

PANGOLAKHA WILDLIFE SANCTUARY-ZULUK-BEDANG TSO – NATU LA COMPLEX



IBA Site Code	: IN-SK-09
State	: Sikkim
District	: East Sikkim
Coordinates	: 27° 20' 28" N, 88° 46' 42" E
Ownership	: State Forest Department
Area	: 12,400 ha
Altitude	: 1,300 - >4,000m
Rainfall	: Not Available
Temperature	: Not Available
Biogeographic Zones	: Himalaya
Habitats	: Subtropical Pine Forest, Subtropical Broadleaf Hill Forest, Alpine Moist Pasture

IBA CRITERIA: A1 (Threatened Species), A2 (Endemic Bird Area 130: Eastern Himalayas; Endemic Bird Area 133: Southern Tibet), A3 (Biome-5: Eurasian High Montane, Biome-7: Sino-Himalayan Temperate Forest; Biome-8: Sino-Himalayan Subtropical Forest)
 PROTECTION STATUS: Wildlife Sanctuary, established in 2002

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

The Pangolakha Range, extending below the Chola Range, separates Sikkim from Bhutan. Hathichirey (the place where elephants can penetrate) forms the tri-junction between Bhutan, Sikkim and West Bengal where further down the forest continues as the Neora Valley National Park (an IBA in West Bengal). The Sanctuary has typical alpine-temperate-subtropical vegetation with high altitude lakes around Jelep La. Rhododendron, Silver Fir, Juniper forest and associated ground flora, moss-filled oak forests with dense bamboo thickets form ideal habitat for the Red Panda *Ailurus fulgens*, the State Animal.

AVIFAUNA

The mountain passes of Natu La and Jelep La (La = Pass) form the routes for migratory waterbirds many of which stop over at the various wetlands in the area, especially Bedang Tso Lake. The Himalayan Monal Lophophorus impejanus (locally called as Feydong) used to be found here (Chezung Lachungpa pers. comm. 1996), hence the name Bedang Tso. Sometimes there is mass migration of birds of prey such as Red Kites *Milvus milvus* and unidentified eagles (U. Lachungpa pers. comm. 2003). The Sherathang marshes are one area where the Brahminy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea* breeds.

Some birds of this complex are Eurasian Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola* and Wood Snipe *Gallinago nemoricola*, a globally threatened species (BirdLife International 2001) occasionally seen

Pangolakha and nearby areas are important habitat for the Alpine Accentor of Biome-5.



Photo: Otto Pfister

on the banks of the Bedang Tso. Hill Pigeons *Columba rupestris* are seen on smoking chimneys of local houses in snowy winters. The Snow Pigeon *Columba leuconota*, Snow Partridge *Lerwa lerwa*, Himalayan Monal and Gold-naped Black Finch *Pyrrhopterus epauletta* are common on the alpine slopes. The Pallas's Fish-Eagle *Haliaeetus leucoryphus* was once seen in the forest patch over the Pangolakha range in 1994. Large Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* and Bar-headed Geese *Anser indicus* were sighted at Bedang Tso in 1992 (U. Lachungpa pers. comm. 2003).

The Tibetan Eared Pheasant *Crossoptilon harmani*, a Near Threatened species, has been reported from Kupup (near Bedang Tso) below the Jelep La (U. Lachungpa pers. comm. 2003). This area falls under Pangolakha Wildlife Sanctuary and is adjacent to the Chumbi Valley of Tibet. This pheasant is one of the two endemic birds in Southern Tibet (EBA-133). It is reported from the edge of mixed Broadleaf Coniferous forest; Rhododendron, Juniper and deciduous scrub and grassland (Stattersfield et al. 1998). Another Near Threatened species found in this IBA is the Giant Babax *Babax waddelli*.

Due to great altitudinal variation from 1300 m to above 4,000 m, three biomes occur in this IBA: Biome-5: Eurasian High Montane (Alpine and Tibetan), from above 3,600 m; Biome-7: Sino-Himalayan Temperate Forest, between 1,800 m and 3,600 m; and, Biome-8: Sino-Himalayan Subtropical Forest, occurring between c. 1,000 m to 2,000 m (BirdLife International, undated). In Biome-5, 48 species are found, out of which 11 are found at this site. Similarly, 112 species are representative of Biome-7 and in this site are found 14 species (U. Lachungpa pers. comm. 2003). At lower altitude, in Biome-8, only two species out of 95 are reported from this IBA. It is likely that with more detailed surveys, more biome restricted species would be found.

Vulnerable

Pallas's Fish-Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucoryphus</i>
Greater Spotted Eagle	<i>Aquila clanga</i>
Red-breasted Hill-Partridge	<i>Arborophila mandellii</i>
Wood Snipe	<i>Gallinago nemoricola</i>
Rufous-necked Hornbill	<i>Aceros nipalensis</i>
Slender-billed Babbler	<i>Turdoides longirostris</i>
Black-breasted Parrotbill	<i>Paradoxornis flavirostris</i>
Hodgson's Prinia	<i>Prinia cinereocapilla</i>

Important Bird Areas in India - Sikkim

Near Threatened	
Ward's Trogon	Harpactes wardi
Endemic Bird Area 130: Eastern Himalayas	
Ward's Trogon	Harpactes wardi
Hoary-throated Barwing	Actinodura nipalensis
Broad-billed Flycatcher-Warbler	Tickellia hodgsoni
Biome- 5: Eurasian High Montane (Alpine and Tibetan)	
Himalayan Griffon	Gyps himalayensis
Snow Partridge	Lerwa lerwa
Solitary Snipe	Gallinago solitaria
Rosy Pipit	Anthus roseatus
Alpine Accentor	Prunella collaris
Altai Accentor	Prunella himalayana
Grandala	Grandala coelicolor
Hodgson's Mountain-Finch	Leucosticte nemoricola
Red-fronted Rosefinch	Carpodacus puniceus
Rufous-necked Snowfinch	Pyrgilauda tuficollis
Plain-backed Snowfinch	Pyrgilauda blanfordi
Biome- 7: Sino-Himalayan Temperate Forest	
Common Hill-Partridge	Arborophila torqueola
Rufous-breasted Accentor	Prunella strophiaata
Gould's Shortwing	Brachypteryx stellata
Himalayan Rubythroat	Luscinia pectoralis
Myzornis	Myzornis pyrrhoura
Great Parrotbill	Conostoma oemodium
Aberrant Bush-Warbler	Cettia flavolivacea
Grey-sided Bush-Warbler	Cettia brunnifrons
Rufous-bellied Crested Tit	Parus rubidiventris
Blanford's Rosefinch	Carpodacus rubescens
Dark-breasted Rosefinch	Carpodacus nipalensis
White-browed Rosefinch	Carpodacus thura
White-winged Grosbeak	Mycerobas carnipes
Gold-naped Black Finch	Pyrrhoplectes epauletta
Blue-throated Barbet	Megalaima asiatica

OTHER KEY FAUNA

Fauna includes Tiger *Panthera tigris*, Leopard *Panthera pardus*, Takin *Budorcas taxicolor*, Red Fox *Vulpes vulpes*, Hill Fox *V. montana*, Goral *Nemorhaedus goral*, Serow *N. sumatraensis*, Musk Deer *Moschus chrysogaster*, Yellow-Throated Marten *Martes flavigula*, Asiatic Black Bear *Ursus thibetanus*, Red Panda *Ailurus fulgens*, Mouse-Hare *Ochotona roylei* and Himalayan Weasel *Mustela sibirica*. There are chances of occurrence of Himalayan Salamander *Tylotriton verrucosus* in addition to other herpetofauna. Lower altitude waterbodies are home to several hillstream fish while in the upper reaches, the exotic Brown Trout has been introduced in the alpine lakes.

LAND USE

- q Forestry
- q Military
- q Nature conservation and research
- q Water /Watershed Management

THREATS AND CONSERVATION ISSUES

- q Frequent and regular change of army units
- q Pollution of wetlands especially by camps of Army and GREF
- q Heavy military traffic via Zuluk
- q Disturbance to wildlife from stray dogs
- q Grazing in forests

As the area is at high altitude bordering Tibet, it is manned by the Indian Army who occupy the area in short shifts of about six months to a year. Any biodiversity sensitization programme is hence short-lived.

Most camps are around or near waterbodies with resultant pollution, especially of non-biodegradable garbage and spread of stray dogs around these settlements. In addition to preying on wildlife such as Brahminy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*, there have been reports of human casualties due to these dogs (U. Lachungpa pers. comm. 2003)

The forest here is used by some yak graziers and is the route that the Tiger and Takin have followed into Sikkim (Ganguli-Lachungpa 1998, 2000). There are sporadic incidents of Tiger attacking small herds of domestic yaks. Due to army camps along the Gangtok-Natu La-Zuluk-Rongli route, there have been cases of poaching of wildlife (U. Lachungpa pers. comm. 2003).

The State Forest Department has set up Eco-Development Committees (EDCs) around all wildlife protected areas. In this IBA an EDC has been set up in the village of Gnathang. These conservation issues have also been addressed in the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan process for the Sikkim State.

KEY CONTRIBUTOR

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KEY REFERENCES

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