

Breeding of Indian Spotted Eagle and some new bird records for Shuklaphanta National Park, Nepal

Shuklaphanta National Park (ShNP) 28.7965 to 29.0471 N & 80.1565 to 80.3653 E; 175–1,300 m) is located in the lowlands of far-western Nepal. The park has a total area of 305 km² and an additional buffer zone of 243.5 km². There are records of 459 avian species in the park (Poudyal & Chaudhary 2019; Poudyal et al. 2022). The objective of this paper is to record and provide information about five new avian species, and document the first confirmed breeding record of Indian Spotted Eagle *Clanga hastata* in ShNP.



Desert Wheatear. © Dev Raj Joshi.

Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti* (Temminck, 1825)

On 4 April 2023, at around 1230 h, a single Desert Wheatear was sighted and photographed in the southern part of the park (28.8134 N; 80.1632 E; 178

m) while perched on a branch of *Tripidium bengalense* in Shuklaphanta grassland. The Desert Wheatear is a scarce summer visitor to Nepal's Trans-Himalayan region, and it is also an infrequent passage migrant (Inskipp et al. 2016).



Grey-bellied Cuckoo. © Dev Raj Joshi.

Grey-bellied Cuckoo *Cacomantis passerinus* (Vahl, 1797)

On 12 December 2022, a Grey-bellied Cuckoo was observed and photographed in the north-eastern part of the park in Hirapur (28.9568 N; 80.3387 E; 217 m), perched on the *S. robusta* branch.

The surrounding habitat is a mixture of grassland and



Common Woodpigeon. © Dev Raj Joshi.

forest, primarily consisting of *Shorea robusta*, *Mallotus nudiflorus*, *Imperata cylindrica*, and Sano Tapre *Senna tora*, an invasive plant species. The species is commonly observed in certain protected areas, but it is scarce in other locations (Inskipp et al. 2016), mainly reported between late April and August from the Terai up to 1,400 m and rare up to 2,135 m (Inskipp & Inskipp 1991).

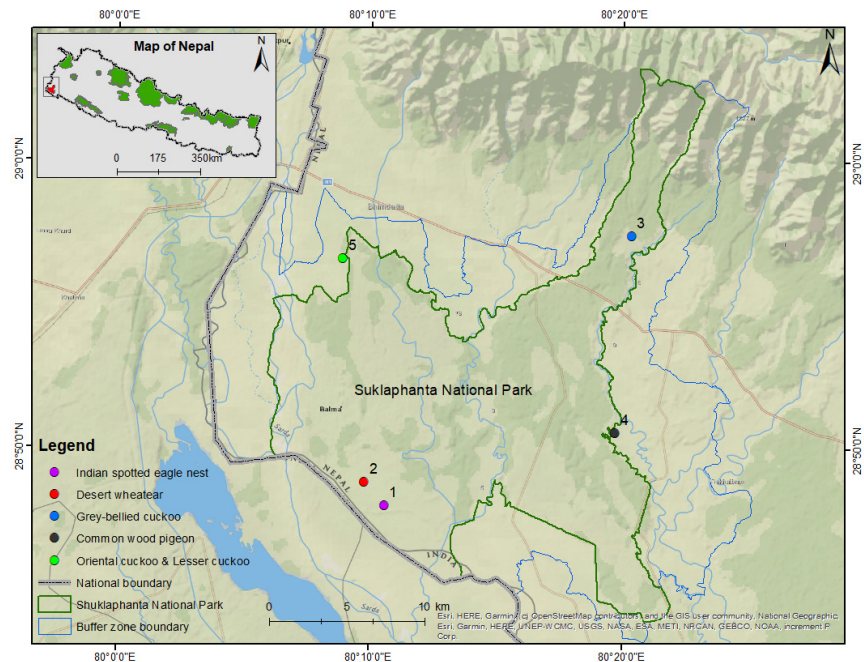
Common Wood-Pigeon *Columba palumbus* (Hodgson, 1837)

An unusually high number of approximately 1,500 Common Wood-Pigeons were recorded on 6 January 2023, at 1400 h. The birds were observed perched on branches of Sal trees near Tara Tal (28.8429 N; 80.3285 E: 180 m). The surrounding habitat is forest predominantly dominated by Sal *Shorea robusta* trees. Since 1990, the species has been observed in more locations

than before, which is possibly due to improved coverage (Inskipp et al. 2016). The bird is a rare winter visitor to Annapurna Conservation Area (Inskipp & Inskipp 2003), a vagrant to Chitwan National Park (Giri & Chaudhary 2005), and a vagrant to Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve (Baral 2005).

Himalayan Cuckoo *Cuculus saturatus* (Blyth, 1843)

At least one Himalayan Cuckoo was heard calling several times early in the morning, at least for an hour (from 0530 to nearly 0630 h) on 2 May 2023 in the Majhgaon area. The voice of the bird is unmistakable, as described in (Grimmett et al. 2016;



Map of ShNP showing the locations of new bird species recorded and the nest of the Indian Spotted Eagle.

eBird 2021). The elevation at Majhgaon is 192 m and the area has mixed Sal forest. The Himalayan Cuckoo is a common summer visitor to most of Nepal's protected areas within the usual range of altitude, viz., between 1525–3355 m (Inskipp et al. 2016).

This species has been previously recorded in lowlands, viz., Chitwan National Park and Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve (Inskipp et al. 2016). The bird recorded was probably on passage to a higher altitude but stopped at ShNP due to the disturbance caused by rainfall on the night of May 1.

Lesser Cuckoo *Cuculus poliocephalus* (Latham, 1790)

One Lesser Cuckoo was heard calling nearly a dozen times early in the morning (0500 h) on 3 May 2023 in Majhgaon area. The voice of the bird is unmistakable, as described in (Grimmett et al. 2016; eBird 2021).

The Lesser Cuckoo is a fairly common summer visitor to some of Nepal's protected areas and frequent or uncommon elsewhere (Inskipp et al. 2016). Unlike the



Indian Spotted Eagle Nest. © Dev Raj Joshi.

Himalayan Cuckoo, this species has not previously been recorded in the lowlands. The bird recorded was probably on passage to a higher altitude but stopped at ShNP due to the incessant rainfall on 1–2 May.

Photo evidence of Indian Spotted Eagle *Clanga hastata* nest

On 7 April 2023, a pair of Indian Spotted Eagle was observed in their nest placed on a Simal *Bombax ceiba* tree in Shuklaphanta grassland

(28.7998 N; 80.17630 E: 232 m). Until now, no record of the nest has been reported from ShNP. The Indian Spotted Eagle is listed as Vulnerable (VU) in the IUCN Red List categories (IUCN 2022). It was observed in May 1998 in ShNP (Baral 1998). However, we have photographic evidence of the nest.

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