NOTEBOOK

Records of Ward's Trogon *Harpactes wardi* in Neora Valley National Park, West Bengal, India

BISWAPRIYA RAHUT

Ward's Trogon *Harpactes wardi* is a sparsely distributed species, listed as Near Threatened because it probably has a moderately small population and is likely to be in decline owing to habitat loss and degradation in much of its range, particularly through subsistence logging and shifting cultivation; it is also probably susceptible to hunting.

It is found in the lower storey, undergrowth and bamboo of tall broadleaved evergreen forest between 1,500 and 3,200 m, perhaps moving to lower elevations during the cold season, down to about 1,200 m in some areas (BirdLife International 2013) and has been reported as low as 300 m (Collar 2001). Ward's Trogon is known from Bhutan where it is regularly recorded, north-east India where it is a rare resident of Arunachal Pradesh, north and east Myanmar where it was formerly locally common in the north, but there are no recent records and it is thought to be generally uncommon, north-west Yunnan, China (three collected in 1973) and north-west Tonkin, Vietnam, where it was previously common on Fan Si Pan but there are no recent records despite intensive searching (BirdLife International 2001).

In Arunachal Pradesh it is known from the montane broadleaved forests of the West Kameng, Dibang Valley and Lohit districts (Rahmani 2012) and has been recorded from Eaglenest, Sessa Orchid and Dibang Sanctuaries (Choudhury 2006), whilst the first confirmed record from Namdapha National Park came as late as 18 December 2008 (Srinivasan *et al.* 2010). There are few historical records from the Sikkim and Darjeeling Himalayas, although Kazmierczak & Singh (2001) mentioned that it had been reported from Baguwa and Jorethang in southern Sikkim—this was probably the same record as Ganguli-Lachungpa (1996). There have been no subsequent reports from that area. The Neora Valley National Park (NVNP), Darjeeling,

Plates 1 & 2. Female Ward's Trogon *Harpactes wardi*, Neora Valley National Park, West Bengal, India, 29 March 2013.

BISWAPRIYA RAHUT

BISWAPRIYA RAHUT

West Bengal, India, covers an area of 88 km^2; it is a compact patch of virgin forest which lies in the Kalimpong Sub-division in the civil district of Darjeeling (Pradhan 2012). The altitude varies from 183 m to 3,200 m, the highest point being in the north near the Sikkim border. The park is an integral part of the Kanchenjunga landscape and is contiguous with the Pangolakha Wildlife Sanctuary, Sikkim, and Toorsa Strict Nature Reserve, Bhutan, whilst its southern boundary adjoins the forests of Jalpaiguri district. Despite being designated an Important Bird Area, very few ornithological studies have been done there mainly due to its inaccessibility and difficult terrain (see Pradhan 2012).

The first known record of Ward's Trogon in the NVNP was by Edward Vercruysse (pers. comm.) who found a pair on 15 May 2000. Bram Demeulemeester (pers. comm.) visited the park twice over 7–10 days in March and April 2004, seeing a female on his first visit and a male on his second visit, then Filip Verbelen (pers. comm.) found a pair there on 21 April 2005.

On 29 March 2013 during a visit to the NVNP, I found a female Ward's Trogon (Plates 1 & 2) at about 2,450 m. It was around noon on a bright, sunny day and I was sitting on the edge of the forest road when I heard the call of what I thought was a Ward's Trogon; not having heard the call in the wild previously, I was in a bit of doubt regarding the species. Then I heard the call again and it seemed to be quite distant, but this time it left me with no doubt that it was a Ward's Trogon. I had two calls of the species on my MP3 player (downloaded from www.xeno-canto.org), one of which was a bit louder than the other. Assuming the calling bird was distant I played back the louder call and within 30 seconds or so the bird responded; this time the call appeared to come from much closer. I now decided to play the softer call and a female Ward's Trogon flew in and perched on a bamboo strand a few metres away. It perched there for almost 20 seconds, which allowed me to take a few close shots; then, probably disturbed by the noise of the camera shutter, the bird flew away and sat on a high perch partially hidden by orchids and lichen. It stayed there for at least for a minute before disappearing down the valley. The bird called three times during the entire period. This was probably the first time the species has been photographically documented not only in the NVNP but the entire Sikkim–Darjeeling Himalayas.

The status and distribution of the Ward's Trogon in NVNP has not yet been ascertained, although interviews with the local forest guards suggest that the species occurs in at least two areas of the park.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Bram Demeulemeester, Edward Vercruysse and Filip Verbelen for searching their records to find data on their sightings of Ward's Trogon in Neora Valley NP. I am also grateful to the officers and staff of the Neora Valley National Park for their wholehearted cooperation and support during the visit.

References

BirdLife International (2001) *Threatened birds of Asia: the BirdLife International Red Data Book.* Cambridge UK: BirdLife International.

BirdLife International (2013) Species fact sheet: *Harpactes wardi.* Downloaded from http://www.birdlife.org on 01/06/2013.

Choudhury, A. U. (2006) *A pocket guide to the birds of Arunachal Pradesh.* Guwahati: Gibbon Books and Rhino Foundation for Nature in N.E. India.

Collar, N. J. (2001) Family Trogonidae (trogons). Pp.80–127 in J. del Hoyo, A. Elliott & J. Sargatal, eds. *Handbook of the birds of the world*, 6: Barcelona: Lynx Edicions.

Ganguli-Lachungpa, U. (1996) Baseline bird survey in proposed Kitam Wildlife Sanctuary and other low-land forests of South Sikkim. Report submitted to Oriental Bird Club (unpublished).

Kazmierczak, K. & Singh, R. (2001) *A birdwatchers' guide to India.* New Delhi: Oxford University Press.

Rahmani, A. R. (2012) *Threatened birds of India – their conservation requirements.* Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Pradhan, S. (2012) Hornbills in the Neora Valley National Park, Darjeeling, West Bengal, India. *BirdingASIA* 18: 97–100.

Srinivasan, U., Dalvi, S., Naniwadekar, R., Anand, M.O. & Dutta, A. (2010) The birds of Namdapha National Park and surrounding areas: recent significant records and a checklist of the species. *Forktail* 26: 92–116.

Biswapriya RAHUT
Rahut Building, Babupara, P.O. Dist. Jalpaiguri
West Bengal 735101, India
Email: bishwapriya@gmail.com