

# Significant records of birds in Nagaland, north-east India

ANWARUDDIN CHOUDHURY

Nagaland (25°01'–10'N 93°15'–17'E), a state in north-east India, has a rich birdlife, with 492 species listed so far (Choudhury 2003a). However, few ornithological surveys have been carried out in Nagaland. Examples include Godwin-Austen (1872, 1874a,b, 1876, 1878), Coltart (1902), Hutchinson (1946), Stonor (1947), Koelz (1951, 1952), Ripley (1952) and Alexander (1974), and more recently Choudhury (1997a,b, 2001, 2002, 2003b).

I carried out further surveys during 14 days in February 2004 in the districts of Kohima, Mokokchung, Peren, Wokha, and Tuensang (Fig. 1). Fieldwork covered tropical semi-evergreen, subtropical broadleaved forests and small areas of temperate broadleaved forest, and ranged from 200 to 2,700 m. Observations were carried out from transects along existing paths and roads. Preserved specimens and pets were examined opportunistically in villages. Here I report records of species that were new for Nagaland or for which there are few records from the state.

IUCN Red List status follows BirdLife International (2004) and restricted-range status follows Stattersfield *et al.* (1998). Localities are detailed in Table 1.

## SIGNIFICANT RECORDS

### RUDDY SHELDUCK *Tadorna ferruginea*

Two were seen in Doyang reservoir on 19 February 2004. This was only the second confirmed record from the state, following one in Intanki National Park in 1991 (Choudhury 2001). The species was also reported by local people from Shilloi lake, Phek district.

### BROWN HORNBILL *Anorrhinus tickelli*

Near Threatened. One casque seen at a house in Noklak on 23 February 2004 indicated that the species probably still occurs (or at least recently occurred) in Tuensang district, although local people reported that

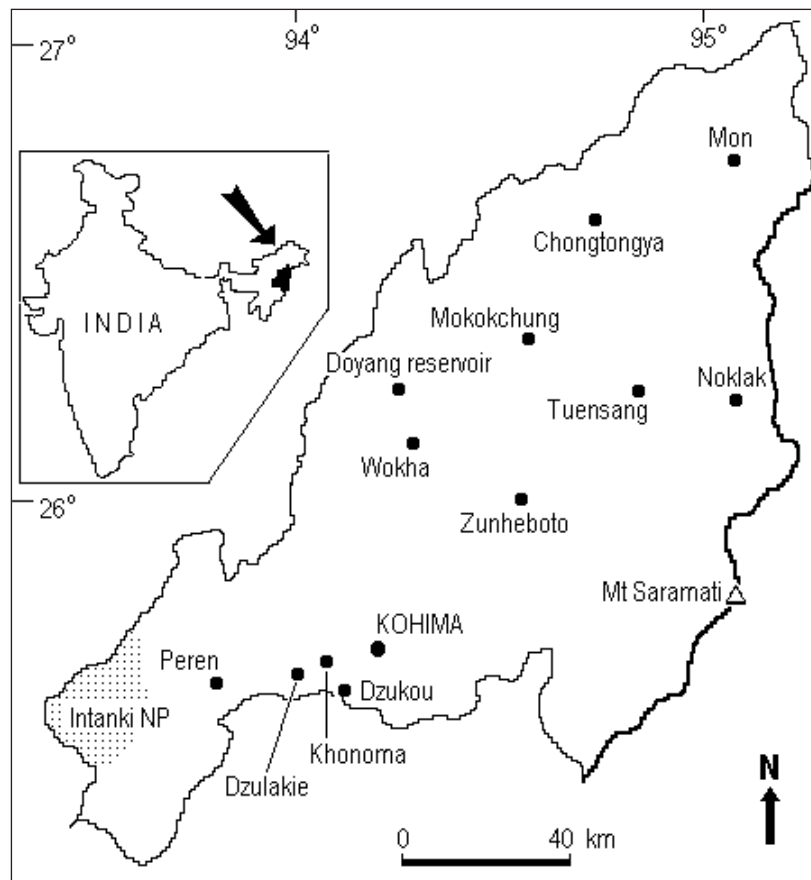


Figure 1. Map of Nagaland, India, showing localities of significant records.

it was now extremely rare owing to hunting. The species has been previously recorded in Nagaland only from the Khelma-Intanki area (Choudhury 2001).

RUFIOUS-NECKED HORNBILL *Aceros nipalensis*

Vulnerable. One casque seen at a house at Noklak on 23 February 2004 indicated that the species probably still occurs (or at least recently occurred) in Tuensang district, although it was reported by hunters to be seen only occasionally. The species has been previously recorded from the Barail range and Intanki National Park (Choudhury 2001). In 2001–2002, its presence in the Saramati-Fakim area was indicated by evidence such as casques and feathers. Unlike in other parts of Nagaland where the tail-feathers of Great Hornbill *Buceros bicornis* are used in ceremonial headgear, in Saramati-Fakim tail-feathers from Rufous-necked Hornbill are used. Hunting appears to have been the main factor causing its disappearance from most of Nagaland.

LARGE HAWK CUCKOO *Hierococyx sparveriioides*

A single silent bird was seen twice between Noklak and Chingthang saddle at about 1,100 m elevation on 24 February 2004 (although two individuals may have been involved). This was only the second record for Nagaland, following a dead bird recorded in Kohima market (Choudhury 2001). Both records were from winter months, which is rather unusual as this species is mainly considered a summer breeding visitor (Ali and Ripley 1987).

GRASS OWL *Tyto capensis*

A specimen was examined at New Pangsha village on 24 February 2004 and the following measurements were taken: length = c.38 cm (neck slightly stretched); wing = 30 cm; bill = 3 cm; tarsus = 10 cm. This was only the second record for Nagaland.

SPOT-BELLIED EAGLE OWL *Bubo nipalensis*

A nestling was collected by villagers from near Yannu in May 2003 and subsequently kept as a pet. It was still

alive on 29 February 2004 at Kohima. A nestling owl, probably of this species, was seen at Chingthang saddle on 23 February 2004. There are two previous records: one listed by Hume (1888) and a bird in Kohima zoo from Jakhama (Choudhury 2001).

BLACK-SHOULDERED KITE *Elanus caeruleus*

One was seen perched in a leafless tree, then flying, on an open hill slope at 1,000 m between Chore and Trongar on 22 February 2004. This was only the second record from the state following a record in Zunheboto district in 1996 (Choudhury 2001).

COMMON BUZZARD *Buteo buteo*

The first record for Nagaland was a pale morph bird of the subspecies *japonicus* seen in flight near Botsa at about 1,400 m on 18 and 25 February 2004. On the first date it was observed soaring over degraded habitat and patches of cultivation, and then flew towards a forested hilltop; it was watched for about seven minutes. On the second occasion it was seen at the same spot for about five minutes. In flight, its pale creamy-buff throat, cheeks and underparts with a brown belly/thigh-patch were clearly visible. There was heavy dark streaking on the breast and prominent dark carpal patches on the underwing. The underwing-coverts were pale brownish-buff and the primaries and secondaries were whitish from below. The upperparts were visible only when the bird banked; they appeared brownish. The undertail was pale; the uppertail was grey-brown with dark bars. The bird appeared noticeably smaller than Upland Buzzard *B. hemilasius*, although I could not make direct comparisons. It was distinguished from Long-legged Buzzard *B. rufinus* by its smaller size and lack of any rufous on the underwing, lower breast and belly.

AMUR FALCON *Falco amurensis*

Local people reported that hundreds of individuals of this species were killed around Doyang lake and near Chongtongya and Mongsenimti in November 2003 and then sold locally. I examined a number of

Table 1. Details of localities mentioned in the text.

Site	Coordinates	Altitude (m)	District
Botsa	25°51'N 94°08'E	1,400	Kohima
Chingthang saddle	26°13'N 94°53'E	2,000	Tuensang
Chongtongya	26°33'N 94°42'E	700	Mokokchung
Chore	26°15'N 94°42'E	1,000	Tuensang
Doyang reservoir	26°13'N 94°15'E	330	Wokha
Dulum Roi bridge	25°35'N 93°53'E	1,600	Peren
Dzukou valley	25°35'N 94°0'E	2,400–2,700	Kohima
Dzülakie	25°36'N 93°55'E	1,800	Kohima
Intanki National Park	25°25–42'N 93°19–36'E	200–500	Peren
Jakhama	25°35'N 94°08'E	1,400	Kohima
Khonoma	25°36'N 94°0'E	1,400	Kohima
New Pangsha	26°15'N 95°06'E	1,250	Tuensang
Noklak	26°12'N 95°00'E	1,500	Tuensang
Trongar	26°14'N 94°42'E	1,000	Tuensang
Yannu	c.26°53'N 95°09'E	c.500	Mon

preserved wings and tarsi of this species. Two pets seen in Wokha had been caught near the town in November 2003. Villagers reported that thousands roost in trees below Chongtongya village. This species was first recorded for the state only recently (Choudhury 2003b).

PEREGRINE FALCON *Falco peregrinus*

The first record for Nagaland was one seen sitting on top of a telephone post between Noklak and Lang bridge (c.26°14'N 95°03'E) at c.1,200 m in a cultivated valley on 24 February 2004. I observed it for about seven minutes and identified it as *F. p. peregrinator* by the dark grey upperparts, and black hood and moustache, rufous breast and whitish cheeks, throat and sides of neck. The cere and orbital skin were yellow. It was sitting in such a position that the remainder of the underparts was not visible. It was distinguished from the similar Oriental Hobby *F. severus* by its conspicuously larger size, stockier build and whitish rather than rufous throat.

BURMESE SHRIKE *Lanius colluriooides*

One was seen between Tuensang and Mokokchung on 22 February 2004 in an area of scrub and abandoned cultivation. Previously recorded near Satoi on 28 June 1996 and at Kohima market in 1997 (Choudhury 2001), the seasonal status of this species in Nagaland is unclear. It is considered a passage migrant elsewhere in the region (Grimmett *et al.* 1998).

BLUE-FRONTED ROBIN *Cinclidium frontale*

The first record for Nagaland was a male seen 8 km north-west of Noklak towards Chingthang saddle (c.26°14'N 95°0'E) at c.1,700 m on 23 February 2004. It perched on a rock by the side of the road for about two minutes and then moved into dense undergrowth. The upperparts and underparts were deep blue, with a glistening paler blue forehead and short supercilium (to above the eyes) and patch on the bend of the wing. The belly was paler; the tail was deep blue and when fanned it was seen to lack any white, eliminating the possibility of White-tailed Robin *Myiomela leucura*.

HODGSON'S REDSTART *Phoenicurus hodgsoni*

One was seen near a bridge on the fast-flowing Lang river between Noklak and Pangsha on 24 February 2004. There have been few records subsequent to Godwin-Austen (1876) and Ripley (1952).

BROWN-CAPPED LAUGHINGTHRUSH *Garrulax austeni*

Restricted-range. A single bird was observed for about ten minutes on the Barail range between Khonoma and Dzukou valley (c.25°37'N 94°0'E) at c.2,300 m on 28 February 2004. The location was just outside Khonoma Nature Conservation and Tragopan Sanctuary, a protected area declared by the local village council. The bird was skulking on the ground in a shady area and allowed observation from as close as 5 m. It was rufous-brown above with white tips to the greater coverts and tertials; the breast was rufous-brown with white scaling, more prominent on the belly. The outer webs to the primaries were whitish, forming a paler wing-panel. The head was rufous-brown buff with streaks on the nape; the bill was black. The

sighting was significant as none was recorded during surveys in Kohima market where many species of laughingthrushes were common (Choudhury 1991), and the last confirmed record for the state was more than five decades ago (Ripley 1952).

GREY SIBIA *Heterophasia gracilis*

Restricted-range. Groups of 2–3 individuals were seen on three occasions at 1,700–1,800 m between Chingthang saddle and Noklak on 23 February 2004. Other groups were observed on 27 February 2004 between Khonoma and Dzülakie and between Dzülakie and Dulum Roi bridge in degraded hill forest with shrubs and a few tall trees. The species was also recorded by Choudhury (2001), but there are very few other recent records (Grimmett *et al.* 1998).

WHITE-NAPED YUHINA *Yuhina bakeri*

Restricted-range. Two groups of at least seven birds each were seen at 9 km north-west of Noklak towards Chingthang saddle (c.26°14'N 94°59'E) at c.1,700 m on 23 February 2004. There have been few recent records of this species (Choudhury 2001).

## DISCUSSION

Logging, *jhum* (shifting) cultivation and poaching for food and local trade are the main conservation issues in Nagaland. The area of closed-canopy forest (canopy cover >40%) declined from 42.8% of Nagaland in 1972–1975 to 21% by 1995 (NRSA 1983, FSI 1997). Birds are regularly shot, trapped with crude snares or killed with slingshot for food. Often the birds are sold for food in local markets. However, owing to efforts by various conservation activists, the sale of birds in the main Kohima market has decreased significantly. Many village councils have banned hunting in their community forest, while some have even declared such forests as 'bird sanctuaries' (e.g. at Khonoma and Ghukhiye). Enforcement of anti-poaching laws in the field is virtually non-existent. The existing protected area network in Nagaland covers only 1.3% of the state. Except for Intanki, all protected areas are tiny. Formation of new and larger protected areas such as Saramati-Fakim (500 km<sup>2</sup>), Satoi (100 km<sup>2</sup>), Barails (200 km<sup>2</sup> encompassing Dzukou-Japfu), and Mt Zephu (50 km<sup>2</sup>), plus improved protection for existing sanctuaries are recommended. The Forest Department should also start enforcing the Wildlife (Protection) Act, at least in the main markets.

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Anwaruddin Choudhury, Deputy Commissioner (District Magistrate), Baksa district. Correspondence: Rhino Foundation, Guwahati 781 007, Assam, india. Email: badrul@sify.com

## Surveys for Lesser Adjutant *Leptoptilos javanicus* in and around Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve, Nepal

HEM SAGAR BARAL

Lesser Adjutant *Leptoptilos javanicus* occurs in India, Nepal, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand, southern China, Laos, Cambodia, Vietnam, peninsular Malaysia, Brunei and Indonesia (BirdLife International 2001). Within this large range, most of the population is now confined to the Indian subcontinent (Choudhury 2000). The species is listed globally as Vulnerable (BirdLife International 2004) and nationally as threatened (Baral and Inskipp 2004) because it has a small and declining population owing to habitat loss and degradation, hunting and disturbance (BirdLife International 2001).

Lesser Adjutant was previously common in southern Nepal, but it is now mainly restricted to isolated areas (BirdLife International 2001), such as Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve (Fleming *et al.* 1984, Pokharel 1998). Although the reserve provides good habitat for many waterbirds, annual counts indicate that waterbird numbers are declining (Baral and Inskipp 2004). Apart from studies in Royal Chitwan National Park (Gyawali 2003a,b, Hungden and Clarkson 2003, Tamang 2003, Choudhary 2004),

systematic surveys of the species have not been carried out. I carried out such surveys in Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve, focusing on population size, nesting and habitat preferences.

### STUDY AREA

Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve (hereafter Koshi Tappu) lies at 26°38'N 87°00'E on the banks of Sapta-Koshi River in Sunsari, Saptari and Udayapur districts of east Nepal. The reserve is characterised by sandy and silty soils with patches of scrub and mixed deciduous riverine forest scattered on the high ground. The vegetation consists primarily of *Acacia catechu* and *Dalbergia sisoo* trees, with tall elephant grass *Saccharum spontaneum*, *S. arundinacea* and cattail *Typha elephantina*. The reserve was gazetted in 1976 mainly to conserve habitat for the remaining population of buffalo *Bubalus arnee*. A total of 477 bird species has been recorded here, of which 18 are globally threatened (Bird Conservation Nepal 2004a). In particular,