

# First Sighting Record of Striated Babbler- *Argya Earlei*, (Aves: Passeriformes: Leiothrichidae) from Bhaluka Beel (Wetland), Dakshin Dinajpur, West Bengal, India

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## Abstract:

The Striated Babbler- *Argya earlei* is a partial migrant bird species from the family Leiothrichidae. It is a resident species in the Himalayas, with a distribution range that includes India, Nepal, Bhutan, Pakistan and Afghanistan. Although the bird is commonly found in other districts of West Bengal, with some photographic and statistical records available (eBird 2023-24), surprisingly, it has never been recorded in Dakshin Dinajpur district, despite the presence of similar and suitable habitat conditions. In this paper, we report the first sighting record of this species from Bhaluka Beel, a wetland area from Dakshin Dinajpur, West Bengal, India with photographic evidence.

**Keywords:** *Argya earlei*, wetland, Bhaluka Beel, Dakshin Dinajpur, West Bengal

## Introduction

Seven species of babblers have been reported in India; *Turdoides striata*, *Argya malcolmi*, *Argya earlei*, *Argya caudatus*, *Turdoides affinis*, *Argya subrufa*, *Chatarrahaea longirostris*. Scientifically *Argya earlei*, commonly known as the Himalayan Babbler belongs to perching birds called passerines with 4 toes (3 directed forward and 1 directed backward) belong to Passeriformes, which is the largest order of birds. It includes the babblers, which are a diverse group of oscine passerine birds, displaying great variation in body size (6-156g), bill shape, plumage colour, vocalization, social behavior and ecology (del Hoyo et al., 2007; Cai et al., 2019). A total of 452 species have been reported, belonging to 5 families (Gill and Donsker, 2018). Among these, family Leiothrichidae represents the largest clade of babblers in terms of species diversity with 125 species (Cibois et al., 2018). In this paper we report the first sighting record of *Argya earlei* from the wetlands of Bhaluka Beel in Dakshin Dinajpur, West Bengal, India.

## Habitat

Bhaluka Beel (Figure 1) is a freshwater wetland surrounded by agricultural fields, two large ponds and scrubby vegetation spread over a vast area. The water body along with peripheral marshy lands measures about 70-80 acres of land. The area is dotted with trees, scrubs, grasslands including species like *Acacia*

and *Eucalyptus*. The terrain is generally flat, with some areas of low-lying grasslands. Several avian species visit the place around the year.



**Figure 1. Bhaluka Beel, Dakshin Dinajpur, West Bengal**

### Observation Details

On 9-12-2023 in a cold winter morning we had the opportunity to visit Bhaluka Beel, a wetland area over a weak water stream locally marked as Shree River, near Maniko village at Hili Subdivision in Dakshin Dinajpur, West Bengal. During our visit, we observed a family of *Argya earlei*, mixed with a flock of jungle Babbler. The family consisted of two full grown adults with four sub adult juvenile sharing common space with a flock of jungle babbler. The birds were foraging for food on a patch of scrubby vegetation. The birds were approximately 10-15 meters away from us, allowing for clear observation. The image was captured with Canon 90D DSLR camera and 100-400 mm lens.



**Figure 2. *Argya earlei* (Date of photograph: 09-12-2023, Time: Around 10.30 am to 11.15 am. Cold and foggy day)**

**Morphology**

The birds had a distinctive brownish-grey spotted plumage under the whitish neck area and round shaped yellow-coloured eyes with black stripe above the eye. Their beaks were strong and brown with slightly curved shaped black tip.

**Behavior**

The adult pair of *Argya earlei* along with four sub adult juvenile species was observed foraging for food on bushy scrubby vegetation, searching for insects and small invertebrates among the leaf litter and grass. They moved around river side bushy areas in a slow and deliberate manner, occasionally stopping to look around and survey their surroundings.

**Conclusion**

The observation of *Argya earlei* at Bhaluka Beel, Dakshin Dinajpur, West Bengal, provided valuable insights into the behavior, habitat, and morphology of this species. The wetland area of Bhaluka Beel appears to provide a suitable habitat for *Argya earlei*, with its mix of scrubby vegetation, grasslands, and trees. Further studies on the ecology and behavior of *Argya earlei* at Bhaluka Beel would be beneficial in understanding the diversity of flora and fauna in this region and conservation status of this species.

**References**

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