

NOTEBOOK

Recent records of Black-necked Stork *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus* in Nepal

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Introduction

The two subspecies of Black-necked Stork *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus* differ markedly in their abundance and conservation status, although overall the species is considered to be Near Threatened (BirdLife International 2017a). *E. a. asiaticus* occurs in South and South-East Asia and is scarce and declining—its total population may not exceed 1,000 individuals (G. Sundar *in litt.* 2006, BirdLife International 2017a). In contrast, the population of *E. a. australis* in Oceania—mainly in north Australia and south New Guinea—is thought to be stable and secure, with possibly up to 20,000 breeding adults (S. Garnett *in litt.* 2006, BirdLife International 2017a). *Asiaticus* is most widespread in India, but has declined and disappeared from many areas in the south, although other populations are stable or marginally increasing (Maheswaran *et al.* 2004). Elsewhere in South Asia and South-East Asia populations have declined seriously and the species is close to extinction in some countries (BirdLife International 2001, 2017a).

In Nepal, *asiaticus* is a very rare local resident and winter visitor to the terai (Inskipp *et al.* 2016, BirdLife International 2017a). In Chitwan National Park, Black-necked Stork was described as an uncommon winter visitor in the early 1980s (Gurung 1983) and it may have been resident, but there are very few records after 1988. Small numbers occurred in the Koshi Barrage and Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve area and at least one pair bred between 1982 and 2007, but the species is now rare there (Inskipp *et al.* 2016). It is possible that it may also occur regularly in Suklaphanta NP and Bardia NP, but there are very few records. The 1988 Asian waterfowl census listed two sites in Nepal, presumably in the western lowlands (C. Inskipp & T. P. Inskipp *in litt.* 1989). In 1995 a total of 16 birds was counted in protected areas, and the resident national population was estimated to be 20 individuals (Baral 1996). Since then numbers have decreased and the national population is currently estimated to be a maximum of 15 birds: its national IUCN status is Critically Endangered (Inskipp *et al.* 2016). More recently, there have been sightings in the Lumbini area in February 2016 (R. Gurung pers. comm.) and January 2017 (this report).



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Plates 1 & 2. Black-necked Stork *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*, Mayadevi Temple, Lumbini, Nepal, 4 January 2017.

Present sightings and discussion

In February 2016 a pair of Black-necked Storks with a juvenile was seen near a pond at the Mayadevi Temple complex, Lumbini, Province 5, Nepal (27.469°N 83.273°E), the Buddhist pilgrimage centre and UNESCO designated World Heritage Site (R. Gurung pers. comm.). This may have been the first breeding record for the species from the Lumbini farmlands area.

In January 2017 we were carrying out a survey of Asian Woollyneck *Ciconia episcopus* in the Lumbini farmlands Important Bird and Biodiversity

Area (BirdLife International 2017b). The major habitats here are forest, scrub, wetlands and grasslands, and this area has the best-known population of the Vulnerable Sarus Crane *Antigone antigone* in Nepal. At 12h00 on 4 January 2017, during a visit to the pond in the eastern part of the Mayadevi Temple complex, we recorded a Black-necked Stork on a small island in the middle of the lake, about 50 m from the bank and 200 m from the sighting in February 2016; this location is relatively undisturbed as pilgrims do not usually visit it. We have been monitoring this site regularly for two years as part of our survey and visited it again in spring 2017, but there were no further sightings of the species.

Further monitoring is needed to understand the behaviour and pattern of visits of Black-necked Storks to this area, to confirm if breeding is taking place and whether it may be possible to establish a population here in the future.

Acknowledgements

The Asian Woollyneck survey was carried out with the support of Rufford Foundation, UK. We thank Carol Inskipp for her guidance and Gopi Sundar for his valuable suggestions throughout the survey. We also thank Rajendra Gurung of Bird Conservation Nepal and Arjun Kurmi for their much appreciated support.

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