

The occurrence of Kessler's Thrush *Turdus kessleri* in Nepal

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Kessler's Thrush *Turdus kessleri* is a Sino-Himalayan species, breeding only in western China. The breeding range encompasses the high mountain ranges of eastern Tibet, i.e. parts of the present-day provinces of Qinghai, Gansu, Xizang, Sichuan and Yunnan. This range extends from approximately 28° to 38°N and 95° to 104°E (Cheng 1987). During the breeding season the species is found at altitudes from 2,750 to 4,615 m, and is commonest between 4,000 and 4,500 m, inhabiting the alpine zone where dwarf *Rhododendron* and willow *Salix* thickets are associated with damp alpine grasslands (Schäfer 1938, Wunderlich 1987). The breeding season commences towards the end of April, and there is initially a great excess of males. These feed over a wide area and congregate to roost at lower altitudes. The species remains gregarious well into the breeding season, and flocks of males have been observed while females are incubating. Courtship takes place during May with breeding during June and July. The nest is usually located near the ground in rocky terrain with thick rhododendron and willow thickets. By mid-August most juveniles are fully fledged and are found in flocks with adults. It appears that Kessler's Thrush is single-brooded (Wunderlich 1987). In keeping with other *Turdus* species in summer the diet is one of worms and insects, in autumn berries, and in winter the seeds of juniper *Juniperus* (Schäfer and Meyer de Schauensee 1938).

The winter range of Kessler's Thrush is less well documented. The sparse literature (Bangs 1932, Schäfer and Meyer de Schauensee 1938, Ludlow 1951) indicates southerly movements to north Yunnan and south-east Xizang along the area of the Tsangpo River. The most westerly records are those of Meinertzhagen (1927), who collected one out of a flock of four at Changu, Sikkim (c.27°30'N 88°30'E) on 21 December 1925, and a specimen obtained, during November, by Mandelli in Tibet close to the Sikkim border (Blanford 1877).

Kessler's Thrush was first recorded in Nepal early in 1986 (Robinson 1988) and there have been subsequent records in April 1986 and in the 1988/89 winter. As these are the first records for this country, and constitute a significant westward extension of the species's known range, full details are tabulated below.

The Everest National Park is drained by the Dudh Khosi originating from the Ngozumpa Glacier. There are two main tributaries to this: the Imja Drangka, from Nuptse and Lhotse glaciers, joins the Dudh Kosi below the village of Phortse, and the Nangpo Tsangpo, from the Nangpa/Lunag/Sumna glaciers to the west, joins the Dudh Kosi below the Sherpa capital of Namche Bazar. Mixed birch *Betula utilis* and *Rhododendron* forest is found along these

Table. Records of Kessler's Thrush from Nepal

Place names are those given in Nepal-Kartenwerk der Arbeitsgemeinschaft für vergleichende Hochgebirgsforschung No. 2 Khumbu Himal 1:50,000 (1988 revision) and No. 8 Helambu-Langtang 1:100,000. Altitudes are in metres.

| Date | Location | Alt. (m) | Lat. (N) | Long. (E) | No. | Associated species | Observer |
|-------------------------------|------------------|-------------|-------------|--------------|-----|-----------------------|-------------|
| <i>Everest National Park</i> | | | | | | | |
| 26.01.86 | Namche Bazar | 3,440 | 27°48' | 86°43' | 1 | <i>T. ruficollis</i> | T. Robinson |
| 03.02.86 | nr. Lhabarma | 4,328 | 27°52' | 86°44' | 2 | <i>T. merula</i> | T. Robinson |
| 05.02.86 | Gyele | 4,084 | 27°52' | 86°44' | 4-5 | <i>T. merula</i> | T. Robinson |
| 05.04.86 | Syampoche | 3,700 | 27°48' | 86°43' | 1 | <i>T. ruficollis</i> | D. Mills |
| 17.11.88 | U. Pangpoche | 3,985 | 27°51' | 86°48' | 13+ | <i>T. merula</i> | P. Jepson |
| 21.11.88 | Tongba | | | | | | |
| | Phortse Drangka | 3,850 | 27°51' | 86°44' | 20+ | <i>T. merula</i> | P. Jepson |
| 15.12.88 | Thame Og | 3,800 | 27°50' | 86°39' | 2 | <i>T. ruficollis</i> | J. Nielsen |
| 16.12.88 | nr. Thame Og | 3,800 | 27°50' | 88°39' | 4 | <i>T. ruficollis</i> | J. Nielsen |
| 19.12.88 | nr. Shomare | 3,900 | 27°52' | 86°49' | 15+ | — | J. Nielsen |
| 28.12.88 | Pangpoche | 3,820 | 27°51' | 86°48' | 4 | — | J. Nielsen |
| 28.12.88 | nr. Deboche | 3,800 | 27°50' | 86°47' | 4 | <i>T. merula</i> | J. Nielsen |
| 29.12.88 | Tengpoche/Phunki | 3,600 | 27°50' | 86°45' | 2 | <i>T. merula</i> | J. Nielsen |
| 31.12.88 | Namche Bazar | 3,440 | 27°48' | 86°43' | 1 | — | J. Nielsen |
| <i>Langtang National Park</i> | | | | | | | |
| 26.01.89 | Kyangchingyang | 4,800 | 28°13' | 85°34' | 35+ | <i>T. merula</i> | D. Barrett |

valleys to an altitude of approximately 4,000 m. Drooping Juniper *Juniperus recurva* is not uncommon with pure stands being found around villages such as Upper Pangpoche and Machhermo. Kessler's Thrush was recorded almost exclusively in this habitat and in all three of the valleys. Records were, however, concentrated in the Upper Dudh Kosi and Imja Drangka valleys within 5 km of the village of Phortse.

Extensive but inaccessible areas of this forest-type are found on the eastern slopes of the Dudh Kosi and southern slopes of the Nangpo Tsangpo valley and thus it is likely that the total numbers of Kessler's Thrushes in the Everest National Park during 1988 were higher than the figure of 35-40 indicated by the above records. Indeed the record of a flock, some 100 km to the west in Langtang National Park, suggests a significant invasion of Kessler's Thrushes into east-central Nepal during 1988.

In the Everest National Park, juniper was clearly the favoured foraging tree, and the thrushes were observed feeding on the berries of this species. In addition several were observed at Upper Pangpoche feeding in and under *Berberis*, which forms dense stands on the valley slopes.

In the absence of knowledge of the conditions in the normal wintering areas in western China it is not possible to suggest reasons for the unusual influx of Kessler's Thrushes into Nepal in the winter of 1988. Schäfer (1938) states that in winter the species descends to the tree line, where together with other species it feeds in big flocks in the sparse juniper scrub, and Wunderlich (1987) states that juniper berries seem to be the main winter food of the species. Recent observations from Nepal confirm that this is an important constituent of the species's winter diet, and it seems reasonable to assume that

a failure of the Tibetan juniper crop would lead to the species dispersing more widely.

These recent Nepalese records have extended the known wintering range of Kessler's Thrush three degrees to the west (= approximately 310 km). They indicate that at least part of the population may sporadically erupt in a south-westerly direction from the breeding grounds. In addition it is clear that the high Himal do not pose an uncrossable barrier, and Ali and Ripley's (1983) suggestion that Kessler's Thrush might occur in Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh in winter may well be correct.

I am grateful to the observers named in the text for providing me with their records of Kessler's Thrush in Nepal, to Craig Robson and Tim Inskipp for commenting on earlier drafts, and to Naturetrek for facilitating my visit to Nepal in 1988.

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Jerdon's Babbler *Moupinia altirostris*: a new species for Nepal

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On 26 November 1989 H.S.B. found a flock of three birds which he tentatively identified as Jerdon's Babblers *Moupinia altirostris*, foraging in