

The Great Himalayan National Park, Himachal Pradesh

Dates of visit: 19 to 29 Th. April 1999

Persons: Anchal and Sanjay Sondhi

The Great Himalayan National Park, with a size of approx. 760 sq. km. is in Himachal Pradesh. The Park has three tributaries of the Beas River flowing through it- Jewa, Sainj and Tirthan. We spent our time in the Tirthan Valley.

Approach to Tirthan Valley: Sai Ropa (1385 m.), Ghusaini (1495 m.) Sai Ropa is a small village about 5 km away from Ghusaini.

Ghusaini, a small village, is the main gateway to the Tirthan Valley. The Park Boundary is approx. 6 km from Ghusaini, begins at Kharongcha.

We trekked in the National Park between the 19th and 29th of April. We climbed from approx. 1400 m. to 3600 m. during our stay, but a large part of our time was spent above 3000 m. The area had not received any snow or rain for over 8 months, so the area was extremely dry. There were very few fresh water sources above 3000 m. In a number of places, we had to manage by melting snow, collected from the few small remnant patches.

Quite a few forest fires had erupted, leading to poor visibility, even at heights above 3000 m. The lack of rain, high temperatures and human carelessness, possibly being the primary reasons for the fires. We basically trekked on 2 routes which are mentioned under . Sanjeeva Pandey, the director of the National Park was with us for the first couple of days, after which we were on our own.

Route 1: Ghusaini-Kharongcha-Rolla-Shilt-Chordwar-Rakhundi

Kharongcha: This is a small village close to the entrance of the National Park. The village is just above the Tirthan Nala at a height of approx. 1900 m.

Rolla (1900 m): Rolla is a camping spot at the banks of the Tirthan Nala and has a few forest dept. huts.

Shilt(3000 m.): Shilt is a small "thach". The climb from Rolla to Shilt is steep, through coniferous and broad leaved forest.

Chordwar(2960 m.): The only place at that height with running water, that too, a small trickle of water. Chordwar is only a camping spot with a small water hole, in the midst of dense jungle. The forest at Chordwar was mainly Deodar, Moru Oak (in great abundance), Maple, Horse-Chestnut and lots of Ringal Bamboo in patches.

Rakhundi(3622 m.): From Chordwar, one climbs to Rakhundi, which is an alpine meadow.

Route 2: Kharongcha-Dingcha-Bakhadi-Dingcha-Kauncha-Ghusaini

Bakhadi(approx. 3000 m.): The route to Bakhadi is a climb from Kharongcha through coniferous forest. Bakhadi is a large "thach", almost half a kilometre long, with spurs of coniferous forest on the hillside. So the entire hillside alternates between forest patches and grass meadows. The forest enroute to Bakhadi is different from the Shilt-Chordwar area. This forest has more confers and less o

ak. The forest enroute to and at Bakhadi was primarily Spruce, Deodar, Blue Pine and Low-level Silver Fir. Ringal Bamboo occurred only sparsely. Ban Oak at the lower levels and Moru Oak at the higher levels. High-level Silver Fir occurred at the higher levels. At Bakhadi, some Birch grew in company of Deodar and High-level Silver Fir. The forest enroute to Bakhadi and at the thach area was not as dense as the Shilt-Chordwar-Rakhundi area.

The Great Himalayan National Park is very rich in wildlife. During our visit we identified 120 bird species, 45 butterfly species and quite a few mammals. In addition, we photographed approx. 40 species of flowers which included 3 species of Primula, 2 species of Rhododendron, Anemones and a host of other flowers.

List of birds seen

134. Blackeared Kite *Milvus migrans lineatus*

23/4/99 Rakhundi

Spotted a solitary kite in flight from the summit of the hill.

Bakhadi

Sighting of 4 kites in flight on the first day at dusk and a solitary kite at the same time the next day. Even though the birds were quite a long way up, their flight was typical of kites. I noticed white patches on the underside of the wings. A pale head visible whenever the bird banked in flight.

164. Booted Hawk-Eagle *Hieraaetus pennatus*

Rakhundi: Spotted the same bird twice, in flight, from the summit in the late morning. Clear sightings from both above and below.

Dhingcha: Spotted the bird in flight in the morning, flying over the Tirthan Nala. The Booted Hawk-Eagle was being repeatedly chivvied by Jungle Crows.

149. West Himalayan Besra Sparrow Hawk *Accipiter virgatus*

Chordwar

Spotted a Sparrow-Hawk in densely forested habitat on 2 different occasions. Size: Shikra sized bird. The bird was slaty grey above with a large amount of rufous on the belly. 3-4 bars on the tail. Spotted the bird hunting in the forest, winging its way adroitly through the forest. Possibly the West Himalayan Besra Sparrow-Hawk.

Call of the bird as it flew past us in the forest: a harsh "chaeeya".

Unidentified accipiter at Kharongcha. Possibly a Shikra.

166. Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos*

Shilt

Spotted a pair of birds- a juvenile and an adult in flight over the thach at Shilt in the forenoon.

Rakhundi

Spotted a juvenile bird on a different day, possibly the same bird seen at Shilt.

