

KYONGNOSLA ALPINE SANCTUARY– TSOMGO- TAMZE- CHOLA COMPLEX



IBA Site Code	:	IN-SK-05
State	:	Sikkim
District	:	East Sikkim
Coordinates	:	27° 22' 33" N, 88° 44' 13" E
Ownership	:	State Forest Department
Area	:	3,100 ha
Altitude	:	375 – 2,750 m
Rainfall	:	Not Available
Temperature	:	Not Available
Biogeographic Zone	:	Himalaya
Habitats	:	Subtropical Broadleaf Hill Forest, Alpine Moist Pasture

IBA CRITERIA: A1 (Threatened Species), A2 (Eastern Himalayas Endemic Bird Area 130), A3 (Biome-5: Eurasian High Montane; Biome-7: Sino-Himalayan Temperate Forest; Biome-8: Sino-Himalayan Subtropical Forest)

PROTECTION STATUS: Wildlife Sanctuary, established in 1984

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Kyongnosla and Tsomgo lie on the Gangtok-Natula highway in East Sikkim. The Sanctuary has dense bamboo thickets and typical temperate vegetation with Rhododendron - Silver Fir - Juniper forest and ground flora like Aconites, Potentilla, Aster, Iris, ground orchids and wild strawberries. There are steep cliffs that are snowbound throughout the year, as also open areas used by livestock in summer, until a recent ban by the government on grazing in forest areas. This IBA is a popular tourist destination barely 40 km from the State capital, Gangtok.

AVIFAUNA

More than 230 species of birds have been identified (U. Lachungpa pers. comm. 2003). Outside Khangchendzonga National Park, this is the site where the State Bird of Sikkim, the Blood Pheasant *Ithaginis cruentus*, is found, probably in significant numbers.

Among the globally threatened species of this site, the most prominent one would be the Wood Snipe *Gallinago nemoricola*, as it possibly breeds here (U. Lachungpa pers. comm. 2003). Satyr Tragopan *Tragopan satyra* at the upper limit of its range, and Himalayan Monal Lophophorus *impejanus*, the former considered as Near Threatened (BirdLife International 2001), are also residents.

The Snow Pigeon *Columba leuconota* come down here in winter. Other species of interest are the Fire-tailed Sunbird *Aethopyga ignicauda* and Gold-naped Black Finch *Pyrrhoplectes epauletta*, birds of temperate forest. Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* and Greater Spotted Eagle *Aquila clanga*, Brown-headed Gull *Larus brunicephalus* with Tufted Pochard *Aythya fuligula* were seen occasionally in Tsomgo Lake during the winter Asian Waterfowl Census (AWC). Pallas's Fish-Eagle *Haliaeetus leucoryphus* was once seen in the forest patch below Tamzey during a survey for Red Panda in 1998 (U. Lachungpa pers. comm. 2003).

The site is located in the Eastern Himalayas Endemic Bird Area (EBA-130) where 21 species have been listed of which only one species, the Hoary-throated Barwing *Actinodura nipalensis*, has been found till now but more are likely to occur.

Perhaps the most important reason for selection of this site as an IBA is the presence of large number of biome restricted species of three biome types. Although, this site lies chiefly in Biome-7 (Sino-Himalayan Temperate Forest), birds of Biome-5 (Eurasian High

Montane-Alpine and Tibetan) and Biome-8 (Sino-Himalayan Subtropical Forest) are also seen, mainly due to their altitudinal movement. In winter, birds of Biome-5 move down, so we see species such as Rosy Pipit *Anthus roseus*, Snow Pigeon *Columba leuconota*, Alpine Accentor *Prunella collaris* and others in this site. Thirteen out of 48 species of this biome have been seen in this IBA. Expectedly, the largest number of biome restricted species is from Biome-7: 35 out of 112 species but more are likely to be present. As the boundary between Biome-7 and Biome-8 is very diffuse (like all other biomes), some species are likely to be present in both the biomes. Till now, U. Lachungpa (pers. comm. 2003) has been able to locate only two biome restricted species, Grey-winged Blackbird *Turdus boulboul* and Black-spotted Yellow-Tit *Parus spilnotus*, of Biome-8 in this IBA. However, considering the long list of Biome-8 birds (95 species) and the extent of good habitat available, more species are likely to be found here.

Vulnerable	
Pallas's Fish-Eagle	<i>Haliaeetus leucoryphus</i>
Greater Spotted Eagle	<i>Aquila clanga</i>
Wood Snipe	<i>Gallinago nemoricola</i>
Near Threatened	
Satyr Tragopan	<i>Tragopan satyra</i>
Endemic Bird Area 130: Eastern Himalayas	
Hoary-throated Barwing	<i>Actinodura nipalensis</i>
Biome- 5: Eurasian High Montane (Alpine and Tibetan)	
Himalayan Griffon	<i>Gyps himalayensis</i>
Snow Partridge	<i>Lerwa lerwa</i>
Brown-headed Gull	<i>Larus brunicephalus</i>
Snow Pigeon	<i>Columba leuconota</i>
Rosy Pipit	<i>Anthus roseatus</i>
Alpine Accentor	<i>Prunella collaris</i>
Plain-backed Thrush	<i>Zoothera mollissima</i>
Kessler's Thrush	<i>Turdus kessleri</i>
Wallcreeper	<i>Tichodroma muraria</i>
Hodgson's Mountain-Finch	<i>Leucosticte nemoricola</i>
Black-headed Mountain-Finch	<i>Leucosticte brandti</i>
Yellow-billed Chough	<i>Pyrrhocorax graculus</i>
Grandala	<i>Grandala coelicolor</i>

Important Bird Areas in India - Sikkim

Bio-me-7: Si no-Hi mal ayan Temperate Forest

Blood Pheasant	<i>Ithaginis cruentus</i>
Satyr Tragopan	<i>Tragopan satyra</i>
Himalayan Monal	<i>Lophophorus impejanus</i>
Darjeeling Pied Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos darjellensis</i>
Rufous-breasted Accentor	<i>Prunella strophiatea</i>
White-collared Blackbird	<i>Turdus albocinctus</i>
Gould's Shortwing	<i>Brachypteryx stellata</i>
Himalayan Rubythroat	<i>Luscinia pectoralis</i>
Golden Bush-Robin	<i>Tarsiger chrysaeus</i>
White-browed Bush-Robin	<i>Tarsiger indicus</i>
Rufous-breasted Bush-Robin	<i>Tarsiger hyperythrus</i>
White-throated Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus schisticeps</i>
White-throated Laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax albogularis</i>
Spotted Laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax ocellatus</i>
Scaly Laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax subunicolor</i>
Black-faced Laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax affinis</i>
Green Shrike-Babbler	<i>Pteruthius xanthochlorus</i>
Bar-throated Minla	<i>Minla strigula</i>
Great Parrotbill	<i>Conostoma oemodium</i>
Brown Parrotbill	<i>Paradoxornis unicolor</i>
Fulvous-fronted Parrotbill	<i>Paradoxornis fulvifrons</i>
Yellow-bellied Bush-Warbler	<i>Cettia acanthizoides</i>
Grey-sided Bush-Warbler	<i>Cettia brunnifrons</i>
Rufous-fronted Tit	<i>Aegithalos iouschistos</i>
Rufous-bellied Crested Tit	<i>Parus rubidiventris</i>
Brown Crested Tit	<i>Parus dichrous</i>
White-tailed Nuthatch	<i>Sitta himalayensis</i>
Rusty-flanked Tree-Creeper	<i>Certhia nipalensis</i>
Fire-tailed Sunbird	<i>Aethopyga ignicauda</i>
Tibetan Siskin	<i>Carduelis thibetana</i>
Dark-rumped Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus edwardsii</i>
White-browed Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus thura</i>
White-winged Grosbeak	<i>Mycerobas carnipes</i>
Gold-naped Black Finch	<i>Pyrrhoptectes epauletta</i>
Yellow-billed Blue Magpie	<i>Urocissa flavirostris</i>

Bio-me-8: Si no-Hi mal ayan Subtropical Forest

Grey-winged Blackbird	<i>Turdus boulboul</i>
Black-spotted Yellow Tit	<i>Parus spilonotus</i>

OTHER KEY FAUNA

Takin *Budorcas taxicolor*, Red or Hill Fox *Vulpes vulpes*, Goral *Nemorhaedus goral*, Musk Deer *Moschus chrysogaster*, Yellow-Throated Marten *Martes flavigula*, Asiatic Black Bear *Ursus thibetanus*, Mouse-Hare *Ochotona roylei* and Siberian Weasel

Some of the Himalayan Marmots *Marmota himalayana* rescued from North Sikkim were released here.

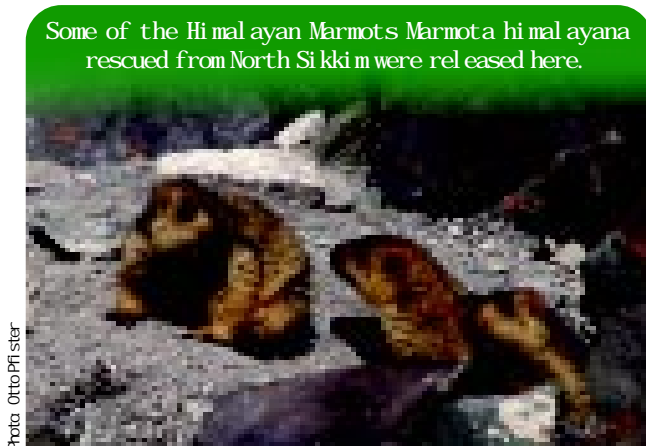


Photo: Otto Pfister

Mustela sibirica have been recorded from this IBA. Some of the Himalayan Marmots *Marmota himalayana* rescued from North Sikkim and released in the Sanctuary were re-sighted after eight years (Ganguli-Lachungpa and Sharma 2002). So far, no herpetofauna survey has been conducted in this IBA (U. Lachungpa pers. comm. 2003).

LAND USE

- q Forestry
- q Military
- q Nature conservation and research

THREATS AND CONSERVATION ISSUES

- q Frequent and regular change of army units
- q Pollution of wetlands especially by camps of Army and GREF
- q Pollution due to uncontrolled tourism activities
- q Heavy traffic
- q Disturbance to wildlife from stray dogs
- q Infrastructure (Transmission /Road lines)
- q Poaching

Part of the Sanctuary has faced logging operations by the Forest Department in the past. Also, much of the tree cover was removed from the area during the time when the Natu La trade route to Lhasa, Tibet was open. The areas towards Tsomgo Lake were also degraded by grazing and annual collection of medicinal herbs, but more due to uncontrolled tourism activities since the area was opened almost a decade ago. Due to deployment of non-native personnel including road maintenance labour force and army camps along the Gangtok-Natu La-Zuluk- Rongli route, there have been poaching incidences of Blood Pheasant (the State Bird) and Himalayan Monal from this IBA, and often traps were encountered during surveys or feathers found outside field kitchens (U. Lachungpa pers. comm. 2003).

Due to heavy human use, including vehicular traffic, both tourist and military, important wetlands, lakes and watershed areas are constantly in danger of being polluted. Almost a decade ago, an epidemic of the jaundice hit the State capital Gangtok and was suspected to be a result of contamination due to a military settlement at the source of the River Ratey Chu, source of Gangtok's water supply. The area lies on the eastern periphery of this IBA (U. Lachungpa pers. comm. 2003). The Brahminy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea*, Tufted Pochard *Aythya fuligula* and Wigeon *Anas penelope* are now seldom seen at Tsomgo Lake due to uncontrolled numbers of tourists wandering around its periphery and continuous traffic.

Like in other IBAs of Sikkim, stray and feral dogs are a menace, proliferating around camp kitchens. There have been instances of human casualties due to these dogs. There have also been instances of Asiatic Black Bear raiding ration depots in this region (U. Lachungpa pers. comm. 2003). A proposal for re-opening of the Natu La trade route is under consideration.

KEY CONTRIBUTOR

Usha Lachungpa

KEY REFERENCES

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- Ganguli-Lachungpa, U. and Sharma, B. K. (2002) Himalayan marmot *Marmota bobak* (Muller) resighted after eight years at Kyongnosla Alpine Sanctuary, East Sikkim J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc. 99 (2): 288.
- Stattersfield, A. J., Crosby, M. J., Long, A. J. and Wege, D. C. (1998) Endemic Bird Areas of the World: Priorities for Biodiversity Conservation. BirdLife Conservation Series No. 7. BirdLife International, Cambridge, U.K.