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New and significant records from Dehra Dun valley and adjacent hills, lower Garhwal Himalayas, India: May 2002–March 2006

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Ornithological records from Dehra Dun valley and adjacent hills in Dehra Dun district (30°04–45′N 77°35′–78°15′E) in Uttaranchal state, India, have been previously published by Osmaston (1935), Wright (1955), George (1957), Fleming (1967), Pandey *et al.* (1994), Mohan (1997), Gandhi and Singh (1995), Tak *et al.* (1997), Singh (2000, 2002) and Singh *et al.* (2001). A checklist of the birds of Dehra Dun and adjacent hills, compiled by Bikram Grewal in 2002 and revised in 2003 by the author is also available (at http://64.6.246.114/checklists/Uttaranchal/checklists_dehradoon.htm), but this is not authoritative and contains a number of highly improbable records.

Until recently, a few areas lying in the eastern part of the valley had remained practically unexplored

ornithologically. These were mainly inaccessible, dense, wet patches of tropical moist deciduous forests, some dominated by sal *Shorea robusta* trees, at 800–1,000 m. These included Kalu Sidh Temple along the Song river in Thanu range, Kansrao-Satyanarayan tract in Rajaji National Park, Chowki and Rikhauri.

Monthly surveys of 3–10 days each, totalling 257 days from May 2002 to March 2006, were undertaken focusing on these areas in the valley. A total of 196 days during the same period were spent surveying the Asan river and Asan Barrage. Observations were also carried out on a 40-km road transect in the adjoining hills of Mussoorie, through Jawaladavi Temple, Benog, Everest House, Hathiapaw, Mussoorie, Jharipani, Kinraig, Bataghat, Suwakholi, Buraskhanda and Dhanaulti on 95 days in the same period.

Finally 10-day treks in May–June 2003 and 2004 treks were undertaken in the inner Jaunsar hills of Chakarata-Deoban, Tiuni and the north-west corner of the district adjoining Himachal Pradesh.

Here I give details of significant new records, i.e. those of threatened or Near Threatened species (as listed by BirdLife International at www.birdlife.org/datazone), first or second records for Uttaranchal state, and significant range extensions. Images of those species noted as being photographed can be viewed at <http://www.orientalbirdimages.org>.

Table 1. Coordinates of sites mentioned in text.

Site	Altitude	Coordinates
Asan Barrage	400 m	30°26'N 77°40'E
New Forest	670 m	30°20'N 78°01'E
Kalusidh temple, Kaluwala	580 m	30°10'N 78°12'E
Jhajra	650 m	30°21'N 77°56'E
Guniyal village	900 m	30°24'N 78°04'E
Hathipaw, near Mussoorie	2,200 m	30°27'N 78°02'E
Chakarata	2,185–2,800 m	30°44–45'N 77°51–52'E
Jhitad, near Tiuni	1,900 m	30°58'N 77°50'E

RESULTS

GREAT BITTERN *Botaurus stellaris*

An adult was observed and photographed feeding in reedbeds, hiding when alarmed and later flying away at Asan Barrage on 13 January 2006. This is the first record from Uttaranchal state of this uncommon winter migrant to India.

GLOSSY IBIS *Plegadis falcinellus*

A large flock of 121 individuals was counted flying east over New Forest campus at a height of c.50 m at 16h50 on 20 October 2003. Some individuals interspersed bouts of flapping with short glides. Their relatively smaller size, legs extending beyond the tail, and lack of white shoulder patches distinguished them from Black Ibis *Pseudibis paspillosa* which also occurs in the area. The species is otherwise only known in Uttaranchal state from Corbett Tiger Reserve (Sharma *et al.* 2003).

FULVOUS WHISTLING-DUCK *Dendrocygna bicolor*

Four individuals were observed on 10 October 2003 as they flew from the eastern bank of Asan Barrage. The flight was low and straight; one individual gave a clear loud *pew-ee* call during flight. They landed c.100 m away on a stony bank on the west central part of the Barrage. While landing the buffy-white uppertail-coverts were seen. They appeared to be larger than Fulvous Whistling-duck *D. javanica*, which is a summer migrant to Asan Barrage. The species is otherwise only known in Uttaranchal state from Corbett Tiger Reserve, where it was recorded as a 'very rare resident through out the park' during 1977–1979 (Lamba 1980, 1987).

BAER'S POCHARD *Aythya baeri*

Vulnerable. A male was observed and photographed swimming in a flock of Gadwall *Anas strepera* and Common Coot *Fulica atra* along the south-west marshes of Asan

Barrage (situated at the confluence of Asan and Yamuna rivers) on 11 December 2002. It had characteristically white undertail-coverts, foreflanks and belly, extending to above the water surface unlike Ferruginous Pochard *A. nyroca*. The head showed a distinct greenish gloss, contrasting with the chestnut breast, and a white iris was glimpsed. The bird appeared smaller than Gadwall. This is the first record of this species from Uttaranchal state.

WHITE-TAILED EAGLE *Haliaeetus albicilla*

A juvenile was recorded feeding on the Asan riverbed between Herbertpur town and Asan Barrage on 23 February 2004. It had streaking on the throat and chest; the gape ended below the eye, and bill was black with a yellow base. After ten minutes it flew away, and soared with four Egyptian Vultures *Nephron percnopterus* and a juvenile Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis*. In flight, the wedge-shaped tail was visible from above and below; it was white except for darker feather margins. The wings appeared very broad in flight compared to the Steppe Eagle. The species is otherwise only known in Uttaranchal state from Corbett Tiger Reserve (Sharma *et al.* 2003).

CHEER PHEASANT *Catreus wallichii*

Vulnerable. A covey of at least five individuals was recorded feeding on steep rocky slopes at 2,200 m in a mixed patch of pine and oaks above Jhitad village, near Tiuni on the Uttaranchal-Himachal Pradesh state border, on 9 May 2004. The long barred tail of the male was clearly seen from 30 m before the birds disappeared down the slope. It has previously been recorded in the area near Chakarata (Osmaston 1935, Srivastava 1977) and at Mussoorie (Fleming 1967), where it was described as rare.

BLACK-TAILED GODWIT *Limosa limosa*

Near Threatened. Two individuals were seen flying together over the Asan Barrage reservoir for five minutes after being disturbed by a Eurasian Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus* on 27 August 2003. The white wing-bar and rump, broad black band, legs trailing well behind the tail and longish beak were noted. The species is otherwise only known in Uttaranchal state from Corbett Tiger Reserve (Sharma *et al.* 2003).

EURASIAN CURLEW *Numenius arquata*

One individual was observed twice at Asan Barrage on 16 and 18 January 2004. On the first occasion it was seen initially in flight and then settling on fallow land alongside the Yamuna canal. On the second occasion it was photographed in a flock of over 100 Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea* on a mudflat in the central part of Asan Barrage. The species is otherwise only known in Uttaranchal state from Corbett Tiger Reserve (Sharma *et al.* 2003).

TEREK SANDPIPER *Xenus cinereus*

One individual was observed for five minutes feeding on sandy banks alongside Red-wattled Lapwings *Vanellus indicus* and Black-winged Stilts *Himantopus himantopus* at Asan Barrage on 20 October 2002. It was the size of a Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus* and had short orange-yellow legs and an upturned beak with an orangey base. There has only been one previous record of this species from Uttaranchal state, in 1967 at Roorkee (George 1968).

WOOD SNIBE *Gallinago nemoricola*

Vulnerable. One was recorded in a small (50 m diameter) swamp covered with grass and water hyacinth in a patch of sal forest at Jhajra at 650 m on 15 December 2004. On approaching it flushed, rose laboriously and landed on the top of a bush ten metres away. It had boldly barred darkish underparts. Osmaston (1935) recorded this species in the area in swampy patches near the forest edge.

GULL-BILLED TERN *Gelocheidon nilotica*

Two adults in non-breeding plumage were seen flying over Asan Barrage reservoir for 25 minutes on 26 August 2003 and for 40 minutes on 27 August 2003. These medium-sized terns were identified by their distinctly short, thick, all-black bill, and dark smudge through the eye on an otherwise all-white head. The species is otherwise only known in Uttaranchal state from Corbett Tiger Reserve (Sharma *et al.* 2003).

GREY-BELLIED TESIA *Tesia cyaniventer*

This species was seen five times: (1) on 19 February 2003, in Jhajra sal forest at 650 m, a *ti-tu-chewit-chewit* call was repeatedly heard in undergrowth in sal forest and a bird was seen briefly; (2) on 17 February 2004, in wet swamp forest at Kalusidh Temple, Kaluwala, Thanu at 600 m, one was glimpsed and its plain green upperparts and head, and light grey underparts were seen; (3) on 25 October 2004 one was heard calling at the same site; (4) on 29 October 2004 a *tii-ti-ti-ti-tu-chiyu* call was heard along a stream with thick cover in forest at Karvapani; and (5) on 31 October 2004, one was heard and eventually seen well at Kalusidh Temple, with the whitish centre of the belly and dark eye-stripe noted. The species is rare at Corbett Tiger Reserve (Sharma *et al.* 2003); these records extend the known range westwards by c.100 km.

WHITE-RUMPED NEEDLETAIL *Zonavena sylvatica*

Small parties numbering 3–40 individuals were seen and flying overhead over rocky slopes with mixed patches of ban oak *Quercus leucotrichophora* near Chakarata at 2,200 m on 30 June 2003. They flew rapidly with short glides, calling *chick-chick* and were identified by the blackish upperparts, white rump, small size, and contrasting whitish lower belly and undertail-coverts merging into the greyish-brown breast. This species was previously known from Almora and Pithoragarh districts in Kumaon Himalayas at 2,400 m (Sultana and Khan 2000), but this record extends the known range 210 km to the west.

LARGE WOODSHRIKE *Tephrodornis gularis*

One male and a probable female were photographed on 3 June 2003 in dense wet forest near Kalu Sidh Temple, Thanu near the river Song. The birds were larger than Common Woodshrike *T. pondicerianus*. The male had plain pinkish-tinged white underparts, uniform brown upperparts, whitish-grey crown and nape, a dark mask through the eye, a typical shrike-like black bill, and light grey legs. The second individual was similar, but the lower mandible had a paler base, the crown was brownish, the nape was concolorous with the mantle, and the black mask had a whitish-grey upper border. Subsequently, a pair was recorded in a mixed-species flock, calling *kiv-kiv-kiv-kew-kiv* in the canopy of sal forest at 'Cheering Crossing gate' near Phanduwala in Rajaji National Park on 1 June 2004. The species is also known from Corbett

Tiger Reserve (Sharma *et al.* 2003), but these records extend the known range westwards by c.100 km.

RUFOUS-FRONTED PRINIA *Prinia buchanani*

Three were seen and one photographed foraging in the dry *Typha* grass at Asan Barrage on 8 February 2006. The species is common further south in Haryana, Uttar Pradesh and Punjab (Grimmett *et al.* 1998, Kazmierczak 2000), and had previously been reported from Corbett Tiger Reserve (Sharma *et al.* 2003) in Uttaranchal, but this record extends the range across the Shiwaliks into Dehra Dun valley.

TYTLER'S LEAF WARBLER *Phylloscopus tytleri*

Near Threatened. This species was recorded on 4 and 15 March 2006 at Guniyal village along the Tons river, feeding on flowering *Erythrina suberosa* and *Callistemon lanceolatum*. Another was recorded in flowering *Rhododendron arboreum* temperate forest at Hathipaw, Mussoorie, on 19 March 2006. Fleming (1967) took two specimens from Mussoorie, one in February and the other in October.

PADDYFIELD WARBLER *Acrocephalus agricola*

One individual was watched for 15 minutes and photographed feeding in reeds at the southern edge of Asan Barrage reservoir on 18 November 2005. It had a short bill with a well-defined dark tip to the lower mandible, which was pale in colour. The upperparts were rufescent, the flanks were warm brown and the prominent supercilium broadened behind the eye, unlike Blyth's Reed Warbler *A. dumetorum*. This is the first record from Uttaranchal state of this winter migrant to India.

DISCUSSION

With these new additions a total of 551 species are now confirmed for Dehra Dun district, which is c.40% of the total number found in the Indian subcontinent. This list includes 11 globally threatened species and 11 Near Threatened species, representing c.15% of the total number of such species found in the Indian subcontinent.

Dehra Dun valley may be an important stopover for many migratory birds that briefly halt here while migrating south (in autumn passage) to winter in the Indian mainland, and while returning north (in spring passage) to their breeding grounds in the Palaearctic region.

The present records include at least three significant westward range extensions of species that are known from the central Himalayas and further east.

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First observation of an advertisement display flight of ‘Steere’s Honey-buzzard’ *Pernis (celebensis) steerei* on Panay, Philippines

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On the basis of DNA analysis, Gamauf and Haring (2004) proposed that Barred Honey-buzzard *Pernis celebensis* be split into *P. celebensis* of Sulawesi, *P. steerei steerei* of Mindanao and adjacent islands and *P. s. winkleri* of Luzon and Polillo islands in the Philippines. Ferguson-Lees and Christie (2005) proposed the name Steere’s Honey-buzzard for *P. steerei*, and this nomenclature is followed here. Compared to Barred Honey-buzzard, Steere’s Honey-buzzard has a longer crest, lighter brown upperparts, thinner streaks on a paler neck, and weaker chestnut barring on the underparts. Seen from below, the underwing-coverts and remiges are much paler and less sharply barred, and the tail is less boldly banded. Some juvenile males have distinctively plain white or cream-coloured underparts (Ferguson-Lees and Christie 2005).

On 11 April 2004, while hiking from Research Station Sibaliw, Municipality of Buruanga, Aklan Province, to Mt Banderahan (also called Mt Tinayunga, 917 m), the highest elevation in the north-west Panay peninsula, we observed a Steere’s Honey-buzzard. We watched it at a distance of 120 m for c.6 mins at 13h00 as it flew over the canopy of primary forest at c.750 m (11°49’30”N 121°59’30”E). The bird was distinguished from the similar Philippine Hawk Eagle *Spizaetus pinskeri* (formerly *S. philippensis*; see Gamauf *et al.* 2005) on the basis of its display flight (see below), which has not previously been described (see Ferguson-Lees and Christie 2001). This represents the first record on Panay, although the species is known from all other larger Philippine islands (Kennedy *et al.* 2000, Curio *et al.* 2001).

OBSERVATIONS

The bird soared in level flight a few metres above the canopy and then flew powerfully upwards in steps to gain c.30 m in height, followed by an unbroken downward swoop with the wings almost closed. This was repeated three times (Figs. 1–2). At the peak of its flight path the bird quivered its fully extended wings rapidly above its back, with their upperparts touching each other and then spreading to an angle of up to c.40 degrees (Fig. 3), and this was done five, six, and eight times at the three peaks. This quivering action was apparently powerful enough to arrest the bird in mid-air. After three cycles of ascent and descent, the bird resumed its level flight close above the canopy and disappeared from view.

This flight pattern recalls that of European Honey-buzzard *P. apivorus* (see Ferguson-Lees and Christie 2001), yet differs characteristically from it. This latter species displays the wing-quiver at the end of each upward swoop and at the summit of its trajectory. It plunges down with partly closed wings interspersed with upward swoops ending with wing-quivering, or alternatively descends with spread wings in one go. Hence it shows many more episodes of wing-quivering than in the display by Steere’s Honey-buzzard we observed. However, female and first-year male European Honey-buzzards may perform more subdued versions of the display than adult males, and there is individual variation too (Ferguson-Lees and Christie 2001), so the display of Steere’s Honey-buzzard that we observed may also have been a low-intensity version.