Reshikhola and Sillory Gaon — Unexplored Paradise of Birds

I was relishing a plateful of hot steamed momos along with a mug of creamy milk coffee sitting under a pine tree. The place was surrounded by lush green forests and in every nook and corner of the forest cover I could feel the presence of hundreds of colourful tiny creatures — singing, chirping and moving to and fro. An early morning cool breeze was desperately trying to nullify the effect of the slowly rising temperature in the environment.

Suddenly a pat on my back following my husband’s whispering ‘come with me’ made me follow him a few yards before I could discover a small flock of Grey-sided laughingthrush inside a dense foliage.

Sighting of this rare beauty was just the beginning of our two-day wonderful birding trip to Sillory Gaon and Reshikhola at Kalimpong Sub-Division of Darjeeling district in West Bengal. These places are rapidly gaining popularity among birders and we did not miss the opportunity.

From New Jalpaiguri railway station we headed towards Sillory Gaon at around five o’clock in the morning and the first halt was at “Silent Valley” on way to Sillory Gaon.

It was around 7.30 am. We were the first customer at a road-side food stall where the mouthwatering momos were just prepared for us in the very early hours in the morning.

In our very short stop-over at “Silent Valley” and “Sillory Gaon” we not only explored the elusive Grey-sided laughingthrush, but also some beautiful birds like the Himalayan Blue-tail, Blue-fronted redstart, Blue-winged minla, White-browed piculet, Black redstart, Fire-tailed sunbird, Rufous-gorgeted flycatcher, Rufous sibia, Rufous-breasted accentor, Grey-wagtail, Rosy pipit, Plain mountain finch, etc.

A half-an-hour journey from ‘Silent Valley’ took us to Sillory Gaon. This Himalayan hamlet boasts of a rich avifaunal treasure. We could explore a plethora of birds...
there on the whole day birding trip. After the day long birding there we left for our next destination ‘Reshikhol’ – an hour’s journey from Sillery Gaon. The place situated beside the bank of ‘Reshi’ river mesmerized us with its beautiful landscape. As we reached there after sunset, there was no scope of exploring the place that day.

We booked our accommodation at ‘Reshi River Camp’ for two nights.

The next morning birding started with the sighting of a flock of Scarlet minivets just around the camp site. Then we decided to look for the Forktails around Reshi River. We had to get down about a 100 feet to reach the river bed from the camp site. Our expectations were fulfilled with the sighting of the Brown dipper, Slaty-backed forktail, Little forktail, Himalayan kingfisher, White-capped water redstart and just beside the river stream we explored a Walcreeper on a rocky inclination.

The next birding session started after a heavy breakfast and we planned to explore inside the forest covers especially for the White-crested laughingthrush. Inside the thick vegetation we spotted the Whistler’s warbler, Yellow-bellied fantail, White-throated fantail, Pied flycatcher-shrike, Slaty-bellied tesia, Puff-throated babbler, Crimson sunbird, Grey-hooded warbler, Small niltava, Little pied flycatcher, Green-backed tit, Black-throated sunbird, Green magpie, Asian barred owlet, etc.

But our target species the White-crested Laughingthrush kept us running all the day. We ran in their direction every time we heard their trademark call, but were able to catch just a few glimpses only. Finally, we could spot them clearly on our way back to the camp. A group of four to five birds with unmistakable long white crest and black mask were found hopping inside the dense undergrowth.

They were foraging on the ground, calling one another, bursting out every now and again, where everyone was trying to outshout the rest. We got ample opportunity to observe this typical behavior along with capturing some beautiful moments.

The next morning we left ‘Reshikhol’ wishing to come back again to this paradise of Laughingthrushes.

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