

Common Coot *Fulica atra*: first report for Kedarnath Wildlife Sanctuary, Western Himalaya, Uttarakhand, India

Ishwari D. Rai, Sabuj Bhattacharyya & Bhupendra S. Adhikari

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Ishwari D. Rai*, Sabuj Bhattacharyya, Bhupendra S. Adhikari: Wildlife Institute of India, P.O. box # 18, Chandrabani, Dehradun. *Email: ishwari.rai@gmail.com
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On 14 March 2008, at 1805 hrs, we observed a Common Coot *Fulica atra* being chased by a flock of Large-billed Crows *Corvus macrorhynchos* in the bouldery subalpine forest gap near Tungnath area (3,000 m asl; Fig. 1) of Kedarnath Wildlife Sanctuary (30°29.22'N, 79°11.95'E). We rescued the bird, as it appeared injured, and had a broken claw (Figs 2 & 3). It was unable to fly and kept dropping to the ground, and in the process appeared to be further injuring itself. We applied some antiseptic ointment that we were carrying, to its wound and released it immediately.

Common Coot are both, resident, as well as partly migratory, in India, and have been reported breeding up to 2500 m in the Himalayas (Ali & Ripley 1978). Their population in India swells up with migrating birds during winter, with the influx of birds from Central, and western Asia. The bird is a reluctant flier, and if it has to fly a short distance, will skitter along the water, half running, half flying.

There is no previous record of Common Coot from the Kedarnath Wildlife Sanctuary. After interviewing the villagers we realised that it was not a common bird for that area.

This observation indicates the possibility of a migratory route, or habitat, of Common Coot in the sanctuary area. The species may be using this range of sanctuary for nesting or migration, both of which are possible due to the presence of a large number of high altitude lakes in the area. It is reported that during winter Common Coots are subjected to heavy predation by several raptor species (Ali & Ripley 1978) and the bird we caught may have been a victim of such an incident.

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Fig. 1. The Chopta-Tungnath area (foreground) of Kedarnath Wildlife Sanctuary, Uttarakhand.

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Figs 2 & 3. Characteristic red eye and, lobed, membrane fringed toes of the Common Coot *Fulica atra*.

Photos: Ishwari D. Rai