

Waders of Dibru-Saikhowa Wildlife Sanctuary, Assam

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Talukdar, B. K. 1996. Waders of Dibru-Saikhowa Wildlife Sanctuary, Assam. *Wader Study Group Bull.* 80: 80-81.

The status of waders in the Dibru-Saikhowa Wildlife Sanctuary, Assam, is summarised. A total of 19 species were recorded from 14 field visits and other information supplied in the period 1990-1994. The Sanctuary has one of the richest wader faunas in Assam and its continued conservation is of key importance.

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In the past two decades, there has been increasing concern about conservation of waders all over the world. Data from the Asian Mid-winter Waterfowl Census in recent years (1990-1994) reveal that the State of Assam (78 523 sq km) harbours around 34 species of wader. A preliminary survey of waders has been initiated in the Dibru-Saikhowa Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) of Assam, which is documented in this paper.

BACKGROUND

The Dibru-Saikhowa WLS (27° 40'N, 95° 24'E), covers 650 km² and is situated in the Tinsukia District of eastern Assam (Figure 1), at an altitude of 90-100 m above mean sea level. The Dibru-Saikhowa forest was declared a "Wildlife Sanctuary" in 1986 with the primary aim of protecting the endangered White-winged Wood Duck *Cairina scutulata*.

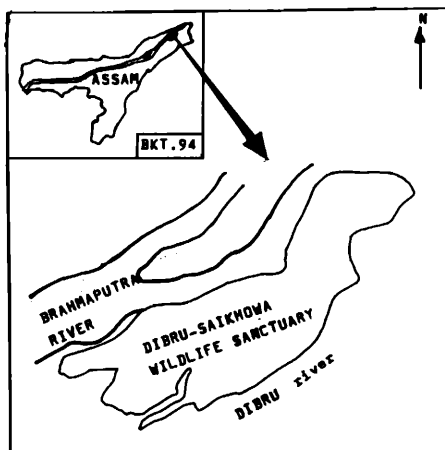


Figure 1. Map of Dibru-saikhowa Wildlife Sanctuary.

Bounded by the River Brahmaputra to the north and the River Dibru to the south, Dibru-Saikhowa is purely a riparian habitat comprising mostly wetlands and grasslands, interspersed with medium to large patches of tree forests. The vegetation types of Dibru-Saikhowa WLS can be classified into - Tropical moist deciduous forests, Tropical semi-evergreen forests, Bamboo and cane brakes, Reedbeds and Alluvial grassland. The land use pattern of the sanctuary is shown in Figure 2 but figure does not refer to these habitats specifically. The climate can be considered as "Sub-tropical Moist", the annual precipitation is 2 500-3 500 mm. The average temperature varies between a maximum of 36° C and a minimum of 5° C. Relative humidity is 64-86%.

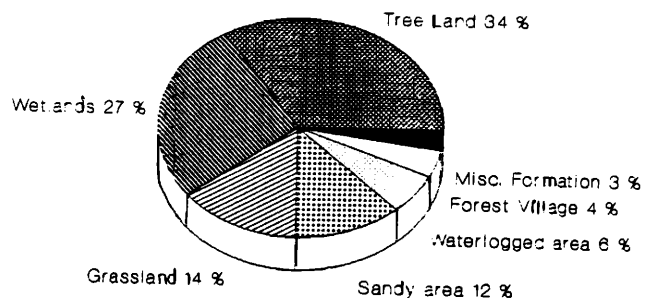


Figure 2. Land use pattern of Dibru-saikhowa Wildlife Sanctuary.

METHODS

The survey was conducted during 14 trips to the WLS during various seasons from 1990 to 1994. All sightings of waders in the sanctuary were recorded. Apart from direct field observations, information from local people, forest guards and forest officials were also gathered. The waders were identified and verified following Ali & Ripley (1983) and Sonobe & Usui (1993).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

As per IWRB's definition of waders (as used in Asian Mid-winter Waterfowl Census), the species recorded during the study period are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Waders of Dibru-Saikhowa Wildlife Sanctuary, Assam.

Charadriidae	Abundance	Seasonality
Red wattled Lapwing <i>Vanellus indicus</i>	C	R?
Northern Lapwing <i>Vanellus vanellus</i>	r	M
River Lapwing <i>Vanellus duvaucelii</i>	r	RB?
Grey headed Lapwing <i>Vanellus cinereus</i>	C	M
Long-billed Ringed Plover <i>Charadrius placidus</i>	r	M
Grey Plover <i>Pluvialis squatarola</i>	r	M
Glareolidae		
Small Indian Pratincole <i>Glareola lactea</i>	C	M
Scolopacidae		
Marsh Sandpiper <i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>	C	R
Green Sandpiper <i>Tringa ochropus</i>	C	M
Redshank <i>Tringa totanus</i>	C	M
Greenshank <i>Tringa nebularia</i>	r	M
Common Sandpiper <i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	C	M
Common Snipe <i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	r	M
Little Stint <i>Calidris minuta</i>	r	M
Curlew <i>Numenius arquata</i>	r	M
Whimbrel <i>Numenius phaeopus</i>	vr	M
Rostratulidae		
Painted Snipe <i>Rostratula benghalensis</i>	r	M
Recurvirostridae		
Black-winged Stilt <i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	r	M
Avocet <i>Recurvirostra avosetta</i>	vr	M

Key

Seasonality

R	Resident
M	Migratory
B	Breeding recorded
R?	Status unknown/confused
B?	Breeding status unknown

Abundance

C	Common
r	Rare
vr	Very rare

A total of 19 species of waders belonging to five families and 12 genera were observed. Red-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus indicus*, River Lapwing *Vanellus duvaucelii*, and Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatilis* were all seen in the sanctuary even in summer months. Apart from these three species, all the others were undoubtedly migratory waders. Migratory waders visit the sanctuary during winter, between October and March. The study reveals that seven species of wader are common in Dibru-Saikhowa WLS, while ten species are rare and two species are very rare to the sanctuary.

Dibru-Saikhowa WLS provides suitable habitat for waders, as well as other aquatic and terrestrial birds, due to its topography, vegetation, vast wetlands and waterlogged areas. It is not only the swamps, marshland, lakes and other seasonal and perennial wetlands that provide suitable habitat for a number of waders in the sanctuary. As the sanctuary is situated between the south bank of the river Brahmaputra and the north bank of the River Dibru, the shore area of the river banks also provides unique ecological opportunities for a wide variety of waders and the species diversity is high in these areas. The sanctuary can be regarded as potentially one of the richest sites for waders in Assam. Further surveys in the sanctuary may reveal the presence of even more wader species.

REFERENCES

- Ali, S. & Ripley, S.D. 1983. *Handbook of the birds of India and Pakistan*. Oxford University Press. New Delhi.
- Sonobe, K. & Usui, S. (Eds). 1993. *A Field guide to the waterbirds of Asia*. Wildbird Society of Japan, Tokyo.

