

First record of Bristled Grassbird from Paschim Bardhaman District, West Bengal

Bristled Grassbird *Chaetornis striata* is a globally threatened bird. It was considered 'Vulnerable' as per IUCN Red List published in 2017 (BirdLife International: 2021). This species was also marked for conservation concern for 3 states (Uttar Pradesh, Uttarakhand, and West Bengal) according to the States of Indian Birds report (SolB 2020). The population of this species is rapidly declining due to rapid habitat loss, i.e., tall, dense grassland with wet soil. The species is resident and restricted at different lowland region of India (Madge 2020). As per the latest literature on the birds of West Bengal, the bird can be found at marshlands of northern part of the state and also at some districts of southern part (Kolkata, Hooghly, and South 24 Parganas) (Baidya et al. 2017). Additionally, this species was also recently recorded multiple times from Paschim Medinipur District (Pal 2020).

An adult individual was first observed on 5 July 2020 at Andai (23.609°N, 87.237°E).

Adult Bristled Grassbird.
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The habitat was tall grasslands which flooded seasonally with rainwater (Image 1). The location was very near to recently constructed Kali Nazrul Islam Airport. Previously, the area (approx. 3,000-acre area including airport and the aero city project area) was seasonally flooded grassland and cultivation land, which was a perfect habitat for the Bristled Grassbird. The area was a paradise for different migratory & resident birds of more than a hundred species and also was home for a great variety of reptiles, amphibians, butterflies, & odonates (Nayak 2018, 2017, 2015). Nowadays, most portion of the habitat is already destroyed due to heavy construction activities surrounding the airport as a part of different development projects. The extent of the habitat loss can be understood to some extent from the Image 1.

The species was further recorded around the same location and those observations are summarised in Table 1 and Image 2. The nests were built at the lower half of the



Image 1. The nesting habitat of Bristled Grassbird as observed on 5 July 2020. © Sankha Misra.

grasses, near to the ground. Preferred habitat was tall grass of about 6–8 ft height. Surprisingly, all nesting sites were at close vicinity from human construction. Adults were found to be carrying food materials. First, they come and sit at mid height of the grass and then vanish inside the bush to their nest to feed their chicks. After that, the male bird was found to call for some duration from the grass-top, while the female bird was never found to call. Image taken during our field visit and sonogram of the call recorded given in Image 3, respectively. The

sonogram is usually mirrored 'N' shaped, may be broken

some time at the beginning. The species was never

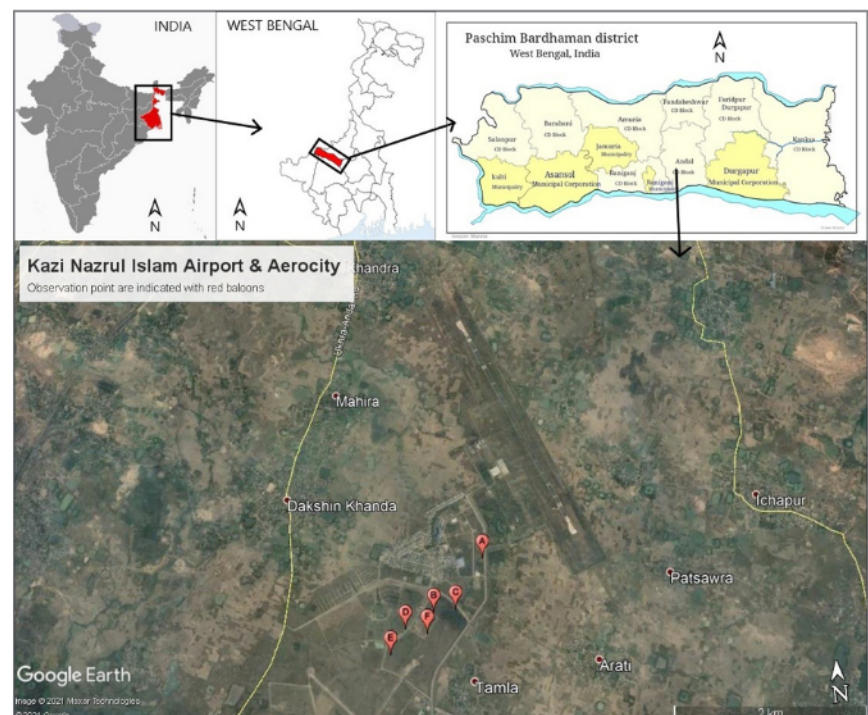


Image 2. Locations of all observations point (red balloon) in satellite image and relative location of the study area in map. The map of Paschim Bardhaman District developed by Sou. av Manna.

Table 1: The table showing the location of the study sites, date and number of birds observed during all visits

Site no.	Coordinates	Observation date	Number of birds
A	23.609194°N, 87.237778°E	5.vii.2020	1
B	23.604389°N, 87.232111°E	12. vii.2020	2
C	23.604500°N, 87.234417°E	26.vii.2020	3
D	23.600750°N, 87.227278°E	2.viii.2020	5
E	23.602444°N, 87.231250°E	29.viii.2020	1

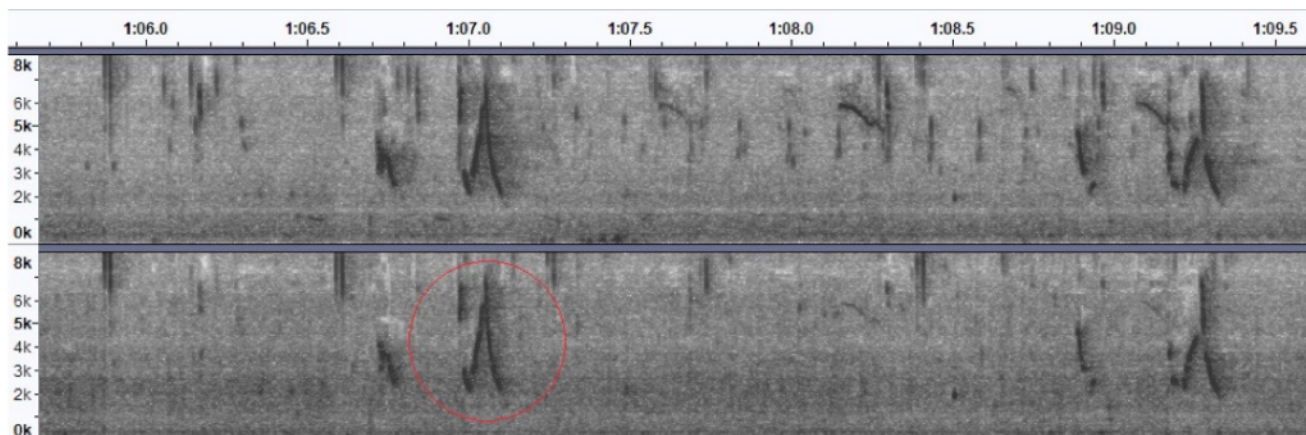


Image 3. Sonogram of the call recorded during the first visit by Sankha Misra .

recorded from Paschim Bardhaman District. Neither does it have any media documentation from adjoining Bankura, Birbhum and Purba Bardhaman Districts. The only previous record of this species near to the study site was from Bankura District around 50 years ago (Gauntlett 1985). This record indicates the presence of this species in this district and needs further search at similar habitats for their presence. The habitat of other sightings of southern Bengal is similar to the study sites. Interestingly, this species was also found to build their nest close to human settlement at Paschim Medinipur District (Pal 2020). Further, conservation of the habitat of this

threatened species is the prime need of the hour from the concerned authorities. Since the birds were found to build their nest at the remaining long grass patches, it is strongly recommended to conserve and fence the nesting sites. In addition, creating man-made fire at the long grasslands during dry-season should be strongly discouraged.

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Sagar Adhurya¹, Sankha Misra², Sumit Kayal³ & Koushik Pan⁴

^{1,2&4} Member, Durgapur Wildlife Information and Nature Guide Society, Durgapur, West Bengal 713206, India.

³ Deputy Chief Electrical Engineer, Maintenance Coordination, Metro Railway, Kolkata, West Bengal 700071, India.

Email: ¹sa.jaradhurya@gmail.com (corresponding author)

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