

Sighting of Lesser Adjutant *Leptoptilos javanicus* at Haripura Reservoir in Uttarakhand, India

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The Lesser Adjutant *Leptoptilos javanicus* is a large bird belonging to the stork family Ciconiidae. Although this bird is typically 110–120 cm in height (Grimmett *et al.* 1999), it is the smallest of the *Leptoptilos* genus. This bird flies with its neck retracted (Grimmett *et al.* 1999), thus differentiating it from other storks. It has a bare head and neck, similar to a vulture (Ali 1941), an adaptation for its carrion feeding habits. The Lesser Adjutant has a glossy black upper body and wings with white belly and under-tail coverts (Kazmierczak & Van Perlo 2000). Its bill is slimmer than the Greater Adjutant and it lacks the pendulous neck pouch (Ali 1941). The adult has a visible pale frontal plate on the head and a crest of dense feathers on the head as well as on the neck (Ali and Ripley 1978). The juvenile is a duller version of the adult (BirdLife International 2012).

The Lesser Adjutant is listed as "Vulnerable" in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species as the global population of this species is small and rapidly declining. Main threats to this species are hunting and conversion of wetland areas (IUCN 2011). The latest global population of this species is estimated to be around 6,500–8,000 individuals (BirdLife International 2012). The species has an extensive range across south and south-east Asia with substantial populations in India, Indonesia and Cambodia and smaller breeding populations in Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Laos, Malaysia, Brunei, Vietnam and Thailand (Sharma 2006; BirdLife International 2012). In India, it breeds mainly in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, West Bengal and Orissa (BirdLife International 2012). The Lesser Adjutant is considered a vagrant species in most of north and central India with only individual records of occurrence (Ali 1941; Ali & Ripley 1978; Grimmett *et al.* 1999; Kazmierczak & Van Perlo 2000). It is mainly found inhabiting inland wetlands, both natural and man-made (BirdLife International 2012).

As part of the regular waterfowl census programme in selected wetlands located in the Corbett landscape to estimate the population of migratory birds arriving every winter, Haripura Reservoir (29° 06' N, 79° 20' E), on Baur River, located in Terai Central territorial forest division of Uttarakhand, was monitored on a fortnightly basis by the wildlife division



Figure 1: Lesser Adjutant *Leptoptilos javanicus* standing in an agricultural field

of the Corbett Foundation during the winter months. During one such census on 6th March 2011, at about 09:50 hrs, the author spotted a large stork with black plumage, white underparts and a yellowish head and neck in a agriculture field which was part of the reservoir area. It was identified as a non-breeding adult Lesser Adjutant. The bird preferred to keep a safe distance from humans. When the field was approached it took flight during which the typically retracted neck was clearly observed, and settled on a large tree much farther away. The bird was not observed during the subsequent waterfowl census carried out at Haripura reservoir a fortnight later. It is hoped that this information of sighting of the Lesser Adjutant would help update its present distribution in Uttarakhand.

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