

# Danphe

Bird Conservation Nepal

QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER

VOLUME 17

BULLETIN NO. 2

JUNE 2008

## Vanishing Vultures and Diclofenac Prevalence in Lumbini IBA

Sharada Paudel

### Background

Three species of vultures in Asia are in grave danger of extinction across the Indian subcontinent. Populations of Asian White-rumped Vulture *Gyps begalensis*, Long-billed Vulture *G. indicus* and Slender-billed Vulture *G. tenuirostris* have declined by more than 97% in India (Prakash *et al.* 2003) and Pakistan and annual rates of decline appear to be increasing

(Baral *et al.* 2002; Baral, 2004). Due to these declines, all three species were listed by IUCN – The World Conservation Union in 2000 as Critically Endangered, which is the highest category of endangerment. The cause of these declines has been shown to have been caused by the veterinary drug diclofenac, which is widely used to treat livestock in Asia. Vultures are exposed to diclofenac by feeding on livestock carcasses which contain residues of this drug. Vultures exposed to diclofenac die of kidney failure symptoms of acute renal gout. Diclofenac has been shown to cause mortality in Eurasian Griffon *G. fulvus* and African White-backed Vultures *G. africanus* and it is very likely that diclofenac will affect all *Gyps* species and potentially other reptors and vultures. It is therefore possible that resident populations of Himalayan Griffon Vultures *G. himalayensis* and migratory Eurasian Griffons are also threatened from the use of diclofenac. Nesting populations of White-rumped Vulture have previously been monitored in Rupandehi (Baral, 2004). This work has continued monitoring the populations of this species and other vulture species in the previously studied area as well as in other new areas on the farmlands in Lumbini. This work has also monitored the NSAIDs (Non Steroid Anti-inflammatory Drugs) market in the agro-vet shops in the study area.



Photo: James Iron

### Study area

The Lumbini Important Bird Area covers farmlands of Rupandehi and Kapilbastu districts which encompass a large rural area where agriculture is the main land use (68%) followed by forests which cover 21.6% of the area (Baral and Inskipp, 2005). The study area encompasses 141,367ha with only 100ha area protected and altitude of the study area ranges from 95-1219m. A number of perennial and seasonal rivers and streams including the Telar, Tinau, Sundi and Dano river systems flow through the area. The forest, scrubs, wetlands and grasslands surrounding Lumbini (the birthplace of Lord Buddha) are especially important refuge for wildlife.

### Methodology

A main transect for the survey was laid along the Bhairahawa –



Taulihawa Road. Four North and three south transects were laid on the both sides of the road. The average distances covered was 10 kilometers north and south of the main transect. The transect survey was done for nesting sites of vultures, flying and resting vultures, vultures at carcass, carcass dumping and survey of the agro-vet shops. A one week per month field survey was done for two months, December 2006 and January 2007.

### Results

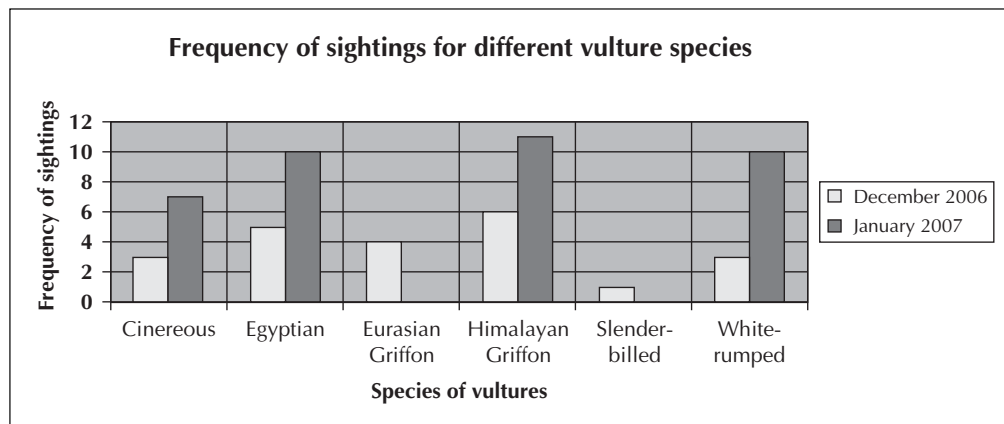
There was no evidence of nesting sites of vultures observed during the study. The Himalayan Griffon Vultures were sighted most commonly during the study. The flock size of the soaring and roosting vultures varied from 1 to 42 at a time. The largest flock size was observed in Wordwolia, Amma-8, Rupandehi which consisted of 34 Himalayan Griffon Vulture, 4 White-rumped Vulture, 2 Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* and 2 Cinereous Vulture *Aegyptius monachus*.

The carcass availability is significant but the sales of the old livestock to animal dealers are also emerging more these days. Two carcasses of Himalayan Griffon vultures were observed within the study area. The cause of death was unknown. They were found dead below the electric power lines near an electric pole.

### Analysis of questionnaire survey

Questionnaire survey was done for the prevalence of NSAIDs on the local market within the study area. The agro-vet shops along the transect of the field survey were included in the questionnaire survey. Twelve agro-vet shops were surveyed. Of these 75% of the agro-vets surveyed had Diclofenac Sodium products as the NSAIDs in sale. The drugs containing Diclofenac Sodium as their composition were replaced with Meloxicam during survey. The replacement programme was conducted by Bird Conservation Nepal which provided the drug, Meloxicam in required quantity to completely replace the Diclofenac Sodium from the agro-vet shops within the study area.

All the practitioners surveyed (100%) were aware of the vulture decline. Only 16.67% of the practitioners surveyed believe that this decline of vulture population relates to the introduction of Diclofenac Sodium and 66.67% didn't think the decline related to



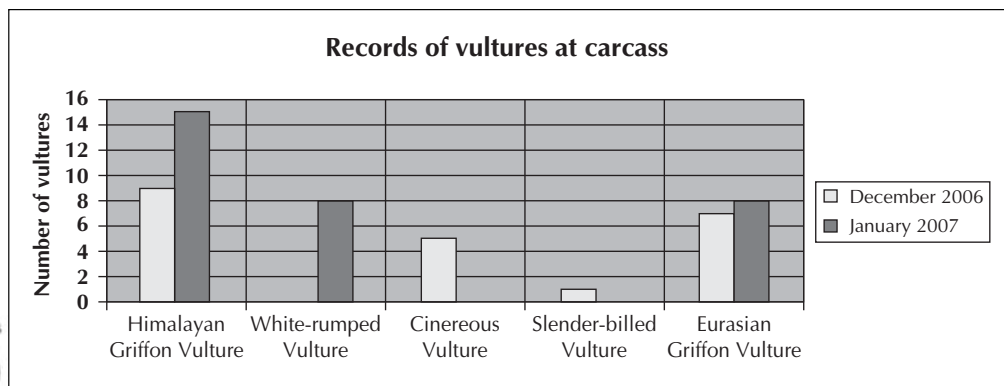
A total of 6 fresh carcasses was observed during the survey, 2 in December 2006 and 4 in January 2007. Vultures were observed only in 2 carcasses, both in the month of December, 2006. Both the carcasses were of buffalo and vultures, crow and dogs were the scavengers attending the carcass. Twenty two vultures of different species were observed at first carcass in Suryapura VDC, Rupandehi and 31 vultures in Chapiya VDC, Rupandehi. Other four carcasses observed in January 2007 were not attended by vultures at the time of observation which were very fresh and only dogs and crows were attending them.

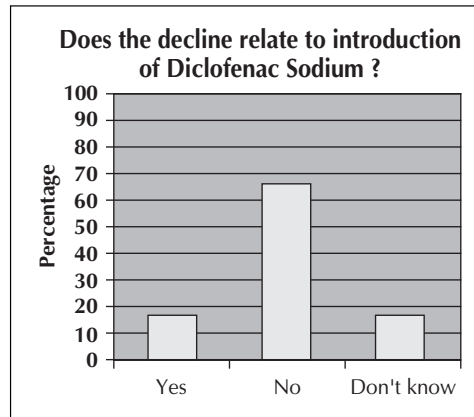
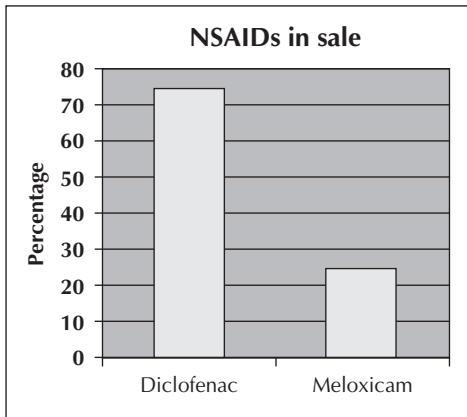
Diclofenac Sodium use. They were more aware about the habitat degradation of the vulture and many thought cutting of Simal trees *Bombax ceiba* contributed their decline. Only 25% of the practitioners had heard about the new drug Meloxicam but didn't know its performance and the rest 75% haven't even heard about the drug.

### Discussions and conclusions

White-rumped Vulture was the most common and widespread vulture species in lowland Nepal (Fleming *et al.* 1984, Inskipp & Inskipp 1991). Following the widespread catastrophic decline of these vultures in Indian subcontinent, the evidence of

drastic decline of vultures was observed in different parts of Nepal with declining trends observed in Lumbini lowlands (Inskipp & Inskipp 2001). Baral *et al* (2002) studied lowland vultures of Nepal and showed a declining trend of number of vultures from 310 in April 1993 to 160 in July 2000 and to





done regularly to ensure that sufficient safe food is available for the resident and migrant vulture population. Since there is no evidence of the nesting site in the area studied, the vulture population of the surrounding areas and migrant area should be monitored to conserve vulture nesting sites.

64 in March 2002, in Rupandehi district near Lumbini. Baral 2004 studied 6 nests in his study area in Lumbini. The present study shows no evidence of nesting behavior in the previously studied area by Baral (2004). The tall Silk Cotton Tree *Bombax ceiba* and Peepal tree *Ficus religiosa* previously studied are still present in the study area.

During our study, the Himalayan Griffon Vultures were observed in maximum number and in 69.5% of total vulture sightings followed by Egyptian vultures (60.8%), White-rumped Vulture (56.5%) and Cinereous Vulture (39.13%). The number of vultures of these species in a flock also varied in the similar manner. Slender billed Vulture was seen at carcass in a very small number. White-rumped Vulture and Slender billed Vulture which are critically endangered, are resident and patchily distributed; declining sharply in most areas, rare in centre and east and generally uncommon in the west (Baral and Inskipp 2004). But the number of these vultures sighted in proportion to the winter migrant Himalayan Griffon vulture is very less. This observation along with the diclofenac prevalence in area shows that there is a huge threat to the winter migrant Himalayan Griffon Vultures also. The study of Sharma (2006) in Upper Mustang, Nepal found that the total observation and density of Himalayan Griffon in his study area have sharply declined by 94% in between 2003 and 2006. He also stated that Diclofenac was still used in the study area during his study. As it is well known that the resident population of White-rumped Vulture and Slender billed Vulture has declined sharply, the study suggest that the Himalayan Griffon Vulture and other winter migrants may be susceptible to the decline if the monitoring of the Diclofenac Sodium and its removal from the study area is not done regularly. The veterinary practitioners survey and the interactions with the local people suggest that there is a need to explain the practitioners, local people and other wider audience that the cutting down of Simal trees is not the main cause of such a massive decline of vultures and the real cause is diclofenac. Though the diclofenac derivatives are replaced with Meloxicam during our study in a significant amount, there are still chances of importing diclofenac from India in a cheaper price. Hence, Meloxicam should be distributed widely in the veterinary drugs market and prices are to be considered accordingly. Besides that it is necessary to aware all about the ill effects of diclofenac and causes of the vulture decline. Carcass availability survey should be

## Acknowledgements

I am grateful to Bird Conservation Nepal for supporting this study with a grant scheme available from Royal Society for the Protection of Birds (RSPB) and Zoological Society of London (ZSL), UK. I would like to thank Dr. Hem Sagar Baral for his encouragement, guidance suggestions and valuable support for research work and the preparation of this research paper. I would also like to thank Dinesh Giri of Lumbini Budhha Garden for providing the field assistance. Thanks to my friend Ranjana Bhatta for her help, support, patience, encouragement and cooperation during the study.

## References

- Baral, H. R., 2004 Conservation status of White-rumped Vultures *Gyps bengalensis* in Lumbini. Masters Degree Dissertation submitted to Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur, Kathmandu.
- Baral, H. S. and Inskipp, C. 2004. *The state of Nepal's birds 2004*. DNPWC, BCN and IUCN – Nepal. Kathmandu.
- Baral, H. S. and Inskipp, C. 2005. *Important Bird Areas in Nepal: key sites for conservation*. Bird Conservation Nepal and Birdlife International, Kathmandu and Cambridge.
- Baral, H. S., Poudel N., Giri J. B., Watson R, and Virani M. (2002) Study of vultures in lowland Nepal, Final report submitted to Peregrine Fund, USA.
- Fleming, R. L. Sr., Fleming, R.L. Jr., and Bangdel, L. S. (1984) *Birds of Nepal*. Third Edition. Nature Himalayas, Kathmandu.
- Inskipp, C. A Guide to Birds of Nepal (1991) Second edition. Christopher Helm, London.
- Inskipp, C. and Inskipp, 2001. A re-visit to Nepal's lowland protected areas. *Danphe* 10(1/2):4-7.
- Prakash, V., Pain, D. J., Cunningham, A. A., Donald, P. F., Prakash, N., Verma A., Gargi, R., Sivakumar, S. and Rahmani, A. R. (2003) Catastrophic collapse of Indian white-backed *Gyps bengalensis* and long-billed *Gyps indicus* vulture populations. *Biological Conservation*, 109, 381-390.
- Sharma, R. A. (2006) Status of Himalayan Griffon *Gyps himalayensis* and Ethno-vulture relationship in Upper Mustang, Nepal. Masters Degree Dissertation submitted to Purbanchal University, Nepal
- Suwal RN (2002) Standing tall with Sarus Cranes. *Danphe* 11 (1): 15- 16.

email: [sharada.paudel@gmail.com](mailto:sharada.paudel@gmail.com)



# Birds with Unusual Tasks!

Karan Bahadur Shah

Birds, the supreme assets of nature and valuable gifts to human beings are sometimes found wittingly or unwittingly doing very funny things and unusual tasks! I have heard some amazing bird related true incidents; here a few are presented to share with you.

## Cormorants with a Heavy Meal!

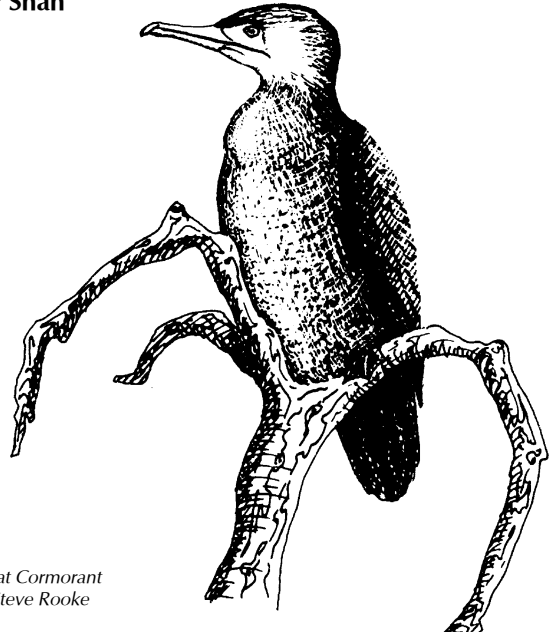
Dhani Shahi a resident of Mastamandu, VDC, Dadeldhura district is very experienced and highly fond of hunting and fishing. One afternoon in early May 2003, when he was heading downstream on a local river to start fishing by casting a net, he saw a flock of *jalewa* (Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*) busy fishing in one of the deep pools of the river. He could not stop himself from the temptation of their meat and hurriedly returned his house to fetch a muzzle-loading gun. When he returned to the site, he saw almost all the birds were resting on the bank. He took position and fired at the resting birds, but his gun failed to produce a shot. He attempted to fire his gun several times but in vain and so he stopped firing at the cormorants.

The birds realised the danger from his proximity and probably his intention, and so a few of them immediately left the site, although they made a very short flight and rested on a tree. To his surprise, he saw the rest of the birds were just moving here and there hurriedly by fluttering their wings and stretching their necks but still remained on the ground! He expected all the birds would leave the ground in such a situation, so he sensed something unusual was going on with the birds. When he came very close to them all the birds managed to leave the ground. On arrival at the site, he was shocked to see many fresh dead fish on the sandy ground! He collected them and as the fish were sufficient for his meal without casting the net, he returned to his house.

The river flows with little water in that season as most of the upstream water is used for irrigation so most of the large fish in the river gather in deep pools like the one he had visited. The cormorants had taken advantage of this situation and they were so heavily gorged that it was not possible for most of them to fly without making themselves lighter. That had compelled them to regurgitate some of the fish!

## Serpent Eagle's Herbal Medicine!

Chorela Dumeuda is a small village in the neighborhood of my own village in Dadeldhura district. Raibhane Parki is one of the inhabitants of Chorela Dumeuda and he is well known in the area for providing herbal medicine for snakebites<sup>1</sup>. The medicine is known to him from his father and the father also knew it from his father. Thus this family has been treating snakebite victims of the area for the last two generations. Like his father and the grandfather Raibhane never charges for the treatment because it is strongly believed that if money is



Great Cormorant  
by Steve Rooke

charged then the medicine loses its efficacy! However, when victims are cured and if they or their families offer something like clothes, utensils, lambs or chicken he happily accepts them. Although the area does not get too many snakebite incidents even then he receives enough gifts by curing at least five to six snakebite victims every year.

Surprisingly the herbal medicine this family has been using for the last two generations was actually made known by a *muse chil*<sup>2</sup> (Crested Serpent Eagle *Spilornis cheela*) more than 60 years ago! The interesting story, which is known to most of the local people is as follows:

One day Raibhane's grandpa saw a *muse chil* catching a large snake by clutching it in its talons resting and feeding on a tree close to his house. As he knew<sup>3</sup> that after finishing the meal the bird will go somewhere to take medicine, he eagerly kept on watching. As soon as the bird finished his job he took off from the tree and landed at the bank of a nearby pond. The old fellow immediately ran towards the pond and after getting closer to the bird, he patiently monitored its activity. The bird was nibbling at the leaves of an aquatic plant! He identified the plant and thereafter started using the plant as an antidote against snakebites!

1. Actually most of the cases are from nonpoisonous snakes; therefore the medicine seems to work.
2. Kakakul is known as *muse chil* in Doteli language.
3. Most of the people of Nepal believe all snakes are poisonous and if animal like cat, birds etc feed on snakes they need to neutralise snake's venom therefore, they always take herbal medicine!

Natural History Museum, Swayambhu, Kathmandu.  
Email: [karan@htp.com.np](mailto:karan@htp.com.np)



# First breeding record of Finn's Weaver *Ploceus megarhynchus* in Nepal

Hem Sagar Baral\*, Eswar Raj Pant\*\*, Dev Raj Joshi\*\*

On 16 May 2008 while searching the grasslands at Sukla Phanta for breeding birds, we located several small flocks of Finn's Weaver *Ploceus megarhynchus*. We counted as many as 36 birds in a small area of Sukla Phanta grasslands. The first flock had six birds, two or three of which were hawking insects and going back to *Phragmites* reeds to perch. They made at least 3 attempts to catch flying insects in a flycatcher manner within 10 minutes. When we approached nearer they flew away with characteristic, sweet chirping calls. Most birds seen were adult in breeding plumage.

We walked further southeast towards the Shikari Tal marshes. The area we were walking through had a grass height of one and half metres. A lone simal tree *Bombax ceiba* stood in the middle of this grassland surrounded by patches of marshes, pools, and tall unburnt *Phragmites* reeds. The height of the tree was approximately 9 metres. The top of the tree was covered with nest-like structures. On close inspection through binoculars, they turned out to be nests of Finn's Weavers. There were 20 Finn's Weavers close to the nest perched on the tree. The birds made typical weaver-like calls now and then, calling more frequently when a Black Drongo *Dicrurus macrocercus* and three of us approached their nests (c. 30m). Most birds that flew away from the nest landed about 20-30 m away on tall grass or reeds. As they evidently wanted to return to the nests we left the area quickly.

Nests were in various stages, some were still to be completed and there were few which looked nearly complete. Nests were located on various parts of the upper half/top of the tree. Most leaves of simal tree in the immediate vicinity of nests were stripped off. Stripping off the leaves often left only the mid rib which was perhaps used as a support to the overall structure of the nest.

The nests were supported (not suspended) on small twigs that made an angle to the main branch (0 to 90°) of the tree. Two or three nests were seen on the mid top and were built around a thinner stem. Analysing the photos taken of the nests shows they were made up of mostly coarse grass materials and mostly oval. These nests looked less intricately woven compared to Baya Weaver *Ploceus philippinus* nests and also smaller in size. Although the nests were orientated in different directions, most had entrances towards the lower end closer to the bottom than the centre.

The timing of breeding and the nests seen here match with the descriptions in Ali and Ripley (1987). The timing indicates early breeding therefore their choice of nesting in a tree rather than reeds. They further state, "the birds strip off all the leaves around the nests so that the upper part of the canopy is normally

completely denuded and the colonies (cluster of nests) thus stand out prominently against the sky, looking in the distance rather like the carton nests of wasps". The observed tree was leafless on the upper part and this could be the explanation.

Although these birds have been recorded previously during the breeding season at Sukla Phanta, and some birds were seen being fed, nests had not been located (Som GC *verbally* 2000, pers. obs). This constitutes the first nesting record of Finn's Weavers in Nepal. A rough count revealed 20 nests in this particular tree alone. We had limited time and the scorching heat restricted us from going further east where more birds might have been breeding.

Finn's Weaver is a little-known globally threatened species found only in India and Nepal (Grimmett *et al.* 1998). This species has a small, rapidly declining and severely fragmented population as a result of the loss and degradation of terai grasslands, principally through conversion to agriculture and overgrazing (BirdLife International 2008). The species is represented by two subspecies widely separated from one another (Grimmett *et al.* 1998). The western nominate race occurs in north India and west Nepal whereas the race *salimali* occurs mainly in the Assam plains (Ali and Ripley 1987). The nominate race of Finn's Weaver was first recorded in Nepal at Sukla Phanta in 1996 (Baral 1998), and on 24 March 1998 as many as 53 were counted here (Giri 1998). This species (possibly *salimali* race) has been reported also from Koshi Tappu, east Nepal on 30 October 2002 (Choudhary *et al.* 2003).

A thorough survey of the species in Sukla Phanta and adjoining Lugg Bugga Nature Reserve and Dudwa National Park of India is urgently needed as well as a survey of the habitat utilization during the breeding and non-breeding periods. These studies may prove helpful in conserving and managing the remaining population of Finn's Weaver.

We would like to thank Nature Safari Tours, Naturetrek, Suklaphanta Wildlife Reserve for sponsoring visit to Sukla Phanta. We would also like to thank Gopal Prasad Upadhyay, Nilambar Mishra and Chiranjivi Prasad Pokharel for their help and courtesy. Thanks to Suchit Basnet, Chairperson and Carol and Tim Inskipp, members of Nepal Rare Birds Committee and Professor Adrian Craig, Rhodes University, South Africa for useful comments on this paper.

## References

- Ali, S. and Ripley, S. D. 1987. *Compact handbook of the birds of India and Pakistan*. Oxford University Press, Bombay.  
Baral, H. S. 1998. Finn's Weaver *Ploceus megarhynchus*



and Singing Bushlark *Mirafra cantillans*: two new species for Nepal. *Forktail* 13: 129-131.

BirdLife International (2008) Species factsheet: *Ploceus megarhynchus*. Downloaded from <http://www.birdlife.org> on 17/6/2008

Choudhary, H., Choudhary, B. and GC, S. 2003. Finn's Weavers *Ploceus megarhynchus* at Koshi. *Danphe* 12(3/4): 2.

Giri, T. 1998. Additional Sightings. *Danphe* 7(1/2): 11-12.

Grimmett, R., Inskipp, C. and Inskipp, T. 1998. *Birds of the Indian subcontinent*. Christopher Helm, London.

\*Bird Conservation Nepal, PO Box 12465, Kathmandu, Nepal,

\*\*Nature Guide Association of Sukla Phanta, Majhgaon, Kanchanpur shuklaphanta@rediffmail.com

## Former US President Jimmy Carter visits Phulchoki



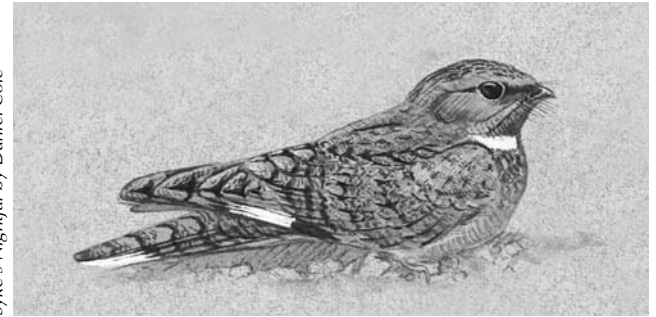
Dr Hem Sagar Baral, CEO at BCN took former US President Jimmy Carter and First Lady Rosalyn Carter for a birding trip to Phulchoki, an Important Bird Area (IBA) on two consecutive mornings of 11 and 12 April 2008. During the excursion, a total of 38 species of birds was seen and three additional species were heard only. During the visit, Dr Baral briefed President Carter and Mrs Carter about BCN's work including efforts in saving the IBAs. BCN's work on participatory conservation of Phulchoki mountain forest funded by Whitley Fund for Nature was also briefed. President Carter came to Nepal to monitor the Constituent Assembly election with his team members from the Carter Center. Nepal IBA book and The state of Nepal's Birds 2004 were presented to the couple.



## Additional Sightings

One Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus merganser* was found in the Phewa Lake on 5 April 2008 (SGC, HKC, PT) A rare vagrant for Nepal!

A pair of Blossom-headed Parakeet *Psittacula roseata* was noted at Chitwan on 15 and 20 February 2008. (SGC, HSB) A rare resident to Chitwan!



Syke's Nightjar by Daniel Cole

One Syke's Nightjar *Caprimulgus mahrattensis* was noted south of the Koshi Barrage. (BC, AT, BMC) A new record for Nepal!

One Slaty-breasted Rail *Gallirallus striatus* was located at Lami Tal, Chitwan on 18 February 2008. (BRR, PW, BM) An uncommon winter visitor to Chitwan!

Five Purple-backed Starling *Sturnus sturninus* on 7 May 2008 and two on 10 May 2008 were noted at Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve. (TG, BC, SGC, AT) Only the second and third records for Nepal!

One Vinous-breasted Starling *Acridotheres burmanicus* was seen and photographed on 10 May 2008. (AT, TG, BC) Currently this sighting is being reviewed by Nepal Rare Birds Committee. If confirmed this will be the first record for Nepal and for the Indian subcontinent!

Upto 20 Black-chinned Yuhina *Yuhina nigrimenta* were sighted in the Churia Hills of Chitwan National Park on 16 February 2008 (HSB, SGC) and on 21 February 2008 (HSB). A rare resident to Chitwan!

A pair of Mrs Gould's Sunbird *Aethopyga gouldiae* were seen feeding at Safari Adventure garden in Bodreni community forest on 9 March 2008. (KP, JPG, DBT) A new species for Chitwan National Park!

AT: Anish Timsina; BC: Badri Chaudhary; BM: Bishnu Mahato; BMC: Barry McCarthy; BRR: Babu Ram Regmi; DBT: Dhan Bahadur Tamang; HKC: Hari KC; HSB: Hem Sagar Baral; JPG: J.P. Gautam; KP: Kamal Pradhan; PT: Paul Triggs; PW: Paul Willowby; SGC: Som GC; TG: Tika Giri

Compiled by Tika Giri and Hathan Choudhary

# Conservation Breeding Centre: securing future for threatened vultures

Hem Sagar Baral

Vultures are scavenging birds, feeding mostly on the carcasses of dead animals and are found on every continent except Antarctica and Oceania. Vultures are medium to large-sized birds that are adapted to a diet of dead animals. They have weak feet with blunt talons and bare heads to prevent the feathers from becoming dirty while feeding. Their long, broad wings are efficient for long distance soaring. Vultures regurgitate food from their crops for their young instead of carrying prey to the nest. So, vultures rarely kill live animals!

Nepal is exceptionally rich in its avifauna, so far a total 863 species are reliably recorded in the country. A total of eight species of vultures is found in Nepal. Six species of Nepal's vultures are breeding resident and rest two are winter visitor and passage migrant in small numbers.

Till very recently when vultures circled in the sky, locals often mistook it for clouds. They were dense and thick and everywhere. They nested in loose colonies all over Nepal in the foothills and in the lowlands. It is estimated that Nepal alone had 150,000 breeding pairs of White-rumped Vulture *Gyps bengalensis* until 15 years ago. Similarly Himalayan Griffon *G. himalayensis*, Slender-billed Vulture *G. fulvus*, Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus*, Red-headed Vulture *Sarcogyps calvus*, Lammergeier *Gypaetus barbatus*, Cinereous Vulture *Aegipius monachus* and Eurasian Griffon *Gyps fulvus* were also found in good numbers but not as numerous as the White-rumped.

These common birds until a decade ago, are now struggling for their existence. It is well established that in the Indian subcontinent vulture numbers have plummeted in an extraordinary rate. The rate of decline is attributed to be many folds faster than the decline of Passenger Pigeon *Ectopistes migratorius*, the species which went from being one of the most abundant birds in the world to extinction during the 19th century. As of today, four species of vultures in Nepal have been threatened with extinction. These include White-rumped, Slender-billed and Red-headed Vultures: all Critically Endangered. In addition to these Egyptian Vulture is now listed as Endangered. Cinereous Vulture is already near-threatened. Himalayan Griffon may also jump to Vulnerable soon. It is not known whether Lammergeier and Eurasian Griffon are also declining: most likely they are. So the general scenario in the country is all species of vultures are declining; some at faster rate than others!

A drug called **diclofenac** which is used to treat livestock was identified as the main reason for killing vultures. This discovery was made public on Kathmandu Summit Meeting organized jointly by Bird Conservation Nepal (BCN), The Peregrine Fund and US State Department of Interior in February 2004. This startling discovery was circulated all

over the world. Following this meeting another meeting was organized by Bombay Natural History Society, Royal Society for Protection of Birds and Zoological Society of London in Himachal Pradesh, India to discuss the issues related with vulture conservation. Both meetings were attended by world's top scientists on vulture conservation, NGOs representatives and high level government delegates. The recommendations of both meetings were: an immediate ban on veterinary use of diclofenac, massive education and awareness, conservation breeding centres in all three range countries and continued in-situ ecological studies.



Ecological studies on the status and numbers of vultures are ongoing. BCN in partnership with funders, local conservation groups and communities has initiated Jatayu: The Vulture Restaurant, an innovative scheme for providing safe food to vultures in strategic locations. This work has recently been selected as one of the most successful projects by UNDP. While work was initiated in all the aspects recommended by the meetings, Nepal's work on setting up conservation breeding centre has been complete only recently. Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) geared up for opening the first vulture conservation breeding centre at Kasara. BCN and National Trust for Nature Conservation are supporting this initiative through technical and financial resources. Currently, 14 young vultures are housed in the aviary at Kasara and more catching is planned for the next season.

The breeding programme is a long term commitment and ensures survival of healthy stock for conservation breeding when the environment remains threatened with diclofenac and similar harmful Non Steroidal Anti Inflammatory Drugs (NSAIDs). This initiative gives added hope for our threatened vultures. The importance of breeding centre is well justified and timely. Because of increased and continual threat from the illicit use of diclofenac and similar NSAIDs in veterinary market vulture species continue declining. Nest monitoring data tell us that nearly all vulture nest colonies are declining rapidly.



Together with efforts on breeding centre, there is also a need that we carry out several other activities parallelly to address some of the threats and challenges. Diclofenac is still being used and is still available (illegal import, illegal manufacture, and illegal use of human diclofenac) in the market. This is the biggest threat to our vultures when they roam in the wild. Other issues include shortage of food and loss of nest trees. In recent years, Simal *Bombax ceiba* and similar large trees from private lands and some community forests have been drastically reduced.

To address these threats we urge the government to put a total ban on the sale and use of veterinary diclofenac, prevent illegal import of diclofenac into Nepal from India and China, stop the illicit use of human diclofenac in the veterinary sector, promote safe alternative drugs such as **meloxicam** and make them widely available, put a ban on cutting large Simal and other trees where these birds nest.

BCN likes to thank Mr Shyam Bajimaya, Joint Secretary and Dr Narendra Man Pradhan, Planning Officer at DNPWC and Mr Bimal Kumar Baniya, Member Secretary and Dr Shant Raj Jnawali, Director at NTNC for their support, vision and constant encouragement in vulture conservation work. Further our thanks are to the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Zoological Society of London, Darwin Initiative UK Government and UNDP Small Grants Programme/GEF for their continued support towards vulture conservation efforts in Nepal.

*Bird Conservation Nepal, PO Box 12465, Kathmandu, Nepal*  
Email: [hem@birdlifenepal.org](mailto:hem@birdlifenepal.org)

(This article is reproduced from Central Zoo newsletter vol. 32)

## Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator* a rare vagrant species

Som GC<sup>1</sup> and Paul Triggs<sup>2</sup>

On 5 April 2008, Paul Triggs and myself were crossing the Phewa lake on a boat to explore the forest in the morning at around 10:15 hrs. As we were scanning the lake, I caught sight of a female Merganser that looked smaller and slimmer than the Common Merganser *Mergus merganser*. It didn't take long for Paul to identify the bird as an adult female Red-breasted Merganser *Mergus serrator* as he frequently sees the bird in UK and I had also seen it a few times while I was there. It had chestnut head with spiky uneven and shaggy crest and slimmer bill and the body. Chestnut on the hind neck was less contrast to the lower fore neck and breast. The white on the wings was broken by a black line running across as it flew later.

<sup>1</sup>Koshi Camp PO box 21016. Email [ibisbill@hotmail.com](mailto:ibisbill@hotmail.com),

<sup>2</sup>[paul.triggs@tribalgroupp.co.uk](mailto:paul.triggs@tribalgroupp.co.uk)



Together for birds and people

BirdLife International is a global conservation federation with a worldwide network of Partner organizations, Representatives and committed individuals.

BirdLife International seeks to conserve all bird species on earth and their habitats and, through this, it works for the world's biological diversity. It recognizes that the problems affecting birds, their habitats and our global environment are linked inseparably with social, economic and cultural factors and that these can only be resolved if human societies function in an ecologically sustainable manner and if the needs, welfare and aspirations of people form a part of all conservation action.

Birds provide BirdLife International with a uniquely valuable focus: they are sensitive indicators of biological richness and environmental trends and fulfil many key ecological functions; they contribute greatly to our understanding of natural processes; they are an important economic resource; and they have inspired and delighted people of many cultures for centuries, which makes them excellent ambassadors for the promotion of conservation awareness and international collaboration.

**BirdLife International pursues a programme of:**

- Scientific research and analysis to identify and monitor worldwide the most threatened bird species and the most critical sites for the conservation of avian diversity;
- Advocacy and policy development to promote the conservation of birds and biodiversity through sustainability in the use of all natural resources;
- Field action and country conservation programmes, ranging from community-based land-use and management projects to species recovery programmes benefiting both wildlife and humans;
- Network and capacity building to expand and strengthen the global partnership of conservation organizations and to promote worldwide interest in the conservation of birds and the wider environment.





# News

## Membership

Mr. Dhan Bahadur Chaudhary joined BCN as a life member. He is long associated with BCN and one of the active members to promote vulture restaurant in Nawalparasi District. He is also active on many bird research works in lowland Nepal. He is naturalist by profession and currently working for Tiger Mountain.

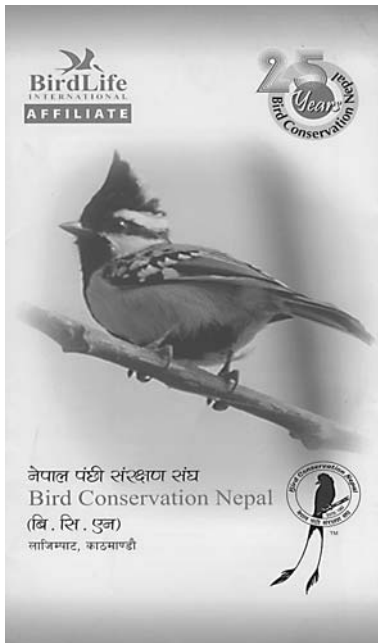
Mr. Shyam Kumar Shah joined BCN as a life member. He is wildlife conservationist by profession. He is working as Assistant Conservation Officer in Bardia National Park. He has keen interest in wildlife conservation.

Mr. Michael Dooher from UK joined BCN as a life member. He is businessman by profession but loves traveling and photography of birds. He is nature lover and keeps great interest in birds and its conservation.

Ms. Celeus Baral, joined BCN as a life member. She is 6 years old and studying at class 1, at Brihaspati Vidya Sadan School.

Mr Hari KC, a resident of Pokhara and a long time BCN member and well wisher has joined BCN as a life member. He is the senior most ornithologists in Pokhara and currently works at Fish Tail Lodge, Pokhara.

## BCN Nepali Brochure



For the first time BCN has produced 5000 copies of Nepali brochure. This will be very useful to provide general information of BCN and its activities at the community level.

## 13th Wildlife Week Celebration

Department of National Parks and Wildlife Conservation (DNPWC) celebrated 13th Wildlife Week (first week of Baishak) to promote wildlife awareness and conservation among school and college students. One of the major programme of wildlife

week is birdwatching programme around Kathmandu Valley. BCN supported DNPWC by providing its expertise to assist birdwatching programme on 18th April 2008 (6th Baisakh 2065).

A revised vulture poster was released by Mr Ananta Vijaya

Parajuli, Acting Secretary of Ministry of Forest and Soil Conservation (MoFSC) during the closing ceremony of 13th Wildlife Week on 20th April 2008.

## World Migratory Bird Day

World Migratory Bird Day was initiated in 2006 and is a global awareness-raising campaign highlighting the need for the protection of migratory birds and their habitats. On the second weekend in May, people around the world will take action and organise public events such as bird festivals, education programmes or bird watching excursions to celebrate WMBD. "Migratory Bird, Ambassador to Biodiversity" was slogan for the celebration of world Migratory Bird Day 2008. BCN organized birdwatching at Phulchowki on 10 May 2008 to celebrate WMBD in Nepal. Over 50 amateur birder, students and local people participated in the programme and recorded 71 species.

## IBA Monitoring Workshop

Mr Shree Ram Subedi, President and Mr Mitra Pandey, CEPF Project Officer took part in the Asian IBA monitoring workshop held in Mumbai from 1 March to 8 March 2008. They have presented how BCN is mobilising local Site Support Groups (SSGs) to monitor IBAs of their surroundings by simple monitoring tools developed by BirdLife and modified and adopted by BCN in the local context. They also participated on post workshop excursion for field based practical knowledge on how IBA is being monitored in southern India.

## Staff Training

Membership and Education Officer, Ms. Menuka Basnyat attended the Social Mobilization Training on 04-06 April, 2008 at Hotel Dragon, Dam Side Pokhara organized by Integrated Rural Development Center, in cooperation with UNDP Global Environment Facility / Small Grants Programme. The main objective of the training is to enhance capacity of the grantee on Social Mobilization for effective and efficient project implementation.

Finance Officer, Ms Pratikchha Srivastava participated in the Financial Management Training organised by Integrated Rural Development Center, in cooperation with UNDP Global Environment Facility / Small Grants Programme.

Mr Dev Ghimire, Administrative Officer took part on month long internship in BirdLife Global Secretariat, Cambridge, UK. The aim of the internship was to develop scientific knowledge on database handling and management. This internship is part of the Scientific Capacity Development of Local NGOs project supported by Darwin Initiatives of UK government.

## Staff Appointment

Mr Anand Choudhary has been appointed as a Vulture



Conservation Officer. His educational background is Masters in Zoology from TU and has a very good field level experience. He will be overseeing all the vulture related work on behalf of BCN.

Mr Krishna Pokharel has been appointed as a Vulture Field Biologist. He has a Masters degree in Zoology (Ecology) from TU.

Ms Aava Shrestha has been taken for 4 months internship. She has completed her BSc, Environment Science from KU.

Donation

Mr Dieter Hoffman, Head of Global Programme (RSPB, UK) and Mrs Carol Inskipp kindly contributed NRs. 3200 and NRs. 5000 respectively for Vulture Restaurant at Nawalparasi.

Project Update

CEPF Project

Bird Survey

BCN organised a bird survey of the Kanchenjunga Conservation Area (KCA) as a contribution to the Critical Ecosystem Partnership Fund (CEPF) initiative in Nepal. Renowned ornithologists Tim and Carol Inskipp along with Richard Winspear and paul Collin (RSPB staff), Dr Angus Robin from UK and Mitra Pandey and Jyotendra Thakuri (BCN staff) took part in the survey work. The survey entailed a 20-day trek from 8 to 27 April starting from Basantapur upto Taplejung. A total of 246 bird species was recorded during the trek, including 185 species in the KCA, of which 18 species were new to the Conservation Area.



NBCN newsletter

500 copies of Nepal Bird Conservation Network (NBCN) newsletter published and distributed among the SSGs, other local communities in Mai valley and Kangchenjunga Conservation Area.



Koshi Project

As the project has now leased ponds for the fishing community, various activities related to the fish pond management have been carried.

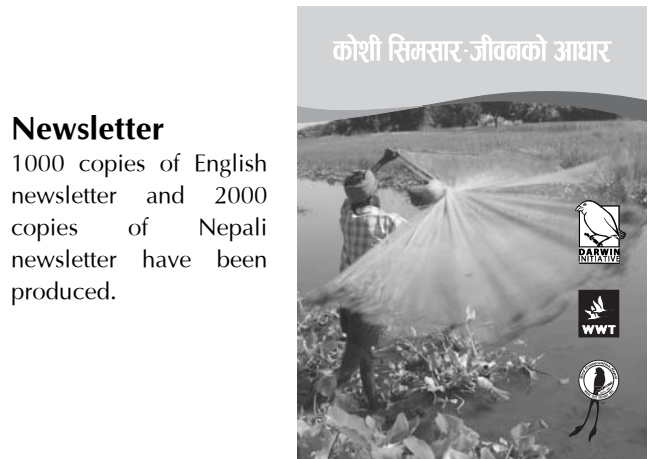
As a part of fish farming training, 4 days training was conducted in order to teach the Malaha community on fish fries stocking methods. Trainers were experts from the Fisheries Research Center, Tarahara. Eco-hydrology survey and water quality test of the leased ponds were also carried. This will help for future management of the ponds.

As part of the fish pond management, pond cleaning and fertilization was done involving all malaha users for 4 days. This is a contribution by the community. As per recommendation from the experts, seven different species of fish fries are now stocked in leased ponds.

The monitoring program for wildlife, vegetation, water quality and fish size and weight was established. The baseline survey of wildlife, vegetation, water quality has been conducted.

Poster

1000 copies of English poster and 3000 copies of Nepali poster have been produced.



Newsletter

1000 copies of English newsletter and 2000 copies of Nepali newsletter have been produced.

Advertisement for 'नेपाल पक्षी संरक्षण सञ्जाल' (Nepal Bird Conservation Network) with logo and text in Nepali.

## Vulture Conservation Programme

### Road Transect Survey

Highway Transect Survey of vultures was carried from 6-17 May 2008 starting from Narayanghat to Mahendranagar. A total of 178 vultures were spotted.

Other important activities carried during the survey:

- Nesting Site Survey for Breeding Success: (Nawalparasi, Kapilvastu, Dang, Kailali). NSAID random survey in vet shops of several sites.
- Observation of potential vulture restaurant sites: Ghanchoura-Kapilvastu, Kalika-Dang, Beli-Dhangadhi and Gaidahwa Lake, Rupandehi.
- Formal/Informal meetings with current/potential partner organizations: Narti CFCC-Dang, WWF -Nepalgunj, TAL-Dhangadhi, Rupak Mall-Dhangadhi, BZUC Pithouli-Nawalparasi, Chitwan NP, NTNC-Sauraha and TAL-Chitwan.

### Vulture Restaurant/UNDP/SGP

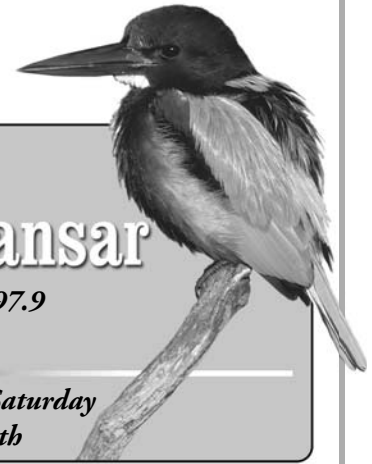
All major construction activities have been completed. The boundaries of the visitor center and cow ranch were formally marked and fencing work has been initiated. An electricity meter has been installed in the visitor center. A plan to furnish and decorate the visitor information center has been finalized and internal decoration work is in progress. Relevant books about wildlife and Tharu culture have been placed at the visitor center. In addition, BCN has donated 2 sets of all its publications to the Jatayu restaurant committee.

T-shirts and hats with Jatayu restaurant logo have been produced. Similarly a brochure, also in Nepali, of a Jatayu restaurant has been published (3,000 copies).

A documentary covering information on vulture restaurant has been produced. This has been telecasted from Nepal Television on 17 April 2008 and also re telecasted on 20 April 2008. The documentary also covers interview with Dr Richard Cuthbert (RSPB, UK), Dr Hem Sagar Baral (BCN), Dhan Bahadur Chaudhary (Vulture Restaurant Coordinator), Mr Gopal Sherchan (UNDP) and local people.

### Vulture Conservation Breeding Centre

With the joint initiation of DNPWC, BCN and NTNC a



Tune in to  
**Panchhi Sansar**

on **IMAGE FM 97.9**  
at **7.45 am**

**Second and Fourth Saturday**  
**of Nepali Month**

Vulture Conservation Breeding Centre has been established at Kasara of Chitwan National Park. Construction of a very high standard two chick aviaries have been completed. Currently all 14 vulture fledglings are in one aviary and plans have been made to move six of these birds to the second aviary in the near future. Perimeter fencing 150 x 200 m has been installed around the whole site. Two keepers are regularly looking after the centre. Construction of staff quarter is also underway.

### Jagdishpur Wetland Project/RAMSAR

A 2 day cross visit (20-21 June 2008) was organised for the local community of Jagdishpur reservoir. They have visited Rupa Lake and observed its well management, and conservation and sustainable resource use carried by Rupa Lake Rehabilitation and Fisheries Cooperative.



#### Editorial Board

**Dr Hem Sagar Baral** (Chief Editor),  
**Ishana Thapa** (Sub Editor),  
**Suchit Basnet, Yub Raj Basnet, Dev Ghimire**

Copyright © 2008 Bird Conservation Nepal.  
All rights reserved. The opinions expressed by  
the authors do not necessarily express  
the policies of the Bird Conservation Nepal.

#### Donation

BCN welcomes all kinds of support from the interested ones. You can even help us by providing us your camera, binocular, telescope, scientific equipment etc. Further more, we will also be grateful if any one provides educational materials for our library. We will always acknowledge your contribution towards our organisation



The newsletter is produced quarterly for members of Bird Conservation Nepal. The aim of the newsletter is to inform BCN members on the recent development of ornithology in Nepal and any other relevant news on birds. It is circulated to all members free of cost. The individual annual membership is NRs. 200 for any SAARC nationals and equivalent Nepali rupees of US\$ 10.00 for others.

Those who would like to donate to or be a member of BCN can do so by a direct bank transfer, to the bank details below, or via cheque. Cheques should be made payable to Bird Conservation Nepal and sent to the address below.

Sunrise Bank Limited, Gairidhara  
A/C No: 002 00200026CL  
Account Holder: **Bird Conservation Nepal**  
SWIFT CODE: SRBLNPKA

Founder President  
**Hari Sharan Nepali 'Kazi'**

Patrons

**Mr. Karna Shakya, Nepal**  
**Mr. Rajendra Lal Shrestha, Nepal**  
**Miss Michie Kashiwabara, Japan**  
**Mr. Shyam Khattri, Nepal**  
**Field Marshal Sir John Chapple GCB, CBE, DL**  
**Mrs. Nicole Nooren, Netherlands**  
**Mr. Yozo Koshiyama, Japan**  
**Mr. Lalit Jung Lalchan, Nepal**  
**Mr. Bishwa Tuladhar, Nepal**  
**Mr. Tara P. Lama, USA**  
**Mr. Krishna Karki, Nepal**  
**Mr Uttam Raj Kayastha, Nepal**  
**Mr Sarbendra Pachhai, Nepal**  
**Mr Deepak Chettri, Nepal**  
**Dr Joel T. Heinen, USA**  
**Mr Lok Nath Wosti, Japan**  
**Mr Rajendra Gurung, Nepal**



नेपाल पंखी संरक्षण संघ

**Bird  
Conservation  
Nepal**

Bird Conservation Nepal (BCN) is the largest and oldest civil society organization dedicated to the interests of ornithologists, birdwatchers and conservationists in Nepal. It seeks to promote an interest in birds among the general public, encourages research on bird biology and ecology, identifies the major threats to birds' continued survival, and acts to conserve birds and their habitats. It also provides the most authentic information on birds and their habitats all over Nepal.

BCN is a membership based organisation. At present it is supported by a Founder President, 17 Patrons, 125 life members and several ordinary members. Members are the major strength of this organisation and people from various backgrounds viz. students, teachers, professionals, bird enthusiasts, conservationists, and the general public are involved.

It is committed to educate the public on the value of birds and the relationship between birds and people. It has also prioritized the significance of peoples participation as future stewardship to attain long term conservation goal.

Our staff form the heart of BCN but the lifeline is provided by the invaluable contributions of volunteers and supporters. Both financial and in-kind support is greatly appreciated and we welcome any kind of help that can be offered. For further information please write to:

**Bird Conservation Nepal**  
Post Box 12465, Lazimpat, Kathmandu, Nepal  
Tel 4417805, 4420213, Fax 0097714413884  
Email [bcn@mail.com.np](mailto:bcn@mail.com.np)  
[www.birdlifeneपाल.org](http://www.birdlifeneपाल.org)

  
**BirdLife  
INTERNATIONAL**  
Together for birds and people

**Tiger MOUNTAIN.**

## TIGER MOUNTAIN POKHARA LODGE



Lodge in Royal Bardia National Park. For high altitude birding expeditions, ask Mountain Travel - the pioneers and leaders of Himalayan trekking.

*Tiger Mountain Central Reservations:*

We are honoured to sponsor the publication of Danphe Newsletter for Bird Conservation Nepal.

Tiger Mountain Pokhara Lodge is the ultimate relaxing retreat just outside Pokhara. Winner of several sustainable tourism awards with delightful, secluded rooms, award winning cuisine and a fully stocked bar; the lodge makes an ideal base for bird watching walks in the surrounding forest and farmland. Our bird list stands at some 135 species positively identified. Culture walks and visits to Pokhara are also easily arranged. All rooms have attached bathrooms and mountain views.

Special rates are available for Nepalis and expatriate residents at the Lodge and at other Tiger Mountain Properties - Tiger Tops Jungle Lodge, Tented Camp and Tharu Lodge in Royal Chitwan National Park and Karnali Jungle

01 436 1500

[reservations@tigermountain.com](mailto:reservations@tigermountain.com)

GPO box 242, Dhapasi, Ring Road, Kathmandu, Nepal

[www.tigermountain.com](http://www.tigermountain.com)

Part of the **Tiger MOUNTAIN.** group of companies.

PUBLICATION OF THIS NEWSLETTER IS KINDLY SPONSORED BY TIGER MOUNTAIN POKHARA LODGE

