

BIRDS OF NEW FOREST, DEHRA DUN : RECENT SIGHTINGS

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Introduction

The campus of the Forest Research Institute, also known as 'New Forest' (30°20'N latitude and 78°01'E longitude), lies in the heart of Dehra Dun valley in Northern India, occupying an area of 4.4 km² at an altitude of 670 m above sea level. This unique area has a combination of both artificial and natural habitats. Habitats found in and around New Forest campus include: a river (Tons) which forms the northern boundary of the study area; an irrigation canal; mixed moist deciduous forests on slopes (Tons valley); pure Sal (*Shorea robusta*) forests; experimental and botanical gardens; an arboretum; old plantations (pines, bamboos and Teak, *Tectona grandis*); big fields; lawns, fruit tree orchards (Litchi and Mango); big and old buildings and dense housing colonies. More than 972 species of trees, bamboos, shrubs and climbers, 73 species of herbs and 28 species of grasses are found here. Some of them were planted as far back as 1954. Out of these ca. 500 species are exotic from all over the world (Raizada and Hingorani, 1954; Bahuguna, 1990) while the rest of plant species occurring here are representatives of the 'Flora of Dehra Dun valley' as described by Kanjilal (1969) and Babu (1977). The large variety of plant species and habitats present in New Forest campus serves as a refuge for birds

(residents, passage migrants, summer and winter altitudinal migrants) belonging to both Himalayan and continental avifauna.

New Forest also has a long history of bird watching. Wright (1949, 1955) was the pioneer to publish an account of "Birds of an area in the Tons valley close to New Forest campus", observed from 1946-51. She cited as many as 142 species, including two species, Pallid Harrier, *Circus macrourus* and Red Necked Falcon, *Falco chicquera*, which are now 'near-threatened' globally (Collar *et al.*, 1994). This study was followed by George's (1957, 1962) work in which he listed 220 species from New Forest within a span of 12 years (1944-46 and 1949-57). Recently, Singh (1989) had observed 18 species of Flycatchers from the campus. Later, Mohan (1993, 1996) added 41 new species to George's (1957, 1962) list, thus increasing the total number of species found in New Forest to 261 species.

Present Study : In a span of 17 years (1982 to 1998) the author has observed 274 species in New Forest and the adjoining Tons river bed. Of these, 31 species are new additions to both George's and Mohan's annotated list (Mohan, 1996) thereby increasing the total number of species in this list to 292 species. These new additions of birds species are described here along with their status, general abundance and a short description

about their habits and habitats, with respect to the study area, only.

Some of these new sightings (species/sub-species), which are new to New Forest campus only, are denoted by NNF, while others which are new records for the entire 'Dehra Dun valley and adjacent Hills' including New Forest (not recorded previously by Osmaston, 1935; Wright, 1949, 1955; George, 1957, 1962; Singh, 1989; Mohan, 1993, 1996), are denoted by NDV, and mentioned in parentheses in front of their respective species name.

Observations

New Records :

1. Greylag Goose, *Anser anser*, (NNF) : Passage migrant. Flocks ranging from a few to as many as 250 individuals observed during spring migration (20-28 February, 1989, 1988), flying over New Forest. Migration was observed in the morning (0800 h) as well as at night (2045 h and 0115 h). Birds headed towards North, 75 to 100m above the ground in a broad inverted V-formation and calling (call a nasal, "Ahag, Ahag").
2. Hen Harrier, *Circus cyaneus*, (NNF) : Winter migrant. Rare. Seen hovering over fields in front of FRI main building (December, 1989).
3. Imperial Eagle, *Aquila heliaca*, (NNF) : A globally threatened species (Collar *et al.*, 1994) : Winter migrant. Rare. Recorded twice, flying overhead on one occasion and an adult observed perching on a *Ficus bengamina* tree near 'Rangers College Ground' (28th February, 1998).
4. Bonelli's Eagle, *Hieraaetus fasciatus*,

(NNF) : Winter migrant. Not common. Two adults perched high on a tall, *Albizia lebbek* tree in Tons valley forest behind Bungalow No. 11 (March, 1986).

5. Eurasian Sparrow Hawk, *Accipiter nisus*, (NNF) : Winter migrant. Very rare. Single sighting of an adult in pine forest, adjoining Golf Course (November, 1987).

6. Jungle Bush Quail, *Perdica asiatica*, (NNF) : Resident. Occasional. Often seen in small parties in bushes and forest openings (pine and Tons valley forests).

7. Black Winged Stilt, *Himantopus himantopus*, (NNF) : Winter migrant. Not common. Single sighting of 3 individuals feeding on Tons river bed (December, 1998).

8. Common Green Shank, *Tringa nebularia*, (NNF) : Winter migrant. Not common. Observed almost every year on Tons river bed. Usually solitary.

9. Common Sand Piper, *Actitis hypoleucos*, (NNF) : Winter migrant. Occasional. One record from Tons river (December, 1998).

10. Temminck's Stint, *Calidris temminckii*, (NNF) : Winter migrant. Very rare. Single record of 2 individuals (male and female) on Tons river (January, 1997), feeding in company of Wagtails.

11. Rufous Woodpecker, *Celeus brachyurus*, (NNF) : Resident. Occasional. Four sightings from Tons valley forest (January, April, May, 1988 and October, 1989). Prefers wild mango trees for feeding on insects.

12. Scaly Bellied Green Woodpecker, *Picus squamatus*, (NNF) : Vagrant. Very rare. Single record of a pair on *Adina cordifolia* tree on Hill road (June, 1989).

13. White Browed Piculet, *Sasia ochracea*, (NDV) : Resident. Rare. One record of a pair on Sal, *Shorea robusta* tree in Tons valley forest in company of Grey Tits and Leaf Warblers (10th April, 1997).
14. Sand Lark, *Calandrella raytal*, (NDV): Winter migrant. Fairly common, few (5 +) birds feeding on the ground amongst bushes in Tons valley shrub jungle (October, 1990).
15. Indian Bush Lark, *Mirafra erythroptera*, (NNF) : Summer migrant. Occasional. Seen on fallow land in Tons valley scrub jungle. Parachuting-courtship display, song and red patch on the wings of male is peculiar of the species.
16. Ashy Wood Swallow, *Artamus fuscus*, (NDV) : Resident. Very rare. Single record of 2 birds circling over Tons valley forests (17 December, 1987).
17. Large Grey Babbler, *Turdoides malcolmi*, (NNF) : Resident. Uncommon. Noisy birds often seen in Tons valley scrub jungle on fallow land. Once a small party was seen in fields adjoining main building (November, 1998).
18. Tawny Bellied Babbler, *Dumetia hyperythra*, (NDV) : Resident. Rare. A shy bird. Only one sighting (20th November, 1989) from Tons valley forest. Three individuals searching for insects amongst dry leaves on ground in a shady mixed moist deciduous hill side.
19. Variable Wheat Ear, *Oenanthe picata*, (NDV) : Vagrant. Rare. A single bird (dark phase, *O. p. opistholeuca*) observed sitting on a boulder in a dry "nullah" in between Tons valley forest and scrub jungle (3rd and 8th January, 1987).
20. Hodgson's Red Start, *Phoenicurus hodgsoni*, (NDV) : Vagrant. Very rare. Single record (26th January, 1990) of a male perched on a small tree in a dry-bush covered hillside in Tons valley forests. White spots on wings clearly visible and distinguishable from that of Black Red Start, *Phoenicurus ochruros*.
21. Plain Backed Thrush, *Zoothera mollissima*, (NNF) : Winter migrant. Uncommon. A party (4 +) feeding on the ground in pine forest in demonstration area (December, 1988). More often seen in gardens during spring.
22. Pale Footed Bush Warbler, *Cettia pallidipes*, (NNF) : Winter migrant. Uncommon. Seen in peak winter (January). Keeps hidden in bushes in the forest (Tons valley). When disturbed makes an alarm call and climbs up the bush, making itself visible.
23. Brownish Flanked Bush Warbler, *Cettia fortipes fortipes*, (NDV) : Passage migrant. Uncommon. Recorded in Tons valley forest in spring passage (March-April, 1989). Identified by its distinctive call 'wheeee... chiwhichee', different from that of *C.f. pallidus*.
24. Spotted Bush Warbler, *Bradypterus thoracicus*, (NDV) : Winter migrant. Rare. Only one record from Tons valley forest (January, 1988) of a single bird hunting for insects in a leafless *Lantana camara* bush. Spots on the collar distinct.
25. Dusky Warbler, *Phylloscopus fuscatus*, (NDV) : Winter migrant. Occasional. Observed on the ground besides a small pool of water in a Sal forest opening, flickering its wings and making visible its

fulvous flanks and under tail coverts (January, 1991). Also seen hovering in foliage of trees.

26. Yellow Browed Warbler, *Phylloscopus inornatus*, (NDV) : Winter migrant. Fairly common. Moves around with mixed hunting parties of other Leaf Warblers and Flycatchers during winter in all types of forests. Call a distinct 'Tiseep-tiseep' and lacks yellow rump.

27. Common Chiff-Chaff, *Phylloscopus collybita*, (NDV) : Winter migrant. Not too common. Usually seen in bushes and on rocks near water course on Tons and Nun rivulets. Common during spring passage when it could be seen coming to the ground on stones near water, feeding on insects (February, March, 1990, 1997, 1998).

28. Booted Warbler, *Hippolais caligata*, (NDV) : Passage migrant. Rare. Recorded in Tons valley scrub jungle on small trees and bushes (March, 1989). Call similar to that of Lesser White Throat, *Sylvia curruca*.

29. Rosy Pipit, *Anthus roseatus*, (NDV) : Winter migrant. Very rare. A single bird observed (15th December, 1998) in nursery beds on Brandis road.

30. Firetailed Sun Bird, *Acthopyga ignicauda*, (NNF) : Winter migrant. Occasional. Males with dull rufous tail and females with light red color on throat (winter plumage) often observed in Botanical garden on *Loranthus* parasitic creepers on bottle brush trees, during peak winter (January-February, 1998).

31. Winter Wren, *Troglodytes troglodytes*, (NDV) : Winter migrant. Very rare. Single sighting (December, 1993) from Tons valley forest behind Officers Rest House.

Identification of birds was done using books by the following authors: Whistler (1949); Porter *et al.*, (1981), Ali and Ripley (1983, 1989); Grewal (1993), King *et al.*, (1993), Inskipp and Inskipp (1991) and Ali (1996).

SUMMARY

The author has listed 31 new records of birds from New Forest campus (4.4 km²) and adjoining 'Tons' river bed, located at Dehra Dun in Northern India, along with their status, general abundance, habits and habitats. With these new additions the annotated check list of birds of New Forest, recorded since 1944, now comprises of 292 species. The avifaunal richness of New Forest campus is mainly attributed to the large variety of habitats, both artificial and natural, and numerous, indigenous as well as exotic, plant species found here.

न्यू फॉरेस्ट, देहरादून के पक्षी - विगत में देखे गए कुछ नए पक्षी

अरूण पी. सिंह

सारांश

उत्तरी भारत के देहरादून जिले में टोंस नदी के किनारे स्थित न्यू फॉरेस्ट परिसर (4.4 किमी²) में लेखक ने 31 नए पक्षियों की, उनकी वर्तमान स्थिति, सामान्य प्रचुरता और प्राकृतावास बताते हुए, सूची प्रस्तुत की है। इन नए परिवर्धनों से न्यू फॉरेस्ट के पक्षियों की सटिप्पण सूची जिसे 1944 से अभिलिखित किया जाता रहा है, बढ़कर अब 292 पक्षिजातियों की हो गई है। न्यू फॉरेस्ट की पक्षिप्राणि सम्पन्नता का कारण मुख्यतः यहां के प्राकृतावासों की कृत्रिम और प्राकृतिक दोनों तरह की बड़ी विविधता है जिससे देशी और विदेशी बहुसंख्य पादप जातियां यहां पाई जाती हैं।

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