

The first breeding record of Common Redshank *Tringa totanus* for Nepal

On 04 August 2015, at 1430 hrs, we were walking along the shore of Tso Lamgyok Lake (30.37°N, 81.58°E; 5010 m asl) in the remote Humla District, Province 6, Nepal. The lake is situated within the Gyau Valley, which is located in the south-western corner of the Tibetan Plateau, bordering the Tibetan Autonomous Region of China to the north of Nepal.

A pair of adult Common Redshank *Tringa totanus* was circling above us, uttering alarm calls of strung-out quick-repeated trilling notes (Ali & Ripley 1987). In due time, we noticed a chick walking slowly along the shore of the lake [33]. Walker & Chandler (1985) report selection of wet areas, for feeding, by Common Redshank chicks for which the adult pairs usually nest close to wetlands such that the family can move to the wetland as soon as the chick(s) hatches. The Common Redshanks in Upper Humla also demonstrated a similar pattern. Here the breeding pair is the most likely to have nested in the alpine steppe near the lake, which comprised abundant grasses, sedges, forbs, and shrubs (*Salix* sp., and *Astragalus* sp.). This vegetation cover may prevent predators from detecting the eggs. The proximity of nesting site and feeding area represents an anti-predator instinct, as long-distance movement of chicks, between such two sites, would provide greater opportunities to predatory birds like a Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*, Upland Buzzard *Buteo hemilasius*, or Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*. The close location of nesting site to the feeding area also precludes the chicks' likelihood of injury, or separation from its parents, when crossing unfamiliar



33. Common Redshank chick at Tso Lamgyok Lake, Upper Humla, Nepal, on 04 August 2015.



34. Common Redshank adult (breeding) in Upper Humla, Nepal, during August 2015.

Pics: Naresh Kusi

terrains (Walker & Chandler 1985). During July–August, we saw Common Redshank adults in breeding plumage [34] on multiple occasions, in the lakes and marshes of Upper Humla, but the reported instance above, was the only time we saw a chick with the adults.

The Common Redshank was earlier considered a winter visitor to Nepal (Ali & Ripley 1987; Inskipp *et al.* 2016). On the Indian Subcontinent, breeding of the species is only reported from the Tibetan Plateau of Ladakh, in Kashmir at an elevation of 4000–5000 m asl (Ali & Ripley 1987) in solitary pairs or in loose colonies (BirdLife International 2016). Because the newly documented breeding site in the Tibetan Plateau of Nepal lies close to the Tibetan Plateau of China, MacKinnon & Phillipps (2000) had already included the region in a map of the breeding range for the species. Our note on the first breeding record of the Common Redshank for Nepal supports the aforementioned map and adds to the knowledge of its breeding areas on the Indian Subcontinent.

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– Naresh Kusi & Geraldine Werhahn

Naresh Kusi, Resources Himalaya Foundation, Lalitpur, Nepal;

Wildlife Conservation Research Unit, Department of Zoology, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK

E-mail: naresh.kusi@gmail.com

Geraldine Werhahn, Wildlife Conservation Research Unit

Department of Zoology, University of Oxford, Oxford, UK

E-mail: geraldine.werhahn@zoo.ox.ac.uk

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Malabar Whistling Thrush *Myophonus horsfieldii* feeding on a rat snake *Ptyas mucosa*

On 28 July 2017, around 1823 hrs, while photographing frogs at Lakshmi Estate road (10.05°N, 77.03°E), Munnar, Idukki, Kerala, GK spotted a Malabar Whistling Thrush *Myophonus horsfieldii* (Family: Muscicapidae) jumping and trying to catch something on a stream-side rock that was surrounded by grass. The bird was trying to kill a snake that was longer than it. The snake was later identified by AS, as a juvenile rat snake *Ptyas mucosa*, based the long tapering tail, dark irregular transverse streaks, and dorsum marked with fine, somewhat irregular, off-white bands [35]. The snake was aggressively attempting to bite the bird and trying to escape. The thrush repeatedly pecked at the snake and jumped upon it several times. Finally, as the snake's movements ceased, the thrush flew



35. Malabar Whistling Thrush feeding on rat snake.

to a tree, with the snake in its bill, and started to swallow it. Soon the bird got disturbed and flew away into the denser areas of the forest, continuing to hold the snake in its mouth.

Members of the Muscicapidae feed predominantly on insects and other arthropods, and also a very wide range of other prey such as woodlice (Isopoda), snails (Gastropoda), earthworms (Oligochaeta), and some seeds and small fruit, principally berries. Instances of muscicapids preying on snakes have been rare. In Africa, the Chat-flycatcher *Agricola infuscatus* is known to take blind-snakes (*Typhlops* sp.), and Fraser's (African) Forest-flycatcher *Fraseria ocreata* was once observed to catch a newly hatched small snake (Taylor 2017).

The current observation is an interesting addition to the rare records of snake-eating among muscicapids.

The Malabar Whistling Thrush varies in length between 240 mm and 250 mm (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Given that the snake was bigger than the bird, this could probably be one of the largest prey items recorded for the Muscicapidae. Ali & Ripley (1998) recorded the food of Malabar Whistling Thrush as chiefly insects, snails, worms, crabs, small frogs, etc., as well as drupes, and wind-fallen figs and berries. Recently, Munnar & Kallettumkara (2017) recorded an instance of a Malabar Whistling Thrush feeding on a shieldtail snake (family Uropeltidae). The present record adds to the food sources in the diet of the bird, and the deftness with which the bird captured the snake indicates that snakes might be a part of its regular diet.

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– Amit Sayyed, Gokulakrishnan G.,
Rajgopal Patil & Anil Mahabal

Amit Sayyed, Wildlife Protection and Research Society, Satara, Maharashtra, India.

E-mail: amitsayyedsatara@gmail.com [AS]

Gokulakrishnan G., 17/A2 Kamaraj Nagar, Sirumugai 641302

Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India.

E-mail: gokulakrishnan123@gmail.com [GK]

Rajgopal Patil, Institute of Natural History, Education & Research (INHER)

B1-602, Kumar Parisar, Kothrud, Pune 411038, Maharashtra, India.

E-mail: rajnpatil@gmail.com

Anil Mahabal, Institute of Natural History, Education & Research (INHER),

B1-602, Kumar Parisar

Kothrud, Pune 411038, Maharashtra, India.

E-mail: mahabal.anil@gmail.com [Corresponding author]

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A colour aberrant Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* in Guwahati, Assam

While birding in Khanapara Veterinary College (26.13°N, 91.82°E), Guwahati, Assam, on 06 October 2017 at 1640 hrs, I observed an oddly plumaged Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* foraging with other, white-plumaged Cattle Egrets. The flock was in a grazing area meant for the research farm animals. The overall appearance, and behaviour, of this bird were quite similar to that of its flock. I took some pictures of the bird to confirm that the colour on the bird was not the result of a mishap [36]. I could take just one picture of the bird that day.

On 22 October 2017, at 0930 hrs, I spotted the bluish Cattle Egret following a cow. This time it was foraging in an unused piece of land within the campus. I was able to click several photographs and better appreciate the greyish-blue colours of the bird. Its beak, and limbs seemed like those of a normally coloured Cattle Egret. It was quite hard to spot the bird due to this disguising colour [37].



36. Dark morph Cattle Egret.



37. Dark morph Cattle Egret.