

OBC IN ACTION

Conservation Fund



COMPILED BY PAUL INSUA CAO, DUNCAN MCNIVEN & GRAHAM HIRONS

Conservation Committee

Chair: Paul Insua Cao. **Small Grants:** Duncan McNiven, Graham Hirons. **Council sub-group:** John Gregory, Chris Gooddie, Yong Ding Li. **Shorebirds Conservation Group:** Sayam Chowdhury, Vivian Fu, Yong Ding Li. **Conservation Officers:** Nick Brickle, Simon Wotton, Joe Taylor, Francis Buner, David Showler, Will Duckworth, Sayam Chowdhury, Jacqui Weir.

Introduction

The Conservation Committee continues to develop its grant-giving programme through the larger team established in 2020. The small grants programme and the relationship with the Asian Species Action Partnership (ASAP) continue as established means of grant-giving. In addition, OBC has a group focussed on shorebirds and is planning a group to bring focus to our support on the songbird trade issue.

The Covid-19 pandemic has meant that several projects have been delayed over the past year. We remain in contact with grantees to monitor progress and no projects have had to be abandoned.

We thank the March Conservation Fund for its continuing support of OBC in 2021. Donations to support projects can be made directly through the OBC website. Specify 'shorebirds' as the purpose if you wish to support that fund. For enquiries about large donations, email mail@orientalbirdclub.org. As the Conservation Committee is run by volunteers, 100% of donations received go directly to conservation projects.

Conservation projects funded by OBC since May 2021**Small grants (£1,000 to £3,000)**

- Monitoring the Endangered Black-bellied Tern *Sterna acuticauda* and other riverine bird species in Tamil Nadu, India—P. Jeganathan. The population and habitat of this species will be studied along the Kaveri River, which is subject to anthropogenic pressures.
- Migration routes of Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* on the central Asian–Indian flyway, Uzbekistan—Robert J. Burnside. Using satellite tags to track the poorly known migration of Egyptian Vultures from Central Asia towards the south.
- Bridging the gap: capacity building for standardised Galliformes research in Pakistan—Muhammad Naeem Awan. Training will be given to ornithologists to ensure reliable and consistent data are collected when surveying Galliformes to assess the conservation status of several of Pakistan's poorly known species.

Small grants (£1,000 to £3,000) supported by the March Conservation Fund

- Survey of Yellow-breasted Bunting *Emberiza aureola* in north-east Bangladesh—Nazim Uddin Khan. There has been no specific and systematic survey of this Critically Endangered species in Bangladesh previously.
- Exploring the enigma: identifying key distribution and threats of Black-browed Babbler *Malacocincla persipillata* (Plate 1), Indonesia—Panji Gusti Akbar, Birdpacker Indonesia Foundation. This bird was recorded in October 2020 for the first time in 170 years (see BA34: 13–14); the surveys carried out in this project will provide a basis for understanding the status and ecology of this almost unknown species.



Plate 1. The first wild photograph of Black-browed Babbler *Malacocincla persipillata* from an ongoing OBC project. Kalimantan, Borneo, September 2021.



PANJI GUSTI AKBAR

Large grant (>£3,000) supported by the March Conservation Fund

A follow-up grant was provided to Irfan Rosyadi of Yayasan Kanopi Indonesia for a second phase of the project 'Implementing bird and habitat conservation through community development at Jatimulyo Village, Menoreh Landscape, Java, Indonesia'. A summary of the first phase is given below.



Migratory shorebirds

Thanks to a generous donation to the Club, a migratory shorebirds team was set up earlier this year to guide the focus of OBC support to where we could best have an impact on migratory shorebird conservation regionally. One of our first activities was organising OBC's inaugural online webinar on 20 March 2021, entitled 'Spoon-billed Sandpipers and the East Asian-Australasian Flyway'. It included guest presentations by Dr Christoph Zöckler of the EAAFP's Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force, giving background history on Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Calidris pygmaea* conservation, Dr Nigel Clark on satellite-tagging of this species, and Ayuwat Jearwattanakanok from Bird Conservation Society of Thailand who spoke on the management of Pak Thale Nature Reserve. A recording of the webinar can be found on OBC's YouTube channel (<https://bit.ly/3bpl1zf>). The webinar raised over £1,500 for our Migratory Shorebirds Fund.

As migratory birds start to move south for the winter, the Club has relaunched—in collaboration with the East-Asian Australasian Flyway Partnership (EAAFP), BirdLife International and the Spoon-billed Sandpiper Task Force—the #legflagchallenge. This campaign encourages bird photographers to submit photographs of shorebirds marked with coloured flags or rings, building on last year's campaign (see BA34: 15–16). Photos can be submitted under #legflagchallenge on Facebook or Instagram with details of species, date, location and leg-flag information. More information can be found at <https://www.eaaflyway.net/join-the-legflagchallenge/>.

As part of this campaign, OBC supported another webinar organised by EAAFP on 7 October to mark World Migratory Bird Day. Bringing together two leading experts, Dr Lee Ki-Sup and Dr Marcel Klaassen, this webinar highlighted the importance of understanding bird migration and how anyone can get involved, with presentations on submitting records of Black-faced Spoonbill *Platalea minor* and for the newly launched BirdMark website. A recording of that webinar can be found through the EAAFP website at <https://www.eaaflyway.net/join-the-quest-of-legflag-challenge-2021-wmbd-webinar-1/>.

Our Young Conservation Scientist Award for Shorebirds was launched to support early-career scientists from the region under the age of 30 to conduct research that supports shorebird conservation. Two award winners were selected for work starting this winter season:

- Gayomini Panagoda, for the project 'To save the only freshwater lake in a migratory mega hotspot in the Central Asian Flyway from poaching and encroachment' in Sri Lanka. This project will work with local stakeholders at Korakulam Lake, the only freshwater lake on Mannar Island and part of the Rama Bridge between Sri Lanka and India, to address poaching and encroachment.
- Shoeb Ali, for shorebird surveys at Teknaf Peninsular on the south-east coast of Bangladesh. This area, which borders Myanmar, is poorly known for shorebirds and is under high human pressure due to the influx of refugees from Myanmar.

Summary reports of recently completed projects supported by the Conservation Fund

Population and nesting habitat survey of the North Philippine Hawk-eagle and other raptors in five protected areas in Luzon. Project kindly funded by Richard Heaver.

North Philippine Hawk-eagle *Nisaetus philippensis* is an Endangered raptor endemic to the islands of Luzon and Mindoro in the northern Philippines. It inhabits forests and is threatened by habitat loss and hunting. Little research has been done on Philippine forest raptors in general, with scant information about population and breeding biology for most species including *N. philippensis*. This project conducted raptor field surveys in six sites in Luzon, modelled species distribution for six raptors, and documented the breeding activities of *N. philippensis*.

Raptor surveys were conducted using point and line transects along a total of 511 km of forest roads between November 2019 and January 2020. Fourteen species were recorded in generally low abundances, with Philippine Serpent-eagle *Spilornis holospilus* being the most abundant. North Philippine Hawk-eagle occurred at five sites but less than one individual per 10 km² was encountered on average. The abundance estimates obtained can serve as baseline data for temporal comparisons when surveys are repeated using the same methods.

To supplement the survey, the potential suitable habitats of six other raptor species were also modelled using Maxent. Only 13–25% of Luzon were deemed suitable for these species, with strongholds located in the Sierra Madre mountain range, the northern part of the Cordillera Central, and the southern part of the Zambales Mountains. These areas contain some of the last remaining lowland dipterocarp forests on the island and cover at least 13 key conservation sites in the Philippines.

Lastly, the breeding biology of North Philippine Hawk-eagle was described for the first time. A pair was monitored for two breeding seasons, in 2019 and 2020, when the parents were successful in fledging one chick a year. Incubation started in late January and lasted for more than 30 days, while the nestling period lasted for more than 53 days. Nest attendance was highest during the incubation period, while sprig and prey deliveries peaked during the first month of the nestling period. The species exhibited strong role asymmetry in parental care. The female was responsible for incubating, brooding and taking care of the chick, while the male provided food for the family. The most common prey type consumed by the hawk-eagles was birds, with a particularly high representation of waterhens and rails, and mammals, mainly comprised of rats and bats. Although observation was limited as they came from a single breeding pair, this study provides important life history data to inform conservation action.

In all study sites, local government offices were given reports about the study. These included data, maps and recommendations for species and habitat conservation. Community engagement activities, such as bird walks and

lectures, were conducted at the nesting site. The project led to a local movement on habitat restoration and biodiversity protection, where pocket forests of native trees have already been created.

Grant awarded to, and summary prepared by, Jelaine L. Gan, Institute of Biology, University of the Philippines, Diliman, Quezon City, NCR, Philippines.

Promotion of bird feeding stations to strengthen interest in bird conservation in Lao PDR

Attitudes in Lao PDR towards nature conservation are changing. A key contributing factor has been a national logging ban through Prime Minister Order No. 15 in May 2016. This has resulted in a rethink regarding the values of the forest estate and, in particular, the emerging national park system. Five new national parks have become established in the last 30 months and nature-based tourism has been seen as an integral part of these positive conservation developments. While these policy changes have occurred relatively rapidly, changes in behaviour and attitudes towards wildlife take a great deal longer and need to be nurtured, particularly when wildlife is persecuted with such high intensity. How can a Lao national enjoy a nature experience when so many birds are either shy or being consumed?

In 2018, we estimated the number of Lao birdwatchers in the country at 11, of whom only half owned a pair of binoculars. If people are to enjoy birds, they need to enjoy some wildlife experiences, and experience birds close-up. It was this notion that led to the idea of creating a video of a bird feeding and watering station in Thailand. Through the OBC Country Rep in Thailand, Phil Round, Khemthong Tonsakulrungruang was engaged to produce a video of bird feeding stations, which are used to attract birdwatchers and photographers to the periphery of Kaeng Krachan NP. The video shows the establishment and management of the bird feeding stations as much as footage of the birds themselves. Khemthong, working with an OBC seed grant of £300, produced a superb video in Thai (generally understood by Lao people), which can be seen on the OBC's YouTube channel. To date, the video has been shared in Lao PDR with national bird photographers in Nakai Nam Theun NP, Nam Et-Phou Louey NP and Nam Kan National Protected Area; private-sector concessionaires in four ecotourism sites; the arboretum in Luang Prabang; and four university lecturers working in conservation who intend to pilot a bird feeding station within the National University of Laos campus. We remain very positive that several bird feeding stations will become established in Lao PDR in the coming two years and start generating more interest in birds and wildlife among Lao nationals.

Grant awarded to, and summary prepared by, John Parr, Vientiane, Lao PDR.

The following five projects were supported by the **March Conservation Fund**.



An assessment of protected areas management effectiveness for the conservation of the Red Listed Western Tragopan *Tragopan melanocephalus* in Pakistan

Protected areas are a critical tool for conserving biodiversity in the face of the global crisis of species extinction. Here we report on the first ever assessment of the management effectiveness of 26 of Pakistan's Protected Areas (PAs), including all the PAs within the range of the threatened Western Tragopan *Tragopan melanocephalus*, which is endemic to Pakistan and India. We linked the assessments to the delivery of conservation outcomes for the Western Tragopan as a case species given its conservation significance in this region. However, the same methods could be applied to many other species of global conservation concern.

We adopted two approaches: (1) mapping the spatial distribution of potential habitat coverage using machine learning ensemble models; and (2) assessing the management effectiveness of protected areas by using an adaptation of the Management Effectiveness Tracking Tool (METT) for PAs. This is based on the notion that good protected area management follows a process that has six distinct stages: understanding existing values and threats, planning, allocation of resources (inputs), management actions/processes, producing products and services (outputs), resulting in conservation outcomes.

Our results show that only Machiara National Park scored (just) above 40% (itself indicating relatively weak management), 22 of the PAs fell within the 25–50% quartile (indicating weak management), and three scored below 25% (indicating poor management). PAs within the species' distributional range covered 92,387 ha, only 2% of the total potential habitat of the tragopan. Scoring showed that the planning element was insufficient both in terms of the site and species. Likewise, inputs (e.g. research and monitoring programmes, staff numbers, staff training, current budget, security of budget, and management) were also inadequate.

We concluded that currently protected areas are not sufficiently contributing to protecting the Western Tragopan and its habitat in Pakistan. We recommend establishment of more protected areas within the potential habitat of the species and the inclusion of species-specific plans in Pakistan's PAs management.

Grant awarded to, and summary prepared by, Muhammad Naeem Awan, Department of Environmental Sciences, Abbottabad Campus, COMSATS University, KPK, Islamabad, Pakistan.

Assessing the population status, anthropogenic threats and people's perception to enhance the conservation of hornbills (Bucerotidae) in Sarpang District, southern Bhutan

This project is one of a series of formulaic hornbill ecology projects conducted by Forest Research Institute students in Bhutan and funded by OBC, and is novel as it examined

government-designated habitat corridors linking three large protected areas.

Sarpang District, in southern Bhutan, lies between three large protected forests: Royal Manas NP, Jigme Singye NP and Phibsoo Wildlife Sanctuary. The protected areas hold important populations of hornbills, which have been the focus of several recent studies mapping distribution and identifying their preferred habitat features. This information has been used to plan management of the protected areas and the conservation awareness programmes that are used to promote wildlife protection.

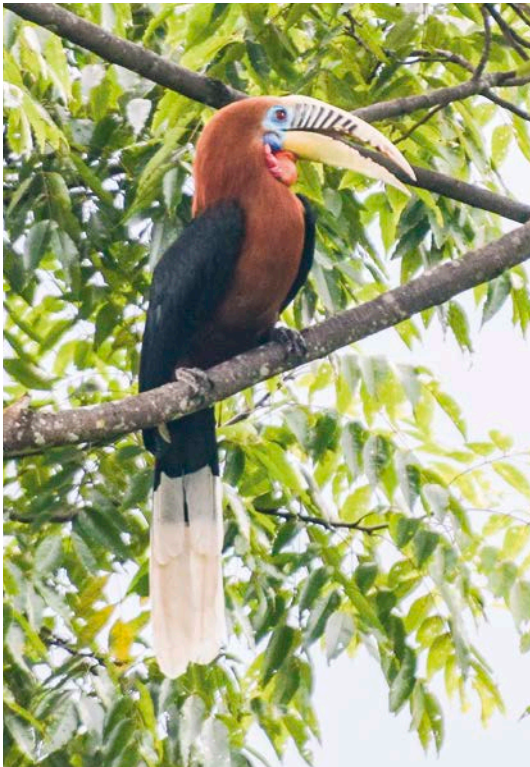
The three protected areas are linked by a designated biological corridor, itself a protected forest. The remainder of the district consists of a mixture of settlements, community forests and disturbed secondary forests. The project was designed to see how hornbills used the corridor. The team undertook transect surveys in both the corridor and the surrounding settled areas. Fieldwork took place in May–June 2020, when hornbills were breeding. Structured interviews were used to gather additional information on how people and hornbills used the forests. The surveys and interviews were hampered by coronavirus restrictions and all fieldwork ended when the country went into lockdown in August 2020.

Four hornbill species were encountered: Rufous-necked Hornbill *Aceros nipalensis* (Vulnerable; Plate 2), Great

Hornbill *Buceros bicornis* (Vulnerable), Wreathed Hornbill *Rhyticeros undulatus* (Vulnerable) and Oriental Pied Hornbill *Anthracoceros albirostris* (Least Concern). Encounter rates were relatively low, but all four species were widely distributed across the district, both in the biological corridor and the settled areas. Local people provided useful information on the hornbills' feeding and nesting behaviour (Plate 3), demonstrating that they fed in forest edges all over the district but only nested in the undisturbed forests of the biological corridor. All the forests were exploited for timber and other forest products by local people, indicating that some form of protection was needed for large nesting trees in the corridor. Most local people understood the ecological importance of the corridor to hornbills but there was little awareness of the conservation importance of the hornbills or that Rufous-necked Hornbill has legal protection in Bhutan. The team concluded that further conservation awareness work would be needed to secure better protection of nesting habitat in the corridor. They also suggested that Great and Wreathed Hornbills would benefit from being offered legal protection given the importance of Bhutan's surviving populations and their deteriorating international conservation status.

Summary prepared by Dave Buckingham.

Plate 2. Rufous-necked Hornbill *Aceros nipalensis*, Nepal, August 2020.



DAMUDAR DAHAL

Plate 3. Local man with a hornbill nest cavity.



DAMUDAR DAHAL

Public awareness campaign to enhance the conservation of avifauna and habitat at Gadi-Siraichuli Forest Area, central Nepal

Gadi-Siraichuli, an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA), lies in the Chepang Hills of central Nepal. It has some of the best remaining mid-altitude subtropical Sino-Himalayan forest in the region and supports an important and diverse avifauna. This includes the only known Nepalese locality of the nationally critically endangered Red-faced Liocichla *Liocichla phoenicea*, the globally Vulnerable Grey-crowned Prinia *Prinia cinereocapilla* and the endemic Spiny Babbler *Acanthoptila nipalensis*. Although recognised as an IBA, the birds and other wildlife face enormous pressure, some species being threatened by anthropogenic activities including hunting, (illegal) collection for sale in the local pet-trade market, and habitat degradation and loss due to infra-structure development, e.g. landslides resulting from construction of a new road (now temporarily halted). There have been no previous, other than very cursory, conservation education initiatives in the area.

A primary goal of the project was to develop within the local people an understanding of the value of birds (and biodiversity in general) and their habitats, and to promote a reduction of hunting/collection of wildlife. The Chepang ethnic group who reside in the area traditionally led a nomadic hunter-gatherer lifestyle living off the formerly more extensive forests. They are now mostly subsistence farmers but many still engage in hunter-gatherer activities, through necessity, for their own use and income generation. Ways of enhancing nature conservation through 'compensatory' income generation via alternative livelihood schemes were discussed through the project.

In January 2021, a team led by Kiran Magar carried out an education programme at eight schools within the Gadi-Siraichuli area. In total, 1,041 pupils and their teachers attended. An additional 136 community members were also involved. Interest and engagement were enhanced (and to provide a lasting reminder) through production of high quality, attractive education materials: the rare and important birds (i.e. species of conservation concern) were highlighted in 3,000 colour brochures and 500 posters distributed to participants and schools. The conservation message was also summarised on informative hoarding boards entitled 'Save birds and their habitats', installed at five locations. At the end of the programme, the performance of students and others was evaluated through comparison of answers to 'before' and 'after' questions. This demonstrated that participants had successfully gained knowledge (to varying extents) on the wildlife of their area. In addition, four 'avifauna ambassadors' were nominated to promote nature conservation in the area, selection primarily based on their keenness to engage in conservation activities and liaison ability.

It is hoped that the education programme can be repeated in c.2 years, links with the avian ambassadors are maintained and strengthened, and that alternative livelihood schemes (e.g. ecotourism and trekking) within and around the IBA can be enhanced and developed.

Summary prepared by Dave Showler. Grant awarded to Kiran Thapa Maga, Biodiversity Research and Conservation Society, Kathmandu, Nepal.

Bird and habitat conservation through sustainable community empowerment in the Menoreh landscape, Jatimulyo Village, Kulonprogo, Yogyakarta

Trapping wild birds for trade is an issue throughout Java and recognised as driving many species, especially Javan endemics, to extinction. Working with communities living close to the habitat of many of the sought-after species is critical to preventing these extinctions, while the demand side needs to be addressed simultaneously. However, it takes time for community-based interventions to be effective.

This project is situated in the Menoreh Mountains, west of Yogyakarta in and around Jatimulyo village in Kulonprogo Regency. The surrounding habitat is typically mixed agroforestry with crops such as clove, coffee, cocoa, coconut and areca palm, combined with timber trees. It is notable for the presence of the Javan Blue-flycatcher *Cyornis banyumas sensu stricto* and other birds known to be targeted by hunters for the songbird trade.

Environmental regulations had been established prohibiting hunting birds in the village area and in 2018 a forest farm community group called Kelompok Tani Hutan (KTH) Wanapaksi was established to support bird conservation and manage a bird adoption scheme. Regulations were ineffective, being unknown to most people living in the area and were unenforced. Awareness raising efforts had not been far-reaching and only a few members of the local community were involved in KTH Wanapaksi.

The project took a further step in raising awareness and building local skills in bird conservation in the area. Fifteen members of KTH Wanapaksi received training on bird identification and monitoring. Some trainees joined a team of ornithologists and birdwatchers from Kanopi Indonesia and students from Yogyakarta in bird surveys around the village. Eight transects were followed in four hamlets and recorded 61 species. Species densities were estimated from point count surveys for 23 species. Javan Blue-flycatcher was recorded in one of the four hamlets.

The nest adoption scheme was also further developed through a series of village meetings to develop standard operating procedures. 'Nest adoption' involves sponsors, often from Yogyakarta, making a donation to support local residents to monitor the nests of target birds until the young birds fully fledge. During the project period, two nests were adopted for Oriental Dwarf-kingfisher *Ceyx erythaca* and the Javan Blue-flycatcher, with three fledging from the former and the flycatcher nest failing due to parasitisation by a cuckoo. The project also delivered awareness-raising events in two hamlets.

The project was implemented between August and December 2020, with a follow-up phase funded by OBC beginning in May 2021.

Grant awarded to Irfan Rosyadi, Kanopi Indonesia, Yogyakarta, Java, Indonesia. Summary prepared by Irfan Rosyadi and Paul Insua-Cao.

Continuing breeding programmes at Cikananga Conservation Breeding Center, Java

Last year, when the COVID-19 global pandemic hit, the Cikananga Conservation Breeding Center (CCBC) found itself struggling financially as donor support dropped (see article on pp.15–20). With reduced funding and global uncertainty, CCBC faced the prospect of reducing all activities to only those deemed essential, potentially halting conservation breeding for two Critically Endangered species: Javan Green Magpie *Cissa thalassina* and Rufous-fronted Laughingthrush *Garrulax rufifrons* (Plate 4). With financial assistance from the ASAP Rapid Action Fund and OBC, CCBC was able to continue vital conservation breeding efforts, enabling two keepers to receive full salary over this period and maintain a diverse diet for the two aforementioned species. A nutritious diet with a consistent supply of live food for all species is key to

Plate 4. Rufous-fronted Laughingthrush *Garrulax rufifrons* undergoing a health check. Cikananga Conservation Breeding Center, Java, Indonesia, April 2021.



CIKANANGA CONSERVATION BREEDING CENTER

encourage breeding, especially the heavily carnivorous diet of the Javan Green Magpie. CCBC was successful in breeding both of these species during the year: three Javan Green Magpies and one Rufous-fronted Laughingthrush fledged. The latter is proving particularly challenging to breed in captivity and the one individual is considered an indicator of success. Furthermore, all successful pairings included an individual who is a founder and was not yet represented in the local population, increasing the centre's genetic diversity for these species. The non-breeding pairs of both species exhibited promising breeding behaviour (e.g. nest-building) that we hope to build on in the next breeding season as we learn how to adapt their environmental conditions in the aviaries.

CCBC will continue to focus on a small number of species in urgent need of conservation, including the continuation of current *ex situ* operations and the development of future *in situ* ones. Consistently breeding Rufous-fronted Laughingthrush is a considerable challenge and over-reliance on this as a conservation approach is risky. Moving forward, the financial threats which this funding helped to alleviate are still present and fundraising is currently a priority for CCBC. To support our breeding centre, please visit <https://www.cikanangawildlifecenter.com/donate-us/>.

Grant awarded to and summary prepared by Bertie Ferns, Cikananga Conservation Breeding Center, West Java, Indonesia.

Ongoing OBC-supported conservation action



NONI TIRTANINGTYAS

Plate 5. In Jakarta Bay, Indonesia, videographers capture footage of fishermen who had previously found frigatebirds in their nets, as part of an OBC-funded film to raise awareness of the plight of Christmas Island Frigatebirds *Fregata andrewsi*.