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Cover: A digital art of water birds of Noyyal River and its wetlands in Coimbatore District by Megha A. Kashyap.



## New photographic and distribution records of the Beautiful Nuthatch *Sitta formosa* (Blyth, 1843) and Lesser Adjutant *Leptoptilos javanicus* (Horsfield, 1821) from the Tsirang District landscape in Bhutan

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The Beautiful Nuthatch *Sitta Formosa*—was first described by Edward Blyth from a specimen collected in Darjeeling (Blyth, 1843). Globally, *S. formosa* occurs in the eastern Himalaya, in the hills of northeastern India, Bhutan, extending through the highlands of Myanmar into Laos & Vietnam, also in southern China and northern Thailand (BirdLife International 2001, 2020; Grimmett et al. 2019). In Bhutan the species has been recorded from Samdrup Jongkhar, Thimphu, Mongar, Zhemgang, Lhuentse, Samtse, Chukha, Dagana, Sarpang, Wangduephodrang, Trashigang, Pemagatshel, and Trongsa (Bishop 1999; Spierenburg 2005; Tobgay 2018; eBird 2024). Although the species is widely distributed in the mainland of Southeast Asia, it appears to be rare and highly localized throughout its range, making population estimation difficult. Furthermore,

deforestation resulting from expanding development activities has led to the classification of its IUCN Red List status as ‘Vulnerable’ in recent years (BirdLife International 2020).

Lesser Adjutant *Leptoptilos javanicus* has a global population estimated to be between 5,000–15,000 individuals across its range (Birdlife International 2023), including India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, Laos, Singapore, Indonesia, and Cambodia. In Bhutan, the presence of *L. javanicus* was confirmed at the border of Royal Manas National Park in Zhemgang and Daifam (Samdrup Jongkhar) in 2004 (Choudhury 2005). It has subsequently been recorded from Gelephu (Sarpang District) (Tobgay 2018; Wangdi 2018), and in Bashaling & Langthel (Trongsa District) (Rinchen 2020). Birdlife International (2023)

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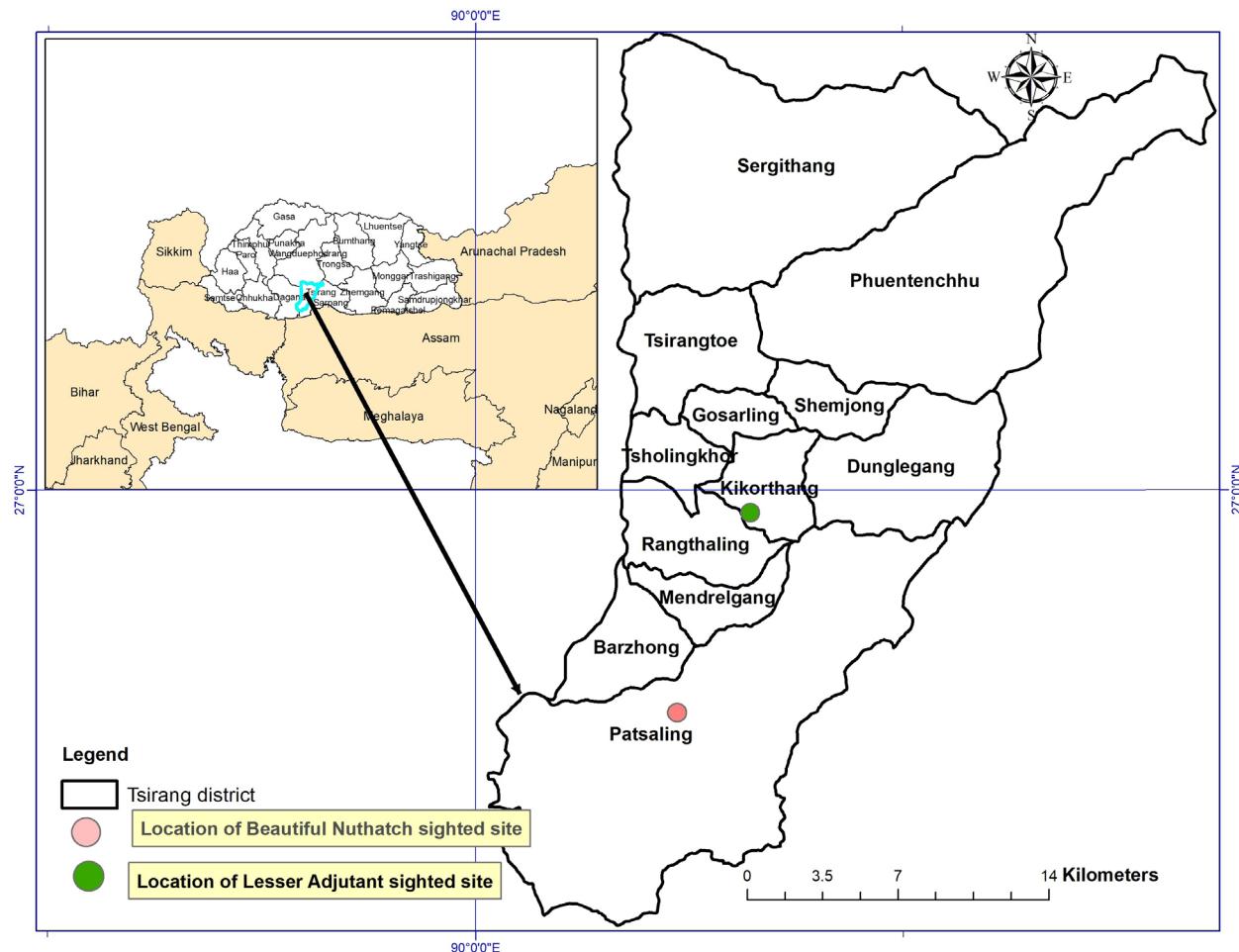


Figure 1. Sighting location of Beautiful Nuthatch (Red icon) and Lesser Adjutant (Green icon) inside the Tsirang District, Bhutan.

have suggested that the species appears in Bhutan as a vagrant, especially during the summer season.

The Tsirang District encompasses a total geographical area of 639 km<sup>2</sup> located in the south-central part of Bhutan, within altitude ranges of 160–4,144 m (Figure 1). Within this area, 15.52% (6329 ha) is covered by Biological Corridor No. 03, which connects with ecologically diverse protected areas such as Jigme Singye Wangchuck National Park (JSWNP) to the north, Royal Manas National Park (RMNP) to the east, and Phibsoo Wildlife Sanctuary (PWS) to the south. Additionally, the Punatsangchhu basin, one of Bhutan's major rivers, flows from north to south, providing primary habitat for the 'Critically Endangered' White-bellied Heron *Ardea insignis* as well as other globally threatened water bird species within the riverine landscape. The landscape is predominantly composed of warm broadleaved forest (47%), followed by sub-tropical forest (17.2%), cool broadleaved forest (17%), with scattered patches of evergreen oak and Chirpine forest (DoFPS 2022).

*S. formosa* was sighted by the first author in the vicinity of Pangthang village (26.940°N, 90.116°E) in the Patshaling Gewog on 5 April 2023, during a field trip (Image 1a,b). The photograph was uploaded to the online Bhutan Biodiversity Portal in 2023. The author observed it foraging on the trunk of an oak tree (*Quercus indica*) along with a flock of other sympatric species, including the Himalayan Shrike-babbler *Pteruthius aeralatus*, Lesser Racket-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus remifer*, Sultan Tit *Melanochlora sultanea*, Scarlet Minivet *Pericrocotus speciosus*, Red-tailed Minla *Minla ignotincta*, Blue-winged Minla *Actinodura cyanouroptera*, Maroon Oriole *Oriolus traillii*, and Ashy Drongo *Dicrurus leucophaeus*. Similarly, Bishop (1999) and Tobgay (2018) also reported sightings of Beautiful Nuthatch in flocks with other species from lower elevations in the Dewathang area of Samdrup Jongkhar District. In terms of elevation and forest types, in Tsirang the species was recorded at 1,400 m in warm broadleaved forests dominated by *Quercus* spp., *Macaranga* spp., *Alnus nepalensis*, and *Rhus* spp.,



Image 1. Dorsal and ventral part of the Beautiful Nuthatch *Sitta formosa* captured from Pangthang Village under Mendrelgang Range Office, Tsirang District. © Birkha B. Mongar.



Image 2. Ventral view of *Leptoptilos javanicus* captured from the Nyizergang Village under Tsirang District. © Birkha B. Mongar.

which is consistent with the findings of Bishop (1999) and Tobgay (2018).

*L. javanicus* was opportunistically recorded from Nyizergang (27.004°N, 90.131°E) in the Tsirang District on 13 March 2024. The bird was chased by feral dogs

but was later rescued with minor injuries by a team of foresters from the Forest Range Office, Tsirang. Due to damage to its left eye and body weakness, it might have missed the regular migratory routes resulting in its landing at central Tsirang District. Currently, this

individual is being cared for and treated at the White-bellied Heron Conservation Center established by the Royal Society for the Protection of Nature (RSPN), based in Changchey. The species has previously been reported up to 500 m (BirdLife International 2023) but this record at 1,469 m, has established a new distribution record for Bhutan and other range countries as well.

Owing to its rarity and the disturbances stemming from ongoing agricultural expansion, the species was recently reclassified from 'Least Concern' to 'Near Threatened' in 2023 (Birdlife International 2023). Separate studies are needed to ensure the long-term conservation of Beautiful Nuthatch, and to confirm whether Lesser Adjutant is a regular visitor in Tsirang.

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