

Sampora near Ghilamora was reduced to a few individuals, while those in Bordoibam-Bilmukh were almost extirpated. Stray animals were still observed in Dulung, Kakoi and Ranga RFs, especially along the rivers. Bordoibam-Bilmukh is a bird sanctuary and is partly in Lakhimpur and partly in Dhemaji districts; the main deer habitat was in Lakhimpur district. The entire grassland and reed bed along the western fringe of the Sanctuary was destroyed by a section of the villagers who were opposed to the declaration of a sanctuary. While a few deer could escape, the rest were killed for the pot. The survivors (about 20) are still seen in Gohain chapori towards west of Bordoibam-Bilmukh. In Dhemaji district, however, the populations continued to exist in the earlier sites, but in depleted numbers. Kobo chapori had suffered heavily in the flash flood in 2000 and there were fresh encroachments. The estimated numbers were <200. In Bordoloni also, the reed and grass cover had been reduced and the numbers may be <80, Poba RF, Jamjing RF (<40), Sengajan RF, Jiadhal RF, Subansiri RF, chapories near Sonarighat, Semen chapori, other chapories on the Brahmaputra river and stray animals elsewhere. The total estimated population in Lakhimpur and

Dhemaji was 150-200 and 450-550 respectively.

The population in Kobo chapori is contiguous with those in D'Ering Memorial Wildlife Sanctuary in Arunachal Pradesh. Both these areas had a few hundred Hog Deer until 1980s.

The first major threat to the Hog Deer came at the end of 19<sup>th</sup> century when large number of people from Majuli area of Jorhat district and also from other parts of Jorhat and Sivasagar districts settled down by clearing grassland in the floodplains of Lakhimpur and Dhemaji. Then in early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a part of Lakhimpur was occupied by people from East Bengal; part of Pabho RF is also encroached. In the later part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, some Bodo tribals from Assam-Nagaland border had moved into some parts of Dhemaji district after disturbance in the former area. They have occupied prime Hog Deer habitat such as Jamjing RF and Semen chapori.

Habitat destruction and poaching, with guns and snares, continue to be major threats. Each year, a chunk of the grassland is added to the mustard cultivation and unless conservation measures are taken, the future of the animal is bleak.

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### 9. FIRST SIGHTING OF WHITE-TAILED EAGLE *HALIAEETUS ALBICILLA* IN BUMDELING WILDLIFE SANCTUARY, BHUTAN<sup>1</sup>

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The White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* is listed by BirdLife International (2004) as 'near threatened'. In the north-eastern part of the Indian subcontinent, including Bhutan, it is an occasional winter visitor moving upstream of larger rivers (Choudhury 2000; Inskipp *et al.* 2004). In Bhutan, it was recorded from the western part of the country in Punakha and Thimphu *dzongkhags* (*dzongkhag* = district) (Inskipp *et al.* 2004). I here report of a sighting in far eastern Bhutan in Bumdeling Wildlife Sanctuary (Fig. 1).

On January 18, 2006, I left Trashigang town (in Bhutan) before dawn and drove towards Bumdeling Wildlife Sanctuary to catch up with the roosting Black-necked Cranes *Grus nigricollis* that take off early in the morning. While returning, we noticed a large bird perched on a tree by the



Fig. 1: Map of Bhutan showing the locality of sighting



Khulong *chu* (*chu*=river). Khulong *chu* is an important tributary of the Manas river. Initially we thought it to be a large fish-owl, but on observing it through a powerful spotting scope, we identified it as an eagle; the bird flew away before we could get a closer look. After some time it perched again on a tree. This time we identified the bird, to our utter surprise, as the magnificent adult White-tailed Eagle. We observed it for about 20 minutes and also took some still and video photographs, through the spotting scope. The photos, though taken from a distance of at least 250 m, were of good quality. The location was at 27° 38' 20" N and 91° 28' 40" E, and the elevation was 1,900 m above msl.

This is the first record of the White-tailed Eagle from

Bumdeling Wildlife Sanctuary, and from eastern Bhutan. Interestingly, this bird is known to move up larger rivers, such as the Brahmaputra and Lohit, but Khulong *chu* is a relatively small river compared to other rivers where the species was recorded earlier. Moreover, it has moved up far north.

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### 10. SIGHTING OF LARGE NUMBER OF SHORT-TOED EAGLE *CIRCAETUS GALLICUS* AND GREATER ADJUTANT *LEPTOPTILOS DUBIUS* IN KAZIRANGA NATIONAL PARK<sup>1</sup>

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The Short-toed Eagle *Circaetus gallicus* was recorded for the first time in Assam in Dhakuakhana area in 1991 (Choudhury 1991). Prior to that there was no report from north-east India (Ali and Ripley 1987). Subsequently, it was sighted in some more areas like the Nameri National Park (NP), Chakrashila Sanctuary, Kaziranga NP, near Abhoyapuri. Most of the sightings were of single birds. On November 20, 2005, while driving along the patrol roads in Arimora area of Kaziranga NP, accompanied by Dharanidhar Boro, Ranger, I saw a Short-toed Eagle perched on a medium-sized Silk Cotton *Bombax ceiba* tree. Before I could attempt to take a photograph, one more was seen soaring overhead, followed by another three, all singly. We moved towards the road to Borbeel where two were seen perched on a single Silk Cotton tree. We were surprised to see a few more, soaring or flying off from one Silk Cotton to another. The total tally, in the same area, was 11 birds. Most of the birds had typical plumage with grey head and breast, barred underbody and broad sub-terminal tail-band.

On the same day, near the junction of the road to Methonmari on Arimora-Hulalpat road, 50 Greater Adjutants *Leptoptilos dubius* were seen flying from east to west. They were seen flying from west of Arimora and when above the Arimora-Methonmari road, they soared for a while before flying off towards the east and south-east. Up to the point where they took to soar they came like a group, but afterwards split into smaller groups and individuals, and flew downwards (could be observed till tree line blocked view). For Dharanidhar Boro also sighting of such large number of Greater Adjutants in Kaziranga was a first time. The maximum number of Greater Adjutants seen together was 87 resting during the daytime on the banks of the Brahmaputra river off Guwahati city on March 14, 1994 (Choudhury 2000). However, just after the breeding season, more than 80 birds roost at Islampur *kabrstan* (26°10' N, 91°45' E) in the heart of Guwahati city. The Greater Adjutant is listed as endangered because of its very small, declining population (BirdLife International 2004).

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