

Sightings of large numbers of Lesser *Leptoptilos javanicus* and Greater *L. dubius* Adjutant-Storks in Barpeta-Baksa area of Assam

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Ms received on 31.vii.2006.

Both, Lesser *Leptoptilos javanicus* and Greater *L. dubius* Adjutant-Storks, are classified as 'threatened' by BirdLife International (2004). The former is considered 'vulnerable' while the latter 'endangered' because of their small and declining populations. For both the species, Assam is a stronghold (Choudhury 2000).

On 6.viii.2005, while driving from Pathsala town towards Koklabari, at the eastern edge of Manas National Park, a large gathering of >60 storks caught my attention (Fig. 1). Through binoculars we could count at least 20 Lesser and 40 Greater Adjutant-Storks in the field, which was partially waterlogged due to rain. The storks were foraging. This was near Baghmara (26°34'N 91°13'E) in Assam's Barpeta district, very close to the border of Baksa district. Later, between Baghmara and Koklabari in Baksa district, 36 more Lesser Adjutant-Storks were seen in twos (5 times), threes (twice), four birds (twice) and six birds (once), in addition to six lone birds. The distance between Baghmara and Koklabari (Kamardoisa) is 25km and sighting of such a large number of globally threatened storks in such a short stretch is noteworthy.

Earlier, on 20.iv.2005, I observed 23 Lesser Adjutant-Storks in the 'Seed Farm' area of Manas National Park near Koklabari. In the same area, the Chief Wildlife Warden of Assam, Mr M. C. Malakar, counted up to 52 Lesser Adjutant-Storks, sometime during the year (M. C. Malakar, verbally). While driving from Barama to Koklabari on 9.vi.2005, I counted 28 Lesser Adjutant-Storks—three between Barama and Pathsala, three between Pathsala and Anchali, four near Anchali, 13 near Hajuwa and five near the entrance of the 'Seed Farm'.

On 25.vi.2006, in the 'Seed Farm', I counted 21 Greater Adjutant-Storks foraging together, >15 Lesser Adjutant-Storks in twos and threes, and also two White-necked *Ciconia episcopus* and three Asian Openbill-*Anastomus oscitans* Storks.

However, such sightings do not indicate an increase in the number of the adjutant-storks as every year both the species are losing a few nesting trees, which are cut by

owners for money. Mortality of nestlings, which fall from nests, is also a matter of concern.

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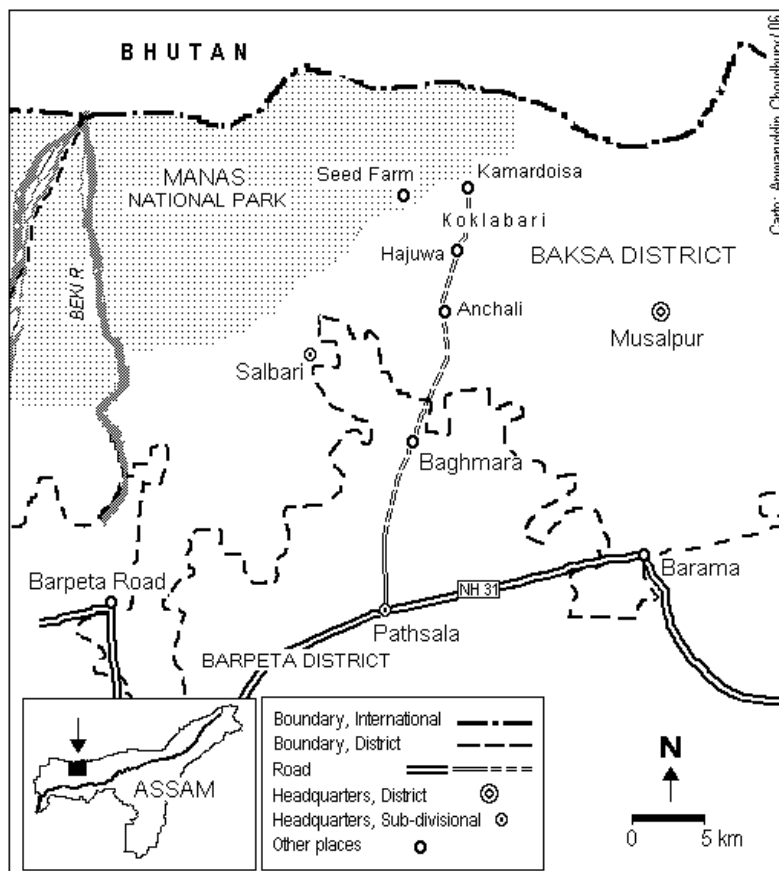


Fig. 1. Map showing the places mentioned in the text.