

## Rescue/Release of Blue-capped Rock Thrush *Monticola cinclorhynchus*

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Road kills can have a significant impact on wildlife populations. Also, road kill statistics are invariably biased toward mammals, reptiles and amphibians and against birds (Noss 2000). In India also, most of the studies focused on the roadside kill are on mammals, reptiles and amphibians, but less focused on birds, except a few. Accidents with vehicles on road may affect population of common and threatened species (Dhindsa et al. 1988; Parasharya & Tere 2007). Vehicles and trains often kill wild animals, even in protected areas, wildlife sanctuaries and national parks. Rajaji National Park, Gir National Park, Dudhwa National Park, Borivalli National Park, Sariska National Park, Mount Abu Wildlife Sanctuary, Sitamata Sanctuary, Kumbhalgarh Wildlife Sanctuary are some such protected areas where accidental deaths of wild animals are common (Chhangani 2004).

The state of Arunachal Pradesh (26°30'N- 29°30'N & 91°30'E- 97°30'E) with a total geographical area of 83,743km<sup>2</sup> constitutes a substantial portion of the Eastern Himalayan mega-biodiversity 'hotspot' region. It is known for its topographic and altitudinal diversity, its rich forest and numerous riverine bodies which provide an excellent habitat to the avifauna in the state. The state of Arunachal Pradesh is one of the highly differing habitats which more than 550 species of birds have been identified (Islam & Rahmani 2004), while Choudhury (2006) has recorded a total of 738 species. The western part of Arunachal Pradesh (both Tawang and West Kameng districts) came into limelight with the proposal of the new biosphere reserve. The newly proposed Tsangyang Gyatso Biosphere Reserve covers total area of 5848km<sup>2</sup> of which 1190km<sup>2</sup> is core zone, 2192km<sup>2</sup> is buffer zone and 2465km<sup>2</sup> is transitional zone. The avifaunal diversity of this area always attracts many avifaunal watcher and researcher. Though the road network in Arunachal Pradesh is comparably less and vehicular movement is also fewer, this state with its huge diversity in terms of avifauna, such cases of road kills of mammals and avifauna seems to increase in areas like Tawang and West Kameng district of Arunachal Pradesh. This may be due to the increase in vehicular movement, specially of the armed forces, as the area has been one of the important strategic points bordering with China.

The Mandla-Phudung area is a part of the 'Shergaon, Mandla-phudung and Kalaktang' important bird area (IBA) site identified by Birdlife International in the western Arunachal Pradesh (Islam & Rahmani 2004). The vegetation of this IBA site is of tropical wet evergreen in the lower areas near Kalaktang (about 1,000m elevation), subtropical and temperate (with both broadleaf and coniferous) occurs above an altitude of 1,800m. Various species like Oak *Quercus* sp., *Magnolia* sp.,

*Rhododendron* sp. and pine (*Pinus roxburghii*, *Pinus wallichiana* and *Pinus kesiya*) dominate the vegetation of the area. The Mandal-Phudung area has a varied altitudinal range of 2500-4000 m and the high altitude lakes located at elevations above 3000m have been known as the potential site for the breeding of Ruddy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea* in summer (Islam & Rahmani 2004; Choudhury 2006). The area is also known for various vulnerable avifaunal species like Blyth's Tragopan *Tragopan blythii*, Rufous-necked Hornbill *Aceros nipalensis* and endemic species (eastern Himalaya) like Ward's Trogon *Harpactes wardi*, Rusty-bellied Shortwing *Brachypteryx hyperythra*, Beautiful Sibia *Heterophasia pulchella*, White-naped Yuhina *Yuhina bakeri*, Austen's Barwing *Actinodura Waldeni*, Hoary-throated Barwing *Actinodura nepalensis* Broad-billed Warbler *Tickellia hodgsoni* and Yellow-vented Warbler *Phylloscopus cantator* (Islam & Rahmani 2004; Mazumdar et al. 2009).

During our regular field visit and birding to the area on 28 August 2009, we found an injured Blue-capped Rock Thrush *Monticola cinclorhynchus* on Dirang-Mandla road (27°20'05"N 92°15'46"E) at an altitude of 1659m. The bird was hit by the road vehicle and was lying on the road and was badly wounded on the left wing. We gave the primary treatment to the bird and kept it under observation for a day. The bird seemed to be the first winter male of the species. The population trend of this species appears to be stable, and hence the species does not approach the thresholds for Vulnerable under the population trend criterion (>30% decline over ten years or three generations) hence it has been cited under the Least Concern category according to the IUCN 2009 status (Birdlife International 2009). After the primary treatment, we release the bird the next day at the forested area nearby the road where we rescued the bird.

The local *Sherdukpen* and *Monpa* people follow Buddhism and hence generally do not kill birds for meat, but with the expansion and construction of new roads, labourers from outside generally kill birds and mammals near the road for consumption of meat. As there are no conservation proprieties and the forest in the Mandla-Phudung area are unclassified, there has been a constant demand for the declaration of this IBA site as Community Conserved Area (CCA) under Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972.

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## A case of ants using bird feathers guarding the opening of their nest

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In the month of August 2009 (part of the monsoon season) in the campus of Maitri Baag in Bhilai (Chhattisgarh, India), it was observed that ants (*Oecophyla* sp.) were using crows' black feathers with their quill inserted into the mouth of the leafy bag like nest, while vanes of the feathers were projecting out of the nest. This observation was made on a small grown Peepal plant (*Ficus religiosa*). 10-15 ants were seen carrying a feather towards their nest, holding it by margins of its vane. When the feathers were removed from a nest, the surface layer of the quill part of the feather was seen eaten away. This association of ants with ants nest was not seen when the monsoon was over, and rains had stopped.

No parallel observation in record could be found by the author, though he has tried to contact some eminent Myrmecologists. It is guessed that the association of the ants with feathers was primarily

for nourishment, and dragging of feather into their nest had provided a shelter for the nest from rain drops; hence this association. The author would be obliged to learn about views of the readers. If my presumptions are correct, it is a rare instance of an insect using a tool.

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## An unusual intersex in Sambar *Rusa unicolor*

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In Maitri Baag Zoo (Bhilai, India) a female Sambar (*Rusa unicolor*), its sex as indicated by its external genitalia, has developed an antler-like structure on the right side of its head, with no such outgrowth on the other side. In Sambar, antlers are a secondary sexual feature, characteristic of the male sex. In the unusual female Sambar the asymmetrically developed antler-like growth has been continuously observed for three years, without its yearly dropping, which normally occurs in a male. In mammals secondary sexual features develop under influence of gonadal hormones circulating with blood. Hence gynandromorphs, known among insects, are not known among mammals. In insects, in absence of gonadal hormones, it is the genome of every body part, which directly influences development of secondary sexual molting of that part. Accidents in mitoses may result in a developing insect in some parts developing male-like features, while other parts have female characteristics, and thus a gynandromorphy may result.

In the Sambar, under study, it seems that a late somatic mutation, during development, has led to cells in a certain body part respond differently to the circulating gonadal hormones.

The only similar teratological development, known to the author of these lines, is that of a Roe Deer in Italy with a median unicorn-like horn, reported by Gilberto Tozzi, who has regarded it as due to a "genetic flaw" (AP News, June 12, 2009). The author invites comments of readers on this note and his presumption.

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AP News, June 12, 2009- as reported in the daily Hitavada (Raipur Edition) 13th June 2009.

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