Indian Silverbill: Lonchura malabarica. R. Occasional. Open areas.
Scaly-breasted Munia Lonchura punctulata. R. Fairly common. Open woods and fields; common during monsoon.
European Goldfinch Carduelis carduelis. W. Rare. Open areas.
Common Rosefinch Carpodacus erythrinus. P. Rare in autumn but abundant in spring passage specially on wheat fields.
Crested Bunting Melopus phaeonotus. W. Rare. Tons valley.
Rock Bunting Emberiza cia. V. Sighting of two birds on 4 January 1954.
White-capped Bunting Emberiza studeri. W. Occasional in the Tons valley scrub jungle, rare in other open areas.
Chestnut-bared Bunting Emberiza fucata. W. Rare. Tons valley.
Black-headed Bunting Emberiza melanocephala. V. Two sightings of small flocks on 22 April 1946 and 2 May 1951 on open ground.

REFERENCES

Dhamanjai Mohan, Indian Forest Service, 28, Trevor Road, New Forest, Dehra Dun, 248006, INDIA.

1996
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Report on an ornithological visit to Buxa Tiger Reserve, West Bengal, India, 17 February to 6 March 1992

Desmond Allen, John Anderton and Krys Kazmierczak

A visit, in 1992, to Buxa Tiger Reserve, in an ornithologically rich area in north-east India, produced a total of 227 species, including two globally threatened and five near-threatened. Previous significant records are discussed, and a complete annotated species list is given.

The eastern Himalaya, stretching eastward from the Arun-Kosi valley of Nepal, is an important area of regional endemism, and has been designated by BirdLife International as Endemic Bird Area (eba) DO8. The larger eastern part of this eba lies within Arunachal Pradesh and Myanmar and is not open for unrestricted scientific exploration. The more accessible areas, for instance eastern Nepal, have suffered serious loss of lower montane forest, resulting in the local extinction of many species (Inskipp 1989). It is a vast area and the distribution, status and movements of many rare and/or threatened species remain little known.

West Bengal is the furthest east along the Himalaya that can be visited with relative ease and so, following a period of three months studying birds in Nepal, we looked for forested submontane/montane areas in this state. The Singgalla Hills, Darjeeling district were too wet and cloudy in early February so we moved down to Buxa Tiger Reserve in Jalpaiguri District.

BUXA TIGER RESERVE

Buxa Tiger Reserve lies in the north-east corner of West Bengal between 26°30'N and 26°48'N and between 89°25'E and 89°35'E, enclosing 759 km². It is bounded to the north by Bhutan, to the east by the river Sankosh and Assam, and to the west by the river Panz; the southern boundary follows what remains of the forest. It is dissected by braids of rivers which rise to the north and flow south (see Fig. 1). The altitude at the border of the reserve reaches 2,000 m, but the majority of the reserve lies at plains level, sloping from c. 160 m at the base of the foothills to c. 60 m towards Alipurduar. The forest is largely Sal Shorea robusta, with many huge emergents. It is divided into blocks, some of which appear to be almost virgin, though there are many teak plantations and also village settlements. The surrounding areas to the south and west have mostly been cleared for cultivation or tea gardens. The
been managed by them since 1993. The area is divided into 'ranges' run by Range Officers, who supervise Beat Officers, who patrol subdivisions known as 'beats'. The headquarters are in Jalpaiguri.

We visited two ranges: Jainti and Buxa.

**Jainti Range**

Jainti range is on the northern edge of the plains and extends south from the edge of the Buxa duars or foothills. The headquarters are at the small settlement of Jainti. Tigers were still present in this lowland forest area, which is probably typical of the reserve, both in its habitats and its avifauna. We surveyed a small part of this area on 17, 18 and 20 February.

**Buxa Range**

The northern edge of this range follows the Bhutanese border, enclosing what perhaps may now be a unique habitat range in this part of India: continuous forest from the plains to nearly 2,000 m at the border, and forest cover probably continues at least to Tale La (4,066 m) in Bhutan. While almost all of the north-eastern border of West Bengal runs along the bottom of the foothills, here it penetrates well up to the Bhutanese plateau. From the border ridge at 1,700-1,925 m the forest descends very steeply so there are few large trees here. In places, owing to periodic landslips, some steep slopes are dominated by bamboo. Continuing south, the topography becomes gentler, and small settlements of hill farmers are encroaching, usually where they are not visible from the main paths. Trees reach 20-25 m in places, but most of the valley bottoms and ridges have been cleared for agriculture or shifting cultivation, and many other areas of forest have had the understorey removed to encourage pasture for grazing animals.

The main village of Buxa lies in the centre of the range at 870 m, by the ruins of a former British fort (Fig. 1). There are some small shops, a Forest Rest House and other accommodation. It is reached by about 1½ hours walk from Santarbari (230 m), where the range HQ is located, and where the road north from Jalpaiguri ends. The path is well used by locals and winds up through the scarp to the border at the Sinchua Pass and the Bhutanese village of Sinchula beyond. This path was particularly good for birds, with many interesting species being recorded between the viewpoint (1,500 m) and the pass (1,900 m).

We surveyed the area as a team on 19, 21-25 February and D.A. stayed until 6 March.
ORNITHOLOGICAL IMPORTANCE OF THE AREA

There is little previously published information for the area, but Inglis et al. (1920) summarized the vertebrates recorded in Jalpaiguri District, and mentioned the Buxa Duars frequently. Inglis (1952-1969) provided details of a few extra species from the Buxa area. Stevens (1923-1925) visited Bhutan Ghat on the Raidak river in January 1922 and noted a number of species. There is a printed list of the 'Avifauna - Buxa Tiger Reserve' (Anon. undated), comprising 213 species, which we were kindly given by the Jainti Beat Officer. We found many apparently previously unrecorded species - mostly from the higher elevations. In nine days we recorded nearly 200 species of birds, and the final total was 227, of which 130 do not appear on the reserve list, and 50 of these latter species are not mentioned by Inglis et al. (1920), Stevens (1923-1925) or Inglis (1952-59). Seven additional species were recorded by R. Singh (pers. comm.), one by Law (1953) and one by Sanyal (1995) giving a total of 359 species for the area (Appendix). Species listed by Inglis et al. (1920) for Jalpaiguri District are included in the Appendix with indications of status where these were given.

SELECTED SPECIES OF INTEREST

Threat categories are from Collar et al. (1994).

CHESTNUT-BREASTED PARTRIDGE Arborophila mandellii (VU) A group of partridges seen briefly on four occasions near the viewpoint, appeared to show a white crescent on the breast and were probably referable to this species. Inglis et al. (1920) noted that 'specimens have been obtained in the Bhutan duars in April, probably in this district, though we have been unable to get it.'

RUFOUS-NECKED HORNBILL Aceros nipalensis (VU) One pair was seen above the fort at c. 1,000 m. Inglis et al. (1920) report a specimen which had been purchased live at Buxa by Mr J. R. Phillips in 1918. It was listed by Anon. (undated).

BEAUTIFUL NUTHATCH Sitta formosa (VU) Two (- four) birds were seen near the ridge at 1,400 m, feeding 3-6 m from the ground on large trees (15+ m), and loosely associated with White-browed Scimitar Babbler, Lesser Yellownapes and Lesser Racket-tailed Drongos. A soft contact call: 'whuck' or 'whit' was noted.

LONG-BILLED WRENN BABBLER Rimator malaccus (L.R. nt) A pair was seen at c. 1,500 m (J.A.), Inglis et al. (1920) noted that 'O'Donel met with a pair at about 4000 ft.', and Inglis (1952-1969) added that this was 'above Baksu Duar.'

BLACK-HEADED SHRIKE BABBLER Pteruthius tenuirostris (L.R. nt) Small numbers were seen regularly, usually with mixed babbler flocks.

YELLOW-THROATED FULVETTA Aleippe cinerea (L.R. nt) A small party was seen once at c. 1,500 m (J.A.).

WHITE-BACKED YUHINA Yuhina bakari (L.R. nt) Small flocks of 6-12 were seen regularly at 1,500-1,600 m. The call was a twitter with a final jeeer.

GREATER RUFOUS-HEADED PARROTBILL Paradoxornis rufipes (L.R. nt) Flocks of 30+ were seen regularly in bamboo at 800-1,200 m, usually in association with Coral-billed Scimitar-Babblers. Inglis (1952-1969) recorded a small party at Buxa on 3 December 1918.

PREVIOUS SIGNIFICANT RECORDS

SWAMP FRANCOLIN Francolinus gularis (VU) Inglis et al. (1920) noted that it was 'getting scarce as suitable localities decrease' in Jalpaiguri district, but Anon. (undated) listed it as still occurring in Buxa.

MANIPUR BUSH QUAIL Perdicula manipurensis (VU) 'The type specimens were procured in Goalpara. Primrose has seen this bird not far from the Tora, and Shebbeare also believes he has seen it. There is a ragged skin in the British Museum said to have been got in the Bhutan Duars. This is evidently the bird mentioned by Thornhill as shot by him at Alipurduar' (Inglis et al. 1920).

SPOT-BELLIED EAGLE OWL Bubo nipalensis (L.R. nt) Inglis et al. (1920) stated '...not often seen.' Listed by Anon. (undated).

BENGAL FLORICAN Houtanopsis bengalensis (EN) Inglis et al. (1920) noted that 'this fine bird is steadily decreasing owing to the indiscriminate shooting of hens and the increasing acreage under tea'. Anon. (undated) listed it as probably extinct in Buxa Tiger Reserve.

LESSER FLORICAN Sypheroides indica (CR) 'Decidedly uncommon. Two were shot at Neora Nuddy tea garden not very far from Baradighi. O'Donel has recorded them from Hasimara. He has only seen them in April, May and June' (Inglis et al. 1920).

BLACK-NECKED CRANE Grus nigricollis (VU) One seen on 2 December 1992 (Sanyal 1995).

WOOD SNIPS Gallinago nemoricola (VU) Inglis et al. (1920) noted that it was a very irregular winter visitor but was 'commoner before so much jungle was cleared for tea'.

WHITE-BELLIED HERON Ardea insignis (EN) Not specifically recorded from Buxa, but Inglis et al. (1920) noted that it was 'Uncommon and keeping to the larger rivers and those running through the forest. O'Donel remarks that
it disappears from the plains during the rains and that it generally feeds at dusk, but also occasionally does so at midday.

**SPOT-WINGED STARLING** *Saroglossa splendens* (LR: nt) Inglis et al. (1920) found it to be 'very common along the base of the hills, occasionally descending to the plains.'

**JERDON’S BARBILL** *Chrysomma altirostre* (VU) Inglis et al. (1920) noted that it was 'recorded from Bhutan and Buxa duars', but it was not recorded by O’Donel or Inglis (1952-1969).

**FINN’S WEAVER** *Ploceus megerlinus* (VU) O’Donel (1916) found a breeding colony at Hasimara (west of Buxa on the river Torsa) in June 1912. Inglis et al. (1920) noted that O’Donel 'never got the birds again', but Inglis (1952-1969) secured specimens from the same locality on 15 February 1927. Anon. (undated) listed it as occurring in Buxa Tiger Reserve.

**THREATS TO THE AREA**

The Buxa range is an area noted for dacoits, and we were warned to be careful away from the main village. Unofficial settlement within the park is illegal, but enforcement of regulations is difficult. Encroachment by local people is carefully concealed from most vantage points so the forest appears continuous. The reserve is under considerable pressure, with a human population of c. 200,000 and about 12,500 livestock. There are plans for a large multi-purpose dam on the Sankosh river.

We would like to thank the Range Officer of Buxa Range, Mr S. K. Barai, and the Range Officer and Beat Officers of Joint Range for their co-operation and enthusiasm during our visit. We would also like to thank Mike Crosby and Tim Inskipp for their help and suggestions with the manuscript.

**REFERENCES**

Anon. (undated) *Avifauna, Buxa Tiger Reserve.*


SYSTEMATIC LIST OF SPECIES RECORDED IN BUXA TIGER RESERVE

This survey     Anon. (unedited) and others

Jalpargarh district

Buxa

Gaur (Bos gaurus)
Black Buck (Antilope cervicapra)
Swamp Deer (Blastocerus dichotomus)
Common Muntjac (Muntiacus muntjak)
Rus均为(Cervus duvaucelii)
Blue Bull (Bubalus arnee)
Morphic Deer (Hydropotes inermis)
Black Buck (Antilope cervicapra)
White-Bellied Deer (Hydropotes inermis)

Jalpargarh district

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### Birds of Buxa Tiger Reserve, India

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<th>Scientific Name</th>
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<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Grey-capped Greenfinch</strong></td>
<td>Chloris sinica</td>
<td>A</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scientific Name</td>
<td>Common Name</td>
<td>Status</td>
<td>Location</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<td>-------------</td>
<td>-------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Bauhinia variegata</em></td>
<td>Red Vein Cashew</td>
<td><strong>J</strong></td>
<td>B, Buxa</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Bauhinia purpurea</em></td>
<td>Purple Orchid Tree</td>
<td><strong>J</strong></td>
<td>B, R, C</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Bauhinia hookeriana</em></td>
<td>Hooker's Bauhinia</td>
<td><strong>J</strong></td>
<td>A, C</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><em>Bauhinia variegata</em></td>
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<td>Hooker's Bauhinia</td>
<td><strong>J</strong></td>
<td>A, C</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Notes:**
- Status: J = January, A = April, X = Existing data.
- Location: B = Buxa, R = Rajdhabhawan, C = Cooch Behar.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Species</th>
<th>Scientific Name</th>
<th>Common Name</th>
<th>Note</th>
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<tr>
<td>Yellow-billed Waxbill</td>
<td><em>Estrilda flavogrisea</em></td>
<td>Yellow-billed Waxbill</td>
<td>This survey</td>
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<td>Yellow-billed Waxbill</td>
<td><em>Estrilda flavogrisea</em></td>
<td>Yellow-billed Waxbill</td>
<td>Anon. (1926)</td>
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<td>Yellow-billed Waxbill</td>
<td><em>Estrilda flavogrisea</em></td>
<td>Yellow-billed Waxbill</td>
<td>Others (1926)</td>
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</table>

**Jaetali and Boxa districts**

- B 600m: Jaetali
- B 1200m: Boxa

**Jaigapur district**

- B 600m: Jaigapur

**Jaetali and Boxa districts**

- B 850m: Jaetali
- B 1500m: Boxa

**Jaigapur district**

- B 850m: Jaigapur
- B 1500m: Jaigapur
Some bird observations from central Bhutan, May 1994

ROBERT TYMSTRA, SCOTT CONNOP, and CHADO TSHERING

Results of a survey in western and central Bhutan in May 1994 are presented. The survey focused on subtropical and temperate zone areas in Jigme Dorji National Park and the buffer zone of Black Mountains National Park and yielded 252 species of birds, including first published records for Bhutan of Common Coot Fulica atra, Russet Bush Warbler Bohycetes rubripectus, and Forest Wagtail Dendronanthus indicus.

An avifaunal survey in parts of western and central Bhutan was conducted from 2 May to 26 May 1994. The project, designed to increase knowledge of the birdlife of some of Bhutan's less-studied areas, was sponsored by the WWF Bhutan Programme. The ornithological survey team consisted of Scott and Joanne Connop, Dr. Murray Gell-Mann, Marsha Southwick, Chado Tsering, and Robert Tymstra. In addition to documenting the birdlife, several hours of bird song recordings were made for future use in conservation and training in survey and recording techniques was provided to Bhutanese biologists.

Our survey time was spent mainly in Jigme Dorji National Park and in the buffer zone bordering the Black Mountains National Park. We found a total of 252 species of birds, including several that were apparently new to the country, or had only been documented once or twice before. We concentrated our efforts on the subtropical and temperate broadleaf forests which Bhutan has in abundance; these forests are a stronghold for several bird species difficult to find elsewhere.

Our expedition (see Figure 1 for locations) began in Thimphu (2400 m) from where we drove east towards Tongsa (2,100 m), stopping along the way at Dochhu La (3,215 m), Nohdung (2,900 m), and Pele La (3,300 m). From Tongsa, we made a daytrip east to Yutong La (3,400 m), then drove south to Wangdinala (1,000 m) where we spent three days. We continued with a week-long trek along the Mangde Chhu (river) to Nobji (1,300 m) via Nimshong. We camped for three nights along a watercourse 5 km upstream of Nobji before retracing our steps to Wangdinala and Tongsa. We next camped for three days at Chendebji (2,400 m), then moved on to Phobjikha from where we trekked to Khebetang (2,800 m) for a four day stay. We travelled to Punakha via Pele La, then up the Mo Chhu for a three day stay at Rinchu (1,350 m), trekking upstream to below Gasa (2,200 m) via Damji before returning to Thimphu. The first trek followed a trail from Nimshong to beyond Nobji and covered an elevational range of 900–1,500 m, with a low point of 700 m while crossing the Mangde Chhu. There was