Project Update December 2020

Executive Summary of the Project

Lesser adjutant (*Leptoptilos javanicus*) is sparsely distributed in south and south-east Asia, and its population is declining rapidly in its range due to anthropogenic activities. Little is known on its distribution, breeding and habitat requirements in lowland Nepal. Also, there is need for understanding knowledge and attitudes of people towards the species, and continuous interaction with local people to minimise the existing anthropogenic threats. The findings can be used for the government and conservation agencies to develop site specific long-term plans and policies for lesser adjutant conservation in human-dominated landscapes of lowland Nepal.

Preliminary Report I (to December 2020)

Interactions/collaboration with organisations

I have discussed and tied up with the organisations who are working in lowland Nepal for bird and biodiversity conservation like Bird Conservation Nepal, Zoological Society of London-Nepal office, Mithila Wildlife Trust, Chitwan Bird Society, Koshi Bird Society, Green Youth of Lumbini, Bardia Nature Conservation Club, Suklaphata National Park, Xishuangbanna Tropical Botanical Garden, etc. I also discussed with the co-chair of IUCN Stork, Ibis and Spoonbill Specialist Group about the project implementation. Their support and suggestion helped to continue the project more smoothly and will help further in awareness campaigns.

Exploring potential breeding sites of lesser adjutant in lowland Nepal

The current project is highly impacted by the lockdown due to COVID-19 outbreak in Nepal. Immediately after the opening of lockdown, we conducted distribution and breeding ecology of the lesser adjutant in possible sites of lowland Nepal. The breeding of the species stats from the July-September and chick fledging starts from December to February. Surveys were conducted in seven districts of lowland Nepal: three eastern districts - Siraha, Saptari, Dhanusa; two central districts - Chitwan and Nawalparasi; and two western districts - Bardia and Kanchanpur. Besides Bardia, where we could not locate the nesting colony of the species, we recorded the nesting colonies from all six districts.

We identified the fixed area in each study site and monitored the area with the help of the motorbikes. During this time, we focus on the three protected areas, Chitwan National Park, Bardia National Park and Suklaphata National Park and its buffer zones. However, we recorded few nesting sites within the protected areas rather we found higher number of nests outside the protected areas. Altogether, we recorded 35 colonies with 85 nests having 95 chicks. During the monitoring, we also recoded the tree characteristics of the nesting trees, like tree height, diameter at breast height and tree species used by the lesser adjutant for nesting. Around 90% of the tree used for nesting was the Simal (*Bombax ceiba)*, while remaining in Karam (*Haldina cordifolia),* Pipal (*Ficus religiosa*), etc.

Above: Lesser Adjutant with a chick. Below: 31372-2A colony of Lesser Adjutant with fledging-stage chicks.

Major Works to be done in 2021

- Final result of nesting success of the species.
- Semi-structured interviews with farmers about the knowledge and threats to the species.
- Poster preparation for education programmes.
- Awareness programmes.
- Overall data analysis.
- Final report.
- Manuscript preparation.