**DOMBANG VALLEY-LACHUNG-LEMA-TSUNGTHANG**

**IBA Site Code**: IN SK-02  
**State**: Sikkim  
**District**: North Sikkim  
**Coordinates**: 27° 37' 60" N 88° 45' 00" E  
**Ownership**: Mixed (Village, Forest, GREF and Army land)  
**Area**: approx. 60,000 ha  
**Altitude**: av. 2,679 m  
**Rainfall**: Not Available  
**Temperature**: -10°C to 25°C  
**Biogeographic Zone**: Trans-Himalaya  
**Habitats**: Hilly Evergreen Forest, Montane Mixed Broadleaf-Coniferous Forest

**IBA CRITERIA**:  
A1 (Threatened Species), A2 (Endemic Bird Area 130: Eastern Himalayas), A3 (Biome-5: Eurasian High Montane; Biome-7: Sino-Himalayan Temperate Forest; Biome-8: Sino-Himalayan Subtropical Forest)  
**PROTECTION STATUS**: Not officially protected

**GENERAL DESCRIPTION**

This is a large IBA on village land, Forest Department land and land under the control of the army and GREF. The total area could be more than 60,000 ha. Starting from the small township of Tsungthang, there are small hamlets at Bop, Malgin, Khedum, Lema, Lachung, Sharchock and Dombang along the Lachung river in North Sikkim. Lachung is the northernmost frontier village in this valley. Hence, there is heavy army deployment in the area. This IBA is subjected to seasonal grazing by livestock such as highland cows, yak and horses.

From subtropical Tsungthang to temperate Dombang Valley with hamlets and villages along Lachung Chu and forest patches under-planted with large Cardamom Ammomum subulatum, there are mostly village lands with subsistence cultivation. The Mixed Coniferous Forests of Hemlock, Spruce, Pine, Fir and Junipers with undergrowth of Rhododendron and Arundinaria at Dombang give way to open Alder Alnus nipalensis towards Tsungthang. The degraded areas are overtaken by the ubiquitous Eupatorium an exotic invasive weed locally called ‘Ban-Mara’ or ‘Forest Killer’.

**AVI FAUNA**

A full checklist of this site is not available but the bird records maintained by U. Lachungpa (pers. comm. 2002) show that this area could have significant populations of Vulnerable Beautiful Nuthatch Sitta formosa and Wood Snipe Gallinago nemoricola.

The site lies in Eastern Himalayas Endemic Bird Area (EBA 130) where Stattersfield et al. (1998) have identified 21 restricted range species. Only one such species, White-naped Yuhina Yuhina bakeri has been noticed till now (U. Lachungpa pers. comm. 2002), but looking at the extent of pristine habitat still available in this site, more restricted range species are likely to be found here.

This complex, with wide altitudinal variation, basically lies in Biome-7 (Sino-Himalayan Temperate Forest), but avian elements of Biome-5 (Eurasian High Montane - Alpine and Tibetan) and Biome-8 (Sino-Himalayan Subtropical Forest) are also found as these biomes merge with Biome-7, and secondly, many birds show seasonal altitudinal movement. Seventeen out of the 48 species listed in Biome-5 (BirdLife International, undated) are found in this site. Similarly, 47 out of 112 species listed in Biome-7 are found here. As this site also has Montane Mixed Broadleaf-Coniferous Forest, Broadleaf Evergreen Forest and Deciduous Forest, many species of Biome-8 are also found here. Thus, this site perhaps has the most numerous biome restricted species among all the sites of Sikkim.

The important birds of the valley are Himalayan Griffon Gyps himalayensis, Wood Snipe Gallinago nemoricola, Snow Pigeon Columba leuconota, Grandala Grandala coelicolor, Plain Mountain-Finch Leucosticte nemoricola and Hill Partridge Arborophila torquata. A specimen of Tibetan Horned Owl (Eurasian Eagle-Owl) Bubo bubo from Lema was collected and deposited with BNHS (Ganguli-Lachungpa 2002).

**Vulnerable**

Wood Snipe Gallinago nemoricola  
Beautiful Nuthatch Sitta formosa  
White-naped Yuhina Yuhina bakeri

**Endemic Bird Area 130: Eastern Himalayas**

Himalayan Griffon Gyps himalayensis  
Snow Partridge Lerwa lerwa  
Solitary Snipe Gallinago solitaria  
Ibisbill Ibisihyncha struthersii  
Snow Pigeon Columba leuconota  
Grey-backed Shrike Lanius tephronotus  
Alpine Accentor Prunella collaris  
Altai Accentor Prunella himalayana  
Plain-backed Thrush Zoothera mollissima  
Hodgson’s Redstart Phoenicurus hodgsoni  
Guldenstadt’s Redstart Phoenicurus erythrogaster  
Grandala Grandala coelicolor  
Wallcreeper Tichodroma muraria  
Hodgson’s Mountain-Finch Leucosticte nemoricola  
Beautiful Rosefinch Carpodacus pulcherrimus  
Common Great Rosefinch Carpodacus rubicilla  
Yellow-billed Chough Pyrrhocorax graculus
Anas platyrhynchos
sightings of male Mallard
pers. comm.
from Lachung (U. Lachungpa
Lachung a few years ago suggest that the valley could be a
regular flyway for migratory waterbirds (U. Lachungpa
pers. comm.

Oriental Stork
Ciconia boyciana
comm.

From the pond near Sharchok, Lachung and Gadwall caught from
Mergus merganser
Dombang, Common Merganser

White-winged Grosbeak
Mycerobas carnipes

Red-headed Bullfinch
Pyrrhula nipalensis

Brown Bullfinch

White-browed Rosefinch
Carpodacus thura

Dark-rumped Rosefinch
Carpodacus edwardsii

Yellow-breasted Greenfinch
Carduelis spinoides

Fire-tailed Sunbird
Aethopyga ignicauda

Grey-sided Laughingthrush
Garrulax caerulatus

Grey-sided Laughingthrush
Garrulax caerulatus

Grey-sided Laughingthrush
Garrulax caerulatus

Rufous-capped Babbler
Stachyris ruficeps

Red-billed Leiothrix
Leiothrix lutea

Yellow-billed Tit-Babbler
Alcippe cinerea

Grey-headed Flycatcher-Warbler
Seicercus xanthochistos

Red-headed Tit
Aegithalos concinnus

Black-throated Sunbird
Aethopyga saturata

Streaked Spiderhunter
Arachnothera magna

M aron Oriole
Oriolus trilili

OTHER KEY FAUNA

Notable mammals are Yellow-throated Martin Martes flavigula, Leopard Cat Prionailurus bengalensis, Spotted Linsang Prionodon pardicolor, Asian Black Bear Ursus thibetanus, Goral Nemorhaedus goral, Barking Deer Muntiacus muntjak, Weasels Mustela spp., Orange-bellied Squirrel Dremomys lokriah and Himalayan Palm Civet Paguma larvata. The Himalayan Pit Viper Gloydius himalayanus and other herpetofauna found in this IBA need further study.

LAND USE

Agiculture
Fisheries and aquaculture
Forestry
Military
Tourism and recreation

CONSERVATION ISSUES

Landslides and gully formation due to road construction and maintenance activities
Poaching of wildlife
Stray dogs
River pollution
Uncontrolled tourism

Subsistence farming of wheat, barley and maize is practised while potato, cabbage and cardamom are grown as cash crops. Some amount of cattle rearing is practiced with stall-fed hybrid milch cows and the rest grazed in forest areas. Farm trials of exotic Lilies, Angora Rabbits and improved livestock breeds are conducted here by the government. Handloom cottage industry for making blankets, rugs and carpets provides alternative employment.

As the area is near the international border with China, there is heavy army deployment. Their role so far has been limited to border security, but now they have to be given a major role in the protection of the area’s biodiversity in collaboration with the State Forest Department and local communities. The State Forest Department lacks manpower and infrastructure to patrol these areas.

Biome-7: Sino-Himalayan Temperate Forest
Common Hill-Partridge Arborophila torqueola
Blood Pheasant Ithaginis cruentus
Satyr Tragopan Tragopan satya
Himalayan Monal Lophophorus impejanus
Spectled Wood-Pigeon Columba hodgsoni
Darjeeling Pied Woodpecker Dendrocopos darjelensis
Nepal House-Martın Delichon nipalensis
Rufous-breasted A ccentor Prunella stropiata
Long-tailed T hrush Zoothera dixoni
Indian Blue Robin Luscinia brunnea
White-browed Bush-Robin Tarsiger indicus
Rufous-breasted Bush-Robin Tarsiger hyperythrus
White-throated Redstart Phoenicurus schiiceps
White-throated Laughingthrush Garrulax albogularis
Striped Laughingthrush Garrulax striatus
Spotted Laughingthrush Garrulax ocellatus
Scaly Laughingthrush Garrulax subincicolor
Black-faced Laughingthrush Garrulax affinis
Sindibled Scimitar-Babbler Xiphorniscus supercilias
Greater Scaly-breasted Wren-Babbler Poephila alphiventris
Green Shrike-Babbler Pteruthius xanthochlorus
Bar-throated M inla M inla strigila
Red-tailed M inla M inla ignotincta
Gold-breasted Tit-Babbler Alcippe chrysotis
White-browed Tit-Babbler Alcippe viniceps
Rufous Sibia Heterophasia capistrata
Stripe-throated Yuhina Yuhina gularis
Rufous-vented Yuhina Yuhina occipitalis
Brown Parrotbill Paradoxornis unicolor
Chestnut-crowned Bush-Warbler Cettia major
Grey-sided Bush-Warbler Cettia brunifrons
Grey-faced Leaf-Warbler Phylloscopus maculipennis
Rufous-fronted Tit Aegithalos iouschistos
Rufous-bellied Crested Tit Parus rubidiventris
Brown Crested Tit Parus dichrous
Green-backed Tit Parus monticolus
Yellow-browed Tit Sylvia curruca
White-tailed Kuthatch Sitta himalayensis
Rusty-flanked Tree-Creeper Certhia nipalensis
Fire-tailed Sunbird Aethopyga ignicauda
Yellow-breasted Greenfinch Carduelis spinoides
Dark-rumped Rosefinch Carpodacus edwardsii
White-browed Rosefinch Carpodacus thura
Brown Bullfinch Pyrrhula nipalensis
Red-headed Bullfinch Pyrrhula erythrocephala
White-winged Grosbeak M ycorebas carnipes
Yellow-billed Blue Magpie Urocissa flavirostris
A n old unconfirmed record of Oriental Stork Ciconia boyciana from Lachung (U. Lachungpa pers. comm. 2003), winter sightings of male Mallard Anas platyrhynchos at Chuba, Dombang, Common Merganser Mergus merganser at a fish pond near Sharchok, Lachung and Gadwall caught from Lachung a few years ago suggest that the valley could be a regular flyway for migratory waterbirds (U. Lachungpa pers. comm. 2003).

Biome-8: Sino-Himalayan Subtropical Forest
Asian Emerald Cuckoo Chrysococcyx maculatus
Golden-throated Barbet Megalaima franklinii
Blue-throated Barbet Megalaima asiatica
Bay Woodpecker Blythipicus pyrrhotis
Striped Bulbul Pycnonotus sinensis
Black Bulbul Hypsipetes leucocephalus
Grey-winged Blackbird Turdus boulboul
Purple Cochoa Cochoa purpurea
Green Cochoa Cochoa viridis
Rufous-chinned Laughingthrush Garrulax rufogularis
Grey-sided Laughingthrush Garrulax caerulatus
Rufous-capped Babbler Stachyris ruficeps
Red-billed Leiothrix Leiothrix lutea
Yellow-throated Tit-Babbler Alcippe cinerea
Grey-headed Flycatcher-Warbler Seicercus xanthochistos
Red-headed Tit Aegithalos concinnus
Black-throated Sunbird Aethopyga saturata
Streaked Spiderhunter Arachnothera magna

M aron Oriole Oriolus trilili
Important Bird Areas in India - Sikkim

Constant heavy traffic on the roads in this IBA and faulty practices of road construction often using dynamite are responsible for many landslips and slides causing much loss of vegetation cover, besides destabilizing the landscape.

Road maintenance workers of the Border Roads Organisation often depend on easily available fuel wood around their shifting camps instead of kerosene that has to be purchased. There are also reports of poaching of wildlife from such areas.

So far there is no efficient system of waste disposal from the cantonments such as Pegong or the villages and townships between Lachung and Tsonthang and garbage is more often disposed off the hillside into the Lachung river. More non-biodegradable waste is noticeable nowadays with increase in tourism pressure and the change from tinned milk products to cartons and tetrapacks.

KEY CONTRIBUTOR
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KEY REFERENCES


Although polythene bags are banned in Sikkim, they are found carelessly discarded near every settlement.