

## Nepal Wren Babbler *Pnoepyga immaculata* nest-building in the Langtang Valley, Nepal

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In June 1999, Ben King and I visited the Langtang Valley, Nepal to search for the Nepal Wren Babbler *Pnoepyga immaculata*. In the early morning of 5 June we walked east from Syabru village for about 45 mins, until we reached a stream, the preferred habitat of the species. The stream bank comprised huge rocks and boulders, and thick vegetation. BK played a tape recording of the song of the species and, after nearly an hour, we obtained a response. We located a single bird calling from the west bank of the stream and, after some time, we saw it fly across the stream to perch on the east bank, which

was damper than the west bank. The bird went into a small hole for a while and finally re-emerged. After another five minutes, the bird returned with nesting materials and disappeared inside the hole. We suspected that it was nest-building, and continued to watch for 45 mins and confirm that the bird was indeed constructing a nest. The site was located at an altitude of 1,962 m near a small waterfall, and was about 3 m above the streambed. This constitutes the first record of any breeding behaviour for the Nepal Wren Babbler.

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## Jerdon's Baza *Aviceda jerdoni* – a new species for Nepal

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At about 08h00 on the 20 March 1999, while leading a Sunbird birdwatching tour on a day trip to the Dharan Forest (near the village of 13 R D, besides the Chatara Canal, Sunsari District near Chatara, eastern Nepal), we flushed two medium-sized brownish raptors. Hurriedly climbing out of our vehicles we soon located the birds, which had now perched, and identified them as Jerdon's Bazas *Aviceda jerdoni*, the first record for Nepal. All ten of us watched them for about 20 minutes at ranges down to about 80 m. Several members of the group took a series of photographs while SB and PH made some field notes and hurried sketches.

The birds were very distinctive. Judged to be approximately the same size as a Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus* but with proportionately much broader wings, a heavier body and a markedly different jizz. The birds were clearly considerably larger than Crested Goshawk *Accipiter trivirgatus*, which occurs in the area, and smaller than a Crested Serpent Eagle *Spilornis cheela* we had just been watching.

### Structure

A long wispy crest of two blackish lanceolate feathers conspicuously tipped with white (and two other elongated feathers about half as long) was held prominently erect at the rear of the crown in a manner that reminded us of Mountain Hawk Eagle *Spizaetus nipalensis* and of the nominate subspecies of Changeable Hawk Eagle *S. c. cirrhatus* (which has not been recorded in Nepal).

The medium length tail was slightly notched at the tip, though this was so subtle as to be invisible in flight. There were five primary tips visible in the folded wing – two closely spaced near the tip and three equally closely grouped near the tip of the longest tertial. All five visible primaries were tipped whitish. The folded wing tip fell just short of the tip of the tail (about half-way to two-thirds of the way down the dark brownish subterminal tail band).

The bill and legs were unremarkable in size. The birds made several short flights among the trees from one perch to another – the wings were very broad, clearly rounded and slightly 'nipped' in at the base, but little other patterning was discernible.

### Plumage

Both birds were very similar in plumage. The head was strikingly pale greyish fawn with a rufous tone becoming more dominant towards the rear crown and on the nape. This rufous colour shaded out into paler ear-coverts, while the chin, throat and upper breast were conspicuously white.

A narrow dark brown or blackish mesial stripe, made up of a series of short feather shaft streaks, extended almost from the base of the bill down to the lower throat. The upper breast was very finely and faintly dappled with pale orange-rufous, while the sides of the chest, the flanks, sides of the belly and upper thighs were quite conspicuously and broadly barred with this same rufous colour. Each of these seven or so bars was very narrowly