

are in the vicinity. Adults drop food into the nest only after the murder of crows has moved away and in some cases they waited more than half an hour, holding prey in their beak, till the crows had moved away.

Once, at 17:35 hrs, the eaglet, which had learnt flying just three days ago, arrived at the nest from a near by perch, to find three bonnet macaques actively moving in the canopy of the nest tree. The young one fumbled on seeing them, but regained its balance quickly, turned and went back to its earlier perch. None of the adults assisted the eaglet in regaining the nesting tree from the macaques. That was a cloudy day and by 18:30 hrs it was dark. The eaglet couldn't occupy the nest and spent entire night on another tree.

### Discussion

In the five years' breeding observations, nests have fallen off, causing chicks' mortality, in the second and third years. The dead chick from the third year, a day or two old was collected and sent to Bombay Natural History Society for preservation. The fourth-year nest also fell down. However, the adults raised a second brood. The fourth-year breeding continued almost up to the end of September, coinciding with an extended monsoon.

In all the breeding years, we feel that the nests were not strong or suitable for breeding activity. Yet, the pair raised three broods out of five. The nest should ensure the safety and protection of eggs and the newborn young (Brown 1976). But it doesn't seem so in this case, perhaps due to faulty tree selection. Despite misgivings, we consciously did not interfere in the natural breeding process of the birds either to save the chicks or strengthen the nest. Although a good number of *Ficus* sp., tamarind,

*Syzigium* sp., trees, with wide-spread canopy are present in the vicinity, the eagles did not utilize them. The coconut tree might have provided a safer place for the nest, as it was taller and afforded a better view of the surroundings and therefore any impending danger. Large scale coconut plantations in this region were started five decades ago (Kamath 1988). Davidson's observation (Barnes 1888) of a blown-down nest that was in a fork but not on branches of a tree, indicates that the bird's breeding habit has changed considerably over the last century. Davidson found the eagle common in central Mysore during 1877 (Barnes 1888). Further study is required to ascertain the cause of decline.

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## Birding in the Saryu-Ramganga river valleys (1,500-4,133 m), Kumaon Himalayas

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(With three colour photographs on back cover)

**B**irds were surveyed on a trek from 27.ix.2004-7.x.2004, in Bageshwar and Almora districts of Kumaon, Uttarakhand, India. The trek started from Song / Supi village (1,500 m; 30°02'N 79°00'E) located along the Saryu River (see map), passing through Bhadratunga village (1,600 m), Madhari Pass (3,040 m), lower Raj Kharak (2,520 m), Gogina village, Ramaganaga River bridge (1,870 m),

Namik village (2,200 m), Sur-Sungri Pass (3,240 m), lower Thaltok (2,950 m), upper Thaltok (3,200 m), Sudam Khan Pass (4,133 m), back to upper and lower Thaltok and Sur Sungri Pass and then a descent to Jakala valley [2,200 m below Rur Khan Pass (3,500 m) which lies above Munsiyari on the other side], and finally ending at Birthi village (1,750 m) – about 100 km in seven days. I

passed through some spectacular scenery: forests, wild flowers and mountain peaks (Nanda Devi, Nanda Ghunti, Trishul, Badrinath, Kedarnath, Gangotri, Shivaling, Bandarpunch, Kamat, Panch Chuli, etc). There was unprecedented rain and snow-fall on the higher reaches.

**Birds recorded on the trek**

105 species of birds were recorded. Sightings of interest were Black-faced Warbler *Abroscopus schisticeps*, Spot-bellied Eagle Owl *Bubo nipalensis*, Himalayan Snowcock *Tetraogallus himalayensis*, Koklass Pheasant *Pucrasia macrolopha*, Impeyan Monal *Lophophorus impejanus*, Yellow-billed Chough *Pyrrhocorax graculus*, Green Shrike-Babbler *Pteruthius xanthochlorus*, Little Pied Flycatcher *Ficedula westermanni* and Collard Grosbeak *Mycerobas affinis*.

Song village to Bhadratunga camp along the Saryu River: Cultivation and open scrub. A large assemblage (c. 600+) of Nepal House-Martins *Delichon nipalensis*, flying and perching high on electric wires along the steep rocky cliffs near a village Patiadhar. Many Himalayan Griffons *Gyps himalayensis* circled overhead. Rufous Sibia *Heterophasia capistrata* and Blue-throated Barbet *Megalaima asiatica* were heard frequently. Brown Dipper *Cinclus pallasii*, Plumbeous *Rhyacornis fuliginosus* and White-capped Redstarts *Chaimarrornis leucocephalus* were noted on the Saryu River. The Blue Whistling-Thrush *Myophonus caeruleus* actively sang at dusk near our tents at Bhadratunga temple.

Bhadratunga to Madhari Pass: Mixed moist-temperate patch of Indian Cedar *Cedrus deodara*, Oaks *Quercus leucotrichophora*, *Q. semicarpifolia* and *Q. dilatata* and *Rhododendron arboreum*: Saw Rufous-bellied Niltava *Niltava sundara* and heard Striated Laughingthrush *Garrulax striatus* (= *Grammatoptila striata*) calling from a 'nullah', Crested Serpent-Eagle *Spilornis cheela* basking on a tree and a party of Black-faced Flycatcher-Warblers *Abroscopus schisticeps* (6+) moving through foliage. Also seen on this route were White-tailed Nuthatch *Sitta himalayensis*, Grey-faced Leaf-Warbler *Phylloscopus maculipennis*, and Greenish Leaf-Warblers *Phylloscopus trochiloides*.

Madhari Pass to lower Raj Kharak: Mixed oak with meadows ('Bugiyars'). Variegated Laughingthrush *Garrulax variegatus* and three Common Hill Partridges *Arborophila torqueola* were recorded in *Rhododendron companulatum* shrubberies and a Mountain Hawk-Eagle *Spizaetus nipalensis* settling on a tree top.

Lower Raj Kharak: Many Chestnut-bellied Rock-Thrush *Monticola rufiventris* pairs and a few juveniles were also present, chasing each other and calling in the evening. Other sightings included

Himalayan Pied *Dendrocopos himalayensis* and Large Scaly-bellied Green Woodpeckers *Picus squamatus*, Himalayan Swiftlets *Collocalia brevirostris* (= *Aerodramus brevirostris*), Blue-fronted Redstart *Phoenicurus frontalis*, Yellow-breasted Greenfinches *Carduelis spinoides*, Orange-gorgeted *Ficedula strophiatea*, Ultramarine *F. superciliaris*, Verditer *Eumyias thalassina* and Sooty *Muscicapa sibirica* Flycatchers, Brown-crested Tit *Parus dichrous*, White-throated Laughingthrush *Garrulax albogularis*, Eurasian Jay *Garrulus glandarius*, and Oriental Turtle Dove *Streptopelia orientalis*.

Lower Raj Kharak–Ramganga River–Namik Village: Open scrub, cultivation and mixed oak. A flock of Slaty-headed Parakeet *Psittacula himalayana* was seen flying over Ramanga River, where Brown Dipper was present. A mixed hunting party consisted of Yellow-naped Yuhina *Yuhina flavicollis*, Black Bulbul *Hypsipetes leucocephalus*, Rufous Sibia and a Black Eagle *Ictinaetus malayensis* flying across. Ashy Drongo *Dicrurus leucophaeus*, Black-headed *Garrulus lanceolatus* and Eurasian *G. glandarius* Jays in the forest, and a Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*, flying across, were also seen.

Namik village to Sur-Sungri Pass: Dwarf rhododendrons *R. companulatum* in a forest with Ban Oak (Himalayan Silver Oak) *Q. leucotrichophora*; yew and silver fir trees. Blue-fronted Redstart, Spot-winged Crested Tit *Parus melanolophus* observed feeding in shrubberies. A Lammergeier *Gypaetus barbatus*, flew over us from time to time. On large trees were Large Scaly-bellied Green and Himalayan Pied Woodpeckers; a female Collard Grosbeak *Mycerobas affinis*; Mrs Gould's Sunbird *Aethopyga gouldiae* and two Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus* feeding on the ground.

Lower Thaltok: These bare rocky mountain slopes, rising above our tents, had 100+ Upland Pipits *Anthus sylvanus* spread all over and three Yellow-billed Choughs feeding near our tents in the morning. Calls of Hill Partridge and Impeyan Monal were heard at dusk, from the mountain tops.

Upper Thaltok: The sub-alpine meadows with *Polygonum* sp. were ideal 'Monal country'. Groups of up to 12 individuals were recorded several times at close range, calling 'whee-(uw)', and on being disturbed, gliding away downhill, to another vale, in an long arcing trajectory, with males showing their brilliant plumage. Flocks of Upland Pipit were recorded in high numbers. At

dusk, calls of Koklass Pheasant, a repeated 'kok-kok-korrok', from nearby slopes, drew a response from other individuals in the vicinity. Lower down, a dense forest with rhododendrons, a few birch trees, and conifers, had a feeding party of Bar-throated Minla *Minla strigula* and Stripe-throated Yuhina in the morning. A flock of Hill Pigeon *Columba rupestris* was also noted circling overhead.

Upper Thaltok to Sudam Khan Pass: This was the toughest part of the trek with a sub-alpine treeless area on the ridge. Impeyan Monal and Upland Pipit were present all along this route. Alpine Accentors *Prunella collaris* (probably) were also noted. Just below Sudam Khan Pass, on our return journey, two Himalayan Snowcock *Tetraogallus himalayensis* were feeding on bare rocky ground. Seeing us, both flew away together, displaying the white patches in their primaries.

Sur-Sungri Pass to Jakala Valley: There is a steep descent from the pass downhill to the valley, through an excellent oak forest. The highlight of this trip was a lone Speckled Wood-Pigeon *Columba hodgsonii*, which flew in and perched on a tree top.

Jakala Valley–Birthing village: Dense oak forest. A Forest Eagle-Owl *Bubo nipalensis* was perched on the branch of a large tree where it was being mobbed by birds until it flew away. A large party of 30+ White-throated Laughingthrush was making various types of calls in the tree tops and a Greater Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle lugubris* was seen on the river.

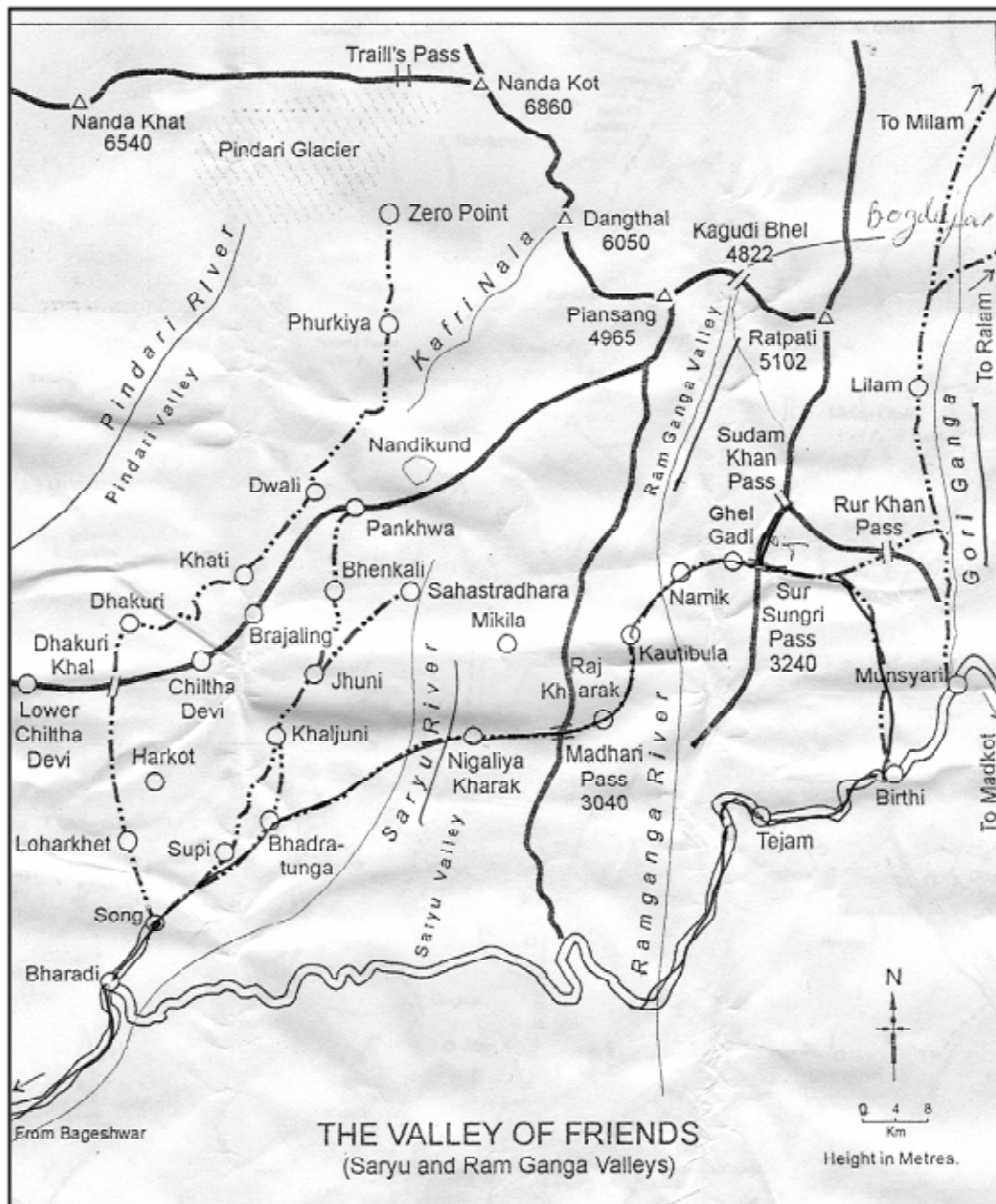
Binsar Wildlife Sanctuary, Almora district (12 km from Almora town): Vegetation mainly of Sub-tropical Chir pine and Himalayan moist-temperate with Ban Oak and Deodar forest on the ridges. I trekked in a nearby village and to the highest point in the sanctuary. Unique sightings included: Rufous-bellied *Dendrocopos hyperythrus* (= *Hypopicus hyperythrus*) and Himalayan Pied Woodpecker pairs feeding on a pine tree on which many Brown-fronted Pied Woodpeckers *D. auriceps* were also present. At night, calls of Asian Barred Owl *Glaucidium cuculoides* ('Kao-kuk') and Spotted Scops-Owl (?) *Otus spilocephalus* (a metallic 'poop-poop'), were heard. Other birds recorded at Binsar were: Oriental Honey-Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus*, Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus*, Red Junglefowl *Gallus gallus*, Oriental Turtle-Dove *Streptopelia orientalis*, Wedge-tailed Green-Pigeon *Treron sphenura*, Slaty-headed Parakeet, Oriental Cuckoo *Cuculus*

*saturatus*, Great Barbet *Megalaima virens*, Blue-throated Barbet, Black-naped Green Woodpecker *Picus canus*, Himalayan Pied Woodpecker, Ashy Drongo, Pied Flycatcher-Shrike *Hemipus picatus*, Eurasian Jay, Black-headed Jay, Red-billed Blue Magpie *Urocissa erythrorhyncha*, Grey Treepie *Dendrocitta formosae*, Long-tailed Minivet *Pericrocotus ethologus*, Black Bulbul, Rusty-cheeked Scimitar-Babbler *Pomatorhinus erythrogenys*, Black-chinned Babbler *Stachyris pyrrhops*, Red-winged Shrike-Babbler *Pteruthius flaviscapis*, Green Shrike-Babbler *P. xanthochlorus*, Rufous Sibia, Striated Laughingthrush, Streaked Laughingthrush *Garrulax lineatus* (= *Trochalopteron lineatum*), Sooty Fly-

catcher *Muscicapa sibirica*, Ultramarine Flycatcher, Little Pied Flycatcher *F. westermanni*, Grey-headed Flycatcher *Culicicapa ceylonensis*, Verditer Flycatcher, Grey-headed Flycatcher-Warbler *Sercercus xanthoschistos*, Greenish Leaf-Warbler *Phylloscopus trochiloides*, Grey Bushchat *Saxicola ferrea*, Chestnut-bellied Rock-Thrush *Monticola rufiventris*, Blue Whistling-Thrush, Plain-backed Thrush *Zoothera mollissima*, Grey-winged Black-bird *Turdus boulboul*, Great Tit *Parus major*, Black-lored Yellow Tit *Parus xanthogenys*, Green Backed Tit *P. monticolus*, Spot-winged Crested Tit, Red-headed Tit *Aegithalos concinnus*, Bar-tailed Tree-Creeper *Certhia himalayana*, White-

tailed Nuthatch *Sitta himalayensis*, Grey Wagtail *Motacilla cinerea*, Fire-breasted Flowerpecker *Dicaeum ignipectus*, Cinnamon Tree Sparrow *Passer rutilans*, Crested Bunting *Melophus lathami*, etc.

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Map: The trek route starting from Song and ending at Birthi, Bageshwar district, Uttarakhand, India.