzard
49 cm

BUZZARDS/HAWKS
have bulky bodies and broad wings.

FALCONS/KESTRELS
have narrow wings and a swift flight.



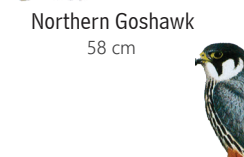
Northern Goshawk
58 cm



Eurasian Sparrowhawk
34 cm



Eurasian Kestrel
32 cm



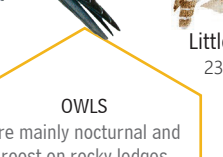
Eurasian Hobby
33 cm



Little Owl
23 cm



Himalayan Owl
38 cm



Eurasian Eagle Owl
60 cm

OWLS
are mainly nocturnal and roost on rocky ledges and abandoned buildings during the day.

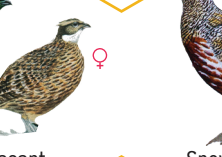


Himalayan Snowcock
65 cm

SNOWCOCKS/ PHEASANTS/PARTRIDGES
are bulky birds seen on rocky slopes and alpine meadows, often in family groups.



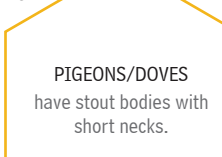
Koklass Pheasant
M: 61 cm, F: 54 cm



Snow Partridge
38 cm



Chukar Partridge
38 cm



PIGEONS/DOVES
have stout bodies with short necks.



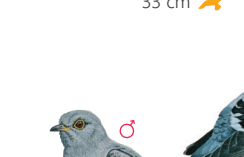
Oriental Turtle-Dove
33 cm



Snow Pigeon
34 cm



Hill Pigeon
33 cm



Rock Pigeon
33 cm



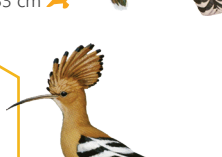
Common Cuckoo
33 cm



Himalayan Cuckoo
33 cm

CUCKOOS
have bulky bodies and long tails, and loud, repetitive calls.

HOPOE
has a long curved bill and raises its crest when alert.



Hoopoe
31 cm



Large-billed Crow
47 cm

CROWS/RAVENS
are inquisitive, noisy birds with long, straight bills.

CHOUGHS
are black with brightly-coloured legs and bill.



Common Raven
65 cm



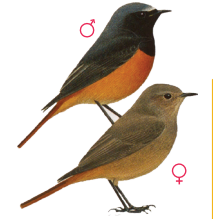
Alpine Chough
38 cm



House Crow
40 cm



Red-billed Chough
38 cm



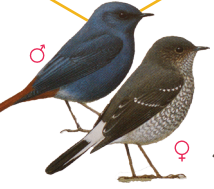
Black Redstart
15 cm



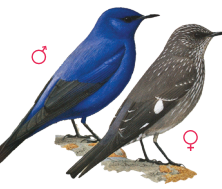
White-winged Redstart
18 cm



White-capped Redstart
19 cm



Plumbeous Redstart
12 cm



Grandala
23 cm



Streaked Laughingthrush
20 cm

LAUGHINGTHRUSHES
are shy birds that are more often heard than seen.

THRUSHES
are usually seen on the ground and have a fluty song.



Variegated Laughingthrush
25 cm



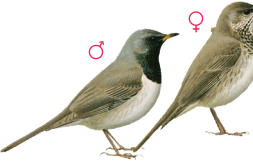
Common Stonechat
13 cm



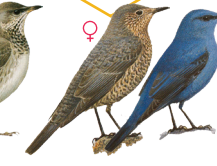
Bluethroat
15 cm

CHATS
like Stonechats, Bluethroats and Rubythroats perch on a low twig or stone and are often seen around streams.

WHEATEARS
are birds of open country that often perch upright on a rock or twig near the ground.



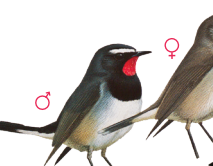
Black-throated Thrush
26 cm



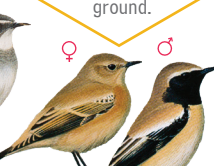
Blue Rock-Thrush
20 cm



Blue Whistling-Thrush
33 cm



Himalayan Rubythroat
14 cm



Desert Wheatear
14 cm



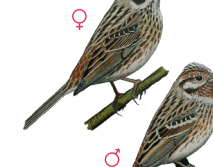
Pied Wheatear
14 cm



Tibetan Blackbird
26 cm



Yellowhammer
16 cm



Pine Bunting
17 cm



Brown Accentor
15 cm



Robin Accentor
16 cm



Alpine Accentor
16 cm



Rock Bunting
16 cm

BUNTINGS
have a strong, conical bill for shelling seeds.

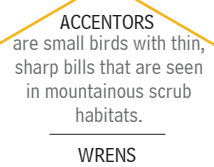
WALLCREEPERS
have large, strong feet to climb over rock faces.



Wallcreeper
16 cm



Rufous-breasted Accentor
15 cm



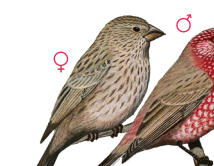
Eurasian Wren
9 cm

ACCENTORS
are small birds with thin, sharp bills that are seen in mountainous scrub habitats.

WRENS
are tiny birds seen in low bushes or fallen logs.



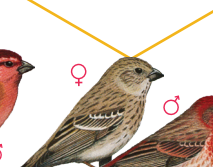
Great Rosefinch
19 cm



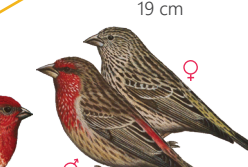
Streaked Rosefinch
19 cm



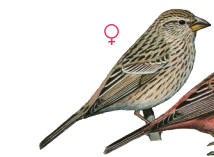
Pink-browed Rosefinch
14 cm



Common Rosefinch
15 cm



Red-fronted Rosefinch
20 cm

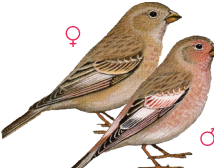


Blyth's Rosefinch
15 cm



Himalayan White-browed Rosefinch
18 cm

ROSEFINCHES
are seed-eaters with thick, conical beaks; the males are various shades of red, females are brown.



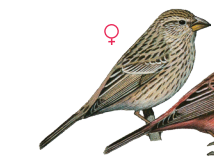
Mongolian Finch
14 cm



Spectacled Finch
16 cm



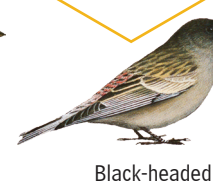
Twite
13 cm



Tibetan Snowfinch
17 cm



Plain Mountain Finch
15 cm



Black-headed Mountain-Finch
18 cm



European Goldfinch
14 cm



Blanford's Snowfinch
15 cm



House Sparrow
15 cm



Oriental Skylark
16 cm



Olive-backed Pipit
16 cm

SPARROWS
are grain eaters found near human habitation.

LARKS
are dull-coloured birds with a melodious song.



Himalayan Bluetail
15 cm



Orange Bullfinch
14 cm



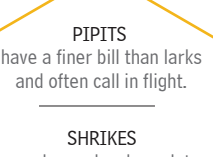
White-winged Grosbeak
23 cm



Hume's Lark
14 cm



Rosy Pipit
15 cm



Long-tailed Shrike
25 cm

PIPITS
have a finer bill than larks and often call in flight.

SHRIKES
perch on a low branch to look for prey.

GROSBEAKS/BULLFINCHES
are seed-eating birds with large conical beaks.

SERINS
are heavily streaked and are found in flocks.



Red-headed Bullfinch
17 cm



Black-and-Yellow Grosbeak
22 cm



Yellow-breasted Greenfinch
13 cm

FINCHES
have pointed, thin, conical beaks. Some of them are colourful or have striking plumage.

SWIFTS
have long, pointed wings and are rarely perched.

MARTINS/SWALLOWS
have a streamlined body, they perch on wires.



Common Swift
17 cm



Little Swift
15 cm



Eurasian Crag-Martin
15 cm

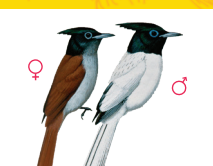


Common House-Martin
13 cm



Barn Swallow
18 cm

AERIAL FORAGING BIRDS



Indian Paradise Flycatcher
20 cm



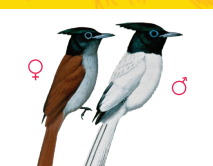
Cinereous Tit
14 cm



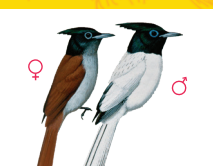
Green-backed Tit
13 cm

FLYCATCHERS
have small, flattened bills and make short sallies from a perch to catch insects.

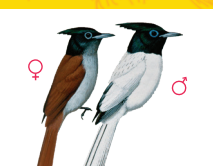
TITS/WHITE-EYES
are active birds that are usually seen in flocks; they feed in the canopy.



Ultramarine Flycatcher
12 cm

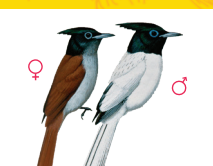


Coal Tit
11 cm

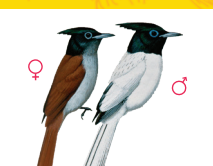


Indian White-eye
10 cm

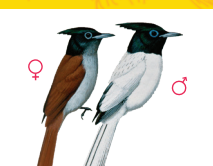
WARBLERS
are tiny, restless birds flicking their wings and chirping in the bushes, dull coloured in shades of yellow, olive and brown.



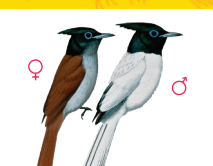
Mountain Chiffchaff
11 cm



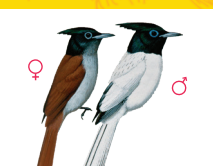
Tickell's Leaf Warbler
11 cm



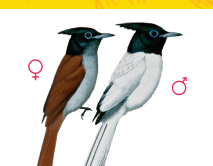
Greenish Warbler
10 cm



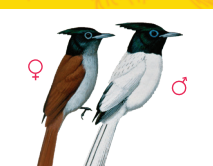
Hume's Leaf Warbler
10 cm



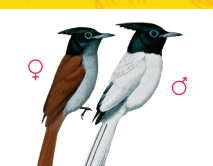
Western Crowned Warbler
11 cm



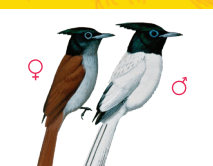
Lemon-rumped Warbler
10 cm



Lesser Whitethroat
13 cm



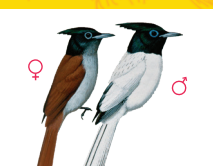
Goldcrest
9 cm



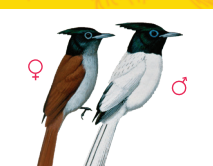
Indian Golden Oriole
25 cm

ORIOLES
are brightly coloured birds with fluty songs.

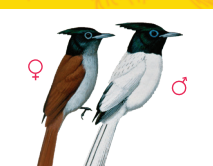
YUHINAS
are usually seen in the canopy in noisy flocks.



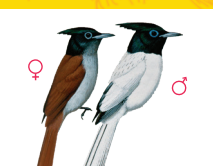
Whiskered Yuhina
13 cm



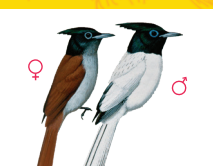
White-cheeked Nuthatch
13 cm



Bar-tailed Treecreeper
14 cm



Himalayan Woodpecker
24 cm



Scaly-bellied Woodpecker
35 cm

NUTHATCHES/TREECREEPERS
creep along tree trunks and branches looking for insects.

WOODPECKERS
have a sturdy bill to probe tree trunks.

ARBOREAL BIRDS