

Phil Hall

1.

Revised altitudinal ranges of some Nepalese birds

ABSTRACT

New data revising the known altitudinal range of 59 species of Nepalese birds, constituting 25 families, is presented and discussed. Observations, unless noted, were recorded by the author during a 27 month residency in southcentral Nepal between September 1976 and December 1978.

INTRODUCTION

An invaluable aid to avifauna study in Nepal is the knowledge of species altitudinal range since it facilitates in-field identifications, promotes insight to the understanding of ecological relationships, and is currently being utilized to assist in the preparation of species distribution maps to augment existing field guides (Tim and Carol Inskipp, pers. com.). Ali and Ripley (1968 - 1974) and Fleming et. al. (1976) are noted sources of reference for this aspect of Himalayan avifaunal distribution. Elevation data of the latter authors may differ for a given species than that of the first mentioned authors in that theirs (Fleming et. al.) depicts research results solely from within Nepal. A more recent (1979) second edition by Fleming et. al. appendices supplementary discoveries (pp. 321 - 328). I now wish to report new data, not contained therein, that further revises the altitudinal range of 59 species of Nepalese birds constituting 25 families in aggregate.

DISCUSSION

The discussion herein is based on personal observations unless noted otherwise. Nomenclature, altitudinal references,

and inferred species status are those of Fleming et. al. (1976; cf. pp. 16 - 18). The bulk of these sightings (44) occurred in Dhanusa district of southcentral Nepal during my residence there from September 1976 to December 1978 and resulted from secondary activities to my duties as a U.S. Peace Corps volunteer in village fisheries extension. The remaining data was recorded in that interim while on leave to the following areas: the hills of far eastern Nepal, the upper Kali Gandaki valley and Manang region, Kosi barrage in southeastern Nepal, and Kathmandu valley with 8, 4, 2, and 1 observations respectively.

Of the 59 species for which findings are presented, 48 show a downward revision in range with all but four of these (Aquila olanga, Pyrrhocorax graculus, Sitta europaea, Tichodroma muraria) occurring in the Tarai, that portion of the northern Gangetic plain which extends into Nepal. The disparity of new data between Tarai (44) and hill region (15) localities is attributed to biased observation time in favor of my lowland residence. Table 1. summarizes the net upward or downward revision from the family and species accounts following.

ARDEIDAE

The Little Egret (Egretta garzetta) and the Chestnut Bittern (Ixobrychus cinnamomeus) have recorded minimum elevation ranges of 244m. (800') and 274m. (900') respectively; however, both species were observed in Janakpur, Dhanusa district, at 76m. (250').

A straggler Pond Heron (Ardeola grayii) was seen at 2745m. (9,000') north of Jomosom on 22 May 1978 by Ridge Dewitt (pers. com.), well above the reported maximum known range of 1525m. (5,000').

CICONIIDAE

White-necked Storks (Ciconia episcopus) are another resident species at 76m. (250') in Janakpur proper.

ACCIPITRIDAE

Many species were noted at altitudes different than previously reported. The following should be revised downward to 76m.(250'): Brahminy Kite (Haliastur indus), Dark Kite (Milvus migrans), Steppe Eagle (Aquila nipalensis), Indian Griffon (Gyps indicus) and the Egyptian Vulture (Neophron percnopterus), all of which were encountered in Janakpur; plus the Shikra (Accipiter badius), White-eyed Hawk (Butastur teesa), Lesser Spotted Eagle (A. pomarina), Hen Harrier (Circus cyaneus), Pied Harrier (C. melanoleucus) and the Eurasian Kestrel (Falco tinnunculus), species recorded in southeastern Dhanusa district between Parbahar and the Kamla river.

A pair of Greater Spotted Eagles (A. clanga), a scarce species for Nepal (Fleming et. al. 1976: 52) and previously reported only at 1525m.(5,000'), were seen below Ilam in eastern Nepal at an elevation of 1068m.(3,500') by Jack Cox and I on 13 November 1978. During October of that year eastern Nepal also yielded to us a Black Vulture (Torgos calvus) at 3650m.(10,000'), up from 2440m.(8,000'), at Kopin Pokhari on the Milke Dande and a Crested Serpent Eagle (Spilornis cheela) at the same height but between Chauki and Gufa. Prior range on the latter species was up to 2135m.(7,000').

RALLIDAE

The range of the White-breasted Waterhen (Amaurornis phoenicurus) can be lowered from 213m.(700') to 76m.(250') where it is found in Dhanusa district along the Bihar border.

JACANIDAE

Pheasant-tailed Jacanas (Hydrophasianus chirurgus), another scarce Nepalese species (Fleming et. al. 1976: 80) and presently listed at 1342m.(4,400'), were seen in Janakpur at 76m.(250') where eight individuals took up temporary residence in the pond opposite the district agriculture office during May 1978.

CHARADRIIDAE

The Curlew (Numenius arquata) was found by Larry Carroll and I at 76m.(250'), down from 213m.(700'), along the Kosi river in southeast Nepal (March 1978).

Similarly, the Little-ringed Plover (Charadrius dubius), and the Spotted Redshank (Tringa erythropus) are now known from 76m.(250'), but at Janakpur. Additionally discovered at this latter location and altitude was a pair of Marsh Sandpipers (T. stagnathus) on 30 March 1978, yet another scarce species in Nepal (Fleming et. al. 1976: 88).

GLAREOLIDAE

The Small Pratincole (Glareola lactea), also lowered from 213m.(700'), was observed along the Kosi river at 76m.(250') in March 1978.

CUCULIDAE

A pair of Pied Crested Cuckoos (Clamator jacobinus) were noted in Janakpur on 28 June 1978 at 76m.(250'). This species was also earlier recorded in Malanawa, Sarlahi district, at a similar elevation (Jim Chapman, pers. com.). Their present minimum range is listed at 305m.(1,000').

CAPRIMULGIDAE

The altitudinal limit of Franklin's Nightjar (Caprimulgus affinis) can be raised from 305m.(1,000') to 457m.(1,500') where a lone individual was seen and heard at dusk on 3 March 1978 by Paul Kirk and I about 2 km. east of Chisopani in northeastern Dhanusa district.

ALCEDINIDAE

Small Pied Kingfishers (Ceryle rudis) are occasionally found at the Janakpur fish farm, elevation 76m.(250').

CAPITONIDAE

A Lineated Barbet (Megalaima lineata) was seen at 76m.(250') near Gobarahi, Dhanusa district (February 1978). The previous reported low was 183m.(600').

APODIDAE

Edible Nest Swiftlets (Collocalia brevirostris) were occasionally observed hawking insects over the ponds at the Janakpur fish farm at an altitude of 76m.(250').

HIRUNDINIDAE

The range of the Barn Swallow (Hirundo rustica) can be lowered to 76m.(250') where it is a common species in Janakpur.

DICRURIDAE

The Black Drongo (Dicrurus adsimilis), recorded at 274m.(900'), may also be lowered to 76m.(250') where it too is a common species in Janakpur.

CORVIDAE

Red-billed Blue Magpies (Cissa erythrorhyncha), presently recorded at 1525m.(5,000'), were encountered by Jack Cox and I at 1982m.(6,500') between Yamphodin and Kebang in east Nepal (5 November 1978).

The Indian Tree Pie (Dendrocitta vagabunda) is a resident species at 76m.(250') in Janakpur.

A flock of Yellow-billed Choughs (Pyrrhocorax graculus) was tallied by Jack Cox, Ridge DeWitt, and I at Kagbeni, Mustang district, in May 1978. Their minimum range is thus lowered from 3660m.(12,000') to 2989m.(9,800').

CAMPEPHAGIDAE

The Small Minivet (Pericrocotus cinnamomeus) was noted down to 76m.(250') in Janakpur, Dhanusa district, on several occasions.

IRENIDAE

The range of the Iora (Aegithina tiphia) should be dropped from 213m.(700') to 76m.(250') where it too is found in Janakpur.

TIMALIIDAE

Jungle Babblers (Turdoides striatus) are yet another species present from 76m.(250') in Janakpur.

The White-crested Laughing-Thrush (Garrulax leucolophus) with a reported maximum range of 1525m.(5,000') was observed at 1982m.(6,500') by Jack Cox and I between Yamphodin and Kebang in east Nepal (5 November 1978) as were Black-throated Babblers (Stachyris nigriceps) on the same date.

MUSCICAPIDAE

A vagrant Brook's Flycatcher (Muscicapa poliozenys) was spotted by Lewis Underwood and I at Gokarna Forest in Kathmandu on 13 July 1978. This extends the range upward to 1281m.(4,200') from a previous high of 457m.(1,500') and represents a new addition to the Kathmandu valley avifauna.(Fleming and Fleming 1970).

Elevation data for the Paradise Flycatcher (Terpsiphone paradisi) may be lowered from 274m.(900') to 76m.(250') where it is occasionally found in Janakpur.

Both the White-breasted Fantail Flycatcher (Rhipidura aureola) and the Gray-headed Flycatcher (Culicicapa ceylonensis) are resident in Dhanusa district from 76m.(250').

SYLVIIDAE

Several species occur in southern Dhanusa district at an altitude of 76m.(250'). Among these are: Blanford's Bush Warbler (Cettia pallidipes), Brown Leaf Warbler (Phylloscopus collybita), Tickell's Leaf Warbler (P. affinus), and the Plain Leaf Warbler (P. inornatus), the latter down from 274m.(900').

FRINGILLIDAE

A flock of about 25 scarce (Fleming et. al. 1976: 304) Eurasian Goldfinches (Carduelis carduelis) were observed by Ridge DeWitt and I on 3 June 1978 just east of Manang at an altitude of 3812m.(12,500'). This is an upward revision from 3660m.(12,000').

Lastly, Common Rose Finches (Carpodacus erythrinus) are a winter species of Dhanusa and Siraha districts at 76m.(250'). The lowest previous data for this species in Nepal is 244m.(800').

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank Larry Carroll, Jim Chapman, Jack Cox, Ridge DeWitt, Paul Kirk, and Lewis Underwood for their amiable and enthusiastic companionship afield. Drs. Robert L. Fleming, Sr. and Jr., deserve special mention for their cordial hospitality on numerous occasions and for their encouragement in the study of Nepal's natural history.

LITERATURE CITED

- ALI, SALIM and S. DILLON RIPLEY. 1968-1974. Handbook of the birds of India and Pakistan. 10 vols. Oxford University Press, Bombay.
- FLEMING, R. L., SR. and R. L. FLEMING, JR. 1970. Birds of Kathmandu Valley and surrounding hills: a checklist. Jore Ganesh Press, Kathmandu.
- FLEMING, R. L., SR., FLEMING, R. L., JR., and L. S. BANGDEL. 1976. Birds of Nepal. R. L. Fleming, Sr. and Jr., Kathmandu. 349pp.
- FLEMING, R. L., SR., FLEMING, R. L., JR., and L. S. BANGDEL. 1979. Birds of Nepal. 2nd ed. Avalok, Kathmandu. 358pp.

SPECIES	PREVIOUS LIMIT	REVISED LIMIT	DIFFERENCE
<u>Pericrocotus cinnamomeus</u>	137m. (450')	76m. (250')	-76m. (250')
<u>Phylloscopus affinis</u>	152m. (500')	76m. (250')	-76m. (250')
<u>P. collybita</u>	152m. (500')	76m. (250')	-76m. (250')
<u>P. inornatus</u>	274m. (900')	76m. (250')	-198m. (650')
<u>P. pulcher</u>	915m. (3,000')	76m. (250')	-839m. (2,750')
<u>Pyrrhocorax graculus</u>	3660m. (12,000')	2989m. (9,800')	-671m. (2,200')
<u>Rhipidura auroola</u>	152m. (500')	76m. (250')	-76m. (250')
<u>Saxicola caprata</u>	244m. (800')	76m. (250')	-168m. (550')
<u>Seiurus castaniceps</u>	2440m. (8,000')	2592m. (8,500')	+152m. (500')
<u>Sitta europaea</u>	3050m. (10,000')	2592m. (8,500')	-458m. (1,500')
<u>Spilornis cheela</u>	2135m. (7,000')	3050m. (10,000')	+915m. (3,000')
<u>Stachyris nigricaps</u>	1830m. (6,000')	1982m. (6,500')	+152m. (500')
<u>Terpsiphone paradisi</u>	274m. (900')	76m. (250')	-198m. (650')
<u>Tichodroma muraria</u>	549m. (1,800')	457m. (1,500')	-102m. (300')
<u>Torgos calvus</u>	2440m. (8,000')	3050m. (10,000')	+610m. (2,000')
<u>Tringa erythropus</u>	152m. (500')	76m. (250')	-76m. (250')
<u>T. stagnathus</u>	152m. (500')	76m. (250')	-76m. (250')
<u>Turdoides striatus</u>	152m. (500')	76m. (250')	-76m. (250')

Table 1. (cont.). Summary of net upward or downward extension to known maximum (+) or minimum (-) species altitudinal range in Nepal.

Philip M. Hall *

University of Idaho
College of Letters and Science
Department of Biological Science
Moscow, Idaho 83843
U.S.A.

26 September 1980

* Present address:

Baboa Crocodile Station
Lake Murray, Western Province
Papua New Guinea