

First report of four bird species from Nepal's Shuklaphanta National Park

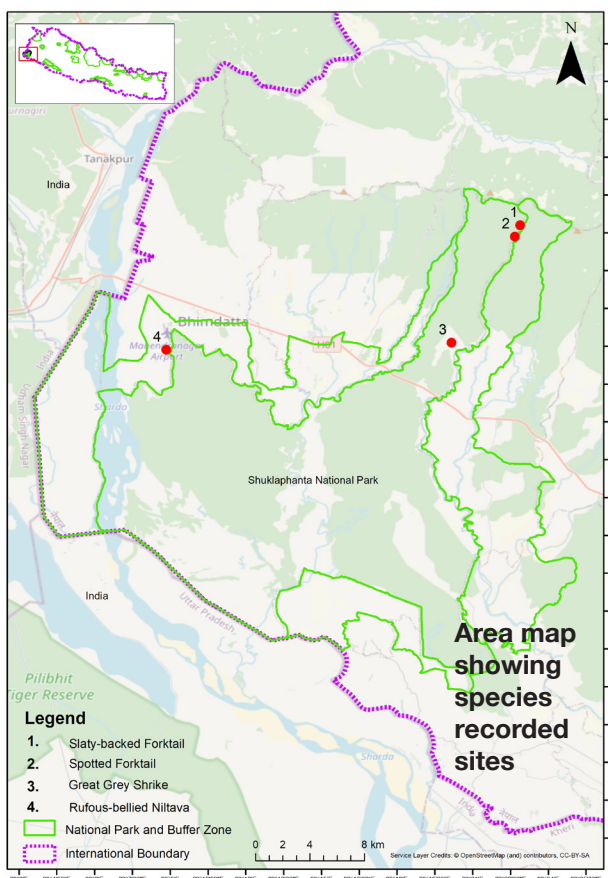
Shuklaphanta National Park was a renowned hunting area for royals and their guests managed since 1969 as a Royal Hunting Reserve within an area of 131 km² (Yadav et al. 2000). It was promulgated as Royal Shuklaphanta Wildlife Reserve in 1976 with a 155 km², which was then expanded to 305 km² in 1994 with the goal of increasing habitats for its species and their seasonal migration from the Terai to the Hills of Churia. The Shuklaphanta National Park (ShNP) is located in Kanchanpur District, in the southwest of the country, between 28.750N & 29.050N latitudes and 80.050E & 80.350E

longitudes, with river beds, open grasslands, and mixed forests covering the park at elevations ranging 175–1,300 m (Poudyal et al. 2020).

The Syali River in the east, Mahakali River in the west, Churia Hills in the north, and the India-Nepal international border in the south define the park's boundaries. It is an important transboundary protected area due to its linkages to India's Dudhwa National Park in the east via the Laljhadi Forest corridor and the Nandhaur Wildlife Sanctuary in the northwest via the Boom-Brahmadev Forest corridor and the Mahakali River. The park lies within the Terai Arc Landscape, a highly biodiverse region and priority conservation area, that covers 14 protected areas of Nepal and India (Chanchani et al. 2014).

The park is known for its 14 different designated grassland habitats, the largest of which is the Shuklaphanta Grassland (approximately 34 km²) in Nepal's lowland terai (ShNP 2017), as well as the world's largest herd of Swamp Deer *Rucervus duvaucelii* (Poudyal et al. 2020). So far, the park has been home to 57 mammals, 56 reptiles, and 15 amphibians (Poudyal et al. 2020; Rawat et al. 2020; Poudyal et al. 2021).

The avian checklist history of the park leads back to 2008 when the count was 423 recognized by Baral & Inskipp (2009). Since



then, Regmi & Acharya (2012) upgraded it with 424 species and till 2018, 17 species have been added to the list making it a total of 441. Poudyal & Chaudhary (2019) added 9 birds and listed a total of 450 birds among which 23 were globally threatened and 74 nationally threatened (Poudyal & Chaudhary 2019). Another paper documented five more species as occurring in Shuklaphanta, summing the total to 455 species (Giri et al. 2020). We have chosen five of the six species reported by Giri et al. (2020) since the Black-breasted Thrush *Turdus dissimilis* in their study was a conditional statement.

This paper aims to document additional four more avian species reliably recorded in Shuklaphanta: Slaty-backed Forktail *Enicurus schistaceus*, Spotted Forktail *Enicurus maculatus*, Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor* and Rufous-bellied Niltava *Niltava sundara*.

Species were opportunistically observed and photographed in the park, and records were confirmed using the Cornell Lab's Merlin Bird ID app by Cornell University (2022) on a mobile device, as well as the field guide Birds of Nepal Revised Edition by Grimmett et al. (2016).

Slaty-backed Forktail *Enicurus schistaceus* (Hodgson, 1836)

Two individuals were seen and photographed on 1 January 2021 at 1051 h perching on rocks of upper Kharghat Khola at Siwalik, the northern part of the park (29.030N, 80.381E; 686 m). The surrounding habitat type was *Terminalia* dominated mixed forest. Species may be confused with Black-backed Forktail



Slaty-backed Forktail © Dharmajit Saud

Enicurus immaculatus but *E. schistaceus* has slate-grey crown and mantle, dark black throat covert wings (Grimmett et al. 2016). Slaty-backed Forktail is a resident, generally uncommon, but fairly common locally in Nepal; and elevation range is 900–1600 m, however it was occasionally recorded down to 450 m in Terai (Inskipp et al 2016). The species is possibly a rare winter visitor to the park.

Spotted Forktail *Enicurus maculatus* Vigors, 1831

An individual was sighted and photographed on 1 January 2021 at 1102 h in same habitat where the Slaty-backed Forktail was recorded. This species was found perched on rocks near *Terminalia* dominating forest of upper Kharghat khola (29.023N, 80.378E; 555 m). Spotted Forktail is a widespread resident and frequent in west and central Nepal, and very uncommon in the east; recorded in the elevation range of 290–3100 m (Inskipp et al. 2016). The species is possibly a rare winter visitor to the park.



Spotted Forktail © Dharmajit Saud

Great Grey Shrike *Lanius excubitor*

Linnaeus, 1758

An individual was observed and photographed on 6 January 2021 at 1554 h on an old stump of a tree at Hirapur (28.952N, 80.336E; 225 m). The habitat of recorded area is open grassland surrounded by mixed forest. Great Grey Shrike is a rare and local resident in the terai of Nepal (Inskipp et al. 2016). The species' status in the park is uncertain, possibly a rare winter visitor.



Great Grey Shrike © Dharmajit Saud

Rufous-bellied Niltava *Niltava sundara*

Hodgson, 1837

An individual was photographed on 2 March 2021 at 1144 h, perched on a *Mallotus philippensis* branch near the park headquarters at Majhgaon (28.948N & 80.147E; 192 m). *Dalbergia sissoo*, *Saraca indica*, and *Shorea robusta* were among the nearby tree species. Rufous-bellied Niltava is a widespread resident of Nepal, ranging from the far west to the far east, and is a seasonal altitudinal migratory bird that winters between 275 and 1,830 m and breeds at higher



Rufous-bellied Niltava © Kum Thakur

elevations ranging 2135–3200 m (Inskipp et al. 2016). The species is possibly a rare winter visitor to the park.

Three of these four additional species were detected in the park's northern section in the Churia Hills. These hills have received less attention in terms of scientific exploration and overall conservation. We strongly recommend conducting periodic bird surveys in the national park including Churia Hills. With the addition of these four species, the checklist on the Birds of ShNP now stands at 459 species.

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