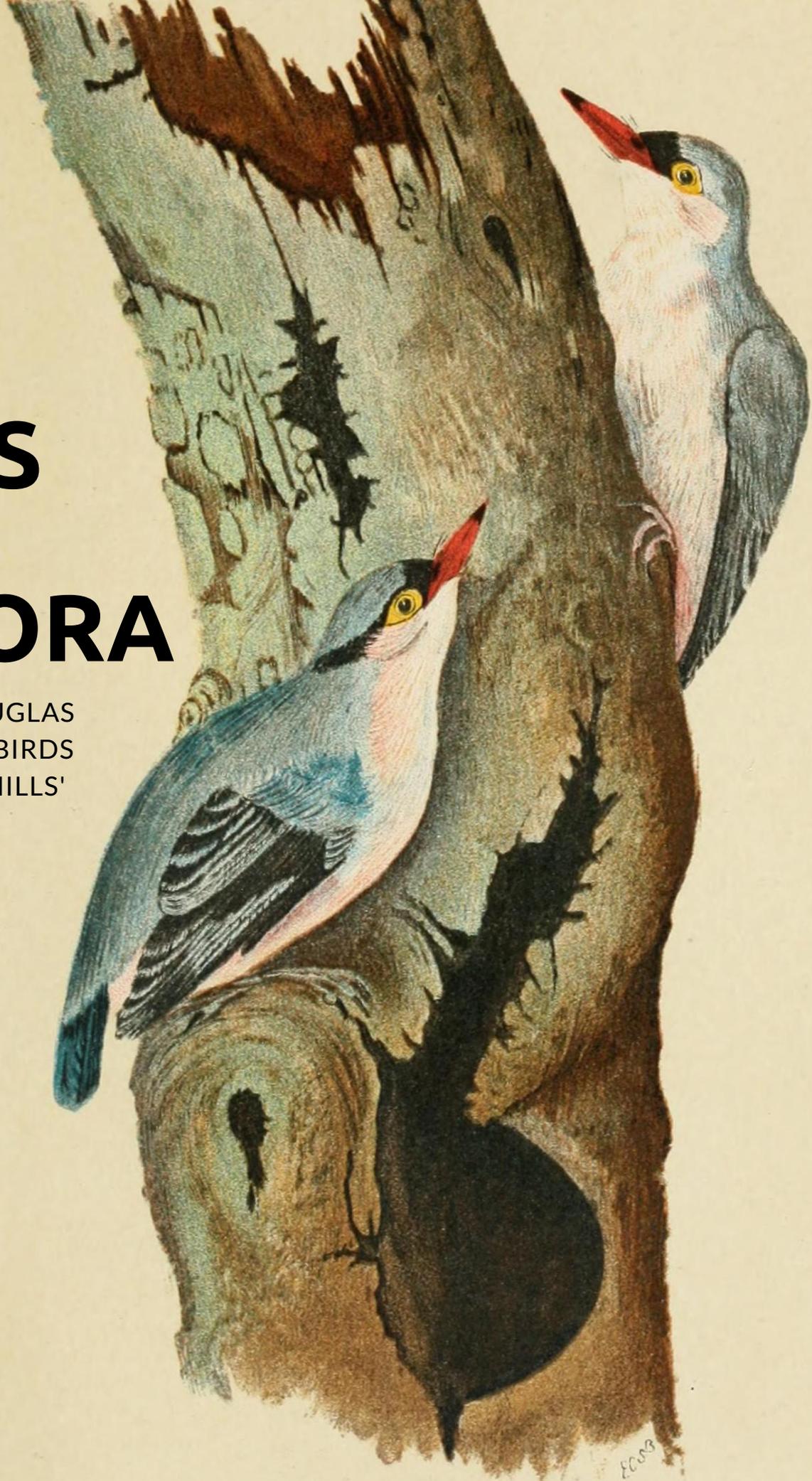


BIRDS OF ALMORA

INSPIRED BY DOUGLAS
DEWAR'S BOOK 'BIRDS
OF THE INDIAN HILLS'



LAYOUTS: DEVAYANI KHARE

INTRO

In 1915, Douglas Dewar, a barrister and British civil servant in India published 'Birds of the Indian Hills'. Targeted at British visitors to India with a keen interest in ornithology, the book describes birds across the Western and Eastern Himalayas, as also the Nilgiris and the Palni hills in the south.

Recently, I happened to stumble upon a copy - I had already read Dewar's 1916 publication, Bird Calendar for Northern India, and was delighted to find another of his books in the public domain. Having visited Almora in May 2019, I thought it would be interesting to compare notes and changes in nomenclature and distribution since Dewar's visits.

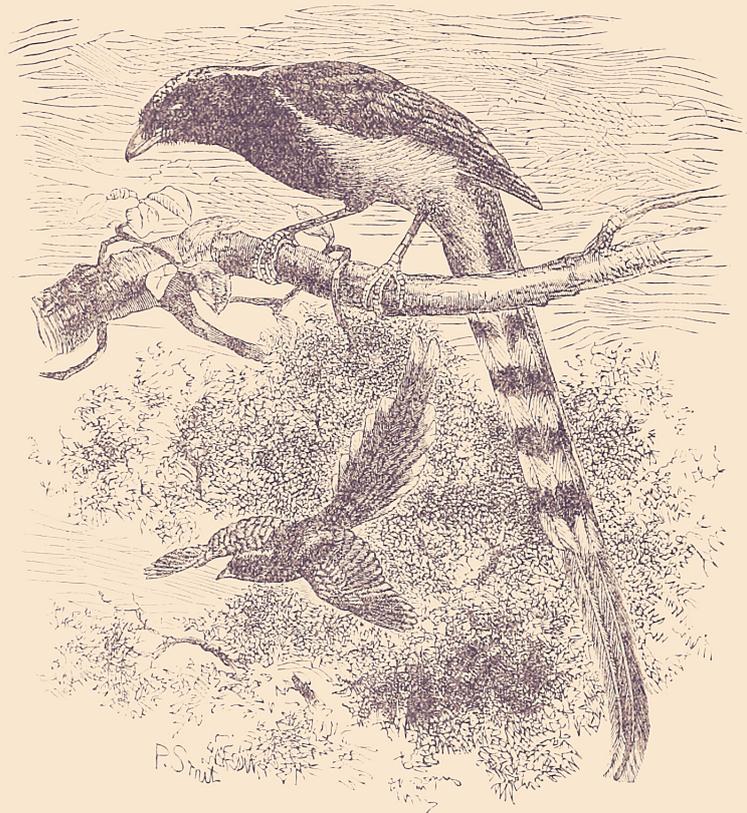
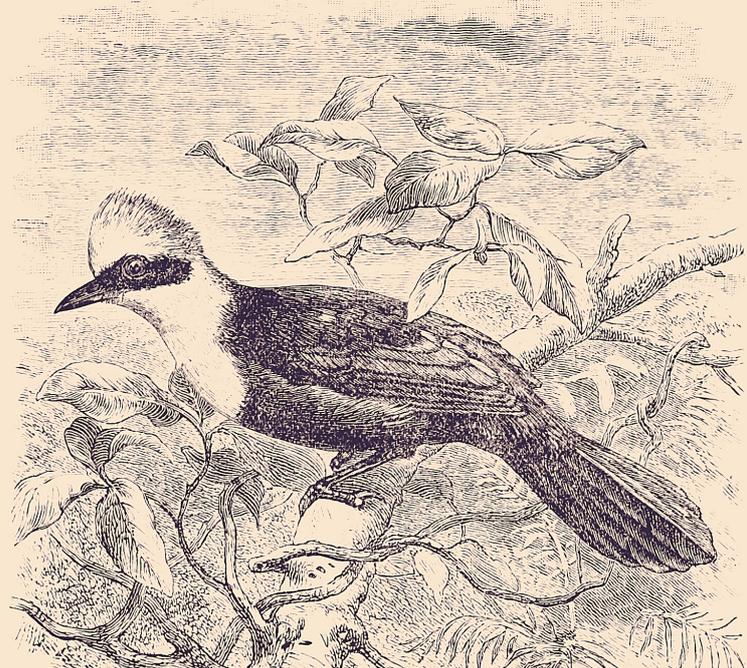
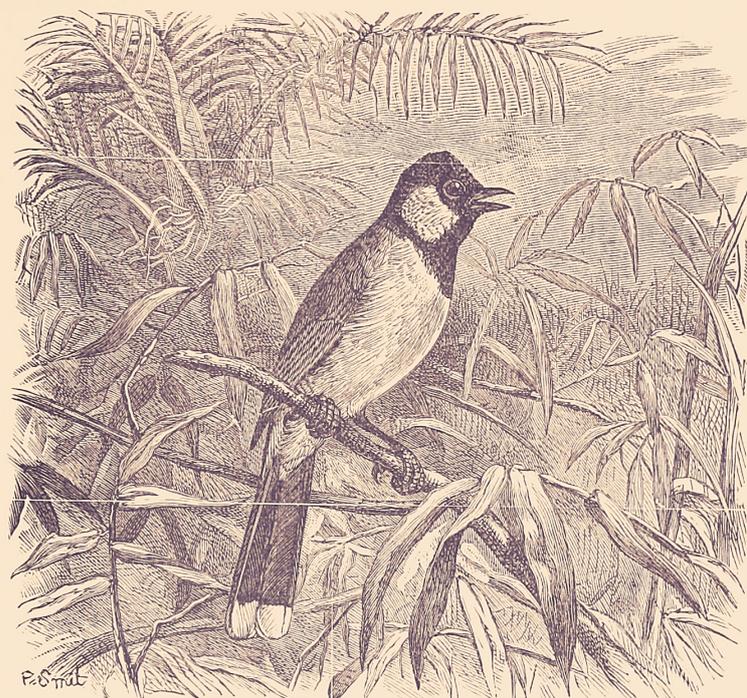
This e-book is a compilation of choice excerpts about some of Almora's birds, with images sourced from my travels or public domain photos (with due credit given).

Please note that bird names have been revised several times since Dewar's ornithology days, and the excerpts are directly picked up from his book. However, wherever possible, I have provided short annotations and notes for context.

Free copies of the book in different formats can be obtained at Project Gutenberg:
<http://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/23755>

INTRO PAGE IMAGES: EDWARD CHARLES STUART BAKER, PUBLIC DOMAIN, VIA WIKIMEDIA COMMONS

COVER IMAGE: VELVET FRONTED NUTHATCH
THE_FAUNA_OF_BRITISH_INDIA,_INCLUDING
_CEYLON_AND_BURMA_(BIRDS_VOL_1)_169
PUBLIC DOMAIN



MONAL PHEASANT



ALBERT FRISCH, BERLIN

HIMALAYAN IMPEYAN PHEASANT.

"The Himalayas are the home of many species of gallinaceous birds. In the highest ranges the snow-cocks, the tragopans, the blood pheasant, and the glorious monaul or Impeyan pheasant abound. The foothills are the happy hunting-grounds of the ancestral cock-a-doodle-doo."

QUOTE: DOUGLAS DEWAR

SOURCE: BIRDS OF THE INDIAN HILLS

IMAGE: CHARLES KNIGHT

BLACK BULBUL

"These are aggressive, disreputable-looking creatures which go about in disorderly, rowdy gangs. The song of most bulbuls is a medley of pleasant tinkling notes; the cries of the black bulbuls are harsh and unlovely. Black bulbuls look black only when seen from a distance. When closely inspected their plumage is seen to be dark grey. The bill and legs are red. The crest, I regret to say, usually looks the worse for wear. Black bulbuls seem never to descend to the ground. They keep almost exclusively to tops of lofty trees. They are very partial to the nectar enclosed within the calyces of rhododendron flowers. A party of half a dozen untidy black birds, with moderately long tails, which keep to the tops of trees and make much noise, may with certainty be set down as black bulbuls."

QUOTE: DOUGLAS DEWAR

SOURCE: BIRDS OF THE INDIAN HILLS

IMAGE: DEVAYANI KHARE



STREAKED

LAUGHING-G-THRUSH



"Laughing-thrushes are merely glorified babblers. The Himalayan streaked laughingthrush (*Trochalopteron lineatum*) is one of the commonest of the birds of our hill stations. It is a reddish brown fowl, about eight inches long. Each of its feathers has a black shaft; it is these dark shafts that give the bird its streaked appearance. Its chin, throat, and breast are chestnut-red, and on each cheek there is a patch of similar hue. The general appearance of the streaked laughing-thrush is that of one of the seven sisters who is wearing her best frock.

Like their sisters of the plains, Himalayan streaked laughing-thrushes go about in small flocks and are exceedingly noisy. Sometimes a number of them assemble, apparently for the sole purpose of holding a speaking competition. They are never so happy as when thus engaged. Streaked laughing-thrushes frequent gardens, and, as they are inordinately fond of hearing their own voices, it is certainly not their fault if they escape observation. "

QUOTE: DOUGLAS DEWAR

EXCERPT FROM: BIRDS OF THE INDIAN HILLS

IMAGE: DEVAYANI KHARE

BLUE-CAPPED ROCK THRUSH



"[The blue-headed rock-thrush (*Petrophila cinclorhyncha*)] is not like any bird found in England. The head, chin, and throat of the cock are cobalt blue; there is also a patch of this colour on his wing; the sides of the head and neck are black, as are the back and wing feathers. The rump and lower parts are chestnut. The hen, as is the case with many of her sex, is a inconspicuous olive-brown bird. This species spends most of its time on the ground, and frequents, as its name implies, open rocky ground."

QUOTE: DOUGLAS DEWAR

EXCERPT FROM: BIRDS OF THE INDIAN HILLS

IMAGE: DEVAYANI KHARE

NOTE: The blue-headed rock thrush has been renamed the Blue-capped Rock Thrush (*Monticola cinclorhyncha*).

GRAY BUSHCHAT

"The dark grey bush-chat (*Oreicola ferrea*) is as common in the hills as is the robin in the plains. It is about the size of a robin. The upper Plumage of the cock is grey in winter and black in summer. This change in colour is the result of wear and tear suffered by the feathers. Each bird is given by nature a new suit of clothes every autumn, and in most cases the bird, like a Government chaprassi, has to make it last a whole year. Both eat, drink, sleep, and do everything in their coats. There is, however, this difference between the bird and the chaprassi: the plumage of the former always looks clean and smart, while the garment of the chaprassi is usually neither the one nor the other. "

QUOTE: DOUGLAS DEWAR

SOURCE: BIRDS OF THE INDIAN HILLS

IMAGES: DEVAYANI KHARE

NOTE: The dark grey bush-chat has been renamed the Gray Bushchat (*Saxicola ferreus*).



PLUMBEOUS REDSTART

"[The plumbeous redstart or water-robin (*Rhyacornis fuliginosus*)] is very robin-like in appearance. The body is dusky indigo blue; the tail and abdomen are ferruginous. The habits of this and the bird just described are similar. Both species love to disport themselves on rocks and boulders lapped by the gentle-flowing stream in the valley, or lashed by the torrent on the hillside. Like all redstarts, these constantly flirt the tail."

QUOTE: DOUGLAS DEWAR

EXCERPT FROM: BIRDS OF THE INDIAN HILLS

IMAGE: DEVAYANI KHARE

NOTE: The plumbeous redstart bears the scientific name *Phoenicurus fuliginosus*.



VERDITER FLYCATCHER



"The beautiful verditer flycatcher (*Stoparola melanops*) must be familiar to everyone who has visited the Himalayas. The plumage of this flycatcher is pale blue—blue of that peculiar shade known as verditer blue. There is a little black on the head. The plumage of the hen is distinctly duller than that of the cock. This species loves to sit on a telegraph wire or at the very summit of a tree and pour forth its song, which consists of a pleasant, if somewhat harsh, trill or warble of a dozen or more notes."

QUOTE: DOUGLAS DEWAR

EXCERPT FROM: BIRDS OF THE INDIAN HILLS

IMAGE: DEVAYANI KHARE

NOTE: The Verditer Flycatcher now bears the scientific name *Eumyias thalassinus*.

BAR-TAILED TREE CREEPER



"[The Himalayan tree-creeper (*Certhia himalayana*)]. This is a small brown bird, striped and barred with black, which spends the day creeping over the trunks of trees seeking its insect quarry. It is an unobtrusive creature, and, as its plumage assimilates very closely to the bark over which it crawls, it would escape observation more often than it does, but for its call, which is a shrill one."

QUOTE: DOUGLAS DEWAR

EXCERPT FROM: BIRDS OF THE INDIAN HILLS

IMAGE: DEVAYANI KHARE

NOTE: Interestingly, this bird still bears the same scientific name but is commonly known as the bar-tailed treecreeper.

RED-RUMPED SWALLOW



"Not unlike the common swallow, but readily distinguishable from it in that the lower back is chestnut red, is *Hirundo nepalensis*— Hodgson's striated swallow, or the red-rumped swallow, as Jerdon well called it. This bird also breeds under eaves. Numbers of redrumped swallows are to be seen daily seeking their insect quarry over the lake at Naini Tal."

QUOTE: DOUGLAS DEWAR

EXCERPT FROM: BIRDS OF THE INDIAN HILLS

IMAGE: DEVAYANI KHARE

NOTE: This bird goes by the common name red-rumped swallow (*Cecropis daurica*).

EURASIAN HOPOE



"The unique hoopoe (*Upupa epops*) next demands our attention. This is a bird about the size of a myna. The wings and tail are boldly marked with alternate bands of black and white. The remainder of the plumage is of a fawn colour. The bill is long and slender, like that of a snipe, but slightly curved. The crest is the feature that distinguishes the hoopoe from all other birds. This opens and closes like a lady's fan. Normally it remains closed, but when the bird is startled, and at the moment when the hoopoe alights on the ground, the crest opens to form a magnificent corona.

Hoopoes seek their food on grass-covered land, digging insects out of the earth with their long, pick-like bills. They are very partial to a dust-bath. During the breeding season—that is to say, in April and May in the Himalayas—hoopoes continually utter in low tones uk-uk-uk. The call is not unlike that of the coppersmith, but less metallic and much more subdued. The flight of the hoopoe is undulating or jerky, like that of a butterfly. Young hoopoes are reared up in a hole in a building, or in a bank. The nest is incredibly malodoriferous."

QUOTE: DOUGLAS DEWAR

EXCERPT FROM: BIRDS OF THE INDIAN HILLS

IMAGE: DEVAYANI KHARE

CRESTED KINGFISHER



"The Himalayan pied kingfisher (*Ceryle lugubris*) is a bird as large as a crow. Its plumage is speckled black and white, like that of a Hamburg fowl. It feeds entirely on fish, and frequents the larger hill streams. Its habit is to squat on a branch, or if the day be cloudy, on a boulder in mid-stream, whence it dives into the water after its quarry. Sometimes, kestrel-like, it hovers in the air on rapidly-vibrating pinions until it espies a fish in the water below, when it closes its wings and drops with a splash in the water, to emerge with a silvery object in its bill."

QUOTE: DOUGLAS DEWAR

EXCERPT FROM: BIRDS OF THE INDIAN HILLS

IMAGE: DEVAYANI KHARE

NOTE: There's another species named pied kingfisher (*Ceryle rudis*) with a distribution across India. The crested kingfisher (*Ceryle lugubris*) is restricted to the Himalayas..