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Bird survey in Lengteng Wildlife Sanctuary and Blue Mountain (Phawngpui) National Park, Mizoram

Raju Kasambe¹, H. Lalthanzara², and Lalawmawia Sailo³

A survey of birds was conducted in Mizoram state in north-east India during February 11–22, 2014. Mizoram is one of the Seven Sister states of India. Mizoram has been neglected as far as the study of birds and other wildlife is concerned.

Indian Bird Conservation Network (IBCN) and the Pachhunga University College conducted a bird survey in two Important Bird Areas (IBAs) of Mizoram, namely, Lengteng Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) in Champhai district and Phawngpui (Blue Mountain) National Park (NP) in Lawngtlai district. The habitat in Lengteng WLS is tropical wet evergreen and semi-evergreen and sub-tropical broadleaf hill forest type. In Phawngpui (Blue Mountain) NP, the habitat is tropical wet evergreen and sub-tropical broadleaf hill forest type.



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Mizoram is a hilly state, with scenic landscape. The hills are covered with forests, but a close look reveals many scars left by *jhum* cultivation and clearing of forests

Bird survey was done in Lengteng WLS during February 12–14, 2014. Bird survey was done around Hnahthial town in Lunglei district during February 15–16, 2014. We travelled from Hnahthial town to Sangau village in Saiha district on February 17, 2014.

We surveyed birds in Phawngpui National Park on February 18, 2014. Here, we did a long trail up to Farpark, where a patch of montane grassland exists. We travelled from Sangau village to Aizawl city on February 19, 2014. On February 22, 2014 we visited Sinners' Friends Rehabilitation Centre, district Aizawl and Aizawl Zoological Park.



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Phawngpui National Park

Phawngpui (Blue Mountain) National Park is an Important Bird Area and is spread across 5,000 hectares in Lawngtlai district of Mizoram. The Kolodyne river along the eastern border separates it from Myanmar. It is known for good populations of Mrs. Hume's Pheasant *Syrnaticus humiae*, Blyth's Tragopan *Tragopan blythii*, and Dark-rumped Swift *Apus acuticauda*. The photograph shows a patch of tropical wet evergreen forest in the IBA.

Lengteng Wildlife Sanctuary

Lengteng Wildlife Sanctuary is spread across 8,000 hectares in Champhai district of Mizoram. This is a wild banana grove in the valleys of Lengteng, typical habitat of the Streaked Spiderhunter *Arachnothera magna*. This IBA is important for four species of pheasants, and also Great Pied Hornbill *Buceros bicornis*, which was seen during the survey.



Raju Kasambe

Conservation issues

Both in and around Lengteng Wildlife Sanctuary we found people selectively felling large old trees. The trees are cut and blocks are made in the forest itself. The blocks are manually transported to the villages. There is a tar road along the Lengteng Wildlife Sanctuary border and most of the forest along the road has been cleared.

In Lengteng WLS and Phawngpui NP, good forest patches are seen only in far and inaccessible places in the mountains. Hunting is rampant – most of the men moving around in the forest area were seen with a gun, and the young at least with slingshots. Collection of firewood is a daily chore as most of the village population depends on the forest for firewood.



Sawmtea

Mizoram bird survey team near Phawngpui National Park (L-R) Faka, Robul, Lalawmawia Sailo, and Dr. Raju Kasambe

We sighted more than 130 species of birds during this bird survey, some of which are featured here.



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Ashy Bulbul *Hemixos flavala*



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Striated Bulbul *Pycnonotus striatus*



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Himalayan Black Bulbul *Hypsipetes leucocephalus*



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Black-crested Bulbul *Pycnonotus flaviventris*

While surveying birds we came across nine species of bulbuls, namely, Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer*, Red-whiskered Bulbul *P. jocosus*, Ashy Bulbul *Hemixos flavala*, Flavescent Bulbul *P. flavescens*, Himalayan Black Bulbul *Hypsipetes leucocephalus*, Black-headed Bulbul *P. atriceps*, Black-crested Bulbul *P. flaviventris*, Striated Bulbul *P. striatus* and Crested Finchbill *P. canifrons*. The bulbuls were mostly seen on flowering trees of Silk Cotton or on fruiting fig trees. Bulbuls are some of the most visible birds here.



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Yellow-browed Leaf-warbler
Phylloscopus inornatus



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Chestnut-crowned Warbler
Seicercus castaneiceps



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Grey-hooded Warbler
Phylloscopus xanthoschistos

Identifying the warblers, especially the brown and green leaf-warblers (*Phylloscopus* spp.) was a daunting task in the field. Most of these were identified later, after consulting bird experts. Many of them are very difficult to photograph and what we could do was record the calls. We could identify Sulphur-bellied Warbler *Phylloscopus griseolus*, Orange-barred Leaf-warbler *Phylloscopus pulcher*, Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus*, Lemon-rumped Leaf-warbler *Phylloscopus chloronotus*, Broad-billed Warbler *Tickellia hodgsoni*, Tickell's Leaf-warbler *Phylloscopus affinis* and White-spectacled Warbler *Seicercus affinis*, to mention some.



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Grey Bushchat *Rhodophila ferrea*



Sawmtea

Himalayan Red-flanked Bush-robin *Tarsiger rufilatus*

Grey Bushchat was seen perching on bushes even along the tarred roads almost everyday, whereas the Himalayan Red-flanked Bush-robin preferred montane forested paths and behaved like a Black Redstart.



Sawmtea

Rusty-fronted Barwing *Actinodura egertoni*



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Striped Laughingthrush *Trochalopteron virgatum*

Rusty-fronted Barwing was seen in small parties foraging in dense vegetation, seldom coming out. It was always associated with other species like yuhinas, minlas, and fulvettas. Striped Laughingthrush seems to be common in both Lengteng and Phawngpui. It is very vocal, but a skulker and keeps to the understory or inside the bush. It prefers scrub and forest edges where the forest has degraded due to anthropogenic pressure.



Sawmtea

Little Bunting
Emberiza pusilla



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Chestnut Bunting
Emberiza rutila



Sawmtea

Yellow-breasted Bunting
Emberiza aureola

We found three species of bunting, the Little Bunting being the most frequently sighted in short grass along the roads. All were seen in Lengteng WLS, whereas in Phawngpui NP we sighted only the Little Bunting. The Yellow-breasted Bunting has recently been uplisted from the Vulnerable to the Endangered category in the IUCN Red List.



Sawmtea

Himalayan Vulture *Gyps himalayensis*



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Crested Goshawk *Accipiter trivirgatus*

A Himalayan Vulture was seen soaring in the sky above Lengteng WLS. We sighted two Crested Goshawks flying over forested area near Tuipui village in Lunglei district.



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Blue-winged Minla *Siva cyanouroptera*



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Whiskered Yuhina *Yuhina flavicollis*

Minlas were often seen in both Lengteng and Phawngpui in small groups, feeding on berries and flying from one bush to another. Yuhinas were seen in flocks foraging for berries and nectar and behaving like tits. Both yuhinas and minlas were always associated with other birds, especially babblers, and flew in waves.



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Kaleej Pheasant *Lophura leucomelanos*



Sawmtea

Grey Peacock-pheasant *Polyplectron bicalcaratum*

Pheasants are hunted for meat all over north-east India. Three Kaleej Pheasants were seen in a privately owned forested area near Aizawl, called Sinners' Friend Rehabilitation Centre. Grey Peacock-pheasant was heard more often than seen in Lengteng WLS. We suspect that the population of all the pheasants in Mizoram has crashed due to severe hunting pressure. We are conducting further surveys on the status of pheasants in Mizoram.



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Mrs Gould's Sunbird *Aethopyga gouldiae*



Sawmtea

Black-breasted Sunbird *Aethopyga saturata*

Mrs Gould's Sunbird and Green-tailed Sunbird *Aethopyga nipalensis* were seen nearly everyday, nectaring on various flowers. Fire-tailed Sunbird *Aethopyga ignicauda* was seen in slightly open areas. We also saw Crimson Sunbird *Aethopyga siparaja*, besides the Ruby-cheeked Sunbird *Chalcoparia singalensis* and Black-breasted Sunbird, which were seen only once each.



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Slaty-backed Flycatcher *Ficedula sordida*



Sawmtea

Orange-gorgeted Flycatcher *Ficedula strophitata*

Both these flycatchers were seen in dense foliage with good canopy cover. They perched high up in branches and made small sallies below to snap smaller insects.



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Pin-striped Tit-babbler
Mixornis gularis



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Black-eared Shrike-babbler
Pteruthius melanotis



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Golden Babbler
Cyanoderma chrysaenum

Pin-striped Tit-babbler was seen only once feeding on ants. It was part of a small flock moving in a dense bush looking for insects. It keeps calling continuously and loudly like tailorbirds. Black-eared Shrike-babbler was seen in Lengteng WLS. Another *Pteruthius*, namely, Green Shrike-babbler *Pteruthius xanthochlorus* was seen hunting for insects among the understorey in the evergreen forest at Sinners' Friend Rehabilitation Centre. Golden Babbler was seen in dense understorey in the upper reaches of Lengteng WLS. It was easy to spot because of its striking colour and hyperactive behaviour. It keeps to the bush and is always associated with other hunting parties.



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Spot-breasted Scimitar-babbler
Megapomatorhinus mcclellandi



Sawmtea

Streak-breasted Scimitar-babbler
Pomatorhinus ruficollis bakeri



Sawmtea

Phayre's Scimitar-babbler
Pomatorhinus phayrei

Nine out of ten species of scimitar-babblers in India are found in the Himalaya. There are very few photographs of the *bakeri* subspecies of the Streak-breasted Scimitar-babbler from India. This subspecies has a yellow bill, colder olive brown upperparts, and paler olive brown underparts. It has been reported from South Assam hills. It is often very noisy but elusive, and keeps to the understorey, seldom venturing out.



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Fire-breasted Flowerpecker *Dicaeum ignipectus*



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Streaked Spiderhunter *Arachnothera magna*

A pair of Fire-breasted Flowerpecker was seen at high elevation in Phawngpui NP feeding on nectar. A Plain Flowerpecker *D. minullum* and a pair of Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker *D. cruentatum* were also seen during the survey. Flowerpeckers are active, with swift flight. Streaked Spiderhunter was seen almost everywhere in its preferred habitat of wild banana orchards. It is noisy, particularly while flying from one tree to another. The Little Spiderhunter *Arachnothera longirostra* was seen on fewer occasions.

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