

First documented record of the White-eared Bulbul *Pycnonotus leucotis* (Gould, 1836) (Passeriformes Pycnonotidae) in Libya

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ABSTRACT

The White-eared Bulbul *Pycnonotus leucotis* (Gould, 1836) (Passeriformes Pycnonotidae) is a predominantly resident passerine distributed across southwestern Asia, from the Indian subcontinent through Pakistan, southern Afghanistan and Iran to Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain and parts of the Arabian Peninsula. Although the species has been introduced and subsequently established in several Gulf countries, including Oman, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar, it has not previously been documented from Libya. Here, we report the first documented occurrence of *P. leucotis* in Libya, based on a photographic record obtained on 30 July 2026 in Telbigha, Souq Al-Jumaa Municipality, Libya and repeated observations were reported from the same locality during the first week of August 2026. The occurrence of *P. leucotis* is not included among the bird species documented for Libya in the major national avifaunal references. Given the species' largely sedentary ecology and the considerable geographical distance from its established native range, natural colonization through regular migration appears unlikely. A human-mediated origin, particularly escape or deliberate release from captivity associated with the ornamental-bird trade, therefore represents a plausible explanation. Continued monitoring is recommended to determine whether the species persists, reproduces or expands its range in Libya. This record highlights the importance of documenting newly appearing non-native birds and establishing early-warning surveillance systems for potentially introduced species.

KEY WORDS

Pycnonotus leucotis; White-eared Bulbul; first record; Libya; introduced species; bird trade; biological invasion.

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INTRODUCTION

The White-eared Bulbul *Pycnonotus leucotis* (Gould, 1836) (Passeriformes Pycnonotidae) is a predominantly resident species of southwestern Asia. Its natural distribution extends from north-western and western India through Pakistan, southern Afghanistan and southern Iran, westwards to Iraq, Kuwait, Bahrain and parts of the Arabian

Peninsula. Two subspecies are generally recognized, with *P. leucotis leucotis* occupying mainly the Indian subcontinent and *P. leucotis mesopotamia* Ticehurst, 1918 occurring primarily around the Mesopotamian and northern Arabian Gulf region (Kaushik, 2022).

The species is associated with relatively warm lowland habitats, including woodland edges, thorn scrub, semi-desert vegetation, agricultural land-

scapes, gardens, plantations and other human-modified environments where food and nesting sites are available. Its capacity to exploit urban and cultivated habitats has contributed to its successful establishment in areas outside its historical range (Fishpool & Tobias, 2024).

Although *P. leucotis* is currently classified as Least Concern by the International Union for Conservation of Nature (IUCN), the species is reported to have a declining population trend (BirdLife International, 2018). Importantly, its conservation status in its native range should not be confused with its potential ecological role when introduced into a non-native environment. Human-mediated movements have played an important role in extending the distribution of *P. leucotis*. The species has been introduced to several Gulf countries, notably Oman, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar. In the United Arab Emirates, the species is specifically documented as an introduced bird whose spread was facilitated by releases or escapes associated with the pet trade. It has subsequently become naturalized and occurs in gardens, plantations, urban areas and other human-dominated habitats (Javed & Khan, 2015; Soorae et al., 2017).

The international trade in ornamental and cage birds is widely recognized as an important pathway for the movement of birds beyond their native geographical ranges. Escaped or deliberately released captive birds may survive in the wild, and repeated introductions can increase propagule pressure and the probability of establishment (Su et al., 2016, 2022; Stanley et al., 2023).

Libya has an extensive Mediterranean coastline and lies at the interface between the Palearctic and African biogeographic regions. Consequently, its avifauna includes resident species, regular migrants, passage migrants, winter visitors and occasional vagrants. The avifauna of Libya has been documented in major works (Bundy, 1976; Isenmann et al., 2016), the latter providing information on approximately 350 species recorded in the country. During the last several years, continued field observations by Libyan ornithologists and birdwatchers have resulted in the detection of previously unrecorded bird species in Libya. Such records require careful evaluation because newly observed species may represent genuine vagrants, range expansions, previously overlooked populations, escaped captive birds or deliberately introduced species.

Here, we document the first photographic record of *Pycnonotus leucotis* from Libya and discuss its possible origin and the implications of its occurrence for the country's biodiversity monitoring and invasive-species surveillance.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Study area

The observation was made in Telbigha, Souq Al-Jumaa Municipality, Tripoli, northwestern Libya (32°52'24.6" N 13°17'20.3" E), on 30 July 2026. Telbigha is one of the localities within Souq Al-Jumaa Municipality in the greater Tripoli urban area (Fig.1). The locality is situated within a highly human-modified landscape characterized predominantly by residential development, roads, buildings, utility infrastructure and scattered vegetation associated with private gardens and cultivated or semi-cultivated areas. Telbigha is recognized as a locality within Souq Al-Jumaa Municipality, Tripoli.

Samples

On 30 July 2026, a member of the Libyan Society for Birds recorded an unfamiliar bulbul in Telbigha. The specimen was photographed while perched on an overhead electrical wire. The bird was subsequently identified as the White-eared Bulbul *P. leucotis* based on its diagnostic plumage characteristics, including the dark head, conspicuous large white cheek/ear patch, grey-brown body, relatively long tail with contrasting pale terminal areas, short dark bill and yellow vent region. These characters are consistent with published descriptions and photographic references for this species.

RESULTS

This record represents the first documented occurrence of *P. leucotis* in Libya based on the available national ornithological literature consulted for this study. Neither Bundy (1976) nor Isenmann et al. (2016), the principal references on the Libyan avifauna, includes *P. leucotis* among the species recorded from Libya.

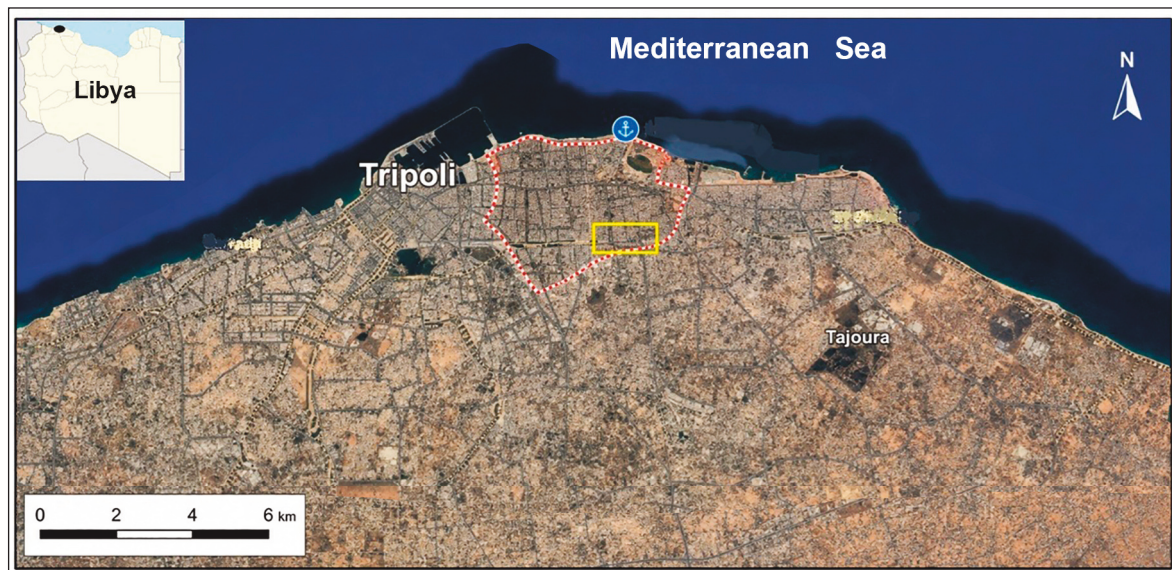


Figure 1. Area of the observation of White-eared Bulbul *Pycnonotus leucotis* at Telbigha, Tripoli, Libya.



Figures 2, 3. A white-eared bulbul *Pycnonotus leucotis* in the Telbigha area, Tripoli, Libya (photos Nuwayji-2026).

Actually, the current status of *P. leucotis* in Libya is of vagrant/non-native occurrence species with no confirmation of an established population. The urban and peri-urban character of Telbigha is relevant to interpreting the record because human-dominated environments can provide suitable resources for adaptable bird species and may facilitate the survival of escaped or released specimens. Following the initial photographic record, the same

species was reportedly observed repeatedly in the same general locality during the first week of August 2026. The recurrence of observations suggests that the bird remained in the area for at least several days after its initial detection. No evidence of breeding, nest construction, territorial behavior, flock formation or the presence of additional specimens was documented during the observation period.

DISCUSSION

The occurrence of *P. leucotis* in Tripoli is particularly interesting because this species is largely resident and has no recognized regular migratory route connecting its core distribution with North Africa. The nearest established populations occur in the Middle East and Arabian Gulf region (Kaushik, 2022; Fishpool & Tobias, 2024), while substantial geographical barriers and ecological discontinuities separate these populations from Libya.

A human-mediated origin is therefore a more plausible explanation of the presence of *P. leucotis* in Libya. This species is kept as a cage bird in parts of its native range, and the species has also been recorded in zoological collections (Cassey & Hogg, 2015). More importantly, documented introductions of the species into Oman, Qatar and the United Arab Emirates have been associated with human-mediated movements, including birds released or escaped from the pet trade (Javed & Khan, 2015; Soorae et al., 2017). The global ornamental-bird trade is recognized as a major pathway for the introduction of alien bird species. Su et al. (2016) demonstrated that species commonly traded as cage birds are more likely to appear as introduced birds, while Su et al. (2022) emphasized the global importance of the pet trade as a pathway for alien-species introduction.

Accordingly, an escaped or deliberately released captive bird represents the most parsimonious explanation for the present Libyan record. However, the presence of a single introduced bird does not automatically indicate an invasive species. The present record should more conservatively be described as a first documented occurrence of a non-native species of uncertain origin.

Nevertheless, this record deserves continued surveillance. *Pycnonotus leucotis*, indeed, has demonstrated the capacity to occupy urban gardens, plantations and other human-modified environments. In the United Arab Emirates, for example, it has become naturalized after introduction and occurs in habitats strongly influenced by human activity (Javed & Khan, 2015; Soorae et al., 2017).

The ecological consequences of introduced birds are highly variable. Some introduced species disappear after release because environmental conditions do not support long-term survival, whereas others become established and may subsequently

expand their ranges. Successful establishment depends on several factors, including propagule pressure, environmental suitability, reproductive capacity, availability of food and nesting resources, and interactions with native species (Blackburn et al., 2011; Su et al., 2016; Stanley et al., 2023).

In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), *P. leucotis* is identified as an introduced species capable of competing with native birds for food resources and nesting space (Javed and Khan, 2015; Charter et al., 2016; Soorae et al., 2017). More generally, a global assessment of alien birds found that competition with native species accounted for a substantial proportion of documented ecological impacts (Evans et al., 2016). Introduced species can also affect plant communities through seed consumption or dispersal, affect arthropod communities through predation, alter food-web relationships, transmit pathogens or parasites, and compete with native species for food and shelter. For example, *P. leucotis* is known to carry external parasites; studies in Iraq have documented several chewing-lice taxa associated with the species (Hamza et al., 2016).

The present observation should also be considered in the broader context of alien birds in Libya (Etayeb & Elkrew, 2025; Etayeb et al., 2025). The Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* (Linnaeus, 1766) Passeriformes Sturnidae provides a useful example of a highly adaptable alien bird that has successfully established populations in numerous regions outside its native range.

However, the ecological behaviour, reproductive biology and invasion potential of *P. leucotis* cannot simply be inferred from the experience of *A. tristis*. The appropriate approach is therefore to monitor *P. leucotis* before making assumptions about its future ecological role in Libya.

CONCLUSIONS

The photographic observation of *P. leucotis* at Telbigha represents the first documented record of this species in Libya.

The species' known sedentary ecology, geographical distribution and documented history of human-mediated introduction elsewhere strongly suggest that the Libyan specimen may have originated from captivity through accidental escape or deliberate release.

Continued monitoring is strongly recommended, because early detection and rapid documentation of additional specimens may provide an progresses toward establishment.

This case also emphasizes the need for greater attention to the movement and trade of exotic birds and other non-native animals in Libya. Preventing the release or escape of potentially adaptable non-native species is generally more effective and less costly than attempting to control established populations after they have become widespread (Stanley et al., 2023).

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