

a failure of the Tibetan juniper crop would lead to the species dispersing more widely.

These recent Nepalese records have extended the known wintering range of Kessler's Thrush three degrees to the west (= approximately 310 km). They indicate that at least part of the population may sporadically erupt in a south-westerly direction from the breeding grounds. In addition it is clear that the high Himal do not pose an uncrossable barrier, and Ali and Ripley's (1983) suggestion that Kessler's Thrush might occur in Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh in winter may well be correct.

I am grateful to the observers named in the text for providing me with their records of Kessler's Thrush in Nepal, to Craig Robson and Tim Inskipp for commenting on earlier drafts, and to Naturetrek for facilitating my visit to Nepal in 1988.

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## Jerdon's Babbler *Moupinia altirostris*: a new species for Nepal

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On 26 November 1989 H.S.B. found a flock of three birds which he tentatively identified as Jerdon's Babblers *Moupinia altirostris*, foraging in

*Saccharum munja* grassland by a small creek near Gaida wildlife camp in the Royal Chitwan National Park, Nepal. On 7 December 1989 H.S.B. found a further group of six birds among *Saccharum* sp. grassland near Dumariya in the Royal Chitwan National Park, and again suspected them of being Jerdon's Babblers. On 25 April 1990 H.S.B. and J.C.E. were leading a party of birdwatchers in the Royal Chitwan National Park. Whilst overlooking Lami Tal, an oxbow lake, their attention was drawn to three birds squabbling together on tall grass stems at the water's edge. They suspected these birds were Jerdon's Babblers and later reference to Ali and Ripley (1983a, 1983b) confirmed the identification.

#### Description

The observations on 25 April 1990 were made using a telescope (20x magnification) and tripod from the roof of a stationary Landrover. Observations were interrupted by the sudden appearance of a female Sloth Bear *Melursus ursinus* with two young about 20 m away. In the ensuing chaos their attention was diverted and the babblers lost. The fact that the birds were observed for only a short period prevented detailed note-taking and the following description is accordingly brief. The birds were similar in size and structure to Yellow-eyed Babbler *Chrysomma sinense* (the only possible confusion species). They differed from that species by the presence of a dark reddish-brown iris, the absence of a supercilium, dark lores and dusky grey cheeks and throat. The underparts were a rich buff-brown. The mantle was brown with a contrasting rufous tail and wing-panel. The short bill had a decurved upper mandible and was greyish horn in colour.

#### Discussion

Three subspecies of Jerdon's Babbler have been described, highly disjunct in range. Each inhabits tall riverine grassland in floodplains of large river systems. The nominate form is known only from the Irrawaddy-Sittang plain in south-central Burma (Smythies 1986). The race *scindicum* occurs in the plains of the Indus in Pakistan, whilst the race *griseigularis* is known 'from the Bhutan and north Bengal duars east in the plains of the Brahmaputra to the Naga Hills, the plains of Cachar and East Pakistan (Bangladesh) in the Surma Valley, the Haor Basin and the Chittagong region' (Ali and Ripley 1971). Morphological differences between the races are slight, lying largely in the degree of rufous tones particularly in the remiges and rectrices. Subsequent examination of skins in the British Museum (Tring), and photographs of skins, have led us to the conclusion that the birds we observed were of the race *griseigularis*. This concurs with the known geographical distribution of the three races as the race most likely to occur in Nepal.

In Pakistan the species appears to be confined to the 'Khan' grass jungle *Saccharum arundinaceum*, whilst to the east it is described as affecting 'ekra' or elephant grass, reeds and vegetation along rivers (Ali and Ripley 1971). This is

supported by our own observations which were made in tall grassland, where *Saccharum munja* and another species of *Saccharum* were noted. On two occasions, observations were made close to water.

Although its appearance in Nepal was predicted (Inskipp and Inskipp 1985), it remains a little known bird affecting a vulnerable and rapidly diminishing habitat throughout the Indian Subcontinent and possibly in Burma; hence its recent treatment as a threatened species (Collar and Andrew 1988). There are no recent records of the nominate race from Burma and there has been speculation that it may be already extinct (Ali and Ripley 1971), although there seems to be no evidence to support this idea.

We would like to thank Peter Colston for providing access to skins at the British Museum (Tring).

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## Mandarin Duck *Aix galericulata*: a new species for Nepal

SHARIFIN GARDINER

On 21 January 1990 at 11h15 I was walking along the east bank of the Arun River, about 1 km south of the Katike Ghat suspension bridge, which is just north of the village of Betheni in Manakamana Panchayat of Sankhuwasabha District, Nepal (27°20'N 87°11'E); the elevation was about 300 m. To my astonishment I saw a drake Mandarin Duck *Aix galericulata* swimming on the river. I was able to watch it for several minutes through 10×40 binoculars at about 50 m range. After a while it climbed onto a rock to rest alongside a Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo*.

The following description was taken: the raised crown was glossy green and purple with a broad white eyestripe and the face was buff. The throat and neck had long extended chestnut feathers, the upper breast was glossy purple