# Birds

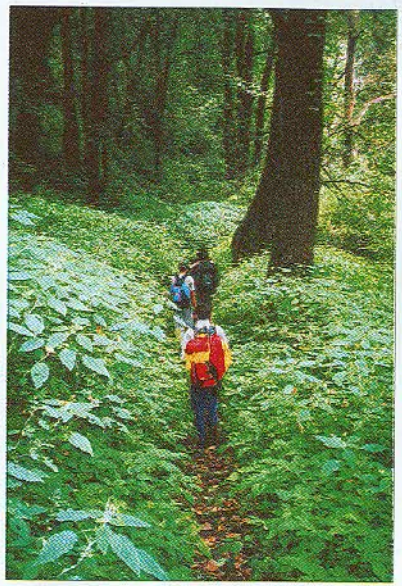
## A Guide

GREAT HIMALAYAN NATIONAL PARK
ग्रेट हिमालयन नैशनल पार्क

The Great Himalayan National Park was created to preserve the unique, pristine beauty of Nature in the Western Himalayan region. Located in the Kullu Valley, the Park offers numerous opportunities to celebrate, conserve, protect, and preserve Nature.

*Peregrine Falcon*

*In celebration of*
*International Year of Mountains and*
*International Year of EcoTourism 2002*



*Trekking through Sainj Forest*

*Black Eagle*

## Contents





# FOREWORD

Perhaps nowhere in the world can one find birds as varied and as colourful as in the mountains - and nowhere more so as in the Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP). Encompassing the Parvati, Jiwa Nal, Sainj and Tirthan valleys in the Kullu district of the Western Himalayas, the GHNP extends from 1,700m to 5,800m above sea level, and represents almost all sub-temperate, temperate and alpine ecosystems to be found in the Himalayas. Each ecosystem, in turn, supports varied floral and faunal elements, some of which are quite unique to the area. It is these unique elements that are the major attraction of the Park.

Birdswatchers, experts and amateurs alike, can expect to find here a variety of bird species, not the least among which are the Cheer pheasant, Monal, Koklash, and the brightest among them all, the Western Tragopan. The last has perhaps the greatest concentration of number in the higher reaches of the Park, and has, therefore, been adopted as the symbol of the GHNP. No less important, although not as colourful or as attractive, are the flycatchers, magpies, tree pipes, parakeets, robins, bulbuls, eagles, and lammergeiers.

The Park has recorded 183 species of birds, visible during various parts of the year, with another 20 species that are likely to occur there. Some birds are resident, and breed within the Park environs, while others are summer visitors. All of them lend colour and sound to the landscape, a treat to the eyes and ears of even the casual visitor.

**Birds of GHNP**, written by Dr. A.J. Gaston of Canadian Wildlife Service and Sanjeeva Pandey, Director, Great Himalayan National Park is an excellent effort towards providing useful information to bird aficionado, and shall go a long way in creating awareness and interest among first time bird watchers visiting the Park. I wish the readers many hours of happy viewing and happy listening.

Shimla

**Pankaj Khullar**
PCCF-cum-Chief Wildlife Warden
Himachal Pradesh

# Introduction

The Indian state of Himachal Pradesh is an enchanting area, both for scenery and culture. Besides its numerous attractions, it is world-class area for birdwatching. It is the best area in which to find a wealth of species of birds largely or wholly confined to the Western Himalayas. Within Himachal Pradesh, there is no better area to view the birds typical of middle and high altitudes than the Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP). The Park is situated more or less in the centre of the state, and contains a complete suite of the temperate and sub-alpine forest types characteristic of the ranges in this part of India. In this booklet, we attempt to give some impressions of what a visiting birdwatcher might find in the Park, and indicate the current status of mountain birds in the area. More than 200 species have been recorded in the Park.
A list of birds observed in the Park up to 1991 has been published previously.[1]

# Geography and Ecology

Himachal Pradesh consists of hill regions of the former Punjab State and takes in much of the Western Himalayas. From an ecological stand-point, it can be divided into three regions: the Shivalik or front ranges, the main Himalayan ranges, and the trans-Himalayan areas of Lahaul, Spiti, and Kinnaur. During the British period, the birds of Himachal were very well-documented, because of the presence of the Imperial summer capital at Shimla, and the development of several other popular hill stations (Dalhousie, Dharamsala, Kullu). Papers by Hugh Whistler[2,3] on the birds of Kangra and Kullu districts are excellent accounts of representative areas, while those by A.E. Jones[4], on the birds of Shimla, although never completed, are one of the most detailed local bird lists available from the sub-continent.

The Great Himalayan National Park is situated in Seraj Tehsil of Kullu District, Himachal Pradesh. It was created in 1984, following the recommendations of the Himachal Wildlife Project, a joint



British, American, and Indian venture to assess the status of wildlife and wildlife habitats, in Himachal Pradesh[5,6]. At present, the Great Himalayan National Park (GHNP) comprises 754 sq kms. It is naturally protected on the northern, eastern and southern boundaries by areas under permanent snow or by impassable ridges. The varied wildlife habitats of the GHNP support the full range of western Himalayan biodiversity, from subtropical to alpine. To facilitate ecodevelopment programmes, an area of 266 sq km around the western periphery of the Park has been declared as Ecozone. It contains 120 small villages, comprising 1,600 households with a population of 16-18,000 people. In addition, there are two wildlife sanctuaries adjacent to the Park: Sainj (90 sq.km.) and Tirthan (61 sq. km.). The total area under the National Park administration is 1,171 sq km. The Park covers an altitude range of 1,700-5,800m and comprises the headwaters of four left bank tributaries of the River Beas: the Parbati, the Jiwa, the Sainj, and the Tirthan (see map).

The climate of the Park is typical of the front ranges of the Western Himalayas. Precipitation is moderate over most of the year and abundant during the Monsoon season (June-August). In winter, snow falls throughout the Park, although it generally does not persist at the lower altitudes. Above 3,000m snow generally persists from November to March.

About one-third of the Park supports closed canopy forests, which extend from the valley bottoms to 3,300-3,600m, depending upon the aspect. A little over half of the area lies above 4,000m, which is the approximate upper boundary of the sub-alpine and alpine scrub vegetation in this part of the Himalayas[7]. The forested areas support good examples of most vegetation types representative of the area, including extensive stands of *Kharsu* Oak, Horse Chestnut, Birch, Himalayan Blue Pine (*Kail*), West Himalayan Silver Fir, West Himalayan Spruce, and Himalayan Cedar (*Deodar*). Besides these the lower altitude oaks, *Ban* and *Moru* are also found in small areas. The Himalayan Yew is an important under- storey tree in some places. Pure stands of any species are relatively rare as most of the forests are mixed to some degree.

Several clearings ('*thach*'), until recently the seasonal grazing places of migrant herders, occur within the forest zone. The forest surrounding such clearings tends to have an open under-storey and the vegetation shows signs of damage by grazing. The Himalayan Balsam is common in such areas, forming extensive patches of ground cover. In areas where slopes are very steep, the forest has a dense under-storey of Ringal Bamboo.

The sub-alpine zone is dominated by a low forest of Himalayan Birch and Fir, or by dense stands of Rhododendrons which grow up to about 3m in height. Juniper scrub occurs in the lower part of the alpine zone, at about 3,700m. Higher up, the vegetation consists principally of herb communities which are very diverse and luxuriant in places.

The area of the Great Himalayan National Park supports some of the best examples of undisturbed West Himalayan temperate forests in Himachal Pradesh. Consequently it supports a near-complete sample of both resident and migrant species of birds characteristic of the Western Himalayas. The Park also falls within one of the globally important Endemic Bird Areas identified by the ICBP Biodiversity Project[8].

# From Tropical to Alpine

## *Approaches and Lower Altitudes*

The Shivalik foothills of the Western Himalayas are clothed, at lower altitudes, with tropical thorn scrub which grades into pine forests (*Chil* Pine) at about 1,000m. This type of habitat is not represented within Park, but can be seen on some of the approaches to the Park. The birds found in these areas in the summer, are very similar to those in the plains, with the addition of a few species such as the Jungle Fowl, the Grey Tit, the Striated Prinia, and the Slaty-headed Scimitar-Babbler. However, between November and February, these areas receive a flood of winter visitors from the adjacent high ranges. So for those who wish to see mountain birds without getting out of breath, the winter is a good time to visit the Shivalik ranges. Within the Park, birds such as Long-tailed Minivets, Yellow-bellied Fantails, Wallcreepers, White-collared, and Greywinged Blackbirds become common at the lowest altitudes during this season. Heavy snow may bring down more exotic species, such as Variegated Laughing Thrush, Scaly-bellied Wren-Babbler, Spectacled Finch, and Golden Bush Robin, all of which may be found from October-February in the lower parts of the main valleys of the Park. In addition, there are a few species of long distance migrants, which too come down to the Shivalik zone of the Western Himalayas, such as the Blue-capped Redstart, Black-throated Thrush, and Black-throated Accentor.



## The Rivers

Himalayan streams and rivers support a very distinctive bird community: one that is more diverse than can be found in any other mountain range on earth. The most obvious birds are the White-capped and Plumbeous Water-Redstarts, which are common in summer along streams at all altitudes up to about 4000m. The White-capped Water-Redstart is especially fond of the small, rapid streams feeding the watermills that are a common feature of valleys adjacent to the Park. They may often be seen perching on the mills or on the associated sluices. The Brown Dipper, less obvious than the Water Redstarts, but no less widespread, makes its presence known by its characteristic call, as it buzzes along the river, before diving under the water to pluck insects from among stones and rocks on the river bed. Less abundant, and usually found along small, wooded streams are the Little and Spotted forktails: the latter a very spectacular sight, with its long, scissor-like, black-and-white tail. The Grey Wagtail is not a resident of the Park, but is a common winter visitor to streams at lower altitudes.

## The Lower Forest Zone

Much of the outer ranges of the Himalayas between 1,500-3,000m were originally covered by oak forest (*Quercus glauca* and *Q. leucotrichophora*), but clearance for cultivation and the policies of foresters in promoting the Deodar cedar, mean that little lower-altitude oak forest remains. The Park retains some areas of oak and mixed forest at altitudes

below 2,500m and these are some of the most rewarding sites for birdwatching, provided that you have the patience to search out the elusive calls of the many species that prefer skulking in dense vegetation. Late summer, just after the monsoon, is a good season to visit these areas, as the small, insectivorous birds gather into large mixed-species parties. Once you have located one, it is possible to follow it for hours, observing several similar species feeding together. This is very helpful for instance, in distinguishing the crowned warblers. Characteristic birds of these areas include the Black-crowned and Himalayan Jays, the Yellow-billed Magpie, the Greyheaded and Black-crowned Flycatcher-Warblers, and the Bar-tailed Treecreeper, as well as several species of Leaf Warblers and Tits, and a number of small babblers: the Black-chinned Babbler, White-browed and Green Shrike Babblers, Chestnut-tailed Minla, Rufous Sibia, and Whiskered Yuhina. In summer, several species of flycatchers also occur, including the suitably Beautiful Niltava and the subtly-coloured Verditer Flycatcher.

Grasslands in the same altitude zone can be found on south facing slopes in areas adjacent to the Park. This habitat supports the otherwise very elusive Cheer Pheasant, a species considered endangered by Birdlife International, as well as Prinias and Bushchats.

## Higher Altitude Forests

At about 3,000m, oak/spruce/deodar forest gives way to a higher altitude forest of *Kharshu* oak on the southern aspects and Himalayan Fir on the northern-facing slopes. This zone is inhabited in summer by a very distinctive avifauna including Orange-flanked Bush-Robin, Ashy-throated, Pale-rumped and Buff-barred leaf warblers, Grey-crested, Dark Grey, Yellow-browed and Rufous-vented tits (the latter are rare), the White-throated Tit, the Goldcrest and the White-cheeked Nuthach. The Warblers are found lower down during winter, but the Tits and Goldcrests remain in these high forests even under heavy snow.

The upper part of the forest zone is the haunt of the Great Himalayan National Park's most famous birds, the Impeyan (Monal), Koklash, and Western Tragopan pheasants, the latter being another endangered species. The area contains an important concentration of the Western Tragopan, which prefers areas of ringal bamboo under dense forest. The Park is probably the best place in India to observe this rare species in its natural habitat.

For such a large, spectacular bird, Impeyan Pheasants can be surprisingly common, and sightings of as many as 50 in a day's march through the higher altitude forests is not unusual. Typically, they fly off with loud, ringing calls as soon as they catch sight of people, but a glimpse of these fantastic birds, gliding swiftly over the mountain slopes, is worth any amount of breathless climbing. They feed mainly by digging in the forest floor with their strong hooked beaks and it is a common sight to find the earth beneath the forest canopy churned up as though someone has been through with a mechanical cultivator. The birds feed principally on roots, but also take any sort of invertebrate that they encounter. In winter, they may be found in the lowest altitudes, but they avoid valley bottoms and are found mainly on steep, south-facing slopes, where a combination of sunshine and gradient combine to keep areas clear of snow.

## The Subalpine Zone

Above the forest, which ends at around 4,000m, there is a zone of sub-alpine vegetation dominated by birch and rhododendrons and interspersed with high altitude meadows, most of which were precious in summer by migrant graziers with herds of sheep, goats, and buffaloes. Golden Eagles, Lammergeiers, and Himalayan Griffon Vultures are all common in this zone, while Blue-fronted Redstart, Scaly-bellied Wren-Babbler, White-browed Fulvetta and elements of the upper forest zone community inhabit the scrub, augmented in autumn by large flocks of Rufous-streaked Accentors and Plain Mountain Finches. On the highest meadows, the fortunate may find Snow Partridge, Grandala or, where marshy, the Solitary Snipe, but none of these are common.

## The Alpine Zone

The true alpine zone, although rich in flowering plants, does not support a large diversity of birds, but Rufous-breasted Accentor, Himalayan Snowcock and Dark-

breasted Rosefinch do occur. Parts of the interior areas of the Park, especially the upper part of the Parbati Valley support an ecology similar to that of the trans-Himalayan zone. Mistle Thrush, Black Redstart, Winter Wren, Fire-fronted Serin, Rock Bunting, and Red-billed Chough are common in these areas.

## Migration

At least 50 species of birds are Summer visitors to the Park (e.g. Eurasian Woodcock, several cuckoos, Oriental Turtle-Dove, Grey Nightjar, Ashy Drongo, House Martins, most flycatchers and warblers and many chats and thrushes). In addition, some resident species move to lower altitudes within the Beas River catchment for the harshest mid-winter period, during which few observations have been made. Only a few species visit the Park in winter, including Grey Wagtail, Rufous-streaked Accentor and Guldenstadt's Redstart. No species can be described definitely as passage migrants, although Shorteared Owl, Fork-tailed Swift, Eurasian Chiffchaff, and Tickell's Leaf-Warbler may fall into that category.

# A Round-up of Bird Families

### Raptors

Both *Himalayan Griffon Vulture* and *Lammergeier* are common in the Park, being seen daily during all seasons. *Golden Eagle* and Common Buzzard are seen frequently during all seasons in the sub alpine and alpine zones. Eurasian Sparrowhawk is common below the tree line. *Peregrine Falcon, Black Eagle,* and *Booted Eagle* also occur, although they are less common.

### Shorebirds

In spring, *Eurasian Woodcock* can be seen and heard 'roding' (the name given to their regular display flights), at suitable spots both within the Park and in adjacent forested areas, between 1,900-3,000m. They presumably breed in the Park. The Solitary Snipe occurs in summer in small marshes in the alpine zone, at about 4,000m attitude.

### Pigeons

The Speckled *Wood-Pigeon* and *Snow Pigeon* are both common in the Park, as is the Oriental Turtle-Dove in Summer.



### Parakeets

The Slaty-headed Parakeet, seen commonly in forest up to 2,200m attitude, is the only species that occurs regularly, although Blossom-headed Parakeets also occur at lower altitudes in adjacent areas.

### Cuckoos

*Large Hawk-Cuckoo, Pied Cuckoo, Indian Cuckoo, Himalayan Cuckoo, Oriental Cuckoo,* and *Common Cuckoo* all occur in the Great Himalayan National Park. All species are summer visitors. The Common and *Oriental Cuckoos* are the most common.

### Owls

The *Collared Owlet* and the *Tawny Owl* are both common in the temperate forest zone and the *Mountain Scops-Owl* has been recorded several times. All three of these owls may be heard calling from the same spot at places in the Park. The *Rock Eagle-Owl* and *Short-eared Owl* have been recorded only once.

### Other non-passerines

The *Grey Nightjar* is common during April-September up to 3,000m. Its steady "chaunk-chaunk" call is a characteristic evening sound where there are open grassy clearings. Himalayan Swiftlets and Fork-tailed Swifts are recorded frequently from April to October, occurring mainly in forests. There has been one record of the White-throated Needletail. The Eurasian Hoopoe occurs up to 2,500m during April-September. *Brown-fronted Woodpecker* and *Great Barbet* both occur up to 2,000m, while the *Scaly-bellied Woodpecker* and Himalayan *Woodpecker* occur throughout the temperate forests. The Speckled Piculet is present only at the lowest altitudes (below 2,000m).

### Passerines

Like most Himalayan forests, those of the Park are rich in babblers and laughingthrushes (14 species), flycatchers (11 species), chats (11 species), warblers (14 species), and thrushes (12 species), which together comprise just under 50% of passerines recorded.

## Regional Specialties

Although there are no bird species that are unique to Himachal Pradesh a few species that breed in the Park are

considered by Birdlife International to be of possible concern. These include, the Western Tragopan and Cheer Pheasant, as well as the Cinereous Vulture, Red-headed Vulture, Long-billed Thrush, and White-throated Tit. The latter two species are tolerably abundant in suitable habitat within the Park.

A few species recorded in the Park are at the western edge of their distribution. These include the White-browed Shortwing, for which there are few records west of Nepal; the Little Pied Flycatcher, not known previously west of Garhwal and the Rufous-vented Tit, a species that occurs only sporadically to the west of Nepal, and the occurrence of which in the Park was a significant range extension when originally described. The Spectacled Finch, although found from Hazara to Nepal, is uncommon throughout its range. It is seen regularly in dense Spruce and Fir forests in the Park.

The two pheasants are the subject of some conservation efforts. The creation of the Great Himalayan National Park was, in part, an attempt to safeguard the largest population of the species known at that time. Currently, there may be anywhere from 20-100 Western Tragopans in Great Himalayan National Park and the total population of the State is probably less than a thousand. The status of the Cheer Pheasant may be a little less precarious, as it is widespread throughout the lower hills, albeit in small pockets[9]. As no hunting is allowed in the State at present, the main threat to these birds comes from habitat destruction. The Great Himalayan National Park remains an important sanctuary for these species which are vulnerable to habitat changes going on in other parts of their range.

The Long-billed Thrush occupies heavy forest with dense under storey at about 2,000m. It can usually be found in the Rolla area, as well as elsewhere within the Great Himalayan National Park. This species is likely to have been adversely affected by the extension of agriculture into the temperate deciduous forests of Himachal Pradesh. The White-throated Tit, on the other hand, is common, even abundant, in the subalpine zone, especially among birches: its habitat is unlikely to have been much affected by human activities.



## Conclusions

Ornithological investigations of the Park are by no means complete. In particular, the alpine areas have been little visited in summer, so the list of high altitude breeders is certainly incomplete. In addition, there have been few observations between November and February, when high altitude species may be driven down into the valley bottoms by heavy snow. Observations in winter, even at low altitudes, would also help to clarify the migratory status of many species. Further work in spring and summer is required to establish whether or not most of the species recorded so far actually breed within the Park, and if so, over what sort of altitude range and in which particular forest types. Visits in May, when weather conditions are usually good, would be especially valuable for this purpose.

Anyone wishing to carry out ornithological studies in the Western Himalayas will find the Great Himalayan National Park an excellent area in which to work. A network of trails is maintained. The Park staff and basic mountain huts are available in places for temporary accommodation. Arranging access to facilities, as well as guides and porters, should be done by contacting the Director, Great Himalayan National Park, Himachal Pradesh Forest Department, Shamshi, Kullu District, Himachal Pradesh. The Director would be most interested to receive notes on any bird observations made by visitors in Kullu District and especially within the Park.

# Personal Impressions

## The Loneliest Bird in the World

***Tony Gaston (Ottawa, Canada)***

Most birds are gregarious to some extent. Even if they do not feed in flocks, they may gather in roosts or move in pairs while breeding. The birds of prey tend to be solitary in their habits, but many congregate on migration, or they may soar together when not feeding. Flycatchers and chats, which defend territories throughout the year are solitary in their habits, but they cannot be lonely, because their nearest neighbours are plainly audible, calling frequently to remind everyone of their presence.

To be truly lonely by nature a species must be not only solitary in its habits, but live at low densities where encountering other members of its species is rare. The tiger bitterns of the rainforest seem to qualify, perhaps also the frogmouths. However, the species to which I would award the 'loneliest bird' title is the solitary snipe. Not only is this species rare and as solitary as its name implies, but it is restricted to a very unusual habitat of limited extent.

Solitary snipes occur along marshy streams and in wet meadows in the Himalayas, breeding at altitudes above 3,000m and shifting lower in winter only far enough to find unfrozen ground. My own acquaintance with the species is confined to the Western Himalayas and I can count the times I have seen it on the fingers of one hand. In every case the bird appeared amid desolate wastes where no other living thing was apparent and for that reason each encounter is etched in my memory.

My first solitary snipe was in Solang Nalla, north of Manali, in January, when the ground everywhere was covered in deep snow. With one companion, I had trekked on snow-shoes towards the source of the Beas, following the course of the river. In an open meadow, where the river ran fairly slowly, we flushed a snipe from under the overhanging river bank. It must have been feeding right at the waters edge. As is typical, it gave a single, hoarse call and landed again only 50 m away, across the stream. A few weeks later I encountered another in nearly identical circumstances at around 3,000 m beside the Manalsu Nalla that descends to meet the Beas at Manali.

The solitary snipe is larger and paler than the common snipe and flies rather heavily - somewhat reminiscent of a woodcock. The call is less shrill than the common's, as though the bird is clearing its throat. The fact that it generally ducks back into cover soon after taking off is probably because most patches of habitat where it occurs are very small, so it has little choice.

My third encounter was also near Manali, in Jagatsukh Nalla. It was late October and there was already a good depth of snow above 4,000m. I was walking alone in search of Ibex, which I was hoping might have been brought to lower altitudes by the snow. At Chikka, about 3,500m altitude and above the tree line, there is a small flat meadow with a tiny lake: a popular camp site for graziers in summer, but deserted by then. As I followed the course of a small stream meandering through the meadow, a solitary snipe rose at my feet, flew to the edge of the lake and pitched into some sedges. I trekked the whole day above Chikka and saw only an ibex and a few mouse hares. The snipe must have been the only bird for several kilometres.

My last encounter with this loneliest bird was in the Great Himalayan National Park. Tirth, near the headwaters of the Tirthan river, is a popular trekking destination. We arrived there from Nada one afternoon and after resting and making camp, I accompanied several of the Park staff on a hike further up the valley towards one of the sources of the river. We arrived at a small flat area created by a glacial moraine, where a boggy pool was set among sedges. We scattered across the marsh, taking photographs and examining the vegetation, when one of the guards flushed a snipe. The call alerted me, or I would have missed it, so quick was it to pitch into the sedges. Again, we found no other birds in the vicinity. It was mid-October and as we left camp the next day wet snow

began to fall and there was ice along the borders of the stream.

Other birds may remain at high altitude in winter: snowcocks and snow partridges, perhaps choughs. These birds make use of areas blown clear of snow by the wind. The solitary snipe is unique in making use of these tiny, scattered mountain marshes and streams, long after dippers and white-capped water redstarts have moved to lower altitudes. I never saw more than one solitary snipe in a day, although several have been seen in the same locality in Nepal. Still, its name is well-earned. The solitary snipe vies with the Himalayan hermits in its most lonely and exclusive disposition. A chance to find this elusive bird in its magnificent home is one of the many reasons why birders might want to trek the high altitudes of the Great Himalayan National Park.

## Bird Watching in GHNP

***William Duckworth***

**(Adviser, UNDP in North Korea)**

**March 2002**

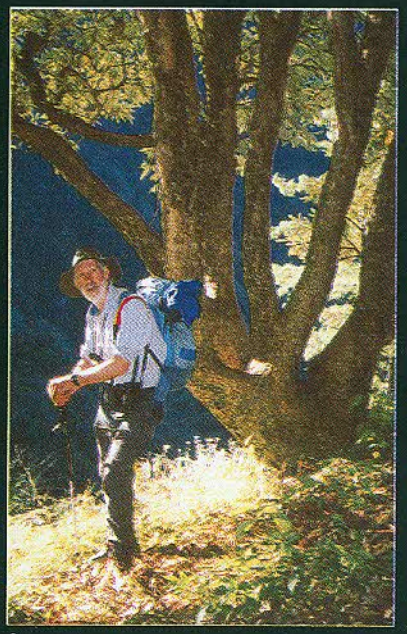
Bird-watching in the Great Himalayan National Park offers unique opportunities for the casual or serious birder. One's first visit to the Park is usually special: there are numerous new birds to be experienced as one walks through new habitats. There is a sense of confusion and excitement that can be especially strong at dawn, when a symphony of unknown and, it may seem, unknowable, sounds, greet the ear. What are all these birds? Will I manage to see them all in the time I have available? Do these sounds include the birds I've dreamt about from poring over the books before coming here? The sense of pleasure and excitement is enhanced when such a first visit to a region takes place in an area of beautiful scenery, and during the optimism of spring, with buds bursting and hazing the winter-brown canopy with fresh green.

Such describes my state as I arrived in Great Himalayan

# Birds of GHNP : A Photo Gallery

Birding in GHNP is a unique and rewarding experience. To a new visitor, the Western Himalaya is a symphony of novel sounds. Birds are everywhere: chats, forktails, laughing thrushes, Chestnut-capped Tesia, Blue Whistling Thrush and, most startlingly, the treepies and magpies.
Among the spectacular pheasants, GHNP is known for the brilliantly coloured and endangered Western Tragopan: symbol of the Park. GHNP offers a never-ending source of challenge, delight, and celebration for the serious or casual bird-lover.

**Come Discover Himachal's Wild Frontier!**



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*1. Dr. A.J. Gaston, Canadian Wild Life Service, an eminent ornithologist visiting the Park since 1980*
*2. White browed Blue Flycatcher*
*3. Hoopoe*

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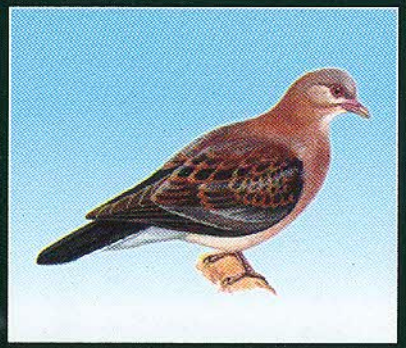

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4. *Black Bulbul*
5. *Wood Cock*
6. *Black Partridge*
7. *Oriental Turtle Dove*

8. *Himalayan Tree Pie*
9. *Koklash pheasant*
10. *A forest habitat in GHNP*

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*Conserving the Western Himalayan Environment*

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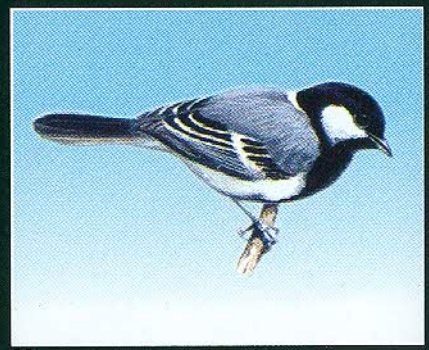

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*10. White-Eye*
*11. Grey Tit*
*12. Blueheaded Rock Thrush*
*13. Himalayan Whistling Thrush*

GREAT HIMALAYAN NATIONAL PARK
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National Park in late March 2002: with the extra factor, that I was visiting the area for work purposes. This meant that after three days of enforced non-action (birding-wise), I was veritably bubbling over with urgency to get in the field. And what an amazing few days I had after the formal meetings were over. The Sairopa Visitor Centre, close to various human-modified habitats, was a backdrop of natural forest set in the clear mountain air with the extra purity of spring. My time there turned my birding dreams into reality, topped by viewing the Golden Bush Robin. Even more satisfying was the general ease of observation of all the birds. I'd spent years in parts of South-East Asia where any birds perching in the vicinity of people was most likely to be greeted by a stone or marble from a small boy's catapult. Sadly in these areas, many species are not present at all, or only in very reduced numbers; and even those that persist are difficult to pin down and observe. But here in the farmland around Sairopa, birds such as chats, forktails, laughing thrushes, Chestnut-capped Tesia, Blue Whistling Thrush and, most startlingly, the treepies and magpies allowed me to absorb their beauty for as long as I wished. And even the bush warblers were so extroverted, that it was impossible not to discipline oneself to study them.

A visit to one of the several innovative features of the protected area, a medicinal plant nursery, produced a single male Himalayan Monal feather. What a galaxy of colour and what a lure to enter the forest and see a bird composed of such plumage. The walk into the protected area itself, leaving behind the lopped trees and the stock grazing of the outside, sets the scene as I entered the natural forest vegetation. On arrival in the Rolla area, as with the passerines, the pheasants were implausibly easy to observe with monals and Koklass Pheasants taking flight at almost zero range as you walk up the steep hills from the stream valley. What a contrast to my birding in Indochina. The yet largely leafless condition of the forest allowed excellent viewing. The ever-present large raptors in the sky—Lammergeiers, Golden Eagles, buzzards and so on—also lent an air of avian opulence.

But probably the most sumptuous

part of my visit was granted courtesy of the *Rhododendron arboreum* trees. They were in full flower (apparently this lasts only a few weeks, so this was a fortuitous chance of timing!) and the flowers oozed nectar. The birds were feeding in droves. The array of species was stupendous—Variegated Laughing Thrush, Rufous Sibia, White-collared Blackbird, Mrs Gould's Sunbird, Great Barbet, Whiskered Yuhina, Chestnut-tailed Minla, Green-backed Tit, and Himalayan Woodpecker. Amazingly, the show went on right through the middle of the day. Even the ubiquitous Blue Whistling Thrushes joined in. Lying under the canopy for a couple of hours and gazing at the flowers in the crisp spring sun, enabled me to see fine birds at point-blank range. The rhododendrons produced copious nectar—so much that when a bird landed on a spray, the motion dislodged a few viscous drops from each flower. And the flowers were also swollen with pollen. Some birds (especially the laughing thrushes) gathered so much pollen on their forehead and crown that they seems to be hitherto undescribed forms with pale yellow heads! The interdependence of the birds and rhododendrons, each performing a service of vital value for the other, couldn't help seeming like a symbol of the park itself. Whether it was me gathering vitality from watching the birds, the local communities collecting necessary resources from the ecozone's forests, or the moderating effects of the forest-clad hills on resources (such as water) over a much wider area, people need the protected area's forests. But even a short while observing the surrounding area shows that now the forest needs people to survive—at least, some people, those that manage the activities of the rest of the people. There is ever-present the risk of human use of the protected area eroding the very features we value of it, and leading to its eventual ecological destruction. It was encouraging to see the diversity of tactics that park management is using to ensure the long term future of the area's natural habitats and wildlife. I was informed that my visit was too early for the majority of the forest birds. Looking at the park list in *Forktail*, it's certainly true that I didn't see most of the birds of the area. But I left feeling satiated with avian novelty, and I probably couldn't have absorbed anything more in terms of new birds. So now is before me the vista of another pulse of novelty—not that the excitement and beauty of the birds, set against the grandeur of the Himalayas, need an excuse for a second visit.

# Useful Information for Bird Watching in GHNP

All trekkers/bird watchers to the GHNP should be in good physical condition. The selection of the trekking route should match the level of fitness. A trekker in good health can easily go up to 4,000m. Some trekking routes are strenuous to very strenuous. It is essential to find the next overnight camping site well before sunset. Your local guide will help you to select a place to camp which is safe and close to water . A Park Ranger must accompany multi-day trekkers. A wireless communication system covering most of the Park is usually available to multi-day trekkers.

For bird watching in the Park, the visitor is advised to use bird books such as *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent* by Richard Grimmett, Carol Inskipp and Tim Inskipp; *Hill Birds* by Salim Ali. A Spotting scope or a high power telescope with stand, or a binocular of 7 to 8 X 35 measurement is a good for viewing the birds. The Park Management can be approached for a CD on the Birdcalls of the Great Himalayan National Park. Consult the Table at the end of this brochure for List of Birds of GHNP.

## Bird Watching Options

There are two main options for bird watching in GHNP: the Ecozone and the Park itself.

## Ecozone

The Ecozone areas are adjacent to the Park and provide a combination of natural and man made forests. The trails go through villages and are generally easy to moderate. The best time to watch birds is during the Spring and the Fall. Some tour examples: **Neuli-Shangarh Loop,** 24 km; **Neuli-Manu Temple,** 12 km. (round trip); **Gushaini-Tinder village,** 12 km; **Siund-Saran-Ghat Seri-Pashi villages,** 10 km.

### Treks within the Park

**Sainj Valley:** A five day trek through the Sainj valley. Total Distance: 56 km (round trip).
**Sainj-Tirthan Valleys:** An 8 day trek crossing two valleys. Moderate to strenuous. Experience the transitions between two magnificent valleys; about 85 km.



**Gushaini to Shilt hut:** Easy to moderate three day hike from Ecozone into Park; round trip 30 km.

**Jiwa Nala to Parvati River Valley:** A very strenuous, dramatic 7 day hike, crossing the mountain passes at Kandi Galu (3,627m), and Phangchi Galu (4,636m). Incredible vistas. Must be in excellent physical condition; 110 km.

**Up to Tirath in Tirthan Valley:** Experience the origin of a river; 6-7 days; round trip 76 km.

**Up to Raktisar in Sainj Valley:** Trek within the Sainj Wildlife Sanctuary/GHNP; 6-7 days, round trip 92 km.

## Accommodation:

Over-night stays in the Ecozone or Park have additional requirements, including, tents, sleeping bags, insulated mats, cooking utensils, food, etc. Entry permits are required for treks in GHNP. Society for Scientific Advancement of Hill and Rural Areas (SAHARA) is a non-governmental group organized by local village people and provides full logistic for treks support. SAHARA offers guides, porters, tents, cooks, and also coordinates different trek tours with GHNP staff.

## The Sai Ropa Tourist Center

The centre is located five kms. from Banjar and 5 kms before the Gushaini entrance to the Park. Nestled in the pine forest, the Tourist Center spreads over three ha. (six acres) area. It is also the headquarters of the Tirthan Wildlife Range Office from where entrance ticket to the Park can be obtained. The Center has a Forest Rest House, two dormitories (20 beds in all), and a hall with a photo exhibition about the park. Outside, there is a 520m long "Biodiversity Trail" which has trees and medicinal plant species transplanted from the Park.

# Bird List of the Great Himalayan National Park

*As compiled by*

K. Ramesh, **Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun**

| | COMMON NAME | ZOOLOGICAL NAME |
|---|---|---|
| **PHASIANIDAE** | | |
| 1 | Snow partridge | *Lerwa lerwa* |
| 2 | Himalayan snowcock | *Tetraogallus himalayensis* |
| 3 | Chukar | *Alectoris chukar* |
| 4 | Black francolin | *Francolinus francolinus* |
| 5 | Hill partridge | *Arborophila torqueola* |
| 6 | Western tragopan | *Tragopan melanocephalus* |
| 7 | Koklass pheasant | *Pucrasia macrolopha* |
| 8 | Himalayan monal | *Lophophorus impejanus* |
| 9 | Kalij pheasant | *Lophura leucomelanos* |
| 10 | Cheer pheasant | *Catreus wallichii* |
| 11 | Common peafowl | *Pavo cristatus* |
| **PICIDAE** | | |
| 12 | Speckled piculet | *Picumnus innominatus* |
| 13 | Brown-fronted woodpecker | *Dendrocopos auriceps* |
| 14 | Himalayan woodpecker | *Dendrocopos himalayensis* |
| 15 | Scaly-bellied woodpecker | *Picus squamatus* |
| 16 | Grey-headed woodpecker | *Picus canus* |
| 17 | Great Barbet | *Megalaima virens* |
| **UPUPIDAE** | | |
| 18 | Eurasian hoopoe | *Upupa epops* |
| **ALCYONIDAE** | | |
| 19 | White-throated kingfisher | *Halcyon smyrnensis* |
| **CERYLIDAE** | | |
| 20 | Crested kingfisher | *Megaceryle lugubris* |
| **CUCULIDAE** | | |
| 21 | Pied cuckoo | *Oxylophus jacobinus* |
| 22 | Large hawk-cuckoo | *Cuculus sparverioides* |
| 23 | Indian cuckoo | *Cuculus micropterus* |
| 24 | Common cuckoo | *Cuculus canorus* |
| 25 | Oriental cuckoo | *Cuculus saturatus* |



| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **PSITTACULIDAE** | | |
| 26 | Rose-ringed parakeet | *Psittacula krameri* |
| 27 | Slaty-headed parakeet | *Psittacula himalayana* |
| 28 | Plum-headed parakeet | *Psittacula cyanocephala* |
| **APODIDAE** | | |
| 29 | Himalayan swiftlet | *Collocalia brevirostris* |
| 30 | White-throated needletail | *Hirundapus caudacutus* |
| 31 | Fork-tailed swift | *Apus pacificus* |
| **STRIGIDAE** | | |
| 32 | Mountain scops-owl | *Otus spilocephalus* |
| 33 | Rock eagle-owl | *Bubo bengalensis* |
| 34 | Tawny owl | *Strix aluco* |
| 35 | Collared owlet | *Glaucidium brodiei* |
| 36 | Brown wood owl | *Strix leptogrammica* |
| 37 | Short-eared owl | *Asio flammeus* |
| **CAPRIMULGIDAE** | | |
| 38 | Grey nightjar | *Caprimulgus indicus* |
| **COLUMBIDAE** | | |
| 39 | Rock pigeon | *Columba livia* |
| 40 | Snow pigeon | *Columba leuconota* |
| 41 | Speckeld wood-pigeon | *Columba hodgsonii* |
| 42 | Wedge-tailed green-pigeon | *Treron sphenura* |
| 43 | Oriental turtle-dove | *Streptopelia orientalis* |
| 44 | Eurasian collared-dove | *Streptopelia decaocto* |
| **SCOLOPACIDAE** | | |
| 45 | Eurasian woodcock | *Scolopax rusticola* |
| 46 | Solitary snipe | *Gallinago solitaria* |
| **ACCIPITRIDAE** | | |
| 47 | Lammergeier | *Gypaetus barabtus* |
| 48 | Himalayan griffon | *Gyps himalayensis* |
| 49 | Griffon vulture | *Gyps fulvus* |
| 50 | Northern harrier | *Circus cyaneus* |
| 51 | Eurasian sparrowhawk | *Accipiter nisus* |
| 52 | Northern goshawk | *Accipiter gentilis* |
| 53 | Common Buzzard | *Buteo buteo* |
| 54 | Black eagle | *Ictinaetus malayensis* |
| 55 | Golden eagle | *Aquila chrysaetos* |
| 56 | Booted eagle | *Hieraaetus pennatus* |

## FALCONIDAE

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 57 | Eurasian hobby | *Falco subbuteo* |
| 58 | Common kestrel | *Falco tinnunculus* |

## CORVIDAE

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 59 | Eurasian jay | *Garrulus glandarius* |
| 60 | Black-throated jay | *Garrulus lanceolatus* |
| 61 | Yellow-billed blue-magpie | *Urocissa flavirostris* |
| 62 | Red-billed blue-magpie | *Urocissa erythrorhyncha* |
| 63 | Grey treepie | *Dendrocitta formosae* |
| 64 | Spotted nutcracker | *Nucifraga caryocatactes* |
| 65 | Red-billed chough | *Pyrrhocorax pyrrhocorax* |
| 66 | Yellow-billed chough | *Pyrrhocorax graculus* |
| 67 | Large-billed crow | *Corvus macrorhynchos* |
| 68 | Common raven | *Corvus corax* |
| 69 | Eurasian golden-oriole | *Oriolus oriolus* |
| 70 | Black-hooded oriole | *Oriolus xanthornus* |
| 71 | Long-tailed minivet | *Pericrocotus ethologus* |
| 72 | Yellow-bellied fantail | *Rhipidura hypoxantha* |
| 73 | White-throated fantail | *Rhipidura albicollis* |
| 74 | Black drongo | *Dicrurus macrocercus* |
| 75 | Ashy drongo | *Dicrurus leucophaeus* |
| 76 | Asian paradise-flycatcher | *Terpsiphone paradisi* |

## CINCLIDAE

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 77 | Brown dipper | *Cinclus pallasii* |

## MUSCICAPIDAE

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 78 | Chestnut-bellied rock-thrush | *Monticola rufiventris* |
| 79 | Blue rock-thrush | *Monticola solitarius* |
| 80 | Blue-whistling thrush | *Myiophonus caeruleus* |
| 81 | Plain-backed thrush | *Zoothera mollissima* |
| 82 | Scaly thrush | *Zoothera dauma* |
| 83 | Long-billed thrush | *Zoothera monticola* |
| 84 | White-collared blackbird | *Turdus albocinctus* |
| 85 | Grey-winged blackbird | *Turdus boulboul* |
| 86 | Eurasian blackbird | *Turdus merula* |
| 87 | Chestnut thrush | *Turdus rubrocanus* |
| 88 | Mistle thrush | *Turdus viscivorus* |
| 89 | White-browed shortwing | *Brachypteryx montana* |
| 90 | Dark-sided flycatcher | *Muscicapa sibirica* |
| 91 | Asian brown flycatcher | *Muscicapa dauurica* |
| 92 | Rusty-tailed flycatcher | *Muscicapa ruficauda* |
| 93 | Rufous-gorgeted flycatcher | *Ficedula strophiata* |
| 94 | Little-pied flycatcher | *Ficedula westermanni* |
| 95 | Ultramarine flycatcher | *Ficedula superciliaris* |
| 96 | Slaty-blue flycatcher | *Ficedula tricolor* |
| 97 | Verditer flycatcher | *Eumyias thalassina* |



| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 98 | Rufous-bellied niltava | *Niltava sundara* |
| 99 | Small niltava | *Niltava macgrigoriae* |
| 100 | Blue-throated flycatcher | *Cyornis rubeculoides* |
| 101 | Grey-headed canary-flycatcher | *Culicicapa ceylonensis* |
| 102 | White-tailed rubythroat | *Luscinia pectoralis* |
| 103 | Orange-flanked bush-robin | *Tarsiger cyanurus* |
| 104 | Golden bush-robin | *Tarsiger chrysaeus* |
| 105 | Blue-capped redstart | *Phoenicurus caeruleocephalus* |
| 106 | Black redstart | *Phoenicurus ochruros* |
| 107 | Blue-fronted redstart | *Phoenicurus frontalis* |
| 108 | White-capped water-redstart | *Chaimarrornis leucocephalus* |
| 109 | Plumbeous water-redstart | *Rhyacornis fulginosus* |
| 110 | Grandala | *Grandala coelicolor* |
| 111 | Little forktail | *Enicurus scouleri* |
| 112 | Spotted forktail | *Enicurus maculatus* |
| 113 | Common stonechat | *Saxicola torquata* |
| 114 | Grey bushchat | *Saxicola ferrea* |

## STURNIDAE

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 115 | Common myna | *Acridotheres tristis* |
| 116 | Jungle myna | *Acridotheres fuscus* |

## SITTIDAE

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 117 | White-tailed nuthatch | *Sitta himalayensis* |
| 118 | White-cheeked nuthatch | *Sitta leucopsis* |
| 119 | Wallcreeper | *Tichodroma muraria* |

## CERTHIIDAE

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 120 | Eurasian treecreeper | *Certhia familiaris* |
| 121 | Bar-tailed treecreeper | *Certhia himalayana* |
| 122 | Winter wren | *Troglodytes troglodytes* |

## PARIDAE

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 123 | Fire-capped tit | *Cephalopyrus flammiceps* |
| 124 | Rufous-naped tit | *Parus rufonuchalis* |
| 125 | Rufous-vented tit | *Parus rubidiventris* |
| 126 | Spot-winged tit | *Parus melanolophus* |
| 127 | Grey-crested tit | *Parus dichrous* |
| 128 | Great tit | *Parus major* |
| 129 | Green-backed tit | *Parus monticolus* |
| 130 | Black-lored tit | *Parus xanthogenys* |
| 131 | Yellow-browed tit | *Sylviparus modestus* |

## AEGITHALIDAE

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 132 | Black-throated tit | *Aegithalos concinnus* |
| 133 | White-throated tit | *Aegithalos niveogularis* |
| 134 | White-cheeked tit | *Aegithalos leucogenys* |

## HIRUNDINIDAE

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 135 | Red-rumped swallow | *Hirundo daurica* |
| 136 | Barn swallow | *Hirundo rustica* |
| 137 | House martin | *Delichon sp.* |

## REGULIDAE

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 138 | Goldcrest | *Regulus regulus* |

## PYCNONOTIDAE

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 139 | Himalayan bulbul | *Pycnonotus leucogenys* |
| 140 | Black bulbul | *Hypsipetes leucocephalus* |

## CISTICOLIDAE

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 141 | Striated prinia | *Prinia criniger* |

## ZOSTEROPIDAE

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 142 | Oriental white-eye | *Zosterops palpebrosus* |

## SYLVIIDAE

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 143 | Chestnut-headed tesia | *Tesia castaneocoronata* |
| 144 | Brownish-flanked bush-warbler | *Cettia fortipes* |
| 145 | Grey-sided bush-warbler | *Cettia brunnifrons* |
| 146 | Eurasian chiffchaff | *Phylloscopus collybita* |
| 147 | Tickell's leaf warbler | *Phylloscopus affinis* |
| 148 | Buff-barred warbler | *Phylloscopus pulcher* |
| 149 | Ashy-throated warbler | *Phylloscopus maculipennis* |
| 150 | Lemon-rumped warbler | *Phylloscopus chloronotus* |
| 151 | Hume's warbler | *Phylloscopus humei* |
| 152 | Greenish warbler | *Phylloscopus trochiloides* |
| 153 | Western crowned-warbler | *Phylloscopus occipitalis* |
| 154 | Blyth's leaf-warbler | *Phylloscopus reguloides* |
| 155 | Golden-spectacled warbler | *Seicercus burkii* |
| 156 | Grey-hooded warbler | *Seicercus xanthoschistos* |
| 157 | White-throated laughingthrush | *Garrulax albogularis* |
| 158 | Striated laughingthrush | *Garrulax striatus* |
| 159 | Streaked laughingthrush | *Garrulax lineatus* |
| 160 | Variegated laughingthrush | *Garrulax variegatus* |
| 161 | Chestnut-crowned laughingthrush | *Garrulax erythrocephalus* |
| 162 | Rusty-cheeked scimitar-babbler | *Pomatorhinus erythrogenys* |



| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 163 | Scaly-breasted wren-babbler | *Pnoepyga albiventer* |
| 164 | Black-chinned babbler | *Stachyris pyrrhops* |
| 165 | White-browed shrike-babbler | *Pteruthius flaviscapis* |
| 166 | Green shrike-babbler | *Pteruthius xanthochlorus* |
| 167 | Chestnut-tailed minla | *Minla strigula* |
| 168 | White-browed fulvetta | *Alcippe vinipectus* |
| 169 | Rufous sibia | *Heterophasia capistrata* |
| 170 | Whiskered yuhina | *Yuhina flavicollis* |

## NECTARINIIDAE

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 171 | Fire-breasted flowerpecker | *Dicaeum ignipectus* |
| 172 | Purple sunbird | *Nectarinia asiatica* |
| 173 | Crimson sunbird | *Aethopyga siparaja* |
| 174 | Mrs Gould's sunbird | *Aethopyga gouldiae* |

## PASSERIDAE

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 175 | House sparrow | *Passer domesticus* |
| 176 | Eurasian tree sparrow | *Passer montanus* |
| 177 | Russet sparrow | *Passer rutilans* |
| 178 | White wagtail | *Motacilla alba* |
| 179 | Grey wagtail | *Motacilla cinerea* |
| 180 | Tree pipit | *Anthus trivialis* |
| 181 | Olive-backed pipit | *Anthus hodgsoni* |
| 182 | Rosy pipit | *Anthus roseatus* |
| 183 | Upland pipit | *Anthus sylvanus* |
| 184 | Rufous-streaked accentor | *Prunella himalayana* |
| 185 | Rufous-breasted accentor | *Prunella strophiata* |
| 186 | Scaly-breasted munia | *Lonchura punctulata* |

## FRINGILLIDAE

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| 187 | Fire-fronted serin | *Serinus pusillus* |
| 188 | Yellow-breasted greenfinch | *Carduelis spinoides* |
| 189 | European goldfinch | *Carduelis carduelis* |
| 190 | Plain mountain-finch | *Leucosticte nemoricola* |
| 191 | Spectacled finch | *Callacanthis burtoni* |
| 192 | Dark-breasted rosefinch | *Carpodacus nipalensis* |
| 193 | Common rosefinch | *Carpodacus erythrinus* |
| 194 | Pink-browed rosefinch | *Carpodacus rodochrous* |
| 195 | Red crossbill | *Loxia curvirostra* |
| 196 | Brown bullfinch | *Pyrrhula nipalensis* |
| 197 | Orange bullfinch | *Pyrrhula aurantiaca* |
| 198 | Red-headed bullfinch | *Pyrrhula erythrocephala* |
| 199 | Black-and-yellow grosbeak | *Mycerobas icterioides* |
| 200 | Collared grosbeak | *Mycerobas affinis* |
| 201 | Spot-winged grosbeak | *Mycerobas melanozanthos* |
| 202 | White-winged grosbeak | *Mycerobas carnipes* |
| 203 | Rock bunting | *Emberiza cia* |

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Coming soon a GHNP Web site developed by Friends of GHNP :
www. greathimalayannationalpark.com

*Note : Please refer to the GHNP Booklets **Wildlife** and **EcoTourism** for more detailed information and/or contact Park officials for specific trek information.*

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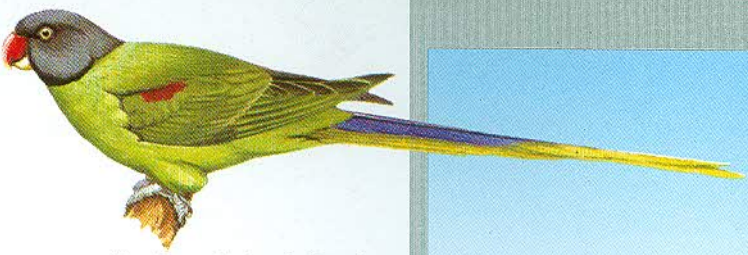
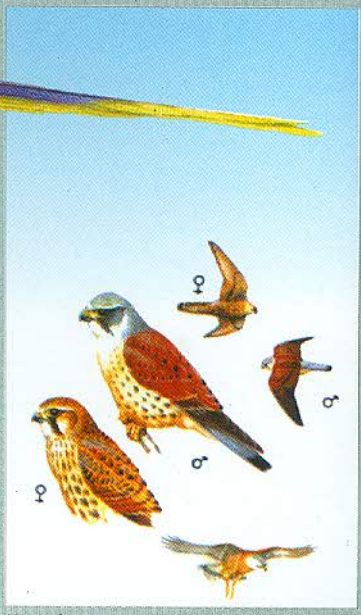


Himalayan Slatyheaded Parakeet

Shikra




Kestrel

Yellowbilled Blue Magpie

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