**GENERAL DESCRIPTION**

The Pangolakha Range, extending below the Chola Range, separates Sikkim from Bhutan. Hathichery (the place where elephants can penetrate) forms the tri-junction between Bhutan, Sikkim and West Bengal where further down the forest continues as the Neora Valley National Park (an IBA in West Bengal). The Sanctuary has typical alpine-temperate-subtropical vegetation with high altitude lakes around Jelep La. Rhododendron, Silver Fir, Juniper forest and associated ground flora, moss-filled oak forests with dense bamboo thickets form ideal habitat for the Red Panda *Ailurus fulgens*, the State Animal.

**AVIFAUNA**

The mountain passes of Natu La and Jelep La (La = Pass) form the routes for migratory waterbirds many of which stop over at the various wetlands in the area, especially Bedang Tso Lake. The Himalayan Monal *Lophophorus impejanus* (locally called as Feydong) used to be found here (Chezung Lachungpa pers. comm. 1996), hence the name Bedang Tso. Sometimes there is mass migration of birds of prey such as Red Kites *Milvus milvus* and unidentified eagles (U. Lachungpa pers. comm. 2003). The Sherathang marshes are one area where the Brahminy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea* breeds. Some birds of this complex are Eurasian Woodcock *Scolopax rusticola* and Wood Snipe *Gallinago nemoricola*, a globally threatened species (BirdLife International 2001) occasionally seen on the banks of the Bedang Tso. Hill Pigeons *Columba rupestris* are seen on smoking chimneys of local houses in snowy winters. The Snow Pigeon *Columba leuconota*, Snow Partridge *Lerwa lerwa*, Himalayan Monal and Gold-naped Black Finch *Pyrrhoplectes epauletta* are common on the alpine slopes. The Pallas's Fish-Eagle *Haliaeetus leucoryphus* was once seen in the forest patch over the Pangolakha range in 1994. Large Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* and Bar-headed Geese *Anser indicus* were sighted at Bedang Tso in 1992 (U. Lachungpa pers. comm. 2003).

The Tibetan Eared Pheasant *Crossoptilon harmani*, a Near Threatened species, has been reported from Kupup (near Bedang Tso) below the Jelep La (U. Lachungpa pers. comm. 2003). This area falls under Pangolakha Wildlife Sanctuary and is adjacent to the Chumbi Valley of Tibet. This pheasant is one of the two endemic birds in Southern Tibet (EBA-133). It is reported from the edge of mixed Broadleaf Coniferous forest; Rhododendron, Juniper and deciduous scrub and grassland (Stattersfield et al. 1998). Another Near Threatened species found in this IBA is the Giant Babax *Babax waddelli*.

Due to great altitudinal variation from 1300 m to above 4,000 m, three biomes occur in this IBA: Biome-5: Eurasian High M ontane (Alpine and Tibetan), from above 3,600 m; Biome-7: Sino-Himalayan Temperate Forest, between 1,800 m and 3,600 m; and, Biome-8: Sino-Himalayan Subtropical Forest, occurring between c. 1,000 m to 2,000 m (BirdLife International, undated). In Biome-5, 48 species are found, out of which 11 are found at this site. Similarly, 112 species are representative of Biome-7 and in this site are found 14 species (U. Lachungpa pers. comm. 2003). At lower altitude, in Biome-8, only two species out of 95 are reported from this IBA. It is likely that with more detailed surveys, more biome restricted species would be found.
OTHER KEY FAUNA

Fauna includes Tiger Panthera tigris, Leopard Panthera pardus, Takin Budorcas taxicolor, Red Fox Vulpes vulpes, Hill Fox V. montana, Goral Nemorhaedus goral, Serow N. sumatraensis, Musk Deer Moschus moschiferus, Yellow-Throated Marten Martes flavigula, Asian Black Bear Ursus thibetanus, Red Panda Ailurus fulgens, Mouse-Hare Ochotona roylei and Himalayan Weasel Mustela sibirica. There are chances of occurrence of Himalayan Salamander Tylototriton verrucosus in addition to other herpetofauna. Lower altitude waterbodies are home to several hillstream fish while in the upper reaches, the exotic Brown Trout has been introduced in the alpine lakes.

LAND USE

- Forestry
- Military
- Nature conservation and research
- Water/Watershed Management

THREATS AND CONSERVATION ISSUES

- Frequent and regular change of army units
- Pollution of wetlands especially by camps of Army and GREF
- Heavy military traffic via Zuluk
- Disturbance to wildlife from stray dogs
- Grazing in forests

As the area is at high altitude bordering Tibet, it is manned by the Indian Army who occupy the area in short shifts of about six months to a year. Any biodiversity sensitization programme is hence short-lived.

Most camps are around or near waterbodies with resultant pollution, especially of non-biodegradable garbage and spread of stray dogs around these settlements. In addition to preying on wildlife such as Brahminy Shelduck Tadorna ferruginea, there have been reports of human casualties due to these dogs (U. Lachungpa pers. comm. 2003).

The forest here is used by some yak graziers and is the route that the Tiger and Takin have followed into Sikkim (Ganguli-Lachungpa 1998, 2000). There are sporadic incidents of Tiger attacking small herds of domestic yaks. Due to army camps along the Gangtok-Natu La-Zuluk-Rongli route, there have been cases of poaching of wildlife (U. Lachungpa pers. comm. 2003).

The State Forest Department has set up Eco-Development Committees (EDCs) around all wildlife protected areas. In this IBA an EDC has been set up in the village of Gnathang. These conservation issues have also been addressed in the National Biodiversity Strategy and Action Plan process for the Sikkim State.

KEY CONTRIBUTOR

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KEY REFERENCES


