

them. This practice may still be continuing.

A further problem is the use by locals and settlers in the Hill Tracts of nylon gill-nets for fishing. These are roughly a metre in height and 10–15 m in length, and are stretched with poles under the surface of a small lake or pool. The adult ducks swimming under water occasionally get entangled, and are either eaten directly or sent to market.

In the mid-1980s the government started leasing out the forest lands, of both Pablakhali Sanctuary and neighbouring areas, to the plains-dwellers for settlement there at the rate of 2.5 ha per family. By now (1986) an estimated 10,000 families have been settled in the Greater Hill Tracts District. This has posed a serious threat to the survival of the Wood Duck and other wildlife of Pablakhali and its neighbourhood, because the settlers are clearing the forest land given to them, encroaching on the reserved forest, fishing the lakes and pools, and disturbing the habitat and activity patterns of the Wood Duck. This detrimental trend of human settlement must be stopped not only to save the Wood Duck but also for the greater benefits of the forest and other wildlife. Instead of settling the plains-dwellers as a counter-measure to tribal insurgency, the government should solve the latter problem politically.

Conclusion

As nothing is known about the status of the species since 1981, an immediate survey in the Pablakhali Wildlife Sanctuary and its environs is needed to determine whether any population still survives there. If the result is positive, steps must be taken to save it. All remaining isolated softwood trees should be saved from selective logging, to ensure nesting sites. Use of gill-nets in the sanctuary and other areas holding Wood Duck should be banned. All forestry operations in the Pablakhali Sanctuary, for that matter in all other sanctuaries, should be stopped and human settlement discouraged. A small scientific unit might be established at Amtali within the Pablakhali Sanctuary for continuous monitoring of the Wood Duck situation in the area.

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Black-tailed Crake *Porzana bicolor*: a new species for Thailand

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Late in the afternoon of 25 January 1985, in the Doi Inthanon National Park, Thailand (18°34'N 98°51'E), 1,300 m above sea level, two of us (O.P. and J.S.) and C. Howlett observed a crane which they identified as a Black-tailed Crake *Porzana bicolor*. The next day the bird was seen by R.S. and Ph.J.D.

It was feeding on a marshy field, staying close to a bushy area along a stream. It was scared by every movement in the surroundings and often disappeared under the bushes. This habit was also noted by Delacour and Jabouille (1931). The size of the bird was roughly that of a Pintail Snipe *Gallinago stenura*, with which it was seen. The wings and back were reddish-brown, uppertail-coverts blackish, tail black. The throat was whitish, but the rest of the head, neck, flanks and belly were dark ash-gray, darker on breast, vent blackish, undertail-coverts black. The bill was yellowish-green with a red spot (only visible at close range) at the base. The legs were red (not reddish-brown); eyes red.

Notified by us, Ph. Goffart and D. Lafontaine saw the Black-tailed Crake on 29 January 1985. P. D. Round and B. F. King saw it on 31 January and heard three further birds calling (of which one was seen) at an additional site, less than 1 km distant. It seems possible that the species nests here (P. D.

Round *in litt.*).

Published information on the Black-tailed Crake is sparse, and the species appears to have been reported very little in the past fifty years; this is evidently due in some degree to the inaccessibility (on political grounds) of certain parts of its range, but also possibly to confusion with the Brown Crake *Amaurornis akool*.

There are a few specimens from unspecified localities in Nepal, some others possibly being from an adjacent site in northern India (Inskipp and Inskipp 1985). Baker (1929) recorded the species from Sikkim, where it nests 'between 4,000 and 6,000 feet' (1,200 and 1,800m). He also described it as common in the North Cachar Hills, Khasi Hills, 'Assam' (now in Meghalaya), 'a dozen birds breeding in a small patch about 100 yards long by 600 wide' at one unspecified locality. Baker (1935) added that the species never nested below 3,000 feet (900m) except in the Lakhimpur district.

In Burma, Smythies (1953) reported that 'a nest was taken by Osmaston near Mogaung on the 18 July' and 'Harington records that Tancock obtained a nest with 6 eggs at Sinlum Kaba on the 9 May'. The species is known throughout the higher hills of the country from the Chin Hills in the west (where one observer found it common) to Karenni in the east (one specimen obtained at Nattaung), and it is described as not uncommon in the Shan states (Smythies 1953).

In China, the Black-tailed Crake is recorded from south-east Sichuan east to Wa Shan and south to the Likiang Mountains in north Yunnan (Meyer de Schauensee 1984). In Viet Nam, Delacour and Jabouille (1931) considered it scarce, two birds having been collected in the High Tonkin; they also record it from Cha Pa, central Annam. In Laos, David-Beaulieu (1941) noted it in the marshes of Xieng Khouang and Nong Het. Delacour and Jabouille (1931) mention it as occurring in Siam but it is not listed for Thailand by Deignan (1963), Lekagul and Cronin (1974) or King *et al.* (1975). Our observations thus seem to be the first for Thailand.

The Black-tailed Crake is typical of mountain areas, seldom seen below 1,000m; Baker (1929) found it near 'small streams, especially those which had plenty of cover on one side and open grassland on the opposite one', and we found it in such habitat in Doi Inthanon. Delacour and Jabouille (1931) also noted that it frequents open meadows mainly in the mornings and evenings. Baker (1935) gives its breeding season as apparently from mid-May to the end of August; the behaviour of the Thai birds suggests that breeding might occur at Doi Inthanon, perhaps earlier than Baker's dates.

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Status of wintering Black-necked Cranes *Grus nigricollis* in Bhutan

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The Black-necked Crane *Grus nigricollis* has been described as the least known of all crane species (Walkinshaw 1973, King 1978-1979, Archibald and Oesting 1981, Johnsgard 1983) with incomplete knowledge available on its status and distribution. During the last ten years researchers have shown increasing interest in the species and the habitats it occupies for breeding and wintering.

The Black-necked Crane is a central Asian species, with a breeding range now known to include Ladakh and areas of southern China bordering the Tsangpo river (Xizang province), and in Sichuan and Qinghai provinces (Johnsgard 1983). Meyer de Schauensee (1984) also reports it breeding from north-west Kansu southwards, but his source for this is unknown. It is probable that there are unknown breeding areas in the central plateau of Xizang (Tibet) (Walkinshaw 1973). The main wintering areas used by this species are reported to include parts of south-central Xizang, south-west Sichuan and Yunnan provinces in China and the northern Viet Nam lowlands, while a few birds have been reported in Bhutan, Arunachal Pradesh in north-east India, and in the Kamon range in northern Burma (Archibald and Oesting 1981, Khacher 1981a,b, Archibald 1983).

Recently, teams of Indian researchers under the auspices of the World Wildlife Fund have been studying Black-necked Cranes at the Indian breeding grounds in Ladakh (Gole 1981a, Hussain 1985), and more casually where the species winters in Bhutan. Wintering cranes have been known