

SOME POST-MONSOON BIRDS OBSERVED IN CENTRAL NEPAL¹

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Though Pokhara, and the surrounding terrain in Gandaki Anchal, is one of the more readily accessible regions in Nepal, surprisingly little information has been published on the avifauna of that area. Woodcock and Woodcock (1976) provided information on monsoon season (July and August) birds. They expressed hope that their account would stimulate others to keep records on the birds encountered in the same area, particularly during other seasons. It is for this reason that I present the following observations. They were made during the post-monsoon season between 17 October and 30 December, 1974 while I was stationed at Batulechar 3 km. N of Pokhara with the U.S. Peace Corps program. I have also included species observed on a short trek from Bandipur to Bharatpur, SE of Pokhara and in the same watershed, in December. All observations were made below 2000 m. For a general description of the vegetation and physiography of the region see Biswas (1966). Identification of species encountered was originally based on accounts in Ali (1949, 1972). Subsequently these have been correlated to accounts in Fleming *et al.* (1976), whose common and scientific nomenclature I use in this paper.

Woodcock and Woodcock (op.cit.) listed 107 species from the Pokhara region to which I have added 36 species not reported in their paper. Lists of species in themselves are of limited value, but when the data are combined, particularly if it has been collected during different times of the year in the same area, then some conclusions on the seasonal presence,

abundance, and movements of species can be made. With this in mind I have compared my notes with species reported from Kathmandu Valley (KV) by Proud (1949, 1952, 1955, 1958, 1961a, 1961b), and with the list of Pokhara area birds by Woodcock and Woodcock (op. cit.), hereafter abbreviated WW when referred to. Though my list of post-monsoon birds is not comprehensive it never-the-less provides a nucleus of data with which future, more detailed, work can be compared. Considering the rapid deforestation of Nepal (Eckholm 1975 ; Cronin 1979), and the associated ecological problems created, this kind of information is urgently needed if any future management plan is to be intelligently implemented. Additionally, I have included brief notes on behaviour and ecology where appropriate.

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Ardeola grayii Pond Heron

Seen around Bharatpur 18 December ; a group of 10 perched and preening atop a bamboo grove in Batulechar 23 December. Not seen around Pokhara by WW ; considered abundant year round in KV (Proud 1949).

Bubulcus ibis Cattle Egret

Common in fields with cattle around Bharatpur on 17 December.

Ciconia episcopus White-necked Stork

Batulechar ; on 4 December a flock of 24 flying slowly from N to S. On 11 December a single bird flying in wide circles over the village. Not seen by WW ; occasional year round in KV (Proud 1949).

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Mergus merganser Merganser

On Seti river S of Bandipur ; a flight of 7 followed by a flight of 5 headed upriver on 16 December. All were females.

Milvus migrans Dark Kite

Common at Pokhara ; less so at Batulechar, single birds being seen there on 4, 21, 24, 29 Nov., and 23 Dec. Concentrates at centers of human habitation.

Buteo buteo Eurasian Buteo

Regularly seen at Pokhara and Batulechar between 9 Nov. and 24 Dec. Single birds usually riding updrafts over the river gorges or cliffs, sometimes in the company of vultures. Not seen by WW ; apparently a winter visitor.

Torgos calvus Black Vulture

Batulechar ; on 19 Nov. 3 birds soaring over the river gorge in company with 2 Egyptian Vultures. Fairly common year round in KV (Proud 1949) less so around Pokhara.

Gyps bengalensis Whitebacked Vulture

Batulechar ; on 6 Nov. one flushed from a dead cow when approached within 20 m. On 25 Dec. several soaring over the river gorge near the village. Considered the common vulture in KV (Proud 1949).

Neophron percnopterus Egyptian Vulture

Common at Pokhara, less common at Batulechar. Usually single birds soaring within 100 m. off the ground. One observed preening its breast plumage while gliding over the river gorge near Batulechar. Surprisingly, Proud (1949, 1952, 1955) did not see this species in KV, suggesting this species has expanded its range into this region within the last 25 years.

Falco tinnunculus Eurasian Kestrel

Seen infrequently near Pokhara. Single birds noted on 17, 25 Oct., 14, 16, and 25 Dec. A

winter visitor in KV (Proud 1949, 1955) ; seen by WW around Pokhara in summer.

Vanellus spinosus Spurwinged Lapwing

On 16 Dec. 2 individuals were seen on the sandy beaches along the Seti river S of Bandipur. A 3 sec flight chase ensued when the first bird flew by the second. Not mentioned by WW nor by Proud (1949, 1952, 1955).

Calidris temminckii Temminck's Stint

Two seen on the river bank on 17 Dec. near Bharatpur. A winter visitor (Proud 1955).

Sterna aurantia Indian River Tern

Many over flooded paddies outside of Bharatpur on 17 Dec.

Columba livia Blue Rock Pigeon

Common around Pokhara.

Psittacula cyanocephala Blossom-headed Parakeet

On 17 Dec. a flock of 20 flew in a tight group out of a wooded area and over millet fields S of Bharatpur. Both sexes present.

Psittacula himalayana Slaty-headed Parakeet

Batulechar ; on 3 Nov. a flock of 15 flying into a dense grove of trees silently. Appeared to be all males. Not seen by WW ; a winter visitor in KV (Proud 1955).

Bubo bubo Great Horned Owl

Seen at dusk 22, 24 Oct., and 9 Nov. near Pokhara on the cliffs above the Seti river. Heard hooting several times. Not mentioned by Proud (1949, 1952, 1955) nor WW.

Glaucidium cuculoides Barred Owlet

Batulechar ; one seen perched 4 m above a trail mid-morning on 25 Dec. A common and diurnal species around KV (Proud 1955), not seen by WW.

Caprimulgus macrurus Longtailed Nightjar

Batulechar ; on 12 Dec. one heard calling irregularly from 1945-2015, one call every 7 sec/series of calls. Heard by Proud (1949) in KV but not earlier than mid-March.

Coracias benghalensis Indian Roller

Seen daily at Batulechar ; usually single birds and some pairs observed on same perches each day, making sallies to the ground to catch insects. Daily occurrence at same perches suggests the possibility of winter territorial behaviour, though no agonistic encounters were observed. Fairly common in forested areas around KV but not in the valley itself (Proud 1955, 1961a).

Ceryle lugubris Large Pied Kingfisher

Batulechar ; one seen along a clear water river on 25 Dec. Since kingfishers hunt their prey by sight their occurrence along rivers carrying large quantities of suspended glacial sediments would not be expected. Not seen by WW.

Alcedo atthis Eurasian Kingfisher

Batulechar ; on 16 Nov. one seen on a clear water river. It flew from a bank-side perch and hovered 5 m over the water for 2-3 sec. before diving and catching a fish which it carried off. Year round resident in small numbers in KV (Proud 1949) ; not seen by WW.

Megalaima asiatica Bluethroated Barbet

Batulechar ; seen on 2, 4, and 12 Dec. Sunning in the early morning atop a bamboo grove with drongos, mynas, and Himalayan Tree Pies ; 4-5 foraging with a group of Yellow-cheeked Tits. Year round resident in the hill regions (Proud 1949 ; WW).

Megalaima haemacephala Crimsonbreasted Barbet

Batulechar ; one seen on 11 Dec. sunning and preening in the early morning atop a bamboo

grove. Heard by WW ; considered a monsoon visitor to KV (Proud 1949).

Chrysocolaptes lucidus Large Golden-backed Woodpecker

One male seen in open oak forest several km N of Bharatpur on 16 Dec.

Dendrocopos macei Fulvous-breasted Pied Woodpecker

Batulechar ; a female seen in the same area on 6, 12, and 13 Dec. On 15 Dec. a pair was seen along the Seti river S of Bandipur. Not seen by WW ; common in KV (Proud 1949).

Apus affinis House Swift

Roosts under the roofs of houses in Pokhara and seen frequently hunting over the city and nearby river gorge until Nov.

Hirundo rustica Barn Swallow

Seen regularly around Pokhara until Dec.

Hirundo daurica Striated Swallow

Seen regularly around Pokhara until Nov.

Lanius schach Blackheaded Shrike

Batulechar ; seen 23 Oct., 9, 11, and 23 Dec. Usually perched atop a bush hunting ground-dwelling insects. One seen in company with 2 mynas. Year round resident (Proud 1949 ; WW).

Oriolus xanthornus Blackheaded Oriole

One seen feeding with a group of Scarlet Minivets atop 20 m tall trees along the Seti river S of Bandipur on 15 Dec.

Dicrurus leucophaeus Ashy Drongo

Batulechar ; several usually in association with Black Drongos during Dec. The behaviour of the two species is similar. Not seen around Pokhara in summer but found at higher elevations (WW). Seems to move to lower and more open habitats in winter (Proud 1949).

Dicrurus adsimilis Black Drongo

Batulechar ; seen regularly each morning sunning and preening atop a bamboo grove. Group varied in size from 4-20. Other morning tree-top associates included Ashy Drongo, Jungle Myna, Common Myna, Blue-throated Barbet, Red-vented Bulbul, Himalayan Tree Pie, and Jungle Crow. One crow was mobbed by several drongos when it departed the bamboos. Intraspecific flight chases were common ; some individuals made sallies from the bamboo to the ground and back once warmed up (about 0700). Individuals dispersed during the day in smaller groups. Common year round (Proud 1949 ; WW).

Sturnus contra Pied Myna

One seen on 17 Dec. in Bharatpur.

Acridotheres tristis Common Myna

Seen daily in Batulechar, usually in the company of Jungle Mynas. Both species roosted together in a nearby bamboo grove, becoming active and vocal with first light (0600-0630). Evening roosts began to form at 1800 accompanied by noisy chatter. In early morning, after sunning, flocks dispersed in groups of 20-30 individuals/flock. Flocks usually were composed of conspecifics only, though both species foraged together.

Acridotheres fuscus Jungle Myna

Seen daily in Batulechar. Exhibits more variation in seasonal abundance than the former species (Proud 1949). For additional notes see the previous account.

Cissa erythrorhyncha Red-billed Blue Magpie

Batulechar ; seen infrequently. A group of 3 appeared in the same area 15 and 17 Nov., and 27 Dec., making a series of short flights from tree to tree. Not seen by WW ; considered very common in KV (Proud 1949).

Dendrocitta formosae Himalayan Tree Pie

Seen regularly at Batulechar during Dec. Usually single birds or pairs sunning in the early morning atop a bamboo grove favoured by mynas and drongos. Inhabits higher elevations in the summer (WW), wintering at lower elevations in the hills (Proud 1949).

Corvus splendens House Crow

Common at Pokhara, less frequently seen at Batulechar where sightings included a flock of 30 flying by on 1 Dec., one bird perched atop a bamboo grove on 9 Dec., and one bird passing through the village on 28 Dec.

Corvus macrorhynchos Jungle Crow

Seen daily in Batulechar, sometimes in groups of 10-15 individuals. Several seen mobbing a hawk 5 Dec. More rural in distribution and abundance than the former species (Proud 1949 ; WW).

Pericrocotus flammeus Scarlet Minivet

Batulechar ; a female was seen on 9 Dec. hunting insects from a low tree limb ; on 15 Dec. a group of 8 (equal sexes) foraging through tree crowns along the Seti river S of Bandipur, accompanied by one Black-headed Oriole. Not seen by WW.

Pycnonotus melanicterus Blackheaded Yellow Bulbul

One low in a tree near Bandipur on 14 Dec. Not seen by WW.

Pycnonotus cafer Redvented Bulbul

Batulechar ; seen daily in Dec. beginning with one bird on 2 Dec. and increasing to a group of 20 by 13 Dec. Usually sunning atop trees in the early morning with several other species. Flocks usually foraged low in trees or shrubs. Common in the summer (WW).

***Leiothrix argentea* Silver-eared Mesia**

A group of 7-8 foraging in shrubs and trees above the Seti river S of Bandipur, hanging from thin branches in the early morning (0700) on 16 Dec. Accompanied by a White-throated Fantail Flycatcher. Not seen by WW.

***Rhipidura hypoxantha* Yellowbellied Fantail Flycatcher**

Batulechar ; one low in a tree at forest-field edge on 25 Dec. A common winter resident in KV (Proud 1949, 1955, 1958), moving to higher elevations to breed.

***Rhipidura albicollis* Whitethroated Fantail Flycatcher**

On 16 Dec. one in the company of a group of Silver-eared Mesias above the Seti river S of Bandipur. An uncommon winter visitor in KV (Proud 1952).

***Culicicapa ceylonensis* Grayheaded Flycatcher**

Batulechar ; one seen on 6, 7, and 26 Dec. chattering constantly and flicking its tail, making short sallies from a twig perch at the forest-field edge, catching aerial insects. Common at higher elevations during summer (WW) ; usually leaves KV by Nov. (Proud 1955).

***Erithacus pectoralis* Himalayan Rubythroat**

Batulechar ; one male seen in dense undergrowth in woods on 25 Dec. A winter migrant in KV (Proud 1955).

***Erithacus brunneus* Blue Chat**

Batulechar ; a female on a forest lined trail on 7 Dec., a female seen in similar habitat on 10 Dec. Appears to be a winter visitor, breeding at higher elevations (Proud 1955).

***Copsychus saularis* Magpie Robin**

Batulechar ; both sexes seen frequently, usually in low shrubs and undergrowth along hedges. Males singing early in the morning (0700) in Dec. ; some birds appeared to be

paired and may have had winter territories, since they were seen in the same places daily. Never more than 2 birds (one male and one female) were seen together. Surprisingly, WW did not report this species for the Pokhara area though they did see it in KV. Proud (1949) found it common year round in KV. She did not report mid-winter song, but reported pairs remained territorial.

***Chaimarrornis leucocephalus* Whitecapped River Chat**

Batulechar ; common along the rivers hunting insects low over the water surface, moving from boulder to boulder while rapidly pumping the tail. Seen within 2 m of conspecifics, Plumbeous Redstarts, and Brown Dippers without agonistic behavior shown. A winter visitor (Proud 1949), not seen by WW.

***Rhyacornis fuliginosus* Plumbeous Redstart**

Batulechar ; seen more frequently than the previous species in the same riverine habitat. Hunting behaviour of the two species also similar. Most individuals seen were males, who wagged and fanned their tails as they sang from river boulders. Only single birds were encountered. Common in summer (WW) ; Proud (1949) considered it common year round in KV.

***Saxicola caprata* Pied Bush Chat**

Batulechar ; one male perched on an electric line near woods on 8 Dec. After remaining stationary for 5-6 min. it began hawking insects.

***Zoothera dauma* Speckled Mountain Thrush**

One seen in Batulechar on 3 Dec. in low dense brush. Several individuals in similar habitat around Bharatpur. Seen by WW in the summer near Pokhara ; usually a winter visitor in KV (Proud 1955).

***Myiophonus caeruleus* Whistling Thrush**

One seen in Batulechar along a river on 2 Dec. As it moved amongst rocks it paused

several times to slowly stretch and bow its body as it raised its tail, spreading the retrices, then slowly lowering the tail again. The bird appeared to be alone. A year round resident (WW).

Cinclus pallasii Brown Dipper

Seen infrequently only along clear water rivers around Batulechar. Most observations were of lone birds, but a pair was seen on 10 Nov. Both birds moved together. Dippers are territorial, and intolerant of conspecifics except during the breeding season, which begins in Dec. (Sunquist 1976) or Jan. (Fleming *et al.* 1976). Fledglings have been seen in Feb. (Proud 1955). Two birds together in Nov. suggests that pairing may occur earlier than previously reported. Distribution of this species is probably restricted to clear water since it hunts aquatic prey by sight and its prey base is sensitive to sediment load. Not seen by WW.

Parus major Gray Tit

On 16 Dec. a group foraging in trees and shrubs along the Seti river S of Bandipur. Several foraging with Yellowcheeked Tits in Batulechar on 26 Dec.

Parus xanthogenys Yellowcheeked Tit

Batulechar ; common in Dec., usually in company of other species, foraging in open stands of trees and shrubs.

Sitta castanea Chestnutbellied Nuthatch

Noisy group of 8-10 moving through a patch of woods S of Bandipur on 15 Dec. Considered common by Proud (1949) in KV ; not seen in the Pokhara area by WW.

Anthus novaeseelandiae Paddyfield Pipit

Batulechar ; common in Dec., usually in fields in flocks of 6-15 birds. A winter visitor in KV (Proud 1961b).

Motacilla flava Yellow Wagtail

One seen in Pokhara on 25 Oct. in a grassy meadow. A winter visitor (Proud 1955).

Motacilla caspica Gray Wagtail

Batulechar ; seen infrequently along rivers in Nov. and Dec. Only single birds noted. A winter visitor (Proud 1955).

Motacilla citreola Yellowheaded Wagtail

Batulechar ; one seen along a river on 7 Nov. A winter visitor (Proud 1955).

Motacilla alba Pied Wagtail

Seen regularly around Batulechar, usually in grassy meadows but also along river bottoms. Mostly single birds, but pairs and one group of 3 noted. The most abundant wintering wagtail in the Pokhara area and KV (Proud 1949).

Aethopyga siparaja Scarletbreasted Sunbird

Batulechar ; an adult male visiting poinsetta flowers on 28 Nov. Single males visiting poinsettias on 4 and 22 Dec. Both of these birds were molting head plumage, with the brilliant red feathers of the head and breast present in small patches. Proud (1949) considered it scarce in KV in spring and fall, and did not see it in summer or winter. Not seen by WW.

Passer domesticus House Sparrow

Seen daily in Batulechar, but usually only a pair or small group within a large flock of Tree Sparrows. Proud (1949) considered it a scarce summer visitor in KV. It appears to have become established in small numbers in many places since then.

Passer montanus Tree Sparrow

Batulechar ; common in flocks, which roost under roofs of houses. Much more abundant than House Sparrows. Abundant in KV (Proud 1949).

POST-MONSOON BIRDS IN CENTRAL NEPAL

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