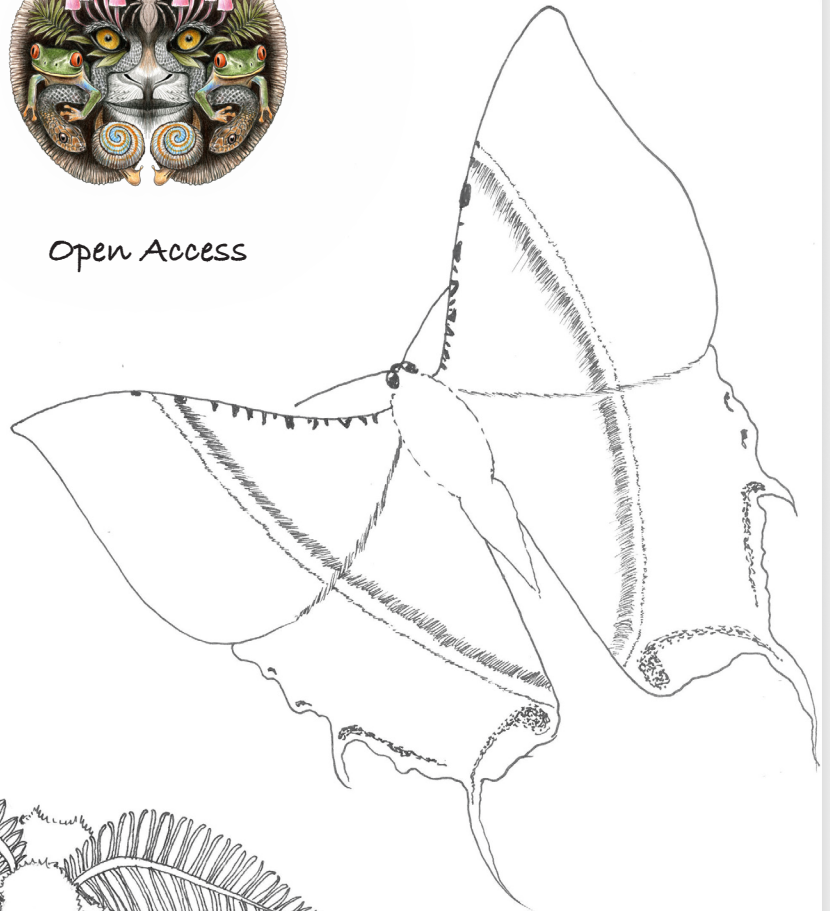
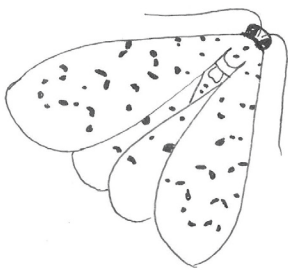


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Cover: Celebrating the unsung heroes—moths, our nocturnal pollinators. © Priyanka Iyer.



First record of Horned Grebe *Podiceps auritus* (Linnaeus, 1758) (Aves: Passeriformes: Podicipedidae) from Jammu & Kashmir, India

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The Horned Grebe *Podiceps auritus*, a little diving waterbird in the family Podicipedidae and is found in North America and Eurasia. It breeds in eastern Siberia, western Europe, and Eurasia (Stedman 2020). The bird is a vagrant in India and Pakistan, and migrates during winter (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Brraich & Singh 2021). It is reliant on a watery environment throughout the whole year and nests close to the edges of ponds and marshes that have patches of open water and vegetation that emerge from the water. The bird is monogamous and very possessive of its territory. After hatching, the young ones are sub precocial and require care for many days, during which they are fed and kept warm by parents (Stedman 2020). During summer, it primarily feeds on arthropods, including adults and larvae of insects, particularly beetles, dragonflies, mayflies, damselflies, caddisflies, and water bugs. In winter, it mainly forages on fishes and crustaceans except in Europe. In North America, it feeds predominantly on macroinvertebrates (Stedman 2000), while sticklebacks of the family Gasterosteidae are its key prey in Europe (Fjelds  1973).

The Horned Grebe is widespread in Europe, however, it seems to be relatively uncommon throughout Asia, where it has been considerably less studied; population trends are not known (Stedman 2020). Populations of Horned Grebe are decreasing all over the world (Vlug & Fjelds  1990), currently it is listed as 'Vulnerable' by the IUCN Red List (Birdlife International 2018). The exact causes of the population decline are unclear, it is quite possible that it is connected to the human disturbance, forestry activities around breeding grounds, competition with sympatric grebes, egg depredation by European Mink *Mustela lutreola*, Raccoon *Procyon lotor*, & Hooded Crow *Corvus cornix*, killing by inclement weather during migration, and loss of natural habitat (del Hoyo et al. 1992; Stedman 2020).

The Wular Lake is an Important Bird Area (IBA) and a well-known Ramsar site in the world. It has a total area of 13,292 ha and is situated about 34 km to the north-west of Srinagar. It is an essential habitat for both migratory as well as resident water birds. The important migratory waterfowl species, including the Common Teal *Anas crecca*, Pintail *Anas acuta*, Shoveler

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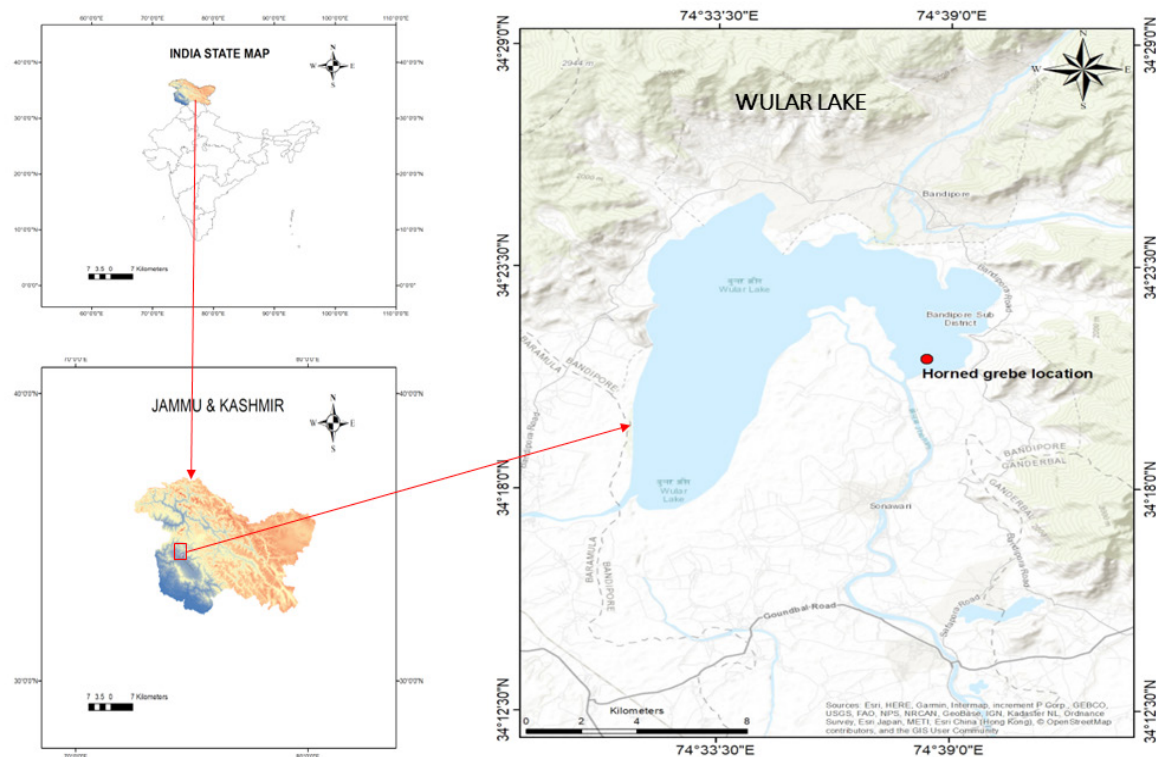


Image 1. The sighting location of Horned Grebe at Wular Lake, Bandipora, Jammu & Kashmir, India.

Anas clypeata, Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*, Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*, Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina*, Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*, Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*, Greylag Geese *Anser anser*, and Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis*, find the lake to be an ideal wintering location.

The first record of Horned Grebe from India was on 28 December 1993, near Ramnagar, Uttar Pradesh (Drijvers 1995). This was followed by several records from northern India (Brraich & Singh 2021). In India, Horned grebe was mostly seen in Dighal Wetland, Haryana (Ahlawat 2018), and one sighting was also observed in Borit Lake, Hunza Gilgit-Baltistan, Pakistan on 14 December 2016 (Shah 2016; Brraich & Singh 2021). There is no previous published evidence on the presence of Horned Grebe in Jammu & Kashmir including Ladakh (Suhail et al. 2020). Here we report the first record of a group of three Horned Grebes with photographic evidence (Images 2–5). The birds were sighted on 06 March 2023 at 1030 h at Wular Lake of Jammu & Kashmir (Image 1). The birds were feeding and diving during observation. The first two authors successfully got photographs and a short video. The bird was recorded at 34.35327 N, 74.63724 E, with an

altitude of 1,597 m. In contrary, the Horned Grebes were seen in December–February in previous sightings observed in other parts of India (Brraich & Singh 2021).

The bird was small in size (31–38 cm) and the bright orange eye suggested (Image 2–5) that it is either a Black-necked or a Horned Grebe. The longish neck, white mark on the lore, head pattern and white tip of the bill differentiate it from the Black-necked Grebe (Mullarney et al. 1999; Prasad 2008). The colour pattern surrounding the eye was also distinctive, the black cap reached only to the centre of the eye, and the line that ran back from the eye was straight. The bill was pale, but the top edge of the upper mandible had a visible black edge, which is a characteristic feature of Horned Grebe.

Regular monitoring of Wular Lake and its surroundings is necessary for wetland conservation and eco-restoration.

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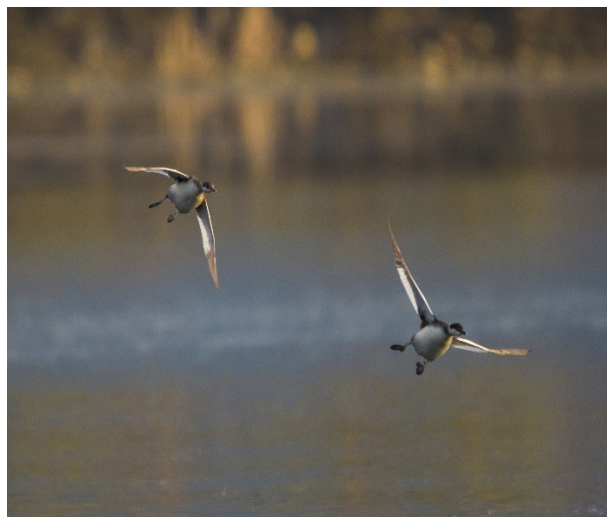
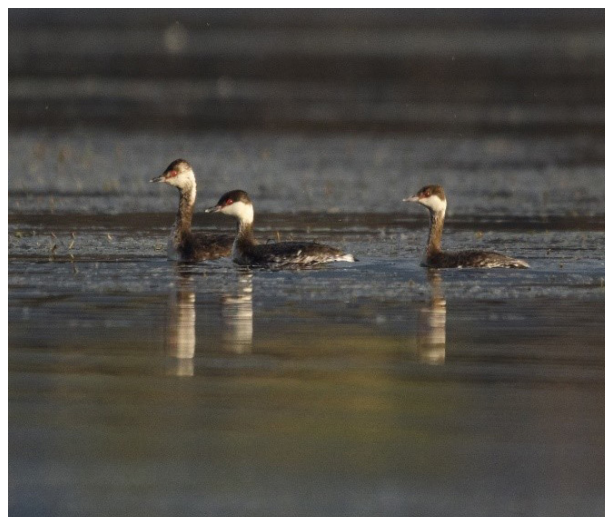


Image 2–5. Horned Grebe *Podiceps auritus* (Linnaeus, 1758) from different angles at Wular Lake, Jammu & Kashmir. © Bilal Nasir Zargar.

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