

A NOTE ON TREECREEPER (CERTHIIDAE) NESTING IN WEST NEPAL

by Jack H. Cox

A late spring trek in 1985 afforded me the opportunity to gather nesting data on birds in the remote and rugged Lake Rara-Jumla area of western Nepal.

On 09 May 1985, I observed a pair of nesting Common Treecreepers (Certhia familiaris mandelli) while travelling northwest from the regional center of Jumla. This record occurred at approximately 3250m elevation, some 400m beyond the hamlet of Thahamari, and 15m from a main trail that traverses the north slope of Dori Lekh.

The nest was located at a height of 5m in a trunk crevice of a dead fir Abies spectabilis, which unfortunately could not be closely examined. Nonetheless, it was evident that hatchling chicks were present, as both parents busily foraged lepidopteran larvae and small insects. One parent would remain on the nest, occasionally poking its head out of the crevice, until the other returned with food, where-upon the waiting parent would immediately dart off in search of prey. I returned to this site on 20 and 21 May 1985 after completing a circuit to the north. There was no further activity at the nest, but on 21 May a single treecreeper, most likely C. f. mandelli although not positively identified, was noted briefly in the vicinity high up a conifer.

Habitat at this site is mixed montane forest of fir A. spectabilis and birch Betula utilis with scattered maple Acer sp., and a relatively open understorey of saplings, shrubs and ringal bamboo Arundinaria spp.

C. f. mandelli ranges from the Kulu region of northwest India across the Nepalese Himalaya to extreme western Arunchal Pradesh (Tawang; Ali and Ripley 1973). Its abundance has been variously reported as occasional (Fleming et al. 1984), fairly common (Inskipp and Inskipp 1985), and common (Ali and Ripley 1973). However, few breeding data exist for this treecreeper subspecies. Nest building in an old fir stump at 3355m was recorded by O. Polunin on 19 April 1952 at Punga Lekh, Jumla district (Inskipp and Inskipp 1985). Juveniles independent of parents were collected at 3950m and 4200m in Khumbu, East Nepal in June 1962 (Diesselhorst 1968). Thus, this most recent breeding record is similar to those previously noted with respect to nesting habitat, elevation, and temporal activity.

Also on 09 May 1985, but further northwest of Dori lekh along the Khapar Khola, I noted nesting activity of the Himalayan Treecreeper C. himalaya infima near Bumra village at about 2740m. A single bird, presumably a female, was observed in an open riverside grove hitching up a walnut Juglans regia tree with a beakful of short yellow grass. A pursuing Sparrow Hawk Accipiter nisus thrice attempted to grab her by clumsily manœvering through the branches, but each time the treecreeper successfully evaded the raptor by sidling around the walnut trunk, until it flew off unnoticed.

The four certhiid species in Nepal all occur in the far western region. However, the Brown-throated Treecreeper C. discolor discolor and the Rusty-flanked Treecreeper C. nipalensis are primarily eastern Himalayan species sparsely distributed at the western limits of their ranges (Inskipp and Inskipp 1985). Niche distinctions between the more common C. f. mandelli and C. h. infima remain poorly understood, although the former appears to favor higher altitude mixed conifer forests where associated rhododendron Rhododendron spp. is replaced with birch (Martens 1981; Inskipp and Inskipp 1985). Clearly, further study of certhiid ecology in West Nepal, especially breeding biology and factors affecting competitive exclusion, is needed.

LITERATURE CITED

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