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Editor: Lobzang Vishuda
Editorial team: XXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXXX
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EDITORIAL



Message



Wildlife Conservation and Birds Club of Ladakh

Dear Advocates and Defenders of Wildlife,

I am truly delighted and inspired by your work to protect the rich and varied wildlife and birds of Ladakh and their habitats. Your work has become increasingly important in view of the ignorant and negative human activity on wildlife, such as inhumane poaching, illegal wildlife trafficking and destroying of wildlife habitats. These activities must be prevented through different means and especially through education and public awareness.

Ladakh is a precious abode of some of the most amazing animals and birds in the world. My organisations and I look forward to working with you to be guardians of these beings.

With prayers and blessings for your continuous good work.

In the Dharma



The Gyalwang Drukpa



Message



It gives me immense please to know that Wildlife Conservation and Birds Club of Ladakh (WCBCL) Leh is coming out with the first volume of its journal Jungwa on the eve of New Year 2017.

My sincerest congratulations and gratitude to the enterprising members behind the establishment of the much needed club for wildlife conservation and protection in Ladakh. I am impressed by the number of significant activities being undertaken by the club in a short period since its inception. Organizing significant events like Clean Birds habitat campaign, workshops, anti poaching activities, photo exhibition, etc speaks volumes of the dedication and enterprise of the dynamic members of WCBCL. I am told that since the inception of the club, a new interest and awareness about our rich avifauna has developed amongst the expert and birders world over as well as the locals.

Wildlife conservation assumes precedence in a vast region like Ladakh which is bestowed with vast diversity of birds and mammals, some of which are exclusive to this part of the world and endangered. Wildlife is Mother Nature's greatest treasure, it is our shared responsibility to protect and preserve it through every possible measure. I am certain WCBCL shall be our vanguards in this regard.

My best wishes to all the members for the publication of the first volume of Jungwa and all future endeavors.

Dr. Sonam Dawa Lonpo
Chairman / Chief Executive Councillor
LAHDC, Leh

Message



The Wildlife Conservation and Birds Club of Ladakh (WCBCL) has produced another exceptional resource in Jungwa publication which will further highlight the importance of conservation efforts in Ladakh.

The WCBCL has demonstrated its ongoing commitment to preserving this unique ecological system and fauna of Ladakh through a number of recent activities including:

1. Promotion and recording of the 300+ different bird's species found in Ladakh through social media.
2. Cleaning the banks of Indus river and Sindhu Ghat during the "clean birds habitat campaign" which is the only breeding ground for rare birds the "Ibis Bill".
3. Hosting the first ever workshop of Bird Monitoring and also the first ever Photo Exhibition in Leh.
4. Promotion of Wildlife Tourism in Ladakh.

The Jungwa publication will record these major achievements and all future endeavors by WCBCL which will assist in monitoring the ecological situation as time goes by and also to further encourage the society to get involved and assist in preserving the local wildlife and environment.

I am honored to comment on the inaugural publication of Jungwa and I look forward to future conservation efforts that are initiated through voluntary Non Government Organizations such as WCBCL.

Tsering Sangdup
Executive Councillor
Tourism / CA&PD



Message



I am pleased to know that Wildlife Conservation & Birds Club of Ladakh (WCBCL), Leh is coming up with their first Volume of Magazine - JUNGWA dedicated to conservation & environment issues.

WCBCL is doing a wonderful job in the field of conservation and protection of the rich biodiversity of Ladakh which include many amazing and rare species of wild animals & birds.

I wish them success in their endeavor and pledge my support when and where needed.

Prasanna Ramaswamy G IAS
Deputy Commissioner, Leh

Message



The wildlife Conservation and Bird club of Ladakh has come up with the first edition of its magazine "Jungwa". Its unique in the sense that, it is brought up by its members who are driven by sheer passion for wildlife conservation and birding. Jungwa is genuine and authentic reporting of conservation status, distribution, health, nature, sighting, spotting, and protection of wildlife. This magazine will go a long way in educating the masses about the rich biodiversity of Ladakh and as a guide to the wildlife enthusiast and tourist.

Though Ladakh's landscape is stark barren and desolate, it harbours one of the richest and unique biodiversity. Over millions of years Ladakh has nurtured and has evolved wildlife adapted to its extreme geo-climatic conditions. Most of the species are globally rare, endangered and endemic.

It is duty and responsibility of every citizen to protect and conserve its natural heritage. The Wildlife Conservation and Bird Club has worked in tandem with the department to save the environment and species like the Snow Leopard for future generations. As a result of these efforts, biodiversity in Ladakh has been flourishing. This is especially true for one of the most charming and mysterious animals we have on the planet: the Snow Leopard. Each year hundreds of tourists visit Ladakh in the peak of winter to see this enigmatic animal. In fact, Ladakh has been called the Snow Leopard capital of the world. It's one of the best places to see a Snow Leopard, not just in Jammu and Kashmir, or in India but in the entire world.

Ladakh attracts some of the rarest and magnificent birds during the summer. Thanks to Wildlife Conservation and Bird Club of Ladakh, there is a renewed interest in birdwatching in Ladakh. There is a steady increase of birders and bird watchers visiting Ladakh. Birding is a useful tool for environmental education and awareness on environmental issues. Birds easily transmit values on respect to nature and the fragility of ecosystems. It not only generates interest in the ecology and rich biodiversity but also adds to the revenue of the locals.

I put on record, the proactive role played of the wildlife conservation and bird club of Ladakh in conservation and protection of wildlife. The magazine "Jungwa" is manifestation of their commitment. I congratulate all the members for their endeavour and assure of our best services and support.

Jigmet Takpa IFS
Chief Conservator of Forest (wildlife)
Ladakh



INTRODUCTION TO WCBCL

Message



Development throughout this world is advancing in a fantastic pace and the region of Ladakh is no exception. Governments are often overstressed while coping with the magnitude and complexity of attributed tasks meeting citizens' expectations and consequently tend to concentrate on rather visual achievements while demonstrating results. Engagements in environment protection, conservation activities or consciousness-building amongst populations are often considered as topics of secondary importance or worse, are not even finding their way into agendas. It is therefore important for civil society to step in. Motivated, environment conscious citizens are taking action into their own hands while subsidizing official or other institutions in driving environment sensitization initiatives forward.

One such initiative is the commendable creation of "Wildlife Conservation and Birds Club of Ladakh (WCBCL)" where dedicated Ladakhi folks interested in their unique environment and its conservation decided to form an NGO. Initiated activities show encouraging results motivate other parties to step in and complement existing projects. Observing such completing rather than competing initiatives are very inspiring. Continuous organized and quality stock taking of the fascinating diverse Ladakh biodiversity or its monitoring as done by WCBCL will obviously help decision makers to initiate opportune official activities. Achieving these goals are not possible without enjoying full recognition from official and professional sources neither without the keen collaboration by local people from all remote corners of Ladakh. Be it in supporting to collect biodiversity information, be it by fighting illegal wildlife trade or helping to detect and report violation of law including incidences like recent mammal poaching.

Today WCBCL is distributing the first copy of their "Jungwa" newsletter! Congratulations! I wish WCBCL all success with this new publication! This instrument will not only significantly enhance communication with its affiliates but also will help to disseminate important information about its activities and achieved results. It is hoped that many members will participate lively with their articles and observations and make this publication a successful one. Only with common initiatives, visions and combined forces it will be possible to conserve the exclusive and fragile environment in the unique Ladakh land. Only with such efforts it will be possible for our children to still hike through the valleys and plains, over the rolling hills observing the multitude of wildlife, enjoy its distinctive flora and drink the clear water from the streams. Congratulations to WCBCL for its great determination and initiatives to help to make this possible!

Otto Pfister

Author of the book *Birds of Mammals of Ladakh*

CONSERVING Wildlife is struggle of the Governments face all over the world. Ladakh is not exception in this struggle for Conservation of wildlife. Wildlife Protection Department and various organizations and local communities are doing their best, but more and practical efforts are needed to do better to conserve the vulnerable and endangered species to sustain them and make them available for our future generations. Proactive conservation efforts are need of the hour.

Wildlife Conservation and Birds Club of Ladakh (WCBCL) is not an additional organization duplicating the projects already in execution by other stakeholders in the conservation field, but a local community-based organization, involving the

real stakeholders of the region who could not only sustain these conservation programs but also play an important role in educating and enlightening the target communities who are in direct conflict with the wildlife of the region. Involvement and participation of the local communities in such program is inevitable in making any conservation story a success.

WCBCL was founded by few like-minded friends, who before forming the organization, have personally worked – collected data, information, conservation means, and above all made themselves well-acquainted with the facts of conservation by umpteen numbers of personal/group trips to different parts of Ladakh for photographs, data collection for

studies, researches and records for future conservational use.

Over the years, the organization have made a humble beginning in wildlife conservation activities including Clean Birds Habitat Campaign, Workshop on Bird Monitoring, Sloganeering Anti-Poaching Movement, Photo Exhibition on Wildlife of Ladakh, Ladakh Bird Count - annual feature for Celebrating World Sparrow Day, World Migratory Bird Day, Bird Exodus Week, etc.

The organization is in the process of collecting new record-sittings of Birds and Wild Animals in Ladakh and plans to have an Indigenous Checklist of Birds and Wild Animals of Ladakh. Numbers of new record-sightings were made during the last few years by its members.



MEMBERS OF WILDLIFE CONSERVATION AND BIRDS CLUB OF LADAKH (WCBCL), LADAKH

WCBCL ACTIVITIES



WILDLIFE Conservation and Birds Club of Ladakh (WCBCL) is voluntary non-government organization working for Wildlife Conservation and Protection in Ladakh.

Awareness about Avifauna of Ladakh through social media

Ladakh Birds Club 300 is a group dedicated exclusively to the birds of Ladakh which are estimated to be more than 310 species. The group is followed by experts and birders from all over the world and also by local Ladakhi youths. Numbers of New Records of Birds of Ladakh (as per Ladakh Checklist of Birds of Ladakh) were made by the members of WCBCL are listed with photographs on the group's timeline. This is the first local group on social media pertaining to birds of Ladakh and is liked and followed by as many as 1,600 members.

April 2014

Clean Birds Habitat Campaign

WCBCL members carried out many "Clean Birds Habitat Campaign" where garbage were collected – plastics wrappers, beer bottles and other bird-threatening modern-life-style-wastes from the bank of Indus River at Sindhu Ghat. The area is the only breeding ground for one of the rare birds of Ladakh – the Ibisbill.

August 2016

First Ever Workshop of Bird Monitoring

On the 9th of August, 2016, WCBCL with the support of NCF, SLT, Wildlife Protection Department, Leh, organized the first ever Workshop on Bird Monitoring with eBird / Bird Count India for students of Elizer Joldan Memorial College. The program was the first of its kind in Leh and was appreciated by one and all.



Spearheading Anti-Poaching Slogan

WCBCL proactively sloganeered the Anti-Poaching movement and supported the local Administration, Wildlife Protection Department and Police Department by joining them as members of Investigative Team, when a guest of the Army was found poaching in day-light near Magnetic Hill in April 2016.

Another case of poaching at Gya-Meru Rong area on 11th December 2016 when reported, WCBCL have left no-stone-unturned in highlighting the issue and terming it as a Black Day in the history of Ladakh's Wildlife. WCBCL members again were working closely with the Police Department and Wildlife in trying to catch the culprits in the region on the day of poaching.

September 2016

First Ever Photo Exhibition on Wildlife of Ladakh

WCBCL with the support of Wildlife Protection Department, Leh, SLT-(IT), WWF, Leh, ALTOA, Taxi Union and Reach Ladakh, showcased the first-ever Photo Exhibition on Mammals and Birds of Ladakh for 15 days. The first ever exhibition was enjoyed and appreciated by one and all. With the support of Local Administration and WCBCL plans to organize the Photo Exhibition an Annual Feature.

Meeting with Bangladesh Birds Club (BBC)

Meeting with Executive Members of the Bangladesh Birds Club (BBC) during the Photo Exhibition of Mammals and Birds of Ladakh was an important milestone in fulfilling the objectives of the WCBCL. Future tie-ups with BBC for sharing data, information and more over experiences in conservation of Birds will benefit both organizations and strengthen international ties.



Asian Water Bird Census 2017

WCBCL in collaboration with WWF, Leh and Wildlife Department held a 1-Day field trip along the Indus River Belt to Count Water Birds in Leh as part of the Asian Water Bird Census on 19th January 2017. Twelve species of Water Birds were recorded and among them are 300+ Mallards, 1 Common Pochard (male), 3 Red Crested Pochards (1male and 2 females), 2 Ibisbill, 2 Great Cormorant, 9 Common Coot, 1 Brown Dipper, 1 White-capped Redstart, 4 Merganser, 5 Common Sandpiper, 1 Common Redshank.

Ladakh Bird Count 2017

On the 22nd of March 2017 Wildlife Conservation and Birds Club of Ladakh (WCBCL) in collaboration of Department of Wildlife Protection, Govt. of Jammu and Kashmir and WWF, Leh, celebrated Ladakh Bird Count 2017 by organizing a bird count field trip along the Indus River Belt/ Marshes (Phey to Thiksay) which was attended by more than 30 local bird lovers and wildlife enthusiasts. Shri. Pankaj Raina, Wildlife Warden, Leh was Chief attendant on the occasion. More than 35 different species of birds were spotted and among them a single Graylag Goose (*Anser anser*)/ Nangpa Khammar was the main attraction of the day.

WCBCL under the banner LADAKH BIRD COUNT plans to celebrate World Sparrow Day, World Migratory Bird Day, Bird Exodus Week, Ladakh Bird Festival as an annual feature with the support and collaboration of stakeholders in the field of Conservation of wildlife in Ladakh.



Spotting the elusive Eurasian Otter

By Lobzang Visuddha

Chairman, WCBCL

ON 21st of February 2016, we received a call from Nono Stanzin about snow leopard depredation of livestock in Tarchit village. My friend Dorjey Daya and I rushed to the village. Tarchit is about 90 km east of Leh in Rong valley. The village is surrounded by high rocky mountains and famous for snow leopard sightings as the villagers still rear goat, sheep, cow, donkeys, dzo, and yak.

We reached Ligtse and headed towards the village and started asking about the killings. It turned out that the news was a day old. A goat had been killed on the rocky slope the previous afternoon but the family had managed to collect the carcass and the leopard had disappeared. We hoped that the cat might still be around and started to scan the slopes and ridges of the mountains around the village. After a tiring search of four to five hours, we decided to call it a day.

Cold and disappointed, we were also hungry as had not eaten breakfast or lunch. As we headed back to Leh we tried to soothe our stomach with some biscuits and black tea that we had in a small thermos flask. Nono Stanzin yelled suddenly, "What is that?" and pointed to the river bank where a few Chukars were quenching their thirst on the freezing Indus. My immediate response was "those are chukars." I then stopped the car to photograph the Chukars on the icy-cliff. To our surprise, we noticed something downstream moving with the flow of the freezing river. By the time we recovered, it had disap-

peared in the river. We were curious and jumped out of the car and walked towards the river bank to investigate. After a few seconds, 'the thing' reappeared on the surface and moved towards us. We were watching one of the most elusive mammals of Ladakh—Eurasian Otter (*lutra lutra*) that is called Chu-rSham in Ladakhi.

Our excitement knew no bounds! We cried, whooped, "Yes! This is an incredible record! Daya and I took out our cameras, while Nono Stanzin coolly watched it through a pair of binoculars. I managed to switch my camera on movie mode and even recorded its movement for a few seconds and a single frame for our records. That was it. The otter disappeared again. We followed the cur-

rent of the Indus downstream and the otter appeared once again on the surface of the icy river for the third time. It was fast and brief. We could not photograph it again.

We started to move downstream, even as we carefully scanned the river and its banks for the next hour. Unfortunately, we did not spot the otter again. Excited and joyous about the spotting, we returned to Leh on a high. The 200 km snow leopard trip led us to an encounter with an even more elusive Ladakhi mammal.

Thus, a rare spotting of a Eurasian Otter was recorded in the Indus in Rong valley on 21st February 2016 and was registered by Wildlife Conservation and Bird Club of Ladakh (WCBCL).



EURASIAN OTTER (*LUTRA LUTRA*) ALSO CALLED CHU-SRAM IN LADAKHI, INDUS RIVER, RONG VELLEY, LADAKH.

It's a woman world

By Tsering Angmo

Female Birder from Ladakh

THE September sun was shining brightly high up in the sky. The sea-buckthorn bushes were adorned with juicy berries. The murmuring sound of the stream flowing nearby enhanced the beauty of the site. It was the beautiful Markha Valley where my friend Sujata and I were exploring the beauty around. On the way I heard a bird calling, which was very melodious. I told my friend about the sound, and she pointed towards a willow tree. And there it was, the Tseshu Lamo of the avian world: Golden Oriole. So colorful was the bird that everything else looked drab in its presence. The bird brought life to the otherwise brown slopes in the valley bordered with towering mountains. During the same trip, we also encountered some powerful birds like Lammergeier. So close the bird flew across that its enormous wings almost touched our hats. Here was the place where I first got hooked to birds of Ladakh.

After that with each passing day my interest and love for birds grew stronger, and birding has become a routine for me now. I strive to share this interest with the students and other interested people. I love learning and teaching about birds more and more. But this was not an easy journey for me, as initially there was resistance from family and friends. Ladakhi society does not easily accept this kind of profession for girls. In the past only boys took on such professions. But slowly my family and friends understood my passion and quest, and I am really enjoying it. I asked myself why I would deny myself from something I like and enjoy the most. I was determined to continue and fight for the things that



interest me the most. It was always difficult to go against the flow, but I tell you, the effort was worth it and it paid me in the long run.

We now feel proud for those women in Ladakh who think out of the box and set examples in our society. Today many women are heading for unconventional professions, and they are not only surviving but thriving in their chosen fields.

Growing up in Rumbak in the Hemis National Park, I always ad-

mired nature as a kid. I am proud to have had a childhood in the village that many only dream of. As a kid, I used to spend hours with nature observing mountains, streams, sky and the beautiful flowers around. This profound love for nature and outdoors made me join Snow Leopard Conservancy India Trust's (SLC-IT) nature guide training way back in 2004. During this training I got new and immense knowledge about wildlife and nature, which was a turning point in my life. I thought that this passion could be turned into a career. Since then I have been learning about nature, while working for the SLC-IT.

At SLC-IT I dedicate my time entirely to the education program which is especially meant for school kids to help them understand and appreciate nature and the biodiversity around. But it took quite some time to give a final shape to my dreams. People we engaged in this program were first reluctant to get involved as learning about nature to appreciate it was new to them. But hard work and dedication paid in the long run. Now those with control of the education system, parents, and the students themselves show much more interest in these kinds of activities. We have workshops and field trips once or twice in a month for school kids, where kids first learn theory in the classroom and then visit the field for seeing flora and fauna. Some children are overly enthusiastic to join our programs. Even in the first place it was difficult to make them understand the value of biodiversity but with the passage of time things are getting better. More and more kids show their enthusiasm in wildlife now. It was not the same like the first I started. I am satisfied to see the response from children and parents. But there is still a long way to go. Now when we take school kids and



occasionally adults for bird watching, they can recognize most of the birds and feel delighted on watching them. It gives me immense pleasure seeing them enjoying nature and appreciating them. Bird watching is an enjoyable activity, one that does not need much of an investment. It needs a curious mind and a pair of binoculars. It keeps you healthy and happy at the end of the day.

In Ladakh we have more than 310 different species of birds. And among them some are residents, while others migrate to and from other areas. We have a wide range of birds, from the majestic Black-necked Crane to one of the smallest birds like the Winter Wren. Some birds like the Rose Finch and Golden Oriole grab the attention of the kids immediately as it did in my case also. All of these birds have their own ecological significance. Most of the migratory birds travel for thousands of miles in search of breeding grounds, food and mates. They face a lot of hardships during these journeys. Many of the migratory birds like the Black-necked Crane feature in folk songs

of Ladakh. It is my duty to let people know about these hardships so that they can sympathize with them.

We are fortunate to have these birds among us. Some of the best places for birding in Ladakh are high altitude wetlands in eastern Ladakh, Indus Valley, Nubra Valley, Suru and Zaskar Valley. Around Leh, the best places to explore are the Shey Marshes, the bushes along Indus River between Choglamsar and Spituk. For going on a bird watching trip, one needs to have good binoculars and a field guide on birds, notebook and a pencil. One needs to wear clothes that are not bright and merge well with the surroundings. Perfumes and aromatic creams must be avoided. One should not disturb the birds by making noise or walking swiftly.

However, watching birds is not enough. We need to identify all the threats that birds are facing in Ladakh. We need to conserve these birds not only for the birds and wildlife but also for ourselves. It is apparent that all the birds are important for the survival of humans. Some disperse seeds, some pollinate our plants,

some eat all the agricultural pests and some eat all the disease causing bacteria and other micro-organisms. Thus, by destroying the habitats of birds, we have nothing to gain but much to lose. Therefore, it becomes the role and responsibility of all the Ladakhis to protect and conserve the birds of Ladakh so that we can continue to thrive in this otherwise harsh environment of Ladakh. I wish and hope that in the coming years we all live a happy life that is ecologically sustainable and socially responsible. May all sentient beings be happy!

It is the best profession for women in fact, as outdoors keeps you healthy and happy. And more and more girls get encourage if women take the initiative. In Ladakh we have very less women in such profession. We need to come out of the box and venture out for new adventures in choosing our professions also. It is now or never. During our education program we used to teach the students about biodiversity of Ladakh and during the workshop we took students for birding around the village.

The Ibex in Phyang village

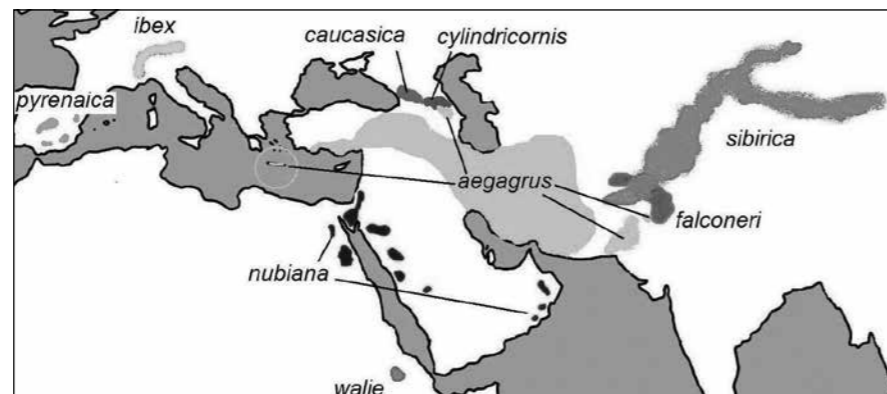


By Tashi Chotak Lonchey

THE ibex is called Skyine in Ladakhi. They are wild goats that live in the mountainous regions of Europe, north central Asia and northern Africa. There are five species of Ibex according to the International Taxonomic Information System. They have long, curved horns and cloven hooves, while the males have long beards. Ibex are related to antelopes, buffaloes, bison, cattle and sheep.

Ibex are typically about 30 to 170 cm from their hooves to withers and weigh about 30 to 130 kg. Male horns may reach 1.5m long and curve backwards to form semicircles with knobby rings on the outer curve. They use the horns to defend their territory and during the rutting period. Ibex are social and live in herds segregated by gender.

Males live in a small herd or by themselves, while females and their offspring live in large herds that can have as many as 45 animals. The herds come together during the mating season, which is known as the rut. The rutting season is from November to December and is marked by combat between males to mate with the females. The gestation period is 160 to 180 days, and the kids are usually born between June and July. The doe



THE GLOBAL DISTRIBUTION OF THE IBEX.

usually gives birth to one or maximum two kids and very rarely three. Immediately after birth, the kids are able to jump and within four weeks are as agile as the adults—an ibex can jump to a height of 1.8 m without a running start and their hooves function like a suction-like mechanism on steep rocks. The kids are generally weaned after six months. The average life span of an Ibex in the wild is around 17 years.

We can trace the recorded history of ibex in human societies to about 1800 BCE. There is a cylinder seal from the Bronze Age that depicts an ibex defending itself from a hunting dog that was excavated from a site in Knossos, Greece. These handsome mountain goats are distributed across Europe and Asia.

In Ladakh, the ibex has a very prominent presence in ancient folk songs such as Skinchen Bargan and they are also depicted in petroglyphs found across Ladakh. Ibex horns are also used as offerings at local Lhato shrines and on mountain passes. The importance of the ibex is also evident during the celebration of important social events such as Losar (New Year). One of the important traditions of celebrating Losar is the making of 'Skyins' from dough to decorate kitchen shelves. They are also used to decorate the family's main living room when a baby is born to symbolize good luck and happiness.

The Asiatic ibex (*Capra ibex sibirica*) is found in western, central, southern and northern Ladakh,

where it lives amongst steep cliffs and Rocky Mountains. The population is estimated to be around 6,000 individuals. However, none of the current literature on ibex in Ladakh mentions that they are found around Phyang village, which is merely 20 km west of Leh.

Geographically, the village of Phyang is located in a valley that is oriented along a north-south axis. I have been observing ibex in the village since my childhood. In the past, they were fewer in number and their visits were irregular. Each time the ibex were sighted in the area, everyone from the village hamlet would watch them with keen interest. In the past, I along with other young children would try to follow these elegant animals to get a closer look at them. These efforts were always in vain as the ibex would climb the rocks at a thundering speed once the guardian ibex would issue its warning whistle on spotting us. The whole herd would then disappear behind the higher mountains. It's possible that the ibex were extra-vigilant around settlements as people in Ladakh have hunted them for many decades and centuries.

Phyang is a convenient and easily accessible site to spot these majestic goats in the wild. The people of the village must take ownership and develop facilities such as home-stays, guest houses and hold guided tours to spot wildlife around the village. This will benefit the village economically, while also provide an incentive to conserve their environment.

More recently, the visits by the ibex herds to Phyang have become more regular and their numbers seem to have increased. I once observed a herd of 47 animals during the rutting period. I have been observing their behaviour and ecology over the last few years. In 2016, I was surprised to spot a herd that included males, females and kids in March and April.

I feel privileged to have the majestic ibex in my village. Sometimes, they have crossed the thorn fence of my neighbour's garden to eat their tender plants. Over time you realise that wild animals do not know or care for any boundaries, borders or fences made by humans.



THE IBEX DURING THE RUT.



SKYIN DECORATIONS DURING LOSAR.

Ibex horns are also used as offerings at local Lhato shrines and on mountain passes

Thankfully, people's attitude towards wildlife has changed with a focus on protection and respect, instead of regarding them as game for hunting. Consequently, the ibex are not as shy as they were in the past. However, there are reports of illegal hunting from different parts of Ladakh, most of which have taken place along the national highway. This will require greater vigilance from villagers and also from wildlife lovers.

At the same time, it's also important that wild animals are not domesticated. There are reports of marmots near highways, which have been socialized by humans to eat biscuits, bread and junk food. Such drastic changes in their diet will play havoc with their health and the larger ecosystem.



MEDICINAL PLANTS OF THE HIMALAYAS

ACONITUM HETEROPHYLLUM (BONG-NGA-DKARPO)

The trans-Himalayan region is known for its high alpine medicinal plants, extreme climate and unique topography

By Amchi Tashi Stobgais

SINCE time immemorial, the Himalayas have been famed for its rich diversity of medicinal plants. The residents of these regions have depended on such plants to meet their need for food, medicines, fodder and other necessities. The Trans-Himalayan regions of Ladakh and Lahoul-Spiti are known for their high alpine medicinal plants, extreme climate and unique topography. The communities in this region have a highly refined body of knowledge of local medicinal plants known as Sowa-Rigpa.

Ladakh is located in north-west India between the Great Himalayan and Karakoram mountain ranges. It shares borders with Pakistan in the west and north and the Tibetan Autonomous Region in the east. The altitude of Ladakh ranges between 2,750 and 7,672 meters above mean sea level. Ladakh is divided into eight major valleys with their unique features and characteristics. These are Leh, Nubra, Changthang, Drass, Suru, Zaskar, Lahaul and Spiti. As a high-altitude cold desert area with

very low rainfall, cold winters and short summers. Snow and glacier are the main source of water in Ladakh.

Much of the region's scant flora survives in the immediate vicinity of rivers and streams. As one starts to move away from water bodies, vegetation becomes scant with sparse grasses and small shrubs spread in vast expanses of sand, gravel and rock. The flora of trans-Himalaya is categorized as alpine and high-alpine and dominated by annual and perennial herbs along with a few stunted shrubs and bushes. Plant growth starts at the beginning of summer when snow melt results in an abundance of moisture. Most flora bloom by the month of August and disappear by the end of September. The mountain slopes, meadows and alpine pasture lands provide a spectacular display of floral diversity unique to these cold desert barren mountains.

The vegetation of the Trans-Himalayas can be classified into three broad categories—Alpine mesophytes, Oasitic vegetation and Desert vegetation. As a result of high humidity levels in some regions of

these cold desert regions, leading to a rich diversity of vegetation that include Temperate, Alpine mesophytes, Oasitic vegetation and Desert Vegetation. Common plant species that grow around barren valley along the Indus and Changthang and Spiti regions are *Polygonum aviculare* (common knotgrass), *Atriplex crassifolia*, *Corydalis flabellata*, *Caragana pygmaea* (pygmy pea shrub), *Capparis spinosa* (caper bush), *Echinosis cornigerous*, *Ephedra gererdiana*, *Physochlaina preaelta*, *Peganum harmala* (wild rue) etc. Similarly desert plant families that grow near high passes like Khardungla (18,380 ft.), Changla (17,500 ft.), Penzila (14,000 ft.), Tanglangla (17,500 ft.), Kunzumla (15,060 ft) include *Thylacospermum caespitosum*, *Acantholimon lycopodioides*, *Arnebia euchroma* (Ratanjot), *Rhodiola imbricate* (rose root), *Waldheimia tomentosa*, *Euphorbia tibetica*, *Arenaria bryophylla*, *Lindelofia stylosa*, etc. The severe geographical and ecological characteristics of the region have imposed significant limitations on human settlement and subsistence systems. Scarce water sources limit the amount of land that can be irrigated.

The forbidding altitude, short summers and cold winters restricts agricultural options to a small range of food crops and, in most parts, a single crop per year. The predominant livelihood strategy is agro-pastoralism. Agriculture is centered on growing barley, buckwheat, peas and root vegetables such as radish and, more recently, potato. Animal husbandry includes herding of sheep, goat, yak, cow and *dzo* (a cow and yak hybrid). ❶



ACONITUM VIOLACEUM (BONG-NGA-NAG-PO)



CREMANTHODIUM ELLISII (MING-CHAN-NAG-PO)



ASTER FLACCIDUS (LUG-MIG)



PODOPHYLLUM HEXANDRUM (OL-MO-SE)



HIPPOPHAE TIBETANA (STAR-BU)



Tsokar under threat

By Tsewang Dorjey Daya
Executive Member, WCBCL

Tsokar Lake – Birding Paradise

Rupshu valley in Chanthang is located at an elevation of 15,000 feet above mean sea level. It includes many lakes and wetlands such as Tsomoriri, Tsokar and Yayatso, which attract scores of birds in the summer.

In the past, the nomadic pastoral community called the Changpas in eastern Ladakh used extract salt from these lakes, especially Tsokar. Over the last few decades, the lake has shrunk dramatically. Tsokar is a few hours' drive from Leh on well-maintained and wide and metallic roads. The lake is about 7 to 8 km off the Leh-Manali highway and does not require a Protected Area Permit. It is thus very popular with researchers and bird-watchers.

This lake and its surrounding areas are rich in biodiversity especially for mammals such as the Kiang or Tibetan Wild Ass, Tibetan Argali, Red Fox, Asiatic Wild Dogs and Tibetan Wolves as well as numerous bird species. The most charismatic species in Tsokar is undoubtedly the black-necked crane, which breeds here.

During the migratory season in spring and autumn, the area is teem-



TIBETAN SAND GROUSE AT TSOKAR LAKE, ONE OF THE MAIN BREEDING AREAS FOR THESE BIRDS IN LADAKH.

ing with large congregations of birds as they travel between their breeding and wintering areas. Some of the rare species that can be observed in Tsokar are Tibetan Sandgrouse, different mountain Finches, Robin Accentor, and different species of Waders. In the winter, the area is bitterly cold with temperatures plummeting below freezing.

The area faces many threats. The most recent one is the establishment of an army camp in areas where the Argali used to roam in the past. There are records of the Tibetan Argali breeding in this area. No one seems to know anything about this

new camp or the need for establishing it near Tsokar, which is far from the international border. The army causes a lot of disturbance in the area and drive around in their large trucks, which damages the pastures and also disturbs the biodiversity in the area. There is an urgent need to cross check the legitimacy of this camp and the authority that issued permissions for it, while ensure that the camp is moved out of the area. If not, the Tibetan Argali and Black-necked Crane may soon abandon this beautiful valley due to increased disturbance and environmental degradation in the area.

A black year in Ladakh's conservation history

By Lobzang Visuddha
Chairman, WCBCL

TRADITIONALLY, Ladakhis followed the Tibetan lunar calendar. According to this calendar, the year 2016 (Monkey Year) was an inauspicious or black year. And it did turn out to be a black year for the voiceless, wild animals of Ladakh, especially Ladakh Urial and Blue Sheep. In two separate incidents of poaching during daylight were reported in the year. The first was in April and the second took place in December.

In April 2016, a civilian guest of the Indian Army took two army personnel to hunt urials. They were caught poaching Ladakh urial or Shapo (*Ovis orientalis vignei*) in daylight with a telescopic gun near Nimo village on the Leh-Srinagar Highway. Thankfully, the culprits were caught with a gun, live ammunitions and their vehicle due to the pro-active action by an informer and quick response from the Department of Wildlife Protection and Police. After they were caught, a case was registered against them in Leh Police station.

Before the year ended, another daylight poaching case of a Blue Sheep or rNapo (*Pseudois nayaur*) was reported near Gay-Miru in December. This time, the poachers are suspected to be Ladakhi with a bus full of eye-witnesses. However, either due to ignorance of the law or some other reason, not a single eye witness has come forward to record their statement. As a result, the culprits remain at large.

For anyone interested in wildlife conservation, these are not a good sign. Unless new strategies for protection of wildlife in Ladakh are developed along with meaningful collaborations and practical strategies are implemented to engage with all stakeholders, the prospects of conservation in Ladakh remain poor.

Unfortunately, these are not isolated cases but a grim reminder that such crimes are indiscriminately being committed against wild animals in Ladakh. Many such poaching goes unreported as the network of conservationist and level of awareness remains rather limited. A proactive and practical roadmap to address such unscrupulous activities needs to be developed and the concerned authorities need to lead it in an effective manner.

At the same time, all law-abiding citizens of Ladakh need to voluntarily take responsibility for wildlife and act as their guardians. Nature without wildlife cannot be imagined and there is need for better awareness amongst

people in general. People need to understand that poaching is a criminal act and if they witness it, they must come forward to report it to the authorities, who in turn are responsible for ensuring the witness' safety.

Hunting was happening in the past, but the context has changed dramatically. In the past, the hunting was necessary due to the scarcity of food and lack agricultural productivity. Now we have an abundant supply of food and are more aware of the importance of wildlife and biodiversity.

In this regard we must pay our respect, remember and recognize the great efforts made by His Eminence 19th Skyabje Kushok Bakula Rinpoche, one of the tallest spiritual and political Buddhist Leaders from Ladakh, who used to publically speak for decades on the need for wildlife conservation in Ladakh.

Many such poaching goes unreported as the network of conservationist and level of awareness remains rather limited



DAYLIGHT POACHING OF THIS BLUE-SHEEP AT GYA-MERU ON 11TH DEC. 2016

Current status & conservation of Black-necked Crane in Ladakh (2012-2016)

By Pankaj Chandan & Tsewang Rigzin

WWF India

Introduction:

Black-necked Crane *Grus nigricollis* is one of the 15 existing species of family Gruidae, presently distributed over the alpine regions of India, China and Bhutan. This species lives in one of the most beautiful areas of the world – literally on top of the world. It is also a good indicator species to study the impact of climate change as it lives and breeds in high altitude lakes and marshes, which will be greatly impacted by melting of glaciers and erratic rainfall pattern.

The main breeding range of the species encompasses Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau in south central China and adjacent parts of India; mainly the Changthang region of Ladakh. The wintering range of the species lies on the southern and eastern parts of Qinghai-Tibetan Plateau and on the Yunnan-Guizhou Plateau of China. A sizable population of about 500 birds spends winters in Bhutan and another small population of about 10-15 birds winters in Arunachal Pradesh in India. Perhaps due to the difficult terrain, inhospitable climatic conditions and inaccessibility of the area, it is the last of the world's crane species to be discovered. Black-necked Crane was first described to science by the Russian Naturalist Nikolai M. Prjevalsky at Lake Koko-Nor in Qinghai Province of China in North – Eastern Tibet in 1876 (Baker 1928). Black-necked Crane's nest and eggs were first discovered by Capt. R. Steen in 1905 at the Hramtso Lake in Tibet at an altitude of about 14,700 feet (Baker 1929). Osmaston (1927)

was the first to report the breeding of Black-necked Crane from Ladakh.

Habitat:

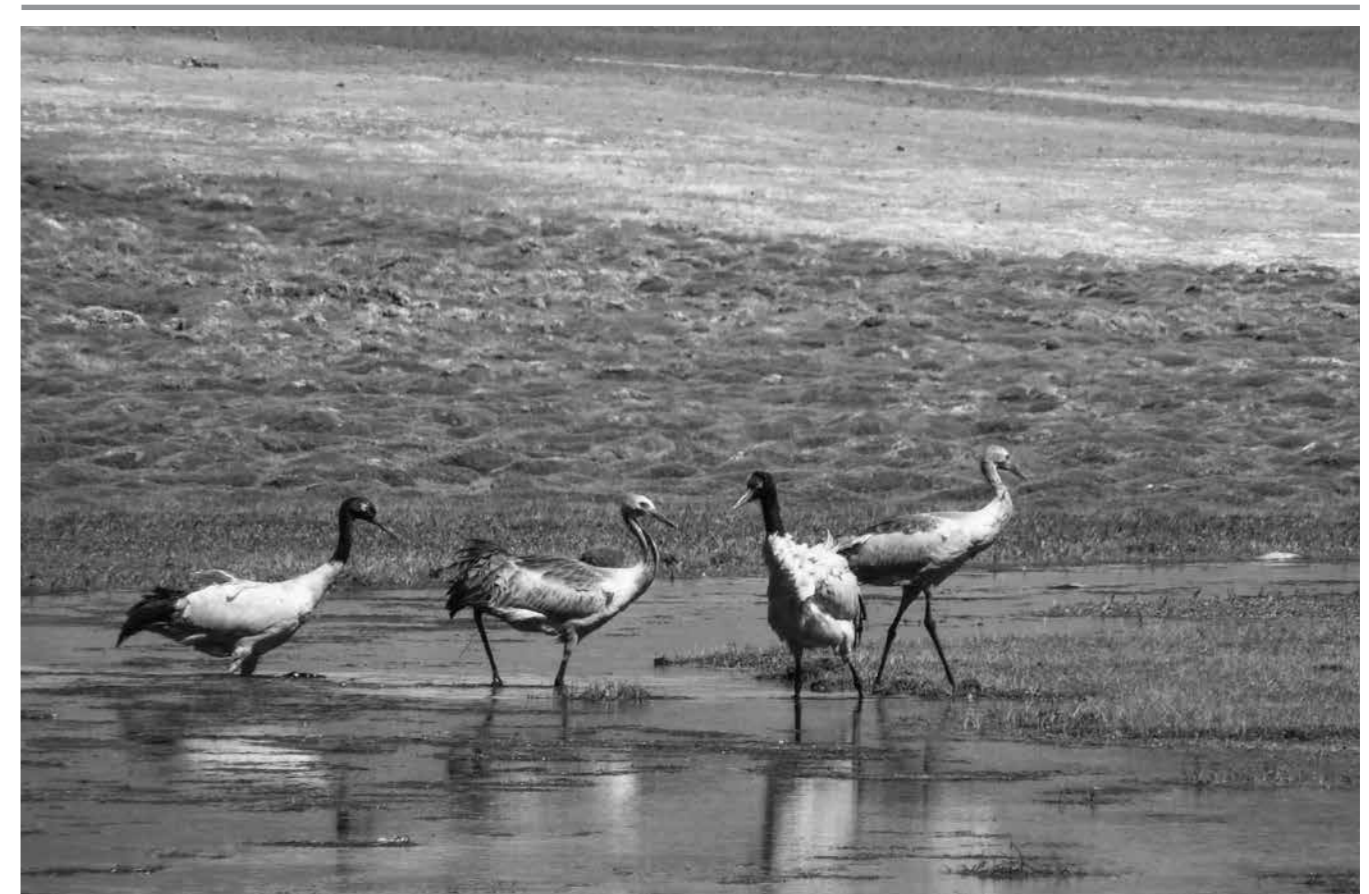
The breeding and wintering grounds of Black-necked Crane differ dramatically (Fengshan 1997). The wintering grounds in China, Bhutan & India are also located at comparatively higher altitudes; in wetlands and on agricultural land. The crane's winter habitats in southern Tibet and western China are cultivated areas where the cranes feed on the remains of the previous year's harvests mainly in rice and potato fields and grasslands where naturally occurring plants and scarabid beetles can be found. Contrary to breeding grounds, at the wintering habitats, the cranes roost in flocks at night in marshy areas or in shallow river waters. The current global population of Black-necked Crane is about 11,000 individuals and is showing an increasing trend. The largest breeding population (ca. 2500 individuals) inhabits Zoige marshes, located on the north-eastern edge of Qinghai-Tibet Plateau.

Regional distribution & migration:

Black-necked Crane is the only alpine species of cranes endemic to Asia. More than 90 percent of the total population of Black-necked Crane inhabits China. The wintering range of the species includes south-eastern Tibet, northern Yunnan, north-western Guizhou and south-west and northern Gansu provinces of China. A small wintering population is in Arunachal Pradesh, India and in Bhutan. The main breeding areas of the species are high elevations in Qinghai province of China and north-east of Tibetan plateau in Tibetan Autonomous Region (TAR). Other breed-

ing areas lie north, north central and western parts of Sichuan, south-west and south-east Gansu, south Xinjiang, and southern parts of Guangxi provinces of China. A small breeding population is in Changthang plateau in eastern Ladakh and a recently known breeding pair in Sikkim, India.

Zhikang et al. (1994) investigated migration pattern of Black-necked Crane and it was concluded that the eastern population of Black-necked Crane in China migrate north to the Ruergai marshes in northern Sichuan and southern Gansu Provinces, whereas the central population migrate to the Longbaotan wetland in southeast Qinghai province. Based on the recovery of the banded birds it was confirmed that birds breeding at Ruergai Wetland Nature Reserve, located in the Upper Yellow River Valley on the eastern Tibetan Plateau migrate to Guizhou (Zhikang et al. 1993) and Yunnan Province (Yang 2005). Qian et al. (2009) using satellite telemetry on six Black-necked Cranes carried out a study on the migration routes and stop-over sites during autumn and spring in China and it was established that the migration distances covered by Black-necked Crane and duration of migration are shortest as compared to other species of crane. In 2005, a migration study was conducted by the scientists of Royal Society for Protection of Nature (RSPN) Bhutan in collaboration with researchers from Japan. As part of this study three PTT's were fixed on different birds, which were later followed up to Bamtsho Lake in Chumbi valley of Tibet. Two of these birds were observed wintering in Phobjikha valley, Bhutan. Although the migration routes of Black-necked Crane are



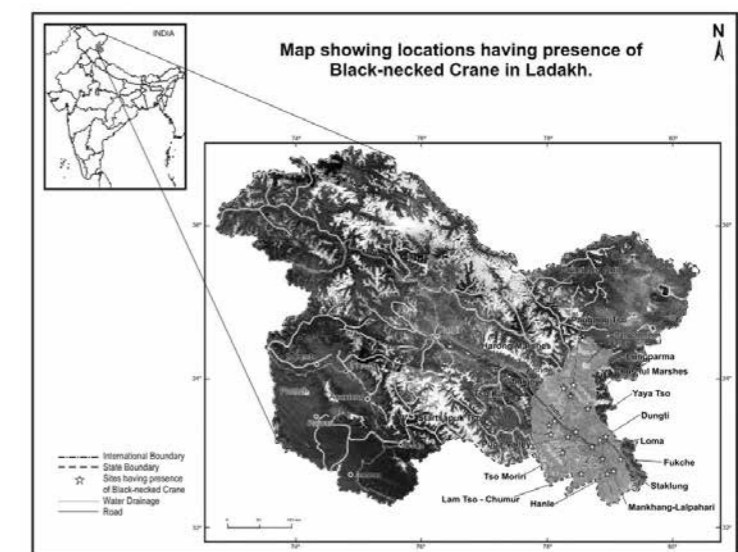
short but these require negotiating areas of high altitudes from 1800 to 5000 m also.

Status & distribution of breeding population in Changthang:

Existence of Black-necked Crane in Changthang region, of India is known to the Changpa nomads since the time immemorial. However, the first scientific record of the species was of Ludlow (1920), who saw three cranes in Tsokar on 2nd June 1919 and shot one for identification. Afterwards, several workers have studied different aspects of Black-necked Crane in Changthang landscape. The map shows all the sites in Ladakh which have presence of Black-necked Crane. The table summarizes the population of Black-necked Crane recorded at various wetlands of Ladakh during last five years. Changthang in Ladakh is the only known breeding area for black-necked cranes in India, with a total population of more than 100 individuals recorded during the last five years. This population includes about 15 breeding pairs. Since crane

Current Status of Black-necked Crane in Ladakh						
S.No.	Year	Total Sightings	Breeding Pairs	Total No. of Adults	Total No. of Chicks Fledged	No. of Wetlands Covered
1	2012	139	14	128	11	22
2	2013	114	15	99	15	22
3	2014	112	17	104	08	22
4	2015	113	15	102	11	22
5	2016	111	11	104	07	22

Source: WWF-India & Department of Wildlife Protection Govt. of J&K



is a long living bird so it is important to keep a regular eye on the recruitment rate of this species. For the long term conservation of the species it is important more and more chicks are added to the population of cranes every year. Therefore each and every nesting site of Black-necked Crane in Ladakh is important and all efforts should be made to protect these nesting sites.

Threats:

Due to the prevalence of Buddhist culture in the areas where Cranes are found, this species has been protected by the locals from a long time. However, better accessibility to remote areas and development of infrastructure has led to encroachment of the crane habitat. Changing land use practices in the wintering grounds are a major threat to the wintering population of Black-necked Crane. More or less similar situation is occurring in breeding habitat of the species within Indian limits particularly in Ladakh, where changing land use pattern coupled with unregulated infrastructure development activities are posing serious threats to the species. Another major threat to the species in Ladakh is the large population of feral dogs which eat away the eggs and chicks of these birds during the breeding season.

Conservation:

At the international level, efforts have been made to provide protection and conservation by way of making policies. The species is listed in the Appendix 1 of CMS (Convention on Migratory Species) and is also listed in Appendix 1 of CITIES (Birdlife International 2011). IUCN has categorized the species as vulnerable, under criteria A1b, c, d, A2c, C1. The Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 of the Govt. of India, has listed the species in Schedule 1 (WPA 1972). Black-necked Crane has been declared as state bird of Jammu and Kashmir. The government of China has listed the species under the category of endangered, in class 'A' (Pfister 1998).

WWF-India in collaboration with Ministry of Environment and Forests, Government of India, BNHS

(Bombay Natural History Society) and IBCN (Indian Bird Conservation Network) has also organized a regional workshop for the conservation of this species in India, China and Bhutan (Chandan 2011). This workshop gave a strong call to all the range countries to work together to protect this majestic species. In Ladakh besides scientific studies on the species, from time to time WWF – India in collaboration with the Department of Wildlife Protection, Government of Jammu & Kashmir conducts

regular education and awareness activities for the educational institutions, local communities, tourism sector and Indian Army. In order to protect the species in Ladakh it is important that a regular concerted effort is made by involving all the key stakeholders for the conservation of the species. This is important and everyone must work together to ensure that the loud trumpet call of this majestic bird keeps resonating in all the valleys of Changthang.



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By Mohd. Abbas

Divisional Forest Officer, Leh Govt. of Jammu and Kashmir

SINCE hundreds of years Ladakh remained the paradise for many of high altitude avian (birds) both migratory and endemic. The different type of habitat used by different species of birds and their movement can be observed for the entire year and for their survival like other animals, adapted so well, where as the winter birds of Ladakh provides a different type of observation opportunities to the serious ornithologists/birders. Some wintering birds migrate from the Arctic region and from Siberia during autumn, September to November to spend few winter months. Whereas some birds, who prefer to visit in summer months and they breed there in Ladakh. Thus Ladakh hosts for both the winter and summer migratory birds.

In case of birds they use the habitat type as swampy margins and wetlands, mounted wet and grasslands dry desert plains riverine areas, hill slopes sand dunes seasonal (channels) willow, poplar and sea buckthorn plantations. But in high altitude areas they use the scrub vegetative area of caragana and myricaria spp. by the endangered black-necked cranes. Mudflats, single banks, riversides, islands, stream banks by waders, wetlands, stream banks by waders, wetlands, lakes, rivers, sedges and water logged areas by water birds, like grebe, poached, garganey, shoveler, teal, mallard, wigeon, gees, etc. The other birds like hill and land birds prefers the habitats types like rocky cliffs, mountain tops, sandy boulders, hill slopes, scrubby valleys, grass land orchards agro forestry and sedge vegetative areas. The open pasture lands are not supposed to be only for the



sheep, goat and other live stock but also the important courtship yards¹ for many breeding birds like Crane, Ruddy shell duck, Gull, Horned and crested Larks, pipit, Lapwing, Stilt and many more. The breeding birds displays courtship dance for their female birds to attract towards themselves, one should not think that pasture areas are not only a pastureland but also a good feeding and roosting² site for many winter birds.

It is now easier to understand that and a question itself arises in our mind that how does the birds will survive during the winter months in place like Ladakh, if the stakeholders put tremendous pressure over the grasslands and the pasture lands more than the carrying capacity of a certain area.

If we think Ladakh receives thousands breeding birds, is a matter of proud; but do we ever think they need both shelter and food. One of the most crucial period of time in a bird life is to give a safe and protec-



In 2006-07 the desert locust had an adverse effect on the courtship yards of the breeding birds in Changthang.

tive nest to their nestlings, in many bird species the selection of site and construction of nest is compulsory for which the need different type of nesting materials such as grass, tubers, twigs, leaves, small branches, soft leaves, sedges, soft dead grasses for center felling with many plant parts feathers, down and other materials like soft sedges and grasses.

There is an urgent need for a concrete plan of sustainable use of the limited natural resources of Ladakh for equitable sharing within the human and animal (livestock and wild animals) in coming days, before it is too late.

As for as the IBAs (Important Bird Areas) of Ladakh is concerned, are now on a serious thread. Thus awareness among local IBAs and inhabits becomes very important for their conservation, telling people where and what the Important bird areas are.

During recent world bird festival, 07-08-Oct. 2006 organized by Birdlife international, in China the participants from the entire globe discussed

¹ The grassland used by different breeding birds for display the courtship dances.

² A place/spot use by different birds for roosting, singing and basking sun etc.



Smew is a winter visitor bird for Ladakh, all though it may be a first sighting from this region, it has been record in and along river Indus water bodies. Where as it may not be a rear bird for the country side but it given important clue regarding the climate change and habitat change (detail on Net. Abass & Wild life of Ladakh (ornithologist) Chanthang). Smew is the first sighting bird for Ladakh and recorded in Chushot forest bagh during the year 2008 in a quite environment of a small water body it was a single male bird in the month of November

for promoting positive action to safeguard the vital bird habitat.

Earlier (Before 8 to ten years) the sindhu ghat was the hotspot for Ibis bill Tunglakma)* but now due to the biotic enterfare and construction huts fisheries bulding , Sindu mella gathering pavilion and chowkidar hut etc.. and many more creating the shelter for stray dog and feral dog as well , whereas the Ibisbill builds his nest direct on the ground within the bolder on the bank of river and water bodies their offspring becomes easy prey for those feral dog.

This is an issue which is quite new and may create conflict between men animal if not resolved well in time.

These birds are forced by human interventions as their roosting and rearing area for their young ones have been selected for play ground and constructed cement structure for cricket ground near Nyoma Changthang. Where as earlier it was



Cricket pitch in the center of crane roosting area near Nyoma (year 2011)

a marshy lush green cranes rearing and one of the most favorable courtship yard of Loma pherii IBA.

The above picture is an evidence in support of the environmental or habitat degradation of an IBA, whereas here in Ladakh the experts are busy in the four day workshop on Ladakh studies these days '19-23rd of August'. As I came to know that wildlife experts are delivering lecture on conservation of wetlands & bio-diversity of Ladakh. The areas becoming garbage dumping place and from other side the dignitaries and experts are quite satisfied with the present scenarios of the IBAs in Ladakh.



Place before their migration to wintering area. The off-track rive on the grassland can be clearly seen in the picture which was taken during August 1st. Week water canal was also found diverted its way disconnecting the source to the swampy and marsh area.

Since Ladakh provides a favorable courtship yards of different habitat for different breeding birds to breed successfully from hatchling to the juvenile and sub-adult to adult stages.

In the early stages like hatchling to juvenile the rearing performances are important part of bird life, which cannot be avoided if the family of a certain species especially in the migratory birds. If the breeding grounds are not that safe for the breeding birds during breeding period from different predators. In Ladakh mostly the birds are facing the lose eggs, hatchlings; and stagnant population size due is due to attack by feral dog and other predator. The major threat caused by feral dogs are places like the Tsomoriri³ lake and Tsokar, Pangong, Phuktsey and Shegul tso, as the military and paramilitary personals and their waste food; without any proper disposal within the I.B.As, resulting the increasing numbers of feral dogs and

other predators.

Out of 317 bird species (Abass checklist birds of Ladakh, Zoo Outreach August 2001) 195 bird species are migrant and rest are resident to Ladakh. Here my point is that we have 122 bird species with us for the winter months. We highlighted as above the habitat with a considerable amount of food materials, which has to be consumed by the winter birds during the long winter months. The food materials which they use to get from the natural resources and other sources are mainly the seeds of plants, as in wild kills, small animals, live rodents, berries, minerals in shape of stone particles R.Elegantaria, Ephedva Gerardiana plants as SBT, Rosaweb, juniprus, metro, comu.Ashmsia, albe, sunflower () clemalis tibetane cajen miscrophylum pangos pebislerea, capparisspinosa, elasagness angush focia caragana versicolor, cavagana Zanskar and many more species food or sqather during alliums and iris spp seed parts are commn rociftnch and stonechaet.

Etc. (other winter food items)

Our winter birds are well adapted to the harsh climatic conditions of Ladakh region with their limited wild food availability, but the man is now trying to grab the bird food materials and the seeds for the natural regenerations in our fragile areas.

Himalayan may apple (Podophyllum hexandrum) (Denmo Kushu) a rear and endangered medicinal plant a big population can be seen in Sanku valley such as Tsangra, Panikhar and ovmba are the hotspots. Unfortunately this important plant is also being collected for the trade in the metropolitan cities of India and abroad; a key content of the herb is used for making medicine of cancer treatment too. As we know that Suru valley is the hotspot for many endangered and critically endangered animal bird and plant species. The few

³ Ladakh's only Ramsar site and with the largest breeding area for Bar headed gees



A bar head goose at an elevation of 14500.00 feet, TSOMORIRI peldo island June 2000.

of wildlife of this very hot spot. The Himalayan Brown and black bear, Denmo mukpo/Nukpo, mountain ungulates the snow leopard Rchan etc. Seed of this plant is a favorite food for many game birds and other seed and fruit eater birds

(Frugivorous) during winter months. Suru valley has a conservable population of winter birds and breeding resident birds. As for as the altitude is concerned, suru valley is the lowest habitat for avifauna of Ladakh region. Thus the valley has a considerable diversity of low as well as high altitude birds. The river Suru with streams which inlets the river; supports many water fowls and water side birds. I have observed the main two species as White throated Dipper (Cincluc cinclus) Chubi mukpo and other one the Brown dipper (cinclus pallasi) Chubi mukpo. Both are breeding resident to the valley. Merganser (Mergus merganser) Zalmma, Pintail, (.....) mallard, (.....), Gold finer F, F, serin mango-leai finch Gosson, with other winter birds like the great Rose finch and Buntings, Accentor and many more.

Since completion of my check list on birds of Ladakh published in Zoo outreach in the year 2000. Where as due to climate change, birdlife in Ladakh has m,m,m,m,m,mm/,/,/,/,/,/,/ cc species.

1.The sea buck thorn berry is being sold by villagers to the industrialists in the Indus belt. 2.SBT collection of co-operative department.

3.The SBT using as fuel in rural areas in Ladakh.

The sea buck thorn seed and berry use by more than 45 bird species in the habitats of land birds and those birds are the real owners of these sea buck thorn forests witch is initially propagated by the seed eater birds (seedaeourse) in an astonishing method through their droppings

with well treated and soaked naturally and very easily sprouts over the surface. Because of the oil content and carotene properties the berries does not freezes even on the temperature minus 45 degree siliceous, thus it provides a very nutritious food those winter birds of Ladakh as the Black redstart, white winged redstart, white winged redstart, fire fronted serine, great rose finch, grandala, robin accentor and many seed eater birds of Ladakh.

Species decline

In a decade of span of time the following migratory and vagrant/passage migrant birds population size declined considerably in which the birds of prey has been adversely effected, with some other scavenger larger birds and game birds or pheasants, among the most effected birds can be named as the Tibetan part-

Range	Block	SANTUARY	Area (sq.km)
Kargil	Shaker-Chiktan	Kamji	421
	Shaker-Chiktan	Bkharboo conservation reserve	450
	Shaker-Chiktan	Nindum	580
	Shaker-Chiktan	Gargardoo	325
Sankoo	Sanko	Brako	160
	Sanko	Umbo	270
	Taisuru	Rangdum	1200
Zanskar		Rizong	280
		Tungri	125
		Lugnak	400
Drass		Shimsa-Kharboo	675
	Drass	Proposed Drass WLS	235
		Proposed Mulbekh WLS	1021

niqe, snow cocks, plain backed finch and the Humes ground picker in upper Ladakh.

Earlier the Demosite cane chose the Indus belt as stoppage from 12 to 23 days during their migration from India to abroad for mentoring, but some sever to eight years the sightings are very less in numbers.

The streak throated work picker on use to visit fregrey but now it has risteated to battalite valley of during winter months, if we take example of other smaller birds of typical viz, white browed tit warblers in Hanu and lower Ladakh as Lhakha has drastic change in population size of winter birds.

The total finch 9999 species found out 20202 spp found globally. The common rose finch (Carpodacus erythrinus) is a migratory to Ladakh and breeds here the other finch species found are Eastern Great Rose finch (Carpodacus rubicilloides), streaked Rosefinch, red breasted roes finch, Mangolian finch, Bandit's Mountain finch, European Goldfinch.

Think; life in Ladakh without bird!

Reverence afforestation areas along Indus river.

As IBA as complete gost for the thousands of w.w redstat and many other bird app. as dark throated trush (turdus sufficollis) The great tits (parus major) winter wren (trog-lodytes trogolodytes) Robia accutor (silvia curruea) Gry bush chat (sexicola ferrea) The wall creefrt (tichodroma murasia) rufous mapedtit (parus rufonuchalis) are few examples lessor while throat warble.

As and when the snow metts in month of March, the summer migratory birds from larger to smaller, starts their arrvel in which the tickets thrush (terrdus unicolor) the blue throat (Luscinia sercica) Roby throats (luscinia petoralis) common starling (sturnus vulgaris) Rossy starking (stur roseus).

Acknowledgements.

Roger T Peterson 1964 by time Inc.

Deterioration Scene along the Indus Belt

By Tsewang Dorje Daya

Executive Member, WCBCL

RIVER banks are very important breeding spot for birds. One such area stretched from Shashi Bridge near Thiksey to Spituk village, where thousands of birds breed and others use for rest during migration. The area sees large congregations of birds in the period from the middle of March till the end of May and then again from early October till the beginning of November. Chushot village is another good place for watching birds. The small pond at Gupuk is one of the best sites for different species of resident and migratory birds, who throng to it in spring and autumn.

One of the rarest birds in the areas is the Ibisbill or Tunglekma/Tung-gyalmo (*Ibidorhyncha struthersii*) who lives along the banks of the Indus and also breeds and nurture their young before migrating to other places each winter. The Ibisbill is very popular among birdwatchers and usually live in small groups or in a pair. They camouflage very well in their surroundings and it is very hard to spot them. A pair of binoculars or spotting scopes is essential to spot these birds.

In addition to these, one can spot birds such as the solitary snipe (*Gallinago solitaria*), common snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*), common redshank (*Tringa tetanus*), common greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*), marsh sandpiper (*Tringa stagnatilis*), green sandpiper (*Tringa ochropus*) and many other species along the banks of the Indus. They and Thiksey marshes are famous for grey heron (*Ardea cinerea*), great cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*), little egret (*Egretta garzetta*) and seasonal birds like cattle egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) and blue whistling Thrush (*Myophonus caeruleus*).

Unfortunately, the banks of the Indus are affected by pollution, human disturbance and a growing population of stray dogs. These activities disturb the birds that use these banks and damage the nests of breeding birds.

In the summer, we often observe boys and girls hanging out near Sindhu Ghat and on the banks of the river. They leave behind broken beer bottles that harm the birds and other creatures in the area. In the summer, labourer and residents can be seen defecated on the banks of the river. This not only pollutes the water but also disturbs the area and spoils its aesthetic beauty. In addition, the river is now full of garbage dumped by people upstream. Unfortunately, no one has come forward to complain about acts that damage the river.

The members of Wildlife Conservation and Birds Club of Ladakh have carried out several cleanliness drives along the river. However, such efforts will have no impact unless every citizen makes it their responsibility to pro-



CLEAN BIRD HABITAT CAMPAIGN BY MEMBERS OF WCBCL, ALONG THE INDUS BELT, APRIL 2014

tect the river and keep it clean for the other creatures that use the area. In addition to this, contamination of drinking water creates havoc in the human society. It is thus very important to create awareness and take preventive steps. If we damage our environment, we may not have a future in this area.

While some of us have chosen to dedicate our lives to work for the conservation of biodiversity, it is the duty of every human being to conserve the environment we share with many other species.

THE BEAUTY OF THE SNOW LEOPARD

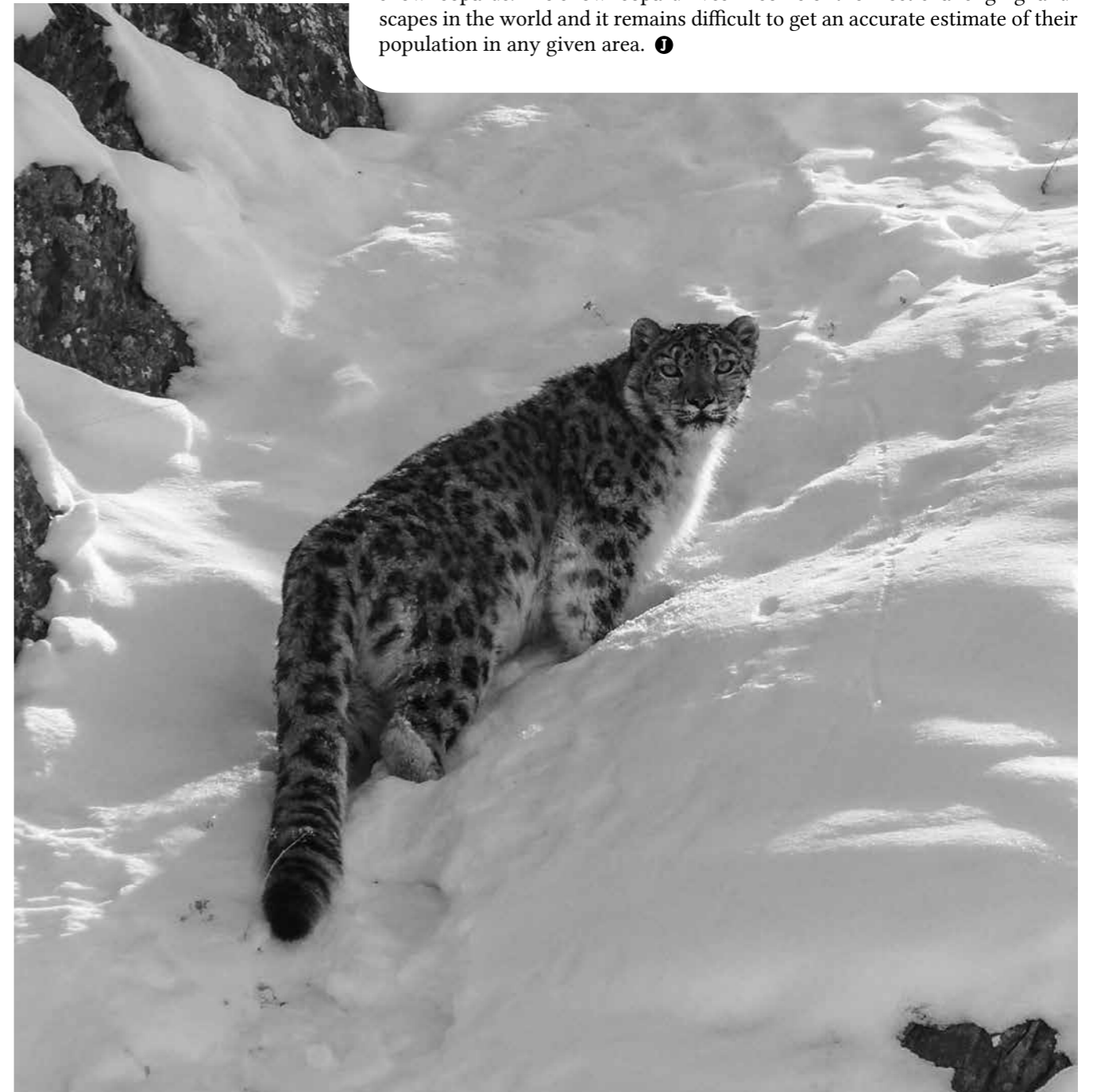
By Dorje Chitta

WCBCL member

THE endangered snow leopard is an amazing and beautiful cat. It is called by many names such as mountain monarch, elusive cat and grey ghost. Its coat camouflages very well with its surroundings and it becomes very difficult to spot it. The challenges in spotting the snow leopard have been compared to searching for the Holy Grail. The snow leopard remains the dream of most wildlife photographers.

The snow leopard is found across the Ladakh region. It is mostly nocturnal and prefers rugged, mountainous terrains, which include cliffs, ridges and ledges. It uses these features to survey the surrounding landscape as it patrols its territory and hunts for prey.

The snow leopards main prey species are the Blue-sheep or Bharal, Asiatic Ibex, Ladakh Urial, and, more rarely, Marmot and Hares. Sometimes, it also attacks livestock. There are many legends and tales about the habits of the snow leopards. The snow leopard lives in some of the most challenging landscapes in the world and it remains difficult to get an accurate estimate of their population in any given area. ❶



MY TRYST WITH WILD LADAKH

Ladakh is one of the most beautiful and awe inspiring places in the world. It is bestowed with beautiful landscapes, meandering rivers, sparkling streams, meandering glaciers and mesmerizing wildlife. It's no wonder that it attracts thousands of visitors from around the world.



By Dr. Tsewang Namgail

Director, Snow Leopard Conservancy-India Trust

LADAKH is one of the most beautiful and awe inspiring places in the world. It is bestowed with beautiful landscapes, meandering rivers, sparkling streams, meandering glaciers and mesmerizing wildlife. It's no wonder that it attracts thousands of visitors from around the world. After years of wanderings outside Ladakh, I returned home some years back. I still remember my teens when I was enthralled by the abundance of plant diversity and lush forests in the plains south of the Himalayas. It took me several years to realize that the greenest pasture were actually in the cold desert high up in the mountains. Here the plants are more nutritious, while the fragrances of flowers are purer and sweeter. But alas, all this is changing rather quickly.

In the past, I used to ponder about the negative relationship between development and fulfillment among people. I could not help but wonder if people in remote areas are more

fulfilled and satisfied with their lives. My experience seemed to suggest that they indeed were. These communities not only breathe fresher air, drink purer water, and eat highly nutritious food, but also have more meaningful relationships with each other and with nature. With development, we are already witnessing shorter life-spans, and growing prevalence of various diseases.

This explains the growing preference for rural areas around the world. Science has shown that people who spend more time outdoors are physically and mentally stronger and have more stable relationships as compared to those who spend most of their time indoors. It's well-known that people in some of the most developed countries live wretched lives filled with anxiety and depression. Hunza valley in north Pakistan is a good example of this contrast. In the past people in this valley live well-over 100 years but by the late twentieth century their life-span started to plummet. This change has now been correlated to the flow of packaged foods.

The situation is not very different in Ladakh, which suffers a deluge of packaged food each year, with negative impacts on our health, environment and economy. First, the transport trucks pollute the air, then the products pump harmful ingredients into our body with little nutritional value and finally the packaging pollute and harm the environment. In time, the toxic chemicals in the packaging leach out and contaminate ground water. It's difficult to understand why people enrich these companies by paying for attractively packaged toxic chemicals that make them ill, pollute their air, harm their environment and contaminate their water.

Instead, it is important for us to boost our land-based economy by encouraging farmers to grow native crops that are healthier and more nutritious. A lot of families migrate to Leh to ensure that their children have access to better educational facilities. We also need to remember that the quality of education in private schools is at par with government schools. Schools outside Ladakh primarily groom children to earn degrees and become a cog in the industrial wheel. Modern education is designed to smother the creativity of children and make them conform to industrial norms. So, they learn job skills, but not life skills that are critical for a meaningful life. They become literate, but not educated. They think too much about their career, and too little about their life. By the time they realize this, it's often too late. There is a Dutch saying, "We grow old too soon and grow smart too late."

We need to encourage farmers to stay in the villages and grow food for Ladakh. One simple solution is to

improve living conditions in the villages, with access to various facilities such as electricity and phone connectivity. However, am not sure if modern amenities equate to a better life. More often than not, these amenities erode the social and ecological systems in the villages. For instance, a road makes villages accessible but at the cost of all the plants that once grew in that area and the animals that depended on them.

Imagine what would happen in Ladakh, if the snow leopard were to disappear. The population of wild sheep and goats would explode and lead to overgrazing leading to desertification. In such a scenario, floods would become more frequent as the soil will not be able to hold water in the absence of plants. Floods cause damage to agricultural fields and property. This is just one possible ecological outcome to highlight the complexity of these ecosystems. Wildlife provides a range of other services. For instance, insects pollinate plants that feed us, while birds spread seeds and control pests and vulture eat carcasses to prevent the spread of disease. Thus, agriculture depends heavily on these ecological processes.

In recent years, there have been complaints about livestock depredation by snow leopards and crop damages by ibexes, marmots and partridges. Many people do not realize the important role played by these animals in ecosystem that sustains us. Marmots, for example, dig the ground and make the soil fertile, and facilitate greater plant diversity. We probably would not have survived in this harsh landscape without the support of wild animals, who are the real 'owners' of the land. They have been

I always wondered if there is a negative relationship between modern development and fulfillment among people

present in this region for tens of thousands of years, while humans arrived only 10,000 years ago.

Fortunately, we still have a lot of wildlife in Ladakh. These animals have been a source of great joy for me. Till a few years ago, I used to live a nomadic life, travelling between Europe, Indian plains and the wildlife landscapes of Ladakh. This was part of my research, which I started in 1998, when I investigated insect pests on poplar trees around Chandigarh. This did not satisfy me and I started looking for more adventurous projects. I ended up in Norway to pursue a Master in Wildlife Science, which was my passport to the wilderness of Ladakh—I needed a scholarship to afford travelling across Ladakh. A few months later I was in Rumbak studying the Tibetan argali, the world's largest wild sheep species. Later, I realized that I was the first person to carry out serious ecological research in Ladakh, as others had mostly focused on surveys.

As an inexperienced researcher in Rumbak, I became fascinated by the story of the argalis in the park. Three individuals (two males and one female) had arrived in the 1970s. Hunting by paramilitary forces was common at that time and the two males were shot, leaving the female behind. Fortunately, the female was pregnant and the population soon grew to 25 individuals. The argali is beautiful and the locals regarded their arrival as a good omen, and protected them. I spent around three months studying their ways. It remains one of the most cherished experiences of my life.

I also saw my first snow leopard on the slopes facing Yurutse near Rumbak. One afternoon, as I was scanning the slopes for different vegetation formations, I saw the silhouettes of two animals on a ridgeline who turned out to be snow leopards. Hoping to catch a closer glimpse, I climbed the slope and hid behind some cairns near the ridgeline. As I peeked out, I saw the leopards at a distance of about 15m. They are the most beautiful creatures on our planet. I was a little scared a bit as this was my first encounter with them. After some time, one walked to a valley on the right and the other to one on the left, which I was able to watch till it 'disappeared' into the ground. There were no boulders, bush or anything else but it disappeared right in front of my eyes. At that moment, I understood why the animal is called the grey ghost. I had come searching for argalis and managed to see a snow leopard. I was starting to get a peek into the secret lives of Ladakh's wild critters.

After my master's degree from the University of Tromsø, I got an opportunity to go to Zaskar in 2002 to

camera trap snow leopards—this was the first such study in Ladakh. The only way to reach Zaskar was to walk over the frozen Zaskar River in the peak of winter. We saluted the Zaskaris, who brave the ice, sometimes barefoot to keep their shoes dry, to travel to and from Zaskar in the winter. I wondered about the fate of the snow leopards in this landscape once the tar road was complete. As of now, uncontrolled tourism is polluting the river during the winter treks.

After the 15-day trek on the Zaskar and Tsarab rivers, we reached Shun valley, where we set up cameras. Some of the cameras finished their film rolls rather quickly. We were very excited till we developed the rolls: The cameras' motion-sensors had responded to snow blown by the wind! Despite this, we got some stunning photos on the camera traps. We then headed back to Leh as my friend had to catch a flight in a week's time. This meant that we had to look for a shorter route. Despite warnings from villagers, we decided to cross Morangla to Tsokar basin and then hitch a ride to Leh. With seven porters, we ploughed through thigh-deep snow for many days. At the

pass, we could not walk as the snow was neck-deep, and had to roll over the pass. We reached Kharnak after struggling through deep snow, after which our porters turned back and we hired two horses for our camping gear. We finally reached Tsokar, after traversing a loop through the wilderness of Zaskar and Changthang.

I then went to the Wageningen University in the Netherlands to explore the wilderness of Ladakh. One winter, I was in Gya-Miru researching human-wildlife conflict. I camped in minus 27 degrees Celsius in a tent made from parachute material and plastic sheets to keep the icy wind at bay. At a cliff below the campsite was a roosting site of a Himalayan Eagle Owl. One day I felt lonely and sought its company. I was sitting 5m from the owl and could see the veins in its eyes. On other days, I would seek the company of wolves that visited the valley or Tibetan Partridges floundering in the snow.

I later studied the elegant gazelles of Changthang. The landscape that they inhabited was equally beautiful. They were so shy and would bounce away like ping-pong balls at the slightest disturbance. I also had the opportunity

get close to cranes in Hanle. To make myself 'acceptable', I would often don the clothes of local herders with whom the birds shared a good relationship. I also had the opportunity to see some rare species like the Tibetan sand fox.

I had many eventful days, with pikas walking over my face to wake me up and Tibetan sandgrouse dropping by to drink water from the spring nearby. By mid-morning, golden eagles would soar above the camp and sometimes wolves would cross the slopes above campsite. A nature-lover could ask for nothing more! This was wild Ladakh unfurling its beauty. Now I fear that these scenes may become a forgotten memory as things are changing fast with unregulated tourism and the push for development. For instance, thoughtless off-road driving is destroying pika dens, crushing the eggs of ground-nesting birds, destroying the fertile topsoil and disturbing wild animals. We need to consider these issues and take corrective measures. We need to act with ecological, social and economic responsibility to ensure that Ladakh's wilderness will continue to enchant future generations.



LADAKH INDIA'S BIRDING HIGHPOINT

By Rajneesh Suvarna

LADAKH, which literally means the land of high passes, is also described as the roof of the world due to its high altitude. It is situated at the edge of the Tibetan Plateau, bound by the Karakoram in the north and the Himalayas to the South and west. It also has the Zaskar and Ladakh ranges running through it creating valleys that are variable in environment and habitat. Rainfall is limited and mostly received in snow, it creates a landscape of windswept high altitude plains overseen by rugged and many a time snow capped mountains. There are lakes with extended marshes, rolling hills and some green wide valleys. The winter as expected is extreme and summers pleasant but being situated on the edge of the pale arctic and the Tibetan biome while being on the pathway to the Indian/Oriental zoo-geog

raphical regions, Ladakh has more than its fair share of winged residents and visitors. From resident species that are altitudinal migrants to high altitude summer breeding visitors to species that use Ladakh as a staging post in their transcontinental migration crossing the Himalayan range; Ladakh hosts nearly 350(?) species.

Ladakh is huge, roughly 90,000sq. km, its stark landscape has to be seen to appreciate the scale of this nature's masterpiece. Vegetation is sparse and so is human habitation. So while it's relatively easy to sight birds you need to cover great distances. The main birding zones can be defined by Indus and Rumbak Valleys. The valleys surround-

ing the Indus river and the marshes from Shey to Thiksay have some cultivation and marshes providing good opportunity to see some 'lowland species' in the valley. Rumbak valley with its Willow and buckthorn slopes rising slowly towards the passes. Nubra Valley beyond the Khardungla pass has spectacular sand dunes, riverine and marshy habitat. It also has extensive buckthorn which is always visited by birds. Puga Sumdo Valley is interesting as it has diverse habitats; rocky slopes wedging in streams, meadows and some cultivation too. There is also a hot spring here.

Hanle and the lakes Tsomoriri of spectacular beauty and nesting site

for a lot of species. Tsokar the brackish water lake and its sister freshwater lake Tataputso would probably be the best birding areas in Ladakh for the amount of species and volumes that you see. Hanle with its vast planes is another treasure trove for birds as well as mammals.

Suru Valley is very different from all other regions of Ladakh. Much more lush and vegetated than any other area it supports a different set of species. Apart from the number of bird species and the spellbinding habitat another reason to bird in Ladakh is that it gives access to species that are difficult or impossible to see in the rest of the country.



Tsokar and its sister freshwater lake Tataputso would probably be the best birding areas in Ladakh.

Black-necked Crane. Probably Ladakh's flagship species. Though can be seen in Arunachal this is the only place to see it in summer. Seen mostly in Changthang in marshes and bogs the best place to see it is Tsokar and Hanle.

Tibetan Sandgrouse. A beautiful sandgrouse seen above 4,200 m in mid-sized flocks on stony planes. Best place to see TsoKar.

Ground Tit / Hume's Groundpecker. This unusual bird is a resident breeder here, best seen in summer when it is displaying and rearing its chicks in burrows. Best place to see TsoKar. Whitebrowed Tit Warbler A colorful bird and another resident breeder but local migrant. Best place to see Panamik in Nubra valley.

Eurasian Eagle Owl. Only confirmed sightings of the awe inspiring birds are from Ladakh. Best place to see Puga, Hanle, Markha Valley, Phyang, Ulley.

Little Owl. High on cuteness factor. Best place to see TsoKar.

Tibetan Lark. This large lark is seen in grasslands/plains besides marshes. Best place to see Hanle.

Golden Eagle. Ladakh has the most consistent sightings of this majestic raptor. Best seen at Khardungla, Tsokar.

Saker Falcon. Though now occasionally seen in Rajasthan, Ladakh is still the best place to see this powerful and graceful Falcon. Best place to see Tsokar.

Upland Buzzard. This powerful bird is often seen perched on lookouts on cliffs. Best place to see, Tsokar.

Himalayan Snowcock. Seen on steep hillsides and boulder marked meadows. Best Place to see Hemis National Park.

Tibetan Snowcock. Seen on rugged bare slopes. Best seen at passes TangleLa and ChangLa

Tibetan Partridge. Resident breeder seen in small flocks in scrubby plains. Best place to see between Puga and Tsokar

Whitethroated Dipper. A resident breeder seen along boulders in fast flowing streams. Best place to see, South Pulu, Puga Sumdo.

Güldenstädt's Redstart. Resident breeder is not uncommon all through the year. Best place to see slopes leading to the passes; KhardungLa, ChangLa and TangleLa.

Mongolian Finch. A little cute finch that is not too easy to get. Best place to see TsoKar, Hanle.

Tibetan Snowfinch. A Large snowfinch, widespread and common.

Blanford's Snowfinch. Summer breeder found in grazing meadows and besides marshes. Best seen at TsoKar.

Brandt's Mountain Finch. A relatively common bird that seems to love high altitudes, often seen as you approach passes and near Gompa. Best seen at near passes.

Streaked Rosefinch. Resident breeder, this large breeder is found near open scrub. Best place to see, seen in most parts of Ladakh best in South and Southeast

Great Rosefinch. Another big rosefinch and often seen in same locations and with the Streaked. Best place to see, seen in most parts of Ladakh best in South and Southeast.

Despite such an impressive list there are records of species like Garden, Barred, Great reed, Sedge, Black browed and Wood Warbler most of which are the only records for India and all until recently were only from mist nets. This is a reflection of how under birded Ladakh is and there are probably many a species waiting to make it to the list. That's one more reason why Ladakh should make its way into your birding calendar.

16 new birds recorded in Ladakh

By Tashi Chotak Lonchey



Common Chaff Finch

Spotted at Phyang village (34° 11' 50" N and 77° 30' 5" E) in Nov/Dec 2015.

The common chaffinch (*Fringilla coelebs*), usually known simply as the chaffinch, is a common and widespread small passerine bird in the finch family. The male is brightly coloured with a blue-grey cap and rust-red under parts. The chaffinch breeds in much of Europe, across Asia to Siberia and in northwest Africa.

The chaffinch breeds in wooded areas where the July isotherm is between 12 and 30 °C (54 and 86 °F). The breeding range includes northwest Africa, most of Europe and extends eastwards across temperate Asia to the Angara River and the southern end of Lake Baikal in Siberia.



Spotted dove (*Spilopelia chinensis*)

Spotted at Tarchit Rong in November 2015.

Is a small and somewhat long-tailed pigeon which is a common resident breeding bird across its native range on the Indian Subcontinent and Southeast Asia. The spotted dove in its native range in Asia is found across a range of habitats including woodland, scrub, farmland and habitation. In India it tends to be found in the moister regions, with the laughing dove (*Spilopelia senegalensis*) being commoner in the drier areas. These doves are mostly found on the ground where they forage for seeds and grain or on low vegetation.



Purple Swamphen (*Porphyrio porphyrio*)

Spotted at Shey marshes on 11th Oct 2016.

Is a large size, purple blue coloration with variable greyish head, huge red bill and frontal shield. Large marshes and extensive reedbeds bordering wetlands.



Spotted Redshank

Spotted at Chuchot in November 2015.



Yellow-breasted greenfinch (*Chloris spinoides*)

Spotted at Phyang village (34° 11' 50" N and 77° 30' 5" E) on 1st of November 2016.

A species of finch in the family Fringillidae native to the northern regions of the Indian subcontinent. The species occurs primarily in the mid-altitudes of the Himalayas, and in parts of Southeast Asia. It ranges across Afghanistan, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Thailand, Tibet and Vietnam. Its natural habitats are temperate forests and temperate shrubland.