



111. A close up view of the Khanpur village heronry.

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Some noteworthy records from the Lohit Valley, eastern Arunachal Pradesh, India

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The Lohit River originates in eastern Tibet where it is called Zayul Chu. It enters India a little north of the settlement of Kaho (28°19'N, 97°00'E; c. 1327m asl). Flowing through the Anjaw and Lohit districts of Arunachal Pradesh, running through Mishmi Hills, it enters the flood plains of Assam where it meets the combined waters of the Dibang and Siang rivers to form the river Brahmaputra. In Arunachal Pradesh it is a turbulent river, rushing through narrow, steep, and wooded valleys. Along its course the vegetation ranges from coniferous temperate on the hill tops to broadleaved evergreen tropical on the lower elevations. The fragile ecosystem that the river supports is threatened by the receding glaciers at its headwaters in eastern Tibet, a phenomenon recorded over last 25 years, and six hydro-electric projects along its course proposed by the Indian government (Pelto 2013). The area is poorly sampled for its birdlife and many bird species that occur in the nearby

areas of eastern Tibet and Myanmar may also be present here (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

Field surveys were conducted from 05 to 12 May 2013 at the following locations: Chowkham (27°48'N, 96°02'E; c. 167m asl), Medo (27°46'N, 96°14'E; c. 252m asl), Khupa (28°03'N, 96°29'E; c. 669m asl), Walong (28°07'N, 97°01'E; c. 1165m asl), Namiti (28°11'N, 97°01'E; c. 1269m asl), and Musai (28°15'N, 97°01'E; c. 1272m asl). The areas around Chowkham, Medo, Wakro (27°46'N, 96°21'E, c. 477m asl) and upto Parshuramkund (27°52'N, 96°21'E; c. 333m asl) in the foothills of Arunachal Pradesh is low-lying. The forest, wherever it is still to be found, is degraded with many areas turned into wasteland. The areas along the Lohit river from Parshuramkund to Khupa and Walong are mostly subtropical broadleaved and densely forested with coniferous species dominating the higher tops. There are many patches, mostly around human habitations, that are degraded

due to 'slash and burn' cultivation. Hunting is one of the main occupations of local communities and we came across many hunters, including children, carrying catapults. On one occasion we came across a 'Mishmi' family including three children with the youngest being not more than three years, all carrying catapults and out for the day's hunt. On a few occasions, we saw hunters carrying guns. One man was seen hunting 'macaques' between Khupa and Walong. The forest beyond Walong is temperate in nature with large coniferous trees dominating higher elevations. We did not come across any sign of hunting in these areas, probably due to heavy presence of army.

Some of the significant findings of the surveys were the occurrence of Black-browed Tit *Aegithalos bonvaloti*, an addition to the avifauna of Indian Subcontinent (Sagha *et al.* 2013) and the first breeding record of Godlewski's Bunting *Emberiza godlewski* (Sharma *et al.* 2014), both from areas north of Walong. Some other species of significance, observed during these surveys, are described below:

Chinese Pond Heron *Ardeola bacchus*

One bird, in full breeding plumage, was photographed [112], perched on a large tree in an army camp on the edge of Lohit River above Hayuliang (28°05'N, 96°32'E; c. 731m asl) on 06 May 2013. This is probably the northern most record for Arunachal Pradesh, and the Indian Subcontinent. The bird had a chestnut head, neck and breast, with long, thin, chestnut nape-plumes, and black mantle with hair-like dorsal plumes, as described by Rasmussen & Anderton (2012). Kazmierczak (2000) gives its status in the Indian Subcontinent as a scarce or rare, localised or patchily distributed, resident. In India it is found mainly in the north-east (Grimmett *et al.* 1998, 2011). In Assam Valley, it is recorded from Kaziranga National Park (Choudhury 2003, 2004; Barua 2005), Gibbon Wildlife Sanctuary (Borthakur 2009), and Tinsukia District (Choudhury 2010). Ali & Ripley (1978) record it from Manipur. In Arunachal Pradesh, recorded as 'occasional' by Choudhury (2006), it has occurred at Itanagar (Singh 1995), and Namdapha National Park (Srinivasan *et al.* 2010). There are, however, a few vagrant records from other parts of the country, e.g., Kaninde (2013), and Poonia *et al.* (2013). Its presence during summer, in full breeding plumage, indicates the possibility of it being a scarce resident in north-eastern Arunachal Pradesh.

White-rumped Vulture *Gyps bengalensis*

On 10 May 2013 three birds, and on 11 May 2013 a single individual, of this fast disappearing species were seen in the company of Slender-billed Vulture *G. tenuirostris* and Himalayan Griffon *G. himalayensis* near Chowkham. It is a 'critically endangered' species (BirdLife International 2013), 'formerly abundant but in 1990s declined precipitously throughout range

and is now very local' Rasmussen & Anderton (2012). Choudhury (2006) considers it 'occasional' in Arunachal Pradesh and Singh (1995) records it from Seijusa and Namsai. Naoroji (2006) considers it rare in the eastern Himalaya and shows its status as 'forager' in the area of present observations.

Slender-billed Vulture *G. tenuirostris*

On 10 May 2013 five to six birds, and on 11 May 2013 atleast eight, of this fast disappearing species were seen in big trees close to Chowkham in the company of White-rumped Vulture and Himalayan Griffon. The species is 'critically endangered' (BirdLife International 2013), declining drastically during the 1990s (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). An 'occasional' species in Arunachal Pradesh (Choudhury 2006), it has been previously recorded from Naharlagun, Pasightah and Namsai (Singh 1995) and Namdapha National Park (Srinivasan *et al.* 2010). Naoroji (2006) shows its status as 'resident' in the area and the present observations reconfirm this.

Himalayan Griffon *G. himalayensis*

One soaring juvenile, photographed [113] close to Hayuliang on 06 May 2013. An adult observed in flight on the same day between Hayuliang and Walong showing characteristic pale underparts with black flight feathers and tail, six to eight juveniles on 10 May 2013 seen perched in large trees near Chowkham showing diagnostic pinkish feet and atleast 12 juveniles photographed [114] on 11 May 2013 near Chowkham are the first summer records for Arunachal Pradesh. The species is resident in the Himalaya from northern Pakistan at least to Bhutan (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012) and wanders into the Brahmaputra plains in Assam during winter (Naoroji 2006). Choudhury (2006) lists it as an uncommon winter visitor to Arunachal Pradesh. Singh (1995) mentions an undated record from Thingbhu (3300 m) in north-western Arunachal Pradesh; but Naoroji (2006) treats this as doubtful due to inadequate information. Naoroji (2006), however, gives account of a juvenile soaring at Geling in north-central Arunachal Pradesh during winters.

Japanese Sparrowhawk *Accipiter gularis*

A single bird [115] that flew from a roadside post at Walong on 08 May 2013 was probably on passage migration. The bird showed narrow, more pointed and tapered wings, uniform underwing pattern and narrow dark bars on the tail. The pictures were sent to Rishad Naoroji, who confirmed its identification (*pers. comm.* email dated 14 May 2013). It is a winter vagrant in India (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). A small 'Accipiter' seen on 07 May 2013, with a Grey-backed Shrike *Lanius tephronotus* in its talons, may also have been this species as it was not too far from where the earlier bird had been photographed. There have been

Photos: M. Sharma



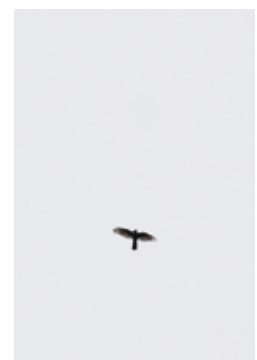
112. Chinese Pond Heron.



113. Himalayan Griffon Juvenile.



114. Himalayan Griffon Juvenile.



115. Japanese Sparrowhawk.

only a handful of records of the species from north-eastern India. One bird was collected near Dibrugarh, Assam (Stevens 1914), and another photographed at Dampa Tiger Reserve, Mizoram (Naoroji 2006). From Arunachal Pradesh it has been recorded twice during winters from Gadhigram (Srinivasan *et al.* 2010). The present sighting is the fourth record for Arunachal Pradesh.

Amur Falcon *Falco amurensis*

A single male perched on a dead tree close to Medo on 11 May 2013 is the first record of the species on spring migration from Arunachal Pradesh. It commonly passes through the area on autumn migration (Choudhury 2006; Naoroji 2006). The spring passage route is not well documented and Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) feel the species migrates south of the region over Indian Ocean as there are several south-east Asian records. The species was however observed at Pungro, Nagaland (25°48'N, 94°50'E; c. 1501 m asl) in May 2011 (*pers. obsv.* May 2011) in good numbers and present sighting substantiates the authors' view that some populations undertake spring migration via north-east India.

Eurasian Hobby *F. subbuteo*

A pair was observed and photographed [116] in display flight on the road from Musai to Kibithu (28°16'N, 97°00'E; c. 1517m asl), on 07 May 2013 is the first summer record of the species from Arunachal Pradesh indicating possible breeding in the area. The species is known to occur in the Himalaya from Chitral to Kashmir, eastwards to Nepal, and probably up to Bhutan (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). However, it is shown as a winter visitor (Choudhury 2006), and a passage migrant (Grimmett *et al.* 2011) to north-eastern Arunachal Pradesh. Singh (1995) cites an undated sight record from Walong.

Derbyan Parakeet *Psittacula derbiana*

At least two males and a female were observed and photographed [117] in tall coniferous trees on the Walong–Kibithu road, seven kilometres past Namiti, on 06 May 2013. Stonor (1952) and Singh (1995) give its records from the area as an uncommon resident, but Grimmett *et al.* (2011) treat it as doubtful for the Indian Subcontinent, and Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) seek corroboration in the absence of specimens and the lack of diagnostic identification details published by previous authors. However, there have been recent sightings of this species from the area (Singh 2013).

Black-capped Kingfisher *Halcyon pieata*

A single bird was observed on the edge of a stream, in dense forest below Khupa, on 09 May 2013. It is occasional in Arunachal Pradesh (Choudhury 2006), with isolated records (Grimmett *et*

al. 2011). Singh (1995) recorded a bird seen in south-western Arunachal Pradesh on 21 April 1991, and found a skin of this species, purportedly locally killed, from Hotsprings (3300m), close to Walong, in September 1991. The bird we observed was extremely vocal and was restlessly flying from perch to perch on the edge of the forest, as if guarding a territory; a possible indication of it breeding in the area.

Ruddy Kingfisher *H. Coromanda*

At least three pairs were seen on 06 May 2013 on the road from Medo to Wakro. It was concluded that they were nesting in the dense jungle along the road as the birds were observed carrying food in their bills, and repeatedly disappearing into the forest. The species is previously recorded from nearby Namdapha National Park (Srinivasan *et al.* 2010).

Grey-backed Shrike *Lanius tephronotus*

Commonly seen throughout the duration of surveys; commoner at elevations above 600m. It is a common winter visitor to Arunachal Pradesh (Choudhury 2006), and our observations confirm the species' presence in the area at least till 10 May 2013, when two–three birds were seen between Wakro and Deban (27°32'N, 96°23'E; c. 574m asl).

Brown Shrike *L. cristatus*

Several birds of nominate race were seen and photographed [118] at Chowkham, Medo, Wakro, and as high up as Khupa, and Hayuliang. It is a common winter visitor to Arunachal Pradesh (Choudhury 2006) and our records confirm the species' presence in the area till at least 11 May 2013, when several birds were observed around Chowkham and Medo.

Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrohynchos*

A few birds that were seen on 07 May 2013 along the road between Walong and Kibithu were larger than Eastern Jungle Crows *C. [macrohynchos] levaillantii*, which are seen in the foothills, with a much heavier bill with an arched culmen, an abrupt, high, and rounded forehead, and in flight, showing a moderately wedge-shaped tail. These were identified as the subspecies '*tibetosinensis*' of the eastern Himalaya. Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) show its distribution in Arunachal Pradesh at 1700–4500m asl. We, however, recorded the birds as low as c. 1200 m.

Swallow (Hirundinidae)

A single swallow was seen flying above Walong on 07 May 2013, and a pair was observed feeding above the Lohit River,



116. Eurasian Hobby.



117. Derbyan Parakeet.



118. Brown Shrike.



119. Hill Blue Flycatcher.

half-way between Walong and Hayuliang on 09 May 2013. Red rumps were visible on the flying birds, which may have been Red-rumped-*Cecropis daurica* or Striated-*C. striolata* Swallows. Grimmett *et al.* (2011) show the former as a winter visitor to the area. Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) show the latter being present in areas south of the Brahmaputra River, whereas Grimmett *et al.* (2011) show it as uncertain in south-eastern Arunachal Pradesh, in areas close to Nagaland there is however a record of the latter from close to Jairampur in south-eastern Arunachal Pradesh (Praveen & Dalvi 2007). These are probably vagrant birds, overwintering in the area.

Grey-crowned Warbler *Seicercus tephrocephalus*

One bird was seen near Tohangam (27°54'N, 96°20'E; c. 1084 m asl) on 05 May 2013—showing prominent grey on crown, strong black lateral crown-stripes, yellow-green face, narrow yellow eye-ring broken at the rear, and no wing-bars—is a first record for Arunachal Pradesh. The bird was observed long enough to eliminate confusable species possible in the area. Grey-cheeked-*S. poliogenys* and White-spectacled-*S. affinis* Warblers are possible in the area and show grey on the crown, but both have white eye-rings instead of yellow. Green-crowned-*S. burkii* and Whistler's-*S. whistleri* Warblers are also possible in the area and both have yellow eye-rings, but lack grey on the crown. The species is known to occur in the southern Assam Hills (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012); Choudhury (2006) considers it likely to occur in Arunachal Pradesh.

Great Myna *Acridotheres grandis*

A flock of upto 12 birds was seen just below Khupa in large trees in forests along a hill stream on 09 May 2013. They showed uniform blackish-grey upperparts, uniform dark grey underparts, strongly contrasting white undertail coverts, as described by Grimmett *et al.* (2011), differing from the similar Jungle Myna *A. fuscus fumidus* in having very prominent frontal crest and no dark base to the lower mandible. It is an uncommon resident in Arunachal Pradesh (Choudhury 2006) with records from upper Noa Dihing Valley (Ripley *et al.* 1991), and Naharlagum near Itanagar (Singh 1995). The species 'inhabits cultivated areas and other open habitats, especially grasslands and marshes,' (Feare & Craig 1998). Its occurrence in forest is interesting.

Blue Whistling Thrush *Myophonus caeruleus*

Recorded on at least three occasions on 09 May 2013 along Lohit River below Walong. These birds belonged to the race *M. c. eugenei*, showing no white spots on upperwing coverts, which is similar to the widespread *temminckii* with 'bill larger and deeper, nearly entirely yellow, and no white spots at the tips of any of the coverts in either sex at any age,' (Hume 1873). The

birds showed yellow bill and blue spangling in plumage, ruling out juveniles of *temminckii*. Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) point out that it is 'said to occur Mishmi Hills, NE Arunachal, but confirmation needed ...' The birds were extremely shy, probably due to rampant hunting by local tribesmen. However, the birds appeared to be holding territories, indicating the probability of breeding in the area.

Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius*

A pair was seen at the bridge on the river Lohit at Parshuramkund on 05 May 2013. It is a common winter visitor to Arunachal Pradesh (Choudhury 2006) where *M. s. pandoo* is known occur (Clement & Hathway 2000). The birds probably were stragglers, on their way back to their breeding grounds north of the Himalayan range.

Taiga Flycatcher *Ficedula albicilla*

One or two birds that were seen on 05 May 2013 near Tohangam were probably stragglers on their northward migration. This is a common winter visitor to Arunachal Pradesh (Choudhury 2006).

Hill Blue Flycatcher *Cyornis banyumas*

A bird photographed [119] on 10 May 2013 on the road from Wakro to Deban, is the first summer record for the Indian Subcontinent. It responded to the playback of a Collared Owlet's *Glaucidium brodiei* call, and appeared to be holding a territory. Grimmett *et al.* (2011) and Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) treat it as winter visitor to Arunachal Pradesh but express doubts about the species being resident in the area. Shashank Dalvi confirmed identification from the photographs (*pers. comm.*, email dated 13 June 2013).

Baya Weaver *Ploceus phillippinus*

A colony of 30+ birds was observed on 05 May 2013 near Chowkham. The birds were busy collecting nesting material from nearby bamboo clumps. In Arunachal Pradesh, this is an uncommon resident subject to local and altitudinal movements (Choudhury 2006) with only a handful of records (Singh 1995; Srinivasan *et al.* 2010).

Blyth's Pipit *Anthus godlewskii*

One bird was photographed [120] on 06 May 2013 close to Hayuliang. Abhijit Menon-Sen confirmed identification based on the photograph (*Pers. comm.*, email dated 11 July 2013). It is listed as occasional for Arunachal Pradesh by Choudhury (2006), and a passage migrant by Rasmussen & Anderton (2012); Srinivasan (2010) has recorded it from Namdapha

Photos: M. Sharma



120. Blyth's Pipit.



121. Tree Pipit.



122. Black-headed Greenfinch.



123. Chestnut-eared Bunting Female.

National Park. The present observation probably involves a straggler on its return migration.

Tree Pipit *Anthus trivialis*

Several birds observed at Chowkham [121] on 05 May 2013, and two photographed between Khupa and Tohangam on 09 May 2013. The photos were sent to Abhijit Menon-Sen who confirmed identification (*pers. comm., verbally*). Choudhury (2006) lists the species as an uncommon winter visitor to Arunachal Pradesh. Though Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) do not show its distribution in north-eastern India, Grimmett *et al.* (2011) show an isolated record from close to the Assam–Arunachal Pradesh border, near Chowkham. The present observation seems to involve stragglers on their return migration.

Black-headed Greenfinch *Carduelis ambigua*

A pair that was photographed [122] between Namiti and Kibithu on 07 May 2013 were probably courting. Though Choudhury (2006) lists it as an uncommon resident, it is also treated as doubtful (Grimmett *et al.* 2011), and hypothetical (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012) for the Indian Subcontinent due to lack of verifiable evidence. However there have been recent records of this species from the same area (Gode 2013; Singh 2013).

Chestnut-eared Bunting *Emberiza fucata*

Many birds that were seen and photographed [123] on 07–08 May 2013 along the road from Walong to Kibithu. The birds were probably migrating north to their breeding grounds. The photos were sent to James Eaton who confirmed our identification (*pers. comm., email dated 14 May 2013*). The species is recorded as an uncommon winter visitor to Arunachal Pradesh (Choudhury 2006).

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