

Occurrence of mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* in high-altitude lakes of Tawang District, western Arunachal Pradesh, India

The Eastern Himalaya and Assam Plain are recognized as endemic bird areas and distribution of 24 species are restricted to the region globally. Of these, 21 species occur in Arunachal Pradesh, which harbours the largest number of restricted range species among the northeastern states of India¹. The richness of the avifauna of the region largely reflects the diversity of habitats associated with a wide altitudinal range². Arunachal Pradesh is a biodiversity hotspot and supports a rich and diverse birdlife³. Several accounts of the avifaunal inventory of Arunachal Pradesh have been published³⁻¹⁴. However, the avifaunas of high altitude areas of Arunachal Pradesh are still poorly understood and several new distributional records including description of a new species *Liocichla bugunorum* from Eaglenest Wildlife Sanctuary³ further signify it.

Mallards (*Anas platyrhynchos*) are among the most common waterfowl species in the northern hemisphere. *A. platyrhynchos* is probably the best-known and most recognizable of all dabbling ducks which breed throughout the temperate and sub-tropical America, Europe, Asia, New Zealand and Australia. It belongs to the family Anatidae and is listed as least concern category (IUCN 3.1) by the International Union for Conservation of Nature. The duck has been recorded as a nonresidential passage migrant in the Trans-Himalayan region^{15,16}. Within Indian limits, Kashmir, including Ladakh is the only state where mallards breed¹⁶⁻¹⁸ and are believed to be altitudinal migrants. In the Indian Himalayan

region, winter sighting of this species was also recorded at Dombang Valley IBA site of northern Sikkim, at an altitude of 2700 m (ref. 1).

During our regular field visit to Tawang District and its high-altitude lake areas, we encountered *A. platyrhynchos* in two different locations, Sela and Nagula. On 16 March 2010, we sighted three individuals in Sela Lake (Figure 1; two males and one female; 27°30'33.14"N, 92°06'10.89"E) situated at an altitude of 4160 m amsl, just at the entrance of Tawang District. We also sighted another pair of duck species (one male and one female) in Panggang Teng Tso Lake (27°38'16.40"N, 91°51'25.39"E) at an altitude of 3900 m amsl. The lake is situated in the northern boundary of Tawang District close to the Indo-Chinese international border and is popularly known as PT Tso. The presence of the species has been confirmed through direct sighting in both the lakes along with photographic evidence. The catchment vegetation of both the lakes is scarce mainly formed of *Rhododendron* scrubs, thick mats of moss and short-lived herbaceous plants like *Aster* sp., *Bistorta* sp., *Anemone* sp., *Potentilla* sp., *Rheum* sp., *Gentiana* sp. and *Primula* sp.

As high-altitude breeding of mallard has been recorded from Kashmir, including Ladakh, there may be a possibility of breeding of the species in these high elevated areas of western Arunachal Pradesh.

There is lack of substantial information about this species from Arunachal Pradesh, although it is found commonly in the lower altitudinal zone of the Assam Plain and probably as an altitudinal migrant in the high-altitude wetlands throughout Arunachal Pradesh. However, further study on the present population status is needed and a database on the range of movement of this species has to be generated. Regular checks on the population fluctuation along with the breeding ecology will help in understanding the distributional status of this species in the high-altitude regions of Arunachal Pradesh.



Figure 1. Mallards at Sela Lake.

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