

forest at c.1,200m a.s.l., near the '40km' milestone on the BR Hills-Chamarajanagar road. A pair was seen in the treetops of this ravine, at eye-level from a road that runs along the top edge of the ravine, on 1.vi.2003, and a single birds seen on 8.xii.2003 and 31.i.2004. These records extend the known range of this species and may indicate that the species is resident in the area.

Muscicapidae

Yellow-eyed Babbler *Chrysomma sinense*

One individual recorded from scrub jungle at c.800m a.s.l., in the northern part of the sanctuary, in May 2004, near the lake after the Gumballi checkpost.

Blue-throated Flycatcher *Cyornis rubeculoides*

A single male recorded on 11.x.2003 in a bamboo clump in the garden of a coffee plantation (Watapi Coffee estate) at c.1,200m a.s.l. We also heard it uttering a song very similar in pattern and quality to that of Tickell's Blue Flycatcher *Cyornis tickelliae*. Although a winter migrant to "SW Ghats and possibly Eastern Ghats" (Rasmussen and Anderton 2005), this is the first record of this species from BR Hills.

Tickell's Thrush *Turdus unicolor* A single record of a female from the edge of a coffee plantation near Bangli Podu in March 2004 at c.1,200m a.s.l. The bird was foraging in leaf litter in the typical thrush manner. This is the southernmost winter record of this species till date, having previously been recorded "...in the peninsula to eastern M. P. (Bastar, Raipur), Orissa (Mayurbhanj, Nilgiri), north-eastern Andhra (Anantagiri, Lammasinghi), southern Bengal. In winter frequents edges of forests and, in the Peninsula groves and well wooded areas," (Ali and Ripley 1987). Most recently, it has been recorded at Lalbagh botanical garden in Bangalore (Prashanth 2005).

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Bird watching in Kedarnath Musk Deer Sanctuary, Chamoli district, Uttarakhand: the upper Garhwal Himalayas

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A bird survey was carried out from 13-16.v.2003 in areas lying in the south-eastern part of Kedarnath Musk Deer Sanctuary (975km²) comprising Mandal (1,720m), Kanchula Kharak (2,665m), Chopta Chatti (2,840m), Tunganath (3,600m) and Duggal Bitta (2,360m), all located

between c. 30°27'-30°33'N, 79°10'-79°20'E along an altitudinal gradient, situated about 350km north of Delhi. This was done during a continuous 40km trek on a stretch of forest road from Mandal up to Duggal Bitta (on the Gopeshwar-Okhimath road). Besides this, a 3.5km trek uphill to Tunganath temple

and peak from Chopta Chatti in between this route was also done.

The entire sanctuary lies in the northern catchments of Alaknanda River, which is the main tributary of River Ganga (Fig. 1). The area has one of the best, undisturbed forests designated as Himalayan wet-evergreen,

sub-tropical, temperate, sub-alpine and alpine (Champion and Seth 1968; Agrawala 1973; Green 1986). In Garhwal, this forest-patch is a biodiversity hotspot as it has over 650 plant species. The forests here spread over the mountain slopes in large dense continuous patches, with a closed canopy. Lichens (on oak trees), dwarf bamboos (e.g. *Arundinaria falcata*), numerous freshwater streams and a high rainfall [c. 3,093mm annually at 3,050m (Green 1986) are characteristic of the area besides enormous plant diversity (Pande et al. 2001)].

79 avian species were identified during this study of which 14 were not reported by Green (1986) who worked the same area from 1979 to 1981 (these are marked with the superscript "1" after the scientific name). In addition, two species identified are globally threatened (species marked as "2" in superscript) while two species are westward range extensions (species marked as "3" in superscript) in the Himalayas.

At the forest rest house (FRH) in Mandal (base camp) the calls of Rufous Sibia *Heterophasia capistrata*¹, Great Barbet *Megalaima virens*, Indian *Cuculus micropterus* and Common *C. canorus* Cuckoo, Streaked *Garrulax lineatus* and Striated Laughingthrush *G. striatus*, Black Bulbul *Hypsipetes madagascariensis*¹, Green-backed Tit *Parus monticolus*, Grey-winged Blackbird *Turdus boulboul*, and Wedge-tailed Green-Pigeon *Treron sphenura* filled the morning air. Pairs of Kaleej *Lophura leucomelanos hamiltoni* pheasants roamed along the FRH compound. They were numerous in the jungle too. Other common birds in the broad-leaved forest at Mandal included the Red-billed *Urocissa erythrorhyncha*¹ and Yellow-billed *U. flavirostris* Blue Magpie, Grey Treepie *Dendrocitta formosae*, Eurasian *Garrulus glandarius* and Black-headed *G. lanceolatus* Jay, Rusty-cheeked Scimitar-Babbler *Pomatorhinus erythrogenys*, Long-tailed Minivet *Pericrocotus ethologus*, Oriental Turtle-Dove *Streptopelia orientalis*, Ashy Drongo *Dicrurus leucophaeus* and, Slaty-headed Parakeet *Psittacula himalayana*.

In the dense lush green 'nullahs' around Mandal, Chestnut-headed Tesias *Tesia castaneocoronata*¹ (1+2; pair probably nesting) were observed in undergrowth thick with ferns and climbers. Close by, near flowing water, a rufous morph of the Nepal Wren-Babbler *Pnoepyga immaculata*^{1,2,3} fed near its nest, which was located beside the stream in a dense tuft of ferns, fallen

branches, grass and boulders. It came out to feed in the open along the bases of tree trunks on the rocky slopes and retreated to its hideout on being disturbed. Overhead, a sailing Collared Falconet *Microhierax caerulescens*¹ made short downward sweeps while circling and calling. A Crested Serpent-Eagle *Spilornis cheela* was also circling and calling. A few Alpine Swifts *Tachymarptis melba*¹ were also recorded in the sky above the forest slopes of Mandal.

Daily, at dusk in Mandal, Indian Jungle Nightjars *Caprimulgus indicus* chased each other around the FRH garden and nursery beds. Their calls, "chuk-chuk-chuk-chuk-chuk" and "chuckoo-chuckoo-chuckoo", ending with a "woo-wo-woo-woo" were continuous and engine-like. A Brown Wood-Owl *Strix leptogrammica*¹ was spotted perched on a tree behind the FRH, twice, at dusk and dawn. Its call, uttered by bending its body and inflating its throat, started with a short "wuh" at dusk, and when it became darker, lengthened to "wuh-wu-who", repeated at short intervals of 5-10sec. Another owl responded to these calls, from a distance of about c.50m.

Trekking in the morning through the jungle on a trail towards Kanchula Kharak (13km from Mandal), small parties of Stripe-throated Yuhina *Yuhina gularis* (2-4 birds), three Yellow-naped Yuhinas *Y. flavicollis*¹, and six Bar-throated Minlas *Minla strigula* were noted feeding on berries in low canopy among bushes. Maroon Orioles *Oriolus traillii* were common and sang all along this route. On the sloping forest floor amongst the dry leaves, pairs of Common Hill-Partridges *Arborophila torqueola* were common. Their call, a deep, mournful, hollow ascending whistled "whooha", ended abruptly. It was given off several times with small gaps and often followed by an excited rapid whistle, "bobwhite-bobwhite-bobwhite". Sometimes there was a response to such calls by other individuals present in the same or other nullahs. Along the forest streams, Spotted *Enicurus maculatus* and Black-backed *E. immaculatus* Forktail, a Greater Long-billed Thrush *Zoothera monticola*² and a pair of nesting Green-tailed Sunbirds *Aethopyga nipalensis*, were noted. The twittering song of a Verditer Flycatcher *Eumyias thalassina* was heard in the canopy of small trees.

Nearing Kanchula Kharak I encountered Grey-headed Flycatcher *Culicicapa ceylonensis*, White-throated

Laughingthrush *Garrulax albogularis*, White-browed Tit-Babbler *Alcippe vinipectus*, Spotted Laughingthrush *Garrulax ocellatus*, Rufous-bellied Niltava *Niltava sundara*, Yellow-naped Yuhina and Black-lored Yellow Tit *Parus xanthogenys* in the forest alongside the road. Of interest along this patch, and a first for me, were two Yellow-browed Tits *Sylviparus modestus*¹, feeding singly on insects on leaves of a large deciduous tree. An unidentified bird, which looked like a Gold-headed Babbler *Stachyris chrysaea* in plumage and size, was also noted in the dense wet undergrowth. In the foliage were Grey-headed Flycatcher-Warbler *Seicercus xanthoschistos*, Grey-faced *Phylloscopus maculipennis* and Blyth's *P. reguloides* Leaf-Warblers besides a species that could not be identified.

At Kanchula Kharak, a white morph Nepal Wren-Babbler was photographed feeding and hiding in bushes / hole on an open damp muddy slope with grass and bushes along the roadside. It was also heard a few times as it gave its typical call, "tii-ti-ti-ti-it-it-ti-ti" (starting with a high rapid series of "ti"s" and descending in tone after half way through to almost a sudden break in the end, as if being generated by a motor engine that starts and accelerates with full power but soon slows down and stops suddenly).

A Large Hawk-Cuckoo *Hierococcyx sparveriioides* was heard and identified from its song. Its call sounds similar to the 'brain fever' notes of a Brainfever Bird *H. varius* but is more subdued and less shrilly. The Oriental Cuckoo's *Cuculus saturatus* "oop-oop-oop" was heard from time to time. At the Musk Deer farm and breeding center were Grey Bushchat *Saxicola ferra*¹ and Large Scaly-bellied Green Woodpecker *Picus squamatus*.

Further ahead, in the *Rhododendron arboreum* (flowering was over for the season) forest, along the meadows at Chopta Chatti (located below Tunganath peak), a pair of Orange-gorgetted Flycatchers *Ficedula strophilata*, Spot-winged Crested *Parus melanolophus* and Red-headed Tit *Aegithalos concinnus*, and Rusty-flanked Tree-Creeper *Certhia nipalensis*, moving low on the tree trunk, were observed. While on the open ground, collecting nesting material (moss / lichens,) was a pair of Himalayan Pied Woodpecker *Dendrocopos himalayensis* and White-tailed Nuthatch *Sitta himalayensis*.

The alpine scrub enroute Tunganath peak had *Rhododendron campanulatum*

blossoming and a beautiful purple colored *Primula* sp. at the higher reaches. Here, in the shrubbery, a Golden Bush-Robin *Tarsiger chrysaeus* pair was observed in courtship display. Amongst Rhododendron bushes, the male chased the female, running on the ground, with a fanned tail, displaying the black inverted 'T' on his golden tail. Besides, Orange-barred Leaf-Warblers *Phylloscopus pulcher*¹ were numerous (10+) in the bushes and on silver fir *Abies* sp. (probably nesting). The Rhododendron shrubs also held Variegated Laughingthrush *Garrulax variegatus*, Blue Whistling-Thrush *Myophonus caeruleus*, White-browed Bush-Robin *Tarsiger indicus* (singing from tree top), Blue-fronted Redstart *Phoenicurus frontalis* pair, three Striped-throated Yuhina, Oriental Tree Pipit *Anthus hodgsonii* and Rufous Sibia.

At Tunganath peak (near the temple), Jungle Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos* was common and a White-capped Redstart *Chaimarrornis leucocephalus* was seen along a small stream. Two Himalayan Griffons *Gyps himalayensis* sailed close by several times.

Further down, on way from Chopta Chatti towards Duggal Bitta village, in rocky alpine meadows of Kharsu oak *Quercus semecarpifolia* a pair of White-collared Blackbirds *Turdus albocinctus* was feeding on the ground and a Rufous-bellied Pied Woodpecker *Hypopicus hyperythrus* on a tree. Returning towards Mandal, near Chopta, a Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* flew along the rocky slopes.

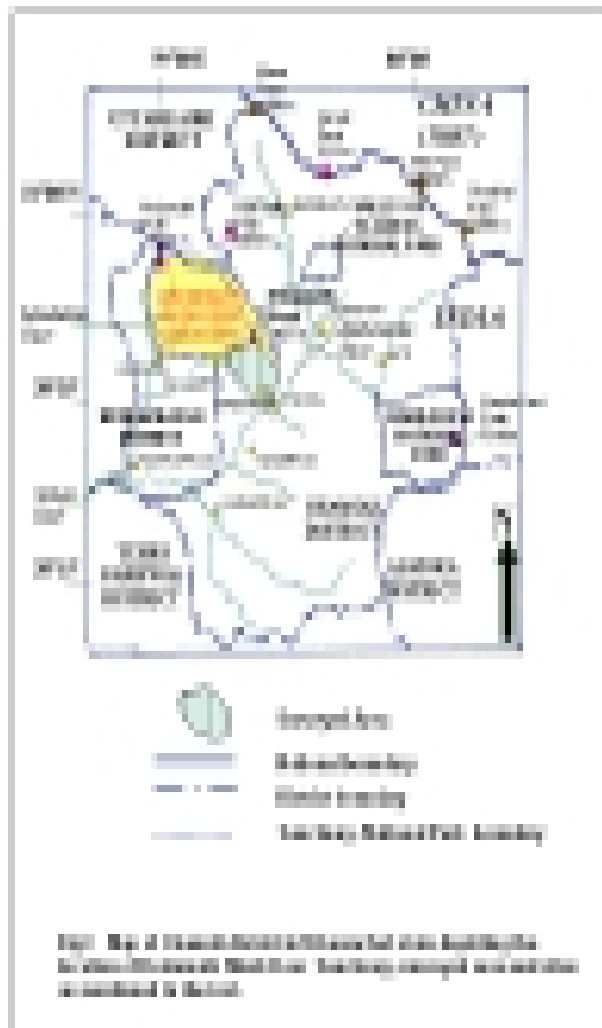
Birds seen close to Mandal village, in lower cultivated areas along the forest's periphery were: Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis*, Common Stonechat *Saxicola torquata*¹, Cinnamon Tree Sparrow *Passer rutilans*¹, Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer*, Rock Bunting *Emberiza cia*, Chestnut-bellied Rock-Thrush *Monticola rufiventris*, House Swift *Apus affinis*, etc.

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Notes from a drought year in Rishi Valley

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This (2004-2005) is the fourth consecutive year that rains failed in Rishi Valley (Chittoor district) and the surrounding Rayalseema region of Andhra Pradesh (India). There has been no surface water anywhere on the campus; the last bit of water in the "Last Pond" had dried up

long ago. Even in early December (2003), trees had begun shedding leaves and a few dry branches came crashing down. The mighty banyan *Ficus benghalensis*, the veteran of the campus, lost a couple of large branches.

There have been hardly any waterbirds

on the campus for several years now. The ubiquitous White-breasted Waterhens *Amaurornis phoenicurus* that used to advertise their presence with loud calls were now conspicuously absent. So were the Little Grebe, Common Moorhens *Gallinula chloropus*, egrets *Egretta* spp., waders, and