

**Subject: Rara bird list****Date:** Thu, 3 Aug 2000 18:10:07 -0700**From:** "explore" <explore@ccsl.com.np>**To:** <birdlife@mos.com.np>

Regmi, B. (2000)

Hem Dai, Namaste!!

Please find the Rara Bird check List.

Thank you,

Bharat Regmi.

Birdwatching Trek to Rara Lake

6 March to 17? March 2000

Bharat Regmi - Kathmandu, Nepal  
 Steve Anyon-Smith - Sydney, Australia  
 Dave Sheils - Sydney, Australia  
 Barry Virtue - Berry, Australia  
 + 13 Nepalese support staff

Getting to Rara National Park

First, you have to get to Jumla.....

Bharat and his company Explore Alpine Adventure P. L. organised all the logistics. How, I can only wonder.

Barry, Dave Bharat and I flew from KTM to Nepalgunj (Nicon Air - very good) and from there chartered a Yeti Airlines plane to Jumla. Accompanying us were the trek cook and his assistant who had caught the bus from KTM to Nepalgunj with our fresh food. The rest of the food, equipment, porters and other staff had travelled by bus to Surkhet from KTM and walked to Jumla (6 days). Two local guides/porters were hired in Jumla for half of the trek. We all meet on the afternoon of March 7 in Jumla. Jumla is known to be a difficult town in which to find fresh food, guides or just about anything else. Nothing we saw or experienced has changed that notion.

The route we took to Rara is unlikely to be followed as the trail(s) is/are not very well travelled. We took the latest maps available in KTM and these were of some use, as were the local guides. We still took a few wrong turns. In 1999 148 trekkers made it to Rara. Some may be still out there! We took a path known as the "high route". I'm still not sure what this means as the "low route" was just as high. Don't even bother asking how we returned. Suffice to say that with the weather the way it was (see below) we couldn't take any "well travelled" route but relied on the continual advice from locals. As it turned out we visited villages that had not seen any foreign visitors before (ever). We were surprised to learn this, but the remoteness of this region cannot be over-emphasised. Don't get seriously sick!!

**The Trek**

Despite the lack of high peaks the trek is quite strenuous. There are few gentle grades. Mostly it is steep unmade paths or switchbacks and no "steps". The paths are not inherently dangerous, but were made so by ice and snow in some sections. Some high passes on the route were closed and had to be avoided. There are no lodges that you would call habitable, and other than Nepali tea, no food is available. Campsites are fairly numerous but long sections are too steep or have no water for sites. Most of the trek is in forest but much of it has been degraded by the activities of the local people, sometimes depressingly so.

**The Forest**

The forest is not very diverse. Broadleaved trees are few in number and

appear especially so in winter when most have lost their leaves. It is a dream, however, for lovers of conifers. Some trees are truly awesome.

Trees present in the park include:

Blue Pine (*Pinus excelsa*)  
 West Himalayan Spruce (*Picea smithina*)  
 Oak (*Quercus semecarpefolia*)  
 Himalayan cypress (*Cupressus torulosa*)  
 Walnut (*Junglans regia*)  
 Himalayan Poplar (*Populus ciliata*)  
 Indian Horse Chestnut (*Aesculus indica*)  
 Fir  
 Deodar  
 Juniper  
 Birch  
 Rhododendron

#### The Weather

March is at the end of winter. It shouldn't have been snowing according to the local people at this time. Needless to say it did. The snow reached the waterline at Rara Lake. It looked nice but it was bloody cold. It reached -150 c at night and dropped below zero by day whenever a cloud obscured the sun. Otherwise it was quite pleasant. The trails froze until mid-morning, after which they turned largely into mush or mud. Otherwise they were good. (Get the picture?)

#### The Mammals

Largely out-competed by goats or eaten. Mammal life is said to be abundant at Rara. It isn't. Yellow-throated martens are in good numbers. Jackals were seen. There is ample evidence of wild boar. It is also clear that a good population of smaller cats do quite well around the edges of the lake, eating waterfowl. We did not identify these as spotlighting is illegal. There is some evidence of Himalayan black bear (after May) and musk deer. There are no ruminant mammals around the lake as the local people use the grassland for their goats and cattle and the army and others graze their horses there. No goral or tahr were seen within the Park with the exception of two tahr on the boundary at Bhulbule. Bharal do not occur here and despite published information to the contrary, nor do snow leopards, otters or red panda. Forest leopards are occasionally heard. There are nocturnal squirrels but the lack of opportunity to view them leaves their identity unknown. Aside from a red fox at Danphe Lagna, Royle's Pika was the only other mammal seen.

#### The Birds

Rara Lake supports a large number of wintering waterbirds, mainly ducks and grebes, but a few gulls and cormorants as well. The surrounding forest is quite rich in diversity compared to the forest outside the park. The warden at Rara said we were the first birdwatchers to visit the area in winter. Many of the birds seen were identified in Inskipp as "individual records" or our observations have increased their known range. Uncertain observations (including that of a very probable Horned Grebe - a new record for Nepal) have been excluded from the following summary. The order and names follow Inskipp. Plate numbers have been included for ease of reference.

Chukar *Alectoris chukar* 1  
 Seen in flocks of up to 12 birds feeding in cultivated fields above Jumla and below Rara Lake.

Himalayan Monal Lophophorus *impejanus* 5  
 Occasional bird seen on high passes. Not common.

Kalij Pheasant *Lophura leucomelanos* 5

Common in forested areas and once in cultivated field below Rara. Common

around the lake.

Gadwall *Anas strepera* 10

25 seen on lake.

Eurasian Wigeon *Anas penelope*  
10

A raft of about 100 birds seen well out into the lake.

Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*  
10

Up to 25 birds in small flocks in shallow parts of the lake, especially the western end. A small flock was also seen near Sinja on Laha Khola.

Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*  
11

A flock of 60 seen on the lake.

Red-crested Pochard *Rhodonessa rufina* 12

A flock of 30 at the western end of the lake near the shoreline.

Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*  
12

35 birds scattered in the lake near the shoreline.

Ferruginous Pochard *Aythya nyroca*  
12

One flock of 6 birds seen on northern edge of lake.

Tufted Duck *Aythya fuligula*  
12

20 birds seen in small groups on lake.

Common Goldeneye *Bucephala clangula* 13

2 pairs near eastern end of lake.

Common Merganser *Mergus merganser* 13

15 seen at eastern end of lake.

Himalayan Woodpecker *Dendrocopus himalayensis* 15

Seen each day onwards from Chautha. The most common woodpecker in the area. Most common in forests with a broadleaved component.

Streak-throated Woodpecker *Picus xanthopygaeus* 16

Seen at Ghurchi La Pass and in forest around lake.

Grey-hooded Woodpecker *Picus canus* 16

Uncommon in forests.

Asian Barred Owlet *Glaucidium cuculoides* 30

1 seen above Jhyari.

Rock Pigeon *Columba livia*  
32

A small flock of about 10 birds in cliff at Kabre.

Snow Pigeon 32	<i>Columba leuconota</i>	
Flocks of up to 70 birds seen on most days. Very common.		
Oriental Turtle Dove 34	<i>Streptopelia orientalis</i>	
Seen at Rara and on trails. Uncommon.		
Common Moorhen	<i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	39
A lone bird on northern edge of lake.		
Common Coot 39	<i>Fulica atra</i>	
About 150 birds around the edge of the lake.		
Pallas's Gull 53	<i>Larus ichthyaetus</i>	
3 or 4 birds on lake. One harassed and finally killed a common pochard. It was unknown if the duck was healthy beforehand or not.		
Black Kite 59	<i>Milvus migrans</i>	
Low numbers seen throughout the trek and at Rara.		
Lammergeier 61	<i>Gypaetus barbatus</i>	
Fairly common and seen on most days. Most common above Pina, where four were seen together.		
Egyptian Vulture	<i>Neophron percnopterus</i>	61
2 seen at Jumla and an occasional bird on the trek. Uncommon.		
Himalayan Griffon Vulture	<i>Gyps himalayensis</i>	62
Common, especially at Jhyari where a number of birds roost in the large and conspicuous cedars on the edge of the village. The most common vulture on the trek.		
Oriental Honey Buzzard	<i>Pernis ptilorhyncus</i>	68
A couple of birds seen around the edge of the lake.		
Common Buzzard 68	<i>Buteo buteo</i>	
One seen at Danphe Lagna.		
Long-legged Buzzard 68	<i>Buteo rufinus</i>	
One seen just south of Ghurchi La Pass.		
Bonelli's Eagle 71	<i>Hieraaetus fasciatus</i>	
2 seen at Jumla and occasionally on trek.		
Common Kestrel 72	<i>Falco Tinnunculus</i>	

Reasonably common throughout trek.

Horned Grebe

single found on the lack Rara a New record for Nepal.

Little Grebe

*Tachybaptus ruficollis*

75

At least one bird on lake.

Great Crested Grebe

*Podiceps cristatus*

75

At least 40 birds seen over all parts of the lake, some in small groups.

Black-necked Grebe

*Podiceps nigricollis*

75

At least 30 birds seen around edges of lake.

Great Cormorant

*Phalacrocorax carbo*

77

At least 4 present on lake.

Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*

80

One seen near the army base on the northern edge of the lake.

Yellow-billed Blue Magpie

*Urocissa flavirostris*

90

Reasonably common in forests or forest edges. Seen on most days during trek and at Rara.

Spotted Nutcracker

*Nucifraga caryocatactes*

91

Very common in pine forests. Multiple sightings most days. About 12 birds maximum on any one day.

Red-billed Chough

*Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax*

91

About a dozen birds at Bumra and occasional elsewhere on trek. Uncommon.

Large-billed Crow

*Corvus macrorhychos*

91

Abundant near villages and common elsewhere. Flocks sometimes numbering in the hundreds.

Long-tailed Minivet

*Pericrocotus ethologus*

93

Common in forests with broadleaved component, especially along creeks and in mixed feeding flocks.

Brown Dipper

*Cinclus pallasii*

95

Very common on creeks and rivers. Seen throughout trek.

Blue Whistling Thrush

*Myophonus caeruleus*

96

Occasional birds seen but not as common as one might expect.

Dark-throated Thrush

*Turdus ruficollis*

99

One of the most common medium sized birds in most habitats but especially in areas of human interference with scattered vegetation.

Mistle Thrush

*Turdus viscivorus*

99

Two birds seen in grassy area on the south west corner of the lake.

Ultramarine Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula superciliaris</i>	101
One seen in forest west of army HQ.		
Rufous-bellied Niltava	<i>Niltava sundara</i>	102
A pair seen at Pina, although apparently well out of range.		
Orange-flanked Bush Robin	<i>Tarsiger cyanurus</i>	105
Reasonably common particularly at the edges of forest where they perch and pounce onto grass. Common near NP HQ at Rara.		
Blue-capped Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus coeruleocephalus</i>	106
Seen at the edges of open areas around the lake and above Jumla.		
White-throated Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus schisticeps</i>	106
A pair seen in the pine forest where we got lost. This doesn't help, I know!		
Blue-fronted Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus frontalis</i>	107
2 seen in gully above Jumla.		
White-capped Water Redstart	<i>Chaimarrornis leucocephalus</i>	107
Seen in Jugad Khola above Jumla and common along the Nyawre Khola.		
Plumbeous Water Redstart	<i>Rhyacornis fuliginosus</i>	107
Common along the larger creeks.		
Little Forktail 107	<i>Enicurus scouleri</i>	
Seen at Nyawre and on the Chautha Khola. Uncommon.		
Spotted Forktail 107	<i>Enicurus maculatus</i>	
Uncommon around rocky shores on the lake as well as the larger rivers where there is sufficient overhanging vegetation.		
Common Stonechat	<i>Saxicola torquata</i>	108
Common, particularly in cultivation above Jumla.		
Pied Bushchat 108	<i>Saxicola caprata</i>	
Seen only in fields at Pina.		
Common Myna	<i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	111
Close to habitation in the larger villages only.		
Kashmir Nuthatch	<i>Sitta cashmirensis</i>	112
Reasonably common in mixed feeding parties or occasionally in pairs feeding alone in better forests throughout the trek. Seen most days.		
White-cheeked Nuthatch	<i>Sitta leucopsis</i>	112
Seen several times on the walk around the lake, always in mixed feeding parties. Every such group of birds seemed to have a pair.		
Wallcreeper	<i>Tichodroma muraria</i>	

112

Seen in Jugad Khola very close to Jumla and on a rock in the Nyawre Khola at Bumra.

Eurasian Treecreeper *Certhia familiaris* 112

Seen on walk around lake but not elsewhere. Far less common than the Bar-tailed.

Bar-tailed Treecreeper *Certhia himalayana* 112

Reasonably common. Seen from Chautha onwards on most days.

Rufous-vented Tit *Parus rubidiventris* 113

Reasonably common in the forests around the lake. Less common elsewhere.

Spot-winged Tit *Parus melanolophus* 113

Common. Seen from Ghurchi Lagna onwards. Abundant in the forests around the lake where they make up a high percentage of mixed foraging groups.

Grey-crested Tit *Parus dichrous*  
113

Common throughout the trek in forests.

Green-backed Tit *Parus monticolus*  
113

Common and widespread in forests.

Winter Wren *Troglodytes troglodytes*  
114

Common in rock walls throughout trek.

Black-throated Tit *Aegithalos concinnus* 114

Seen above Jumla and more commonly in the forests around the lake.

White-throated Tit *Aegithalos niveogularis* 114

Seen north of Danphe Lagna and in the forests around the lake. Reasonably common.

Nepal House Martin *Delichon nipalensis* 116

About 30 birds seen in cliffs near Kabre. Not seen elsewhere.

Himalayan Bulbul *Pycnonotus leocogenys* 117

Common in bushes and secondary growth around the lake. Seen in low numbers elsewhere on the trek. The only bulbul seen.

Black-faced Warbler *Abroscopus schisticeps* 127

A few birds seen south of Danphe Lagna while we were lost.

Goldcrest *Regulus regulus*  
127

Common in forests. Very common in mixed foraging flocks around the lake.

Striated Laughingthrush *Garrulax striatus* 128

Seen only near Danphe Lagna. Uncommon.

Chestnut-crowned Laughingthrush *Garrulux erythrocephalus* 129

Common throughout the trek in most habitats.

Variegated Laughingthrush *Garrulax variegatus* 129

Common. Seen most days in most habitats as per Chestnut-crowned.

Rufous Sibia *Heterophasia capistrata*  
136

2 seen above Jhyari.

House Sparrow *Passer domesticus*  
141

Seen in and around Jumla.

Eurasian Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus* 141

Abundant in villages.

Tibetan Snowfinch *Montifringilla adamsi* 141

One pair seen in scrubby grassland adjacent to campsite near park HQ at Rara.

Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*  
142

Occasional on Nyawre Khola only.

Alpine Accentor *Prunella collaris*  
145

One bird seen at Pina.

Rufous-breasted Accentor *Prunella strophiatea* 145

Seen above Jhyari and below Chalachaur. Uncommon.

Scaly-breasted Munia *Lonchura punctulata* 147

4 seen together on northern edge of lake.

Chaffinch *Fringilla coelebs*  
147

Seen twice on trail around the lake on the northern and southern sides. The latter was a group of 4 birds feeding in the company of 3 brambling. Apparently reasonably common here.

Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla*  
147

3 seen feeding on the ground with chaffinch on the southern side of the lake.

Fire-fronted Serin *Serinus pusillus*  
148

A flock of 70 birds seen on the return trek in an area where apparently no foreigner has visited but I have no idea what the name is.

Twite *Carduelis flavirostris*  
148

One bird seen in scrubby grassland adjacent to campsite near park HQ at Rara.



Plain Mountain Finch	<i>Leucosticte nemoricola</i>	148
Abundant throughout trek. Huge flocks seen every day.		
Beautiful Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus pulcherrimus</i>	149
Common throughout trek, especially in scrubby grassland around the lake.		
Pink-browed Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus rodochrous</i>	149
One pair seen at Pina.		
Spot-winged Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus rodopeplus</i>	150
Several seen feeding on the ground inside pine forest behind the Rara NP HQ.		
Red-headed Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula erythrocephala</i>	151
Aflock of 20 at Bhulbule and smaller flock on northern side of lake.		
Black-and-yellow Grosbeak	<i>Mycerobas icterioides</i>	151
Reasonably common in crowns of pines around the lake. Small flocks seen on several occasions.		
White-winged Grosbeak	<i>Mycerobas carnipes</i>	151
Seen in pines on southern side of lake and elsewhere on the return trek (no idea as we'd fallen off the map) in big flocks.		
Rock Bunting	<i>Emberiza cia</i>	
152		
Ubiquitous.		

#### References

Pocket Guide to the Birds of the Indian Subcontinent (Inskipp x2,  
Grimmett)  
The Book of Indian Mammals (?)  
Rara Lake and Jumla (map) (Nepa Maps)

#### Author's Note:

This was my third trek in Nepal, having visited the Annurpurna Region in 1995 and with Bharat and Dave in the beautiful and wildlife-filled Langtang Valley in 1998. Bharat's company "Explore Alpine Adventure" is specialising in wildlife watching treks and tours in Nepal, Tibet and Bhutan. The company is active in the area of conservation. In Langtang National Park he has been successful in having action taken against those who were flagrantly abusing park regulations with respect to the killing of wildlife. Bharat has set up the "Nalang Bird Watching Club" in his native village of ? to educate schoolchildren and others on the importance of preserving habitat for the local bird and animal life.

Steve Anyon-Smith  
18 April 2000