

The first documented record of Tibetan Lark *Melanocorypha maxima* for Nepal

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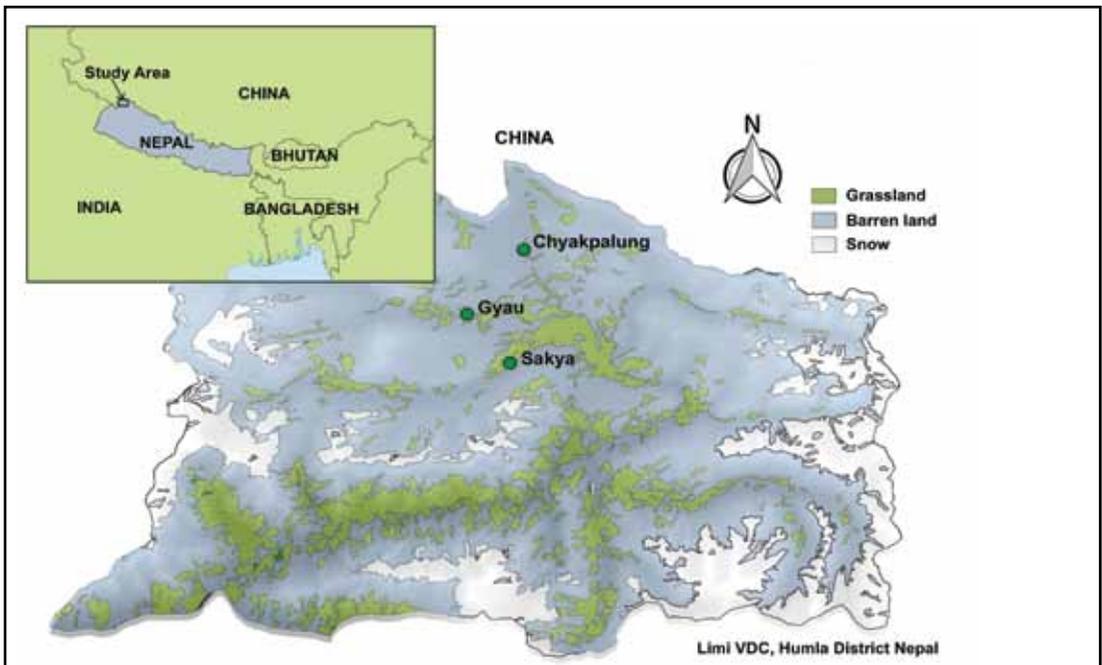
In July and August 2015 we carried out research on wolves *Canis* sp. and Wild Yak *Bos mutus* around the Gyau valley, in the remote upper Humla district of north-west Nepal, which is located in the south-west corner of the Tibetan plateau, bordering the Tibetan Autonomous Region of China to the north. This area comprises alpine steppe with abundant grasses, sedges, forbs (herbaceous flowering plants) and shrubs (*Salix* sp., *Astragalus* sp., etc) and the Gyau River flows through the valley where, on 5 August at 4,872 m (30.355°N 81.598°E) we saw a bird which we did not immediately recognise and we obtained images to assist in identification (Plate 1). The presence of a blackish patch on the side of the lower neck/upper breast indicated two possibilities—Bimaculated Lark *Melanocorypha bimaculata* or Tibetan Lark *M. maxima*. On careful study, we observed that the bird had a long, comparatively thin bill with a pale pinkish base that turned greyer and darker towards the tip. The long-necked appearance, distinctly rufous rump and the absence of an eye-stripe ruled out Bimaculated Lark. In addition, the presence of a white trailing edge to the secondaries and the white sides and broad white tips of the outer tail-feathers supported the identification as Tibetan Lark.

On 8 August another individual was found at 4,954 m (Plate 2) in Chyakpalung (30.388°N 81.630°E). On 13 August we observed a flock of about 30 birds foraging in marshy grassland

at 4,874 m near the Sakya River (30.321°N 81.621°E). In addition to adults with plumage as described above (Plate 1), about 20 birds in the flock had dark blackish-brown upperparts with white feather edges, and yellow underparts with indistinct dark spotting on the breast, indicating they were juveniles (Plate 3), thus implying that Tibetan Larks breed in the area. When subsequently reviewing images obtained in 2014, we belatedly realised that we had a prior record of Tibetan Lark from the Sakya valley taken on 17 July 2014.

Our identification of the Tibetan Larks was confirmed by Carol and Tim Inskipp, Per Alström, Hem Sagar Baral, K. S. Gopi Sundar and Som G. C. The Tibetan Lark is found on the Tibetan plateau from north-west India to central China and described as locally common (Ryan *et al.* 2004, BirdLife International 2016). In South Asia, the Tibetan Lark is resident at high altitudes on the Rupshu plateau of south-east Ladakh and the Inner Himalayas of north Sikkim (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), whilst a record of the species in Pakistan by Khan *et al.* (2012) at 4,623 m extends its range further to the west. Our records from Nepal suggest that the species may occur in other nearby Trans-Himalayan landscapes. The altitudinal range of Tibetan Lark has been given loosely as 3,200–4,600 m (Ryan *et al.* 2004). Our observations were made between 4,872–4,954 m, the highest documented altitudinal records for Tibetan Lark to date.

Figure 1. Study area in Limi VDC, Humla district, Nepal, showing the locations of sightings of Tibetan Lark *Melanocorypha maxima* in 2015 (green circles).



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Plate 1. Adult Tibetan Lark *Melanocorypha maxima*, Gyau valley, Humla district, Nepal, 5 August 2015.

Plate 3. Juvenile Tibetan Lark, Saky valley, Humla district, Nepal, 13 August 2015.



Plate 2. Juvenile Tibetan Lark, Chyakpalung, Humla district, Nepal, 8 August 2015.

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