

P. Jepson (1989)

The occurrence of Kessler's Thrush *Turdus kessleri* in Nepal

Introduction.

Kessler's thrush *Turdus kessleri* is distributed throughout Western China, in the provinces of Qinghai, eastern Xizang and Sichuan. During the breeding season it is found at altitudes from 9000 to 15000 feet (though generally above 11000 ft) inhabiting dwarf rhododendron and willow habitats and alpine grasslands (de Schaunese, Thayer and Bangs). In keeping with other *Turdus* species the summer diet is one of worms and insects, in autumn it feeds on berries and in winter on the seeds of Juniper. The winter range of kessler's thrush is less well documented. Bangs and Ludlow recorded the species in good numbers in Yunnan province, suggesting a South easterly dispersal, but it seems likely that most simply disperse from their breeding grounds in accordance with the availability of food.

Ali & Ripley suggest that it might occur in winter in northern Bhutan or Arunchal Pradesh on account of a record of 4 at Changu, Sikkim during December (Meintzhagen 1927) and a specimen obtained close to the Tibetan border in November by Mandelli. That Kessler's thrush may regularly occur south of the Himalayan peaks during winter has been substantiated by recent records from Nepal. These are detailed below.

Records of Kesslers Thrush from Nepal.

Place names are those given in Nelles Verlag maps No 2 Khumnu Himal 1:50,000 and No8 Helambu-Langtang 1:100 000. Altitudes are in meters.

<u>Date</u>	<u>Location</u>	<u>Alt.</u>	<u>Long.</u>	<u>Lat.</u>	<u>No.</u>	<u>Associate species.</u>	<u>Observer</u>
<u>Everset National Park.</u>							
xx.xx.86	Namche bazar						
xx.xx.86	Khumjung				1	<i>T.ruficolis</i>	D.Mills
17.11.88	U.Pangboche	3985			>13	<i>T.merula</i>	P.Jepson
21.11.88	Tongaba/ Phortse Dangbe				20+	<i>T.merula</i>	P.Jepson
15.12.88	Thame				2	<i>T.ruficolis</i>	J.Nielsen
16.12.88	Gonda				4	<i>T.ruficolis</i>	J.Nielsen
19.12.88	Shomare				>15	-	J.Nielsen
28.12.88	Pangboche				4	-	J.Nielsen
28.12.88	nr Tempoche				4	<i>T.merula</i>	J.Nielsen
29.12.88	nr Tempoche				2	<i>T.merula</i>	J.Nielsen
31.12.88	Namche Bazar				1	-	J.Nielsen

Langtang National Park

xx.xx.89 T.Prescott

1988 clearly saw a major influx of Kessler's thrushes into the high altitude forests of Nepal. Relatively few observers visit these areas during the winter months and it seems reasonable to assume that the influx, was larger and more widespread than the above records indicate.

In the Everest National Park Kesslers thrush was recorded in the mixed birch and rhododendron forest found along the Imja and Dudh Kosi and in the pure stands of Juniper which occur in the vicinity of villages, notably Upper Pangboche. All records were within 5 km of the village of Pheriche at the junction of these two rivers which accords with the distribution of these forest types. Juniper was clearly the favoured foraging species, and the thrushes were observed feeding on the berries of this species. In addition several were observed at Upper Pangboche feeding in and under *Berberis* which forms dense stands on the valley slopes, and the records from Namche and Khumjung refer to individuals foraging in Potato fields where they were presumably feeding on invertebrates.

In November P.Jepson observed 2 large flocks while six weeks later J.Nielsen recorded a single large flock and several groups of 2-4 individuals, although the total number of individuals was similar c.33 as against c. 37. This suggests that the flocks disperse as the winter progresses, probably as the berry crop is depleted.

In the absence of climatical and botanical information from the remote West China it is not possible to suggest reasons for the unusual influx of Kessler's thrushes into Nepal in the winter of 1988. What is clear however, is that the high Himal does not present a barrier to the species, and Ali & Ripley's suggestion that this species may winter in Northern Bhutan and Arunchal Pradesh seems all the more likely.

P.Jepson 3.6.89