

FAMBONG LHO WLS - HIMALAYAN ZOOLOGICAL PARK - RATEY CHU RESERVE FOREST COMPLEX



IBA Site Code	: IN-SK-03
State	: Sikkim
District	: East Sikkim
Coordinates	: 27° 18' 41" N, 88° 32' 01" E
Ownership	: State Forest Department
Area	: 5,176 + 205 + ha
Altitude	: 1,375 – 2,650m
Rainfall	: Not Available
Temperature	: Not Available
Biogeographic Zone	: Himalaya
Habitats	: Subtropical Broadleaf Hill Forest, Subtropical Pine Forest

IBA CRITERIA: A1 (Threatened Species), A2 (Endemic Bird Area 130: Eastern Himalayas); A3 (Biome-7: Sino-Himalayan Temperate Forest, Biome-8: Sino-Himalayan Subtropical Forest)
 PROTECTION STATUS: Wildlife Sanctuary, established in 1984

GENERAL DESCRIPTION

Fambong Lho Wildlife Sanctuary is located in East Sikkim on a mountain range opposite Gangtok, the capital of Sikkim. The highest point of the Sanctuary is the Tinjurey Peak (2,750 m), which is connected by mountainous ridges to Fambong Lho Peak and Ragorathai Peak. The Sanctuary is girdled with a number of growing villages.

The word 'Fambong Lho' seems to have come from the Lepcha word Hambomloh for the local avocado trees *Machilus edulis* and *M. odoratissima*. The Himalayan Zoological Park above Gangtok is adjacent to the Sanctuary, separated by the Rani Khola (river). Both the Fambong Lho and the Gangtok ranges form part of the catchment of the Rani Khola (Anon. 2002) and are contiguous with the Ratey Chu Reserve Forest.

The main vegetation of this IBA includes Oak *Quercus lamellosa* and 'Katus' *Castanopsis hystrix*. *Rhododendron arboreum* interspersed with *Lyonia ovalifolia* are seen gregariously on high hills and saddles. The IBA is also home to a large number of wild orchids, mosses, ferns and *Lycopodium* spp. (Anon. 2002).



Photo: Ketti | Knudsen/Peter Lobo

Vulnerable Beautiful Nuthatch *Sitta formosa* is one of the rare birds seen here.

AVIFAUNA

Over 281 species of birds have been reported from this area, opposite the bustling township of Gangtok (Anon. 2002). Of these, the Oriental White-backed Vulture *Gyps bengalensis* not seen since the slaughterhouse at Gangtok was shifted to south to Rangpo almost a decade ago. The Rufous-necked Hornbill *Aceros nipalensis* reported by Ali (1962) from Gangtok has not been sighted lately. The Beautiful Nuthatch *Sitta formosa* is a globally threatened is still found, while the Rusty-bellied Shortwing *Brachypteryx hyperythra* was remarkably easily netted and ringed both in Fambong Lho and Himalayan Zoological Park in the 2001 BNHS Bird-Banding Programme. The Red-breasted Hill-Partridge *Arborophila mandellii* was reported by Ali (1962) from Gangtok but not heard or sighted recently unlike the commoner Hill Partridge *Arborophila torqueola*. The Hoary-throated Barwing *Actinodura nipalensis* and the White-naped Yuhina *Yuhina bakeri* are restricted range species reported from this IBA (Anon 2002).

In this Eastern Himalayas Endemic Bird Area, four out of 21 restricted range species, at least five out of 48 Biome-5 species, 49 out of 112 Biome-7 species, 38 out of 96 Biome-8 species and three out of 19 Biome-9 species are found (U. Lachungpa pers. comm. 2003).

Other bird species include the biome-restricted Mountain Imperial Pigeon *Ducula badia*, Slaty-headed Parakeet *Psittacula himalayana*, Red-winged crested Cuckoo *Calamator coromandus*, Large Green-billed Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus tristis*, Blue-naped Pitta *Pitta nipalensis*, Orange-bellied Chloropsis *Chloropsis hardwickii*, Brown Dipper *Cinclus pallasi*, and Spotted Forktail *Enicurus maculatus*. The Nepal House Martin *Delichon nipalensis* nests under school roofs while the Common Swallow annually returns to nest in four shops in the heart of Gangtok (U. Lachungpa pers. comm. 2003).

Critically Endangered

Oriental White-backed Vulture	<i>Gyps bengalensis</i>
Slender-billed Vulture	<i>Gyps tenuirostris</i>

Vulnerable

Red-breasted Hill-Partridge	<i>Arborophila mandellii</i>
Rufous-necked Hornbill	<i>Aceros nipalensis</i>
Rusty-bellied Shortwing	<i>Brachypteryx hyperythra</i>
Beautiful Nuthatch	<i>Sitta formosa</i>

Important Bird Areas in India - Sikkim

Endemic Bird Area 130: Eastern Himalayas	
Red-breasted Hill-Partridge	<i>Arborophila mandellii</i>
Rusty-bellied Shortwing	<i>Brachypteryx hyperythra</i>
Hoary-throated Barwing	<i>Actinodura nipalensis</i>
White-naped Yuhina	<i>Yuhina bakeri</i>
Biome-7: Sino-Himalayan Temperate Forest	
Common Hill-Partridge	<i>Arborophila torqueola</i>
Satyr Tragopan	<i>Tragopan satyra</i>
Darjeeling Pied Woodpecker	<i>Dendrocopos darjellensis</i>
Nepal House-Martin	<i>Delichon nipalensis</i>
Rufous-breasted Accentor	<i>Prunella strophata</i>
Long-tailed Thrush	<i>Zoothera dixonii</i>
White-collared Blackbird	<i>Turdus albocinctus</i>
Chestnut Thrush	<i>Turdus rubrocanus</i>
Gould's Shortwing	<i>Brachypteryx stellata</i>
Indian Blue Robin	<i>Luscinia brunnea</i>
Golden Bush-Robin	<i>Tarsiger chrysaeus</i>
White-browed Bush-Robin	<i>Tarsiger indicus</i>
Rufous-breasted Bush-Robin	<i>Tarsiger hyperythrus</i>
White-throated Redstart	<i>Phoenicurus schisticeps</i>
White-throated Laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax albogularis</i>
Striated Laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax striatus</i>
Black-faced Laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax affinis</i>
Slender-billed Scimitar-Babbler	<i>Xiphirhynchus superciliosus</i>
Greater Scaly-breasted Wren-Babbler	<i>Pnoepyga albiventer</i>
Green Shrike-Babbler	<i>Pteruthius xanthochlorus</i>
Bar-throated Minla	<i>Minla strigula</i>
Red-tailed Minla	<i>Minla ignotincta</i>
Gold-breasted Tit-Babbler	<i>Alcippe chrysotis</i>
Rufous Sibia	<i>Heterophasia capistrata</i>
Stripe-throated Yuhina	<i>Yuhina gularis</i>
Rufous-vented Yuhina	<i>Yuhina occipitalis</i>
Myzornis	<i>Myzornis pyrrhura</i>
Brown Parrotbill	<i>Paradoxornis unicolor</i>
Chestnut-headed Tesia	<i>Tesia castaneocoronata</i>
Grey-sided Bush-Warbler	<i>Cettia brunnifrons</i>
Grey-faced Leaf-Warbler	<i>Phylloscopus maculipennis</i>
Ferruginous Flycatcher	<i>Muscicapa ferruginea</i>
Orange-gorgeted Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula strophata</i>
Slaty-backed Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula hodgsonii</i>
Slaty-blue Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula tricolor</i>
Sapphire Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula sapphira</i>
Rufous-bellied Niltava	<i>Niltava sundara</i>
Green-backed Tit	<i>Parus monticolus</i>
Yellow-browed Tit	<i>Sylviparus modestus</i>
White-tailed Nuthatch	<i>Sitta himalayensis</i>
Fire-tailed Sunbird	<i>Aethopyga ignicauda</i>
Yellow-breasted Greenfinch	<i>Carduelis spinoides</i>
Blanford's Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus rubescens</i>
Dark-breasted Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus nipalensis</i>
White-browed Rosefinch	<i>Carpodacus thura</i>
Scarlet Finch	<i>Haematospiza sipahi</i>
Brown Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula nipalensis</i>
Red-headed Bullfinch	<i>Pyrrhula erythrocephala</i>
Spotted-winged Grosbeak	<i>Mycerobas melanozanthos</i>

Biome-8: Sino-Himalayan Subtropical Forest	
Slaty-headed Parakeet	<i>Psittacula himalayana</i>
Blue-throated Barbet	<i>Megalaima asiatica</i>
Bay Woodpecker	<i>Blythipicus pyrrhotis</i>
Blue-naped Pitta	<i>Pitta nipalensis</i>
Black-winged Cuckoo-Shrike	<i>Coracina melaschistos</i>
Short-billed Minivet	<i>Pericrocotus brevirostris</i>
Striated Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus striatus</i>
Himalayan Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus leucogenys</i>
White-throated Bulbul	<i>Alophoixus flaveolus</i>
Rufous-bellied Bulbul	<i>Hypsipetes mccllellandii</i>
Black Bulbul	<i>Hypsipetes leucocephalus</i>
Orange-bellied Chloropsis	<i>Chloropsis hardwickii</i>
Blue-headed Rock-Thrush	<i>Monticola cinclorhynchus</i>
Lesser Long-billed Thrush	<i>Zoothera marginata</i>
Tickell's Thrush	<i>Turdus unicolor</i>
Grey-winged Blackbird	<i>Turdus boulboul</i>
White-tailed Robin	<i>Myiomela leucurum</i>
Blue-fronted Robin	<i>Cinclidium frontale</i>
Slaty-backed Forktail	<i>Enicurus schistaceus</i>
Purple Cochoa	<i>Cochoa purpurea</i>
Rusty-cheeked Scimitar-Babbler	<i>Pomatorhinus erythrognys</i>
Rufous-capped Babbler	<i>Stachyris ruficeps</i>
Red-billed Leiothrix	<i>Leiothrix lutea</i>
Cutia	<i>Cutia nipalensis</i>
Rusty-fronted Barwing	<i>Actinodura egertoni</i>
Blue-winged Minla	<i>Minla cyanouroptera</i>
Nepal Tit-Babbler	<i>Alcippe nipalensis</i>
Striated Yuhina	<i>Yuhina castaniceps</i>
Black-chinned Yuhina	<i>Yuhina nigrimenta</i>
Grey-headed Flycatcher-Warbler	<i>Seicercus xanthoschistos</i>
White-gorgeted Flycatcher	<i>Ficedula monileger</i>
Small Niltava	<i>Niltava macgrigoriae</i>
Red-headed Tit	<i>Aegithalos concinnus</i>
Black-spotted Yellow Tit	<i>Parus sibilans</i>
Black-throated Sunbird	<i>Aethopyga saturata</i>
Streaked Spiderhunter	<i>Arachnothera magna</i>
Maroon Oriole	<i>Oriolus trailii</i>
Grey Treepie	<i>Dendrocitta formosae</i>

OTHER KEY FAUNA

Over 50 species of mammals have been reported from the Sanctuary. Important ones are the Chinese Pangolin *Manis pentadactyla*, Red Panda *Ailurus fulgens*, Leopard-Cat *Prionailurus bengalensis*, Asiatic Black Bear *Ursus thibetanus* and Hodgson's Flying Squirrel *Petaurista magnificus* (Anon. 2002). Glass Snake/Lizard *Ophiosaurus gracilis* has also been seen here (U. Lachungpa pers. comm. 2002).

LAND USE

- q Nature conservation and research
- q Tourism and recreation
- q Watershed management

THREATS AND CONSERVATION ISSUES

- q Grazing
- q Plantations
- q Deforestation

More than 280 species are reported from Fambong Lho WLS and neighboring areas.



Photo: M. Zaifur-Ul-Islam

The Sanctuary is one of the rare protected areas declared on public demand. The State Forest Department received a request from the people in its surrounding villages. They were concerned about the increasing deforestation and overgrazing in their catchment area, which would affect their future.

The area was originally used intensively for cattle grazing and the soil in the Golitar area had been compacted over a large area. Ground vegetation in some areas was poor and Oaks were lopped for fodder. Most of the old Oaks are now gone. Large cardamom plantations which had encroached on the fringes of the Sanctuary have now been removed. There are also thick stands of the exotic conifer *Cryptomeria japonica* planted by the Forest Department before declaring the area as a wildlife sanctuary (Anon. 2002). A large campus of the G. B. Pant Institute for Himalayan Environment and Development has come up at the edge of the Sanctuary, encouraging more commercial investors.

Eco-development Committees have been formed in villages surrounding the Sanctuary. In less than three years the 'Smriti Van' or Memorial Forest concept of the State Forest Department has been adopted successfully through various NGOs in a large degraded forest area adjoining the 205 ha Himalayan Zoological Park at Bulbuley enhancing the forest contiguity with Ratey Chu. This has greatly helped the water regime, benefiting the state capital, Gangtok.

KEY CONTRIBUTOR

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KEY REFERENCES

Anonymous (2002) An Introduction to the Fauna of Fambong Lho Wildlife Sanctuary East Sikkim. Unpublished Report of the Department of Forests, Environment and Wildlife, Government of Sikkim, Sikkim, India.

Ali, S. (1962) Birds of Sikkim. Oxford University Press, Madras.