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## Avifaunal Biodiversity of Zelome, Phek District, Nagaland

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**Abstract :** Birds are one of the most diverse groups of vertebrates. Zelome is a village in Phek District of Nagaland, resides at North-east India which is a part of Himalayan mountain range. The region has steep terrain and abundant evergreen woods, is a biodiversity hotspot rich with flora and fauna. The region is also home to a diverse range of bird species that are important for understanding environmental health. The present study emphasize on the survey of avifauna biodiversity in Zelome, as biodiversity plays a very crucial role in the ecosystem service. A mixed-method research strategy was used, including direct observation and local interviews. The findings gave a prevailing number of bird diversity in the region. There were 53 bird species out of which 45 birds are residents birds' belonging to 11 orders and 31 families, and 8 birds are migratory birds with 3 orders and 5 families. According to the study maximum species of birds are of Passeriformes order. Status of all the species of birds are at Least Concern. This study gives a sample bird population for different regions in the state. Many environmental changes in the region due to shifting farming, deforestation, and hunting are seriously threatening the bird populations. This study revealed the need for conservation efforts and awareness to preserve the region's rich avian species. And also the importance for baseline studies all over Nagaland for protection and conservation of wildlife.

**Keywords:** Birds, Conservation, Hotspot, Mixed-method research, Shifting cultivation, Environment, Conservation, Deforestation, Least Concern, Migratory.

#### Introduction

Ornithology is a science that deals with the study of birds along with the environment where they reside. Birds are considered one of the most diverse groups of modern vertebrates. The birds evolved from theropod dinosaurs during the Jurassic Era (Brusatte, 2015). As per recent research, there are more than 11,000 species of birds, out of which 1,350 species are globally threatened (Birdlife International, 2023). India is home to 1,353 bird species, representing approximately 12.40% of the global bird diversity. Birds are hugely diverse and distributed across the globe, filling a range of ecological niches and ranging in size from tiny hummingbirds to ostriches. Their feathers are optimized for flight and considered one of the most intelligent organisms on the planet, as given by Brusatte (2015). The study of avifaunal is one of the most critical ecological tools

that acts as an indicator for studying different habitats qualitatively and quantitively (Samanta et al., 2023). The population of birds in an ecosystem shows the area's environmental quality, pollution level, and, most importantly, the availability of food and the habitat to support the birds (Chaudhari et al., 2016).

Zelome is a beautiful village in Phek district of Nagaland, North-East India. North-East India is a hotspot for biodiversity and is blessed with rich diversity. Among the most crucial fauna, avifauna is one of the most outstanding. North-East serves as the home to 818 species of avian fauna belonging to 339 genera. A total of 487 species of birds have been recorded in Nagaland (Choudary,2001).

Phek district is a mountainous region rich in flora and fauna, with 70% of its land covered in everyreen forest. The highest mountain is Zanibu, with the summit over 2,400 m (7,900 ft) above mean sea level (AMSL). The region lies between 2,136m to 1,524m above sea level, with a Latitude of 25° 40' 0.12" N and a Longitude of 94° 30' 0.00" E. The largest rivers of the district are the Tizu, Lanyi, and Arachu, and the most important lakes are Shilloi, Chida, and Dziidu, which marked a biodiversity hotspot. Agriculture is the main occupation, with terrace Rice Cultivation (TRC) as the most predominant throughout Phek District. Shifting cultivation, or Jhum Cultivation, is a common practice. Shifting cultivation is a widespread practice in the hills of Nagaland (Solo et al., 2020). Important crops produced in the district include rice, maize, and millet. Every year, new areas have been selected for shifting cultivation, which has led to the disturbance in the community of the birds in the area. Shifting or jhum cultivation practice in the area consists of massive cutting down of trees, felling, drying, and burning, followed by sowing, cultural operation, harvest, and fallowing. All the activities have led the living in that area to shift or search for a new place that is disturbing the birds. Hunting has been going on for ages and is still a common practice in many of the villages of Phek, where catapults, air guns, and traps are used during the open hunting season. The biggest threats to the declining bird diversity are agriculture and residential and commercial developments and also the construction of mobile towers which affects the bird.

The natural sound and bird song play a particular role in building and maintaining the connection with nature. However, the loss of diversity has led to a decline in the pervasive loss of acoustic diversity (Morrison et al., 2021). Due to the declining environmental condition, there is a decline in the bird population, and slipping closer to extinction. The Red List Index(RLI) for birds has shown a steady decline in the last three decades, increasing the rate of extinction risk. Since 1988, 93 species have been downlisted to lower category due to the improvement, but it has been overtaken 436 species have moved up to higher category due to change in environment and anthropogenic activities (BirdLife International, 2022).

Earlier, the importance of taking up intensive baseline studies in areas such as Satoi, Saramati, Intaki, Fakim, and Dzukou Valley was given by Choudhury (2001). However there is an urgent need to conduct intensive baseline studies all over Nagaland. And this study will help in drawing a sample bird biodiversity in a region due to various ongoing activities in the nature.

### **Materials and Methods**

#### Study area

The study was carried out in Zelome village located under the Phek district in the South-Eastern part of Nagaland state, which borders the state of Manipur from December 2023 to June 2024. It is 12km from Pfutsero town and falls under the administrative jurisdiction of Razeba EAC Headquarters. It is surrounded by neighboring villages viz, Zhavame, Tsupfume, and Thetsumi.

#### **Climatic conditions**

The area's climatic conditions are moderately warm during summer, with an average temperature of 27°C without exceeding 32°C. Monsoon starts towards the end of May and ends by the end of September. Winters are cold compared to the nearby plains of India, with the temperature dropping to 0°C in the coldest months of January and February. The average annual rainfall is 1,527 mm (About Phek | District Phek, Government of Nagaland | India).

#### **Collection of data**

Understanding the biodiversity of bird species is crucial for conservation efforts and ecological research. Several methods can be employed to study the biodiversity of birds. The birds' data was collected using the "mixed method research". Both primary and secondary methods were used. The primary method used was sightseeing, where the different bird species which is encountered in a specific area were observed and then was engaged in the study. The birds were identified using "The Book of Indian Birds" (1997).

Another technique is interviewing local people, such as farmers, hunters, or indigenous communities, who know the birds in the region. These individuals have provided valuable information about species that are difficult to spot or identify through direct observation. Furthermore, interviews with local people have offered insights into bird behaviours, migration patterns, nesting sites, and other ecological aspects that may need to be more readily observable. In addition, we used data already available on the internet to study. The IUCN status was checked using the data from Birdlife International 2024.

#### **Result and Discussion**

Checklist of birds recorded during the study

 Table 1: Resident birds of Zelome Village

Order	Family	Scien	tific name	Commo	Habitat	Stat
				n name		us
Passerif	1.	1.	Aethopyga	Green-	Dense forest, scrub	R,
ormes	Nectariniid		nipalensis	tailed	jungle, and garden.	LC
	ae			Sunbird		
		2.	Arachnothe	Little	Moist deciduous and	R, C,
			ra	spiderh	evergreen forests;	LC
			longirostra	unter	glades and secondary	
					growth; banana	
					plantations.	
	2.	3.	Alcippe	Rusty-	Forest undergrowth.	R, C,
	Pellorneida		dubia	capped		LC
	е			fulvetta		
	3.	4.	Alcippe	Nepal	Dense growth on steep	R, U,
	Alcipeidae		nipalensis	fulvetta	hillsides.	LC
	4.	5.	Chloropsis	Orange	Tropical wet evergreen	R,
	Chloropsei		hardwickii	-bellied	forest (dense forest)	LC
	dae			Leafbir		
				d		
	5. Corvidae	6.	Corvus	Carrion	Mixed farmland, parks	U,
			corone	crow	and gardens, forest	LC
					clearings, moorland,	
					inshore islands, and	
					coastal cliffs.	
	6.	7.	Dicaeum	Fire-	Temperate forests,	R,
	Dicaeidae		ignipectus	breaste	subtropical or tropical	LC
				d	moist lowland forests,	
				flowerp	and subtropical or	
				ecker	tropical moist forests.	
	7.	8.	Dicrurus	White-	Terrestrial	R,
	Dicruridae		caerulesce	bellied		LC
			ns	drongo		
	8.	9.	Enicurus	Spotted	Rocky forested streams	R,
	Muscicapid		maculates	forktail	and ravines.	LC
	ae					
	9.	10	.Hypsipetes	Black	Forested region,	R,
	Pycnonotid		leucocepha	bulbul	especially in higher	LC
	ae		lus		elevation	
		11	.Pycnonotus	Red-	Gardens and light	R, C,
			cafer	vented	scrub jungle, both near	LC
				bulbul	and away from human	

 1				
			habitations.	
	12. Pycnonotus	Flavesc	Scrub jungle.	R,
	flavescens	ent		LC
		bulbul		
	13. Pycnonotus	Blacked	Scrub jungle,	R, C,
	flaviventris	-	shrubbery around	LC
		Crested	cultivation and on the	
		yellow	outskirts of the forest.	
		bulbul		
10.	14. Leiothrix	Silver-	Bushes and forest	R,
Leiothrichid	argentauris	eared	undergrowth in	LC
ae		mesia	evergreen biotopes,	
			especially in more	
			open areas.	
11.	15.Lonchura	Scaly-	Cultivation, gardens,	R, C,
Estrilidae	punctulata	breaste	secondary forest, and	LC
		d Munia	bush-covered hillsides.	
	16.Lonchura	White-	Open cultivated	R, C,
	striata	rumped	country. (terrestrial)	LC
		munia		
 12.	17. Paradoxorn	Grey-	Reed bamboo, high	R,
Paradoxorn	is gularis	Headed	grass, scrub jungle.	LC
ithidae		parrotbi		
		11		
13. Paridae	18. Parus	Green-	Common resident of	R,
	monticolus	backed	wooded country, edge	LC
		Tit	of cultivation from 1500	
			to 9000m above msl.	
14.	19.Passer	House	Varied habitats and	R, C,
Passeridae	domesticus	sparrow	climates near human	LC
			development.	
15.	20. Pericrocotu	Short-	Edges of evergreen	R,
Campepha	S	billed	forest.	LC
gidae	brevirostris	Minivet		
16.	21.Prinia	Black-	Wooded hills,	R,
Cistocolida	superciliari	throate	grasslands, and	LC
 е	S	d Prinia	scrubby areas.	
17.Eurylaim	22. Psarisomus	Long-	Tropical and sub-	R,
idae	dalhousiae	tailed	tropical evergreen	LC
		broadbi	biotope up to 2000m	
		11	above msl.	
18.	23. Rhipidura	White-	Forest, groves,	R,

	Rhipidurida	albicollis	throate	secondary growth,	LC
	е		d	ravines, and gardens.	
			Fantail		
Colum	19.	24. Chalcopha	Emeral	Bamboo jungle and	R, C,
biforme	Columbida	ps India	d Dove	deciduous as well as	LC
s	е			evergreen forest.	
				Partial to tangles of	
				castor plants growing	
				up on the site of	
				abandoned forest	
				clearings.	
		25. Treron	Ashy-	Tropical wet evergreen	R,
		phayrei	headed	forest	UC,
		(Blyth 1862)	green		LC
			pigeon		
		26. Streptopeli	Indian	Open, well-wooded,	R,
		a chinensis	spotted	and cultivated country	LC
			dove	avoids arid tracts.	
		27. Streptopeli	Oriental	Open forest and	R,
		a orientalis	Turtle	cultivation from	LC
			dove	foothills.	
Accipit	20.	28. Accipiter	Crested	Forest dwellers in open	R,
riforme	Accipitrida	trivirgatus	goshaw	deciduous to evergreen	LC
S	е		k	forests.	
		29. Ictinaetus	Black	Forested slopes and	R,
		malayensis	Eagle	mountainous terrain,	LC
				where there is ample	
				forest cover.	
		30. Buteo refute	Himalay	Temperate forests,	R,
			an	grassland, and	LC
~			buzzard	shrublands.	_
Strigifo	21.	31. Athene	Little	Terrestrial	R,
rmes	Strigidae	Noctua	owl		LC
		32.Bubo	Forest	Dense evergreen and	R, U,
		nepalensis	eagle	moist deciduous	LC
			owl	forests.	
		33. Glaucidium	Asian	Evergreen jungle in the	R,
		cuculoides	Barred	foothills.	LC
			Owlet		
Picifor	22. Picudae	34.Dendrocop	Freckle	Open forest and	R, C,
mes		os macei	breaste	wooded country. Damp	LC

			d	mixed forest in	
			woodpe	lowlands and uplands,	
			cker	preferring open forest,	
				edge, and secondary	
				growth.	
	23.	35. Megalaima	Blue-	Lowland and montane	R,
	Pamphostid	asiatica	throate	forests	LC
	ae		d		
			Barbet		
	24.	36. Megalaima	Great	Tropical wet evergreen	R,
	Megalaimid	viren	Barbet	forest	LC
	ae				
Gallifor	25.	37.Bambusicol	Mountai	Open scrub jungles	R, C,
mes	Phasianidae	a fytchii	n	near cultivation in the	LC
			bambo	foothills and adjoining.	
			0	Mixed scrub of willow,	
			partrid	oak, and tall grass	
			ge	along the banks of	
				streams.	
		38. Lophura	Kalij	Dense undergrowth in	R,
		leucomelan	Pheasan	evergreen forest.	LC
		OS	t	Terrestrial	
		39. Arborophil	White-	Dense scrub jungle,	R, C,
		a	cheeke	heavy undergrowth in	LC
		atrogularis	d	evergreen jungle.	
			partrid		
			ge		
Coracif	26.	40. Alcedo	Commo	Streams, canals,	R, C,
ormes	Alcedinidae	atthis	n	ditches, ponds, rivers,	LC
			Kingfish	and lakes in open	
			er	country.	
Pelacan	27.	41. Ardea	Interme	Inland wetlands,	R, U,
iformes	Ardeidae	intermedia	diate	marshes, estuaries,	LC
			egret	paddy fields, etc.	
Commission	28.	42. Caprimulg	Indian	Scrub and stony	R,
Caprim	Caprimulgi	us asiaticus	Nightjar	country, dry overgrown	LC
uigiior	dae			nullahs, compounds,	
mes				and groves in the	
				neighborhood of	
				cultivation and human	
				habitations.	

	29.	43. Psittacula	Ringnec	Tropical and sub-	R,
Psittacif	Psittaculida	krameri	k parrot	tropical lightly in	LC
ormes	е			wooded habitats.	
Bucerot	30.	44.Upupa	Ноорое	Open country, plains,	R,
iformes	Upupidae	epops		and hills up to 2000m	LC
				above MSL. Fond of	
				lawns, gardens, and	
				groves in and around	
				villages and towns.	
	31.	45. Zoothera	Scaly	Dense forest with	R,
	Turdidae	dauma	Thrush	grassy clearings, thick	LC
				jungle, sal forest,	
				bamboo brakes, mango	
				topes, etc.	



Fig 1: Percentage representation of resident bird species according to their orders.

# Migratory birds of Zelome village Table 2a: Migratory birds wintering in village

Order	Family	Scientific name	Commo	Habitat	Stat
			n name		us
Passerif	1.	Anthus hodgsoni	Olive-	Open country. In the	W,
ormes	Motacillida		backed	south, in evergreen	C,
	е		pipit(m)	woodland. In the north,	LC
				groves and wooded	
				biotopes.	

## Table 2b: Migratory birds migrating during the breeding season

Order	Family	Scientific name	Commo	Habitat	Stat
			n name		us
Cuculif	1.	Cuculus	Lesser	Terrestrial, well-	Bm,
ormes	Cuculidae	poliocephalus	Cuckoo	wooded country and	LC
				orchards.	
		Cuculus saturates	Himalay	Well wooded country	Bm,
			an	and orchards.	LC
			cuckoo		
Passerif	2.	Delichon urbicum	Commo	Meadows, fields,	Bm,
ormes	Hirundinida		n house	grassland, and open	LC
	е		martin	woodlands.	
	3.	Dendronanthus	Forest	Evergreen and	Bm,
	Motacillida	endicus	Wagtail	deciduous forests.	LC
	е			Haunts cardamom and	
				coffee plantations.	

# Table 2c: Altitudinal migratory birds migrating outside the village

Order	Family	Scientific name	Commo	Habitat	Stat
			n name		us
Accipit	1.	Haliaeetus	White-	Large rivers in winter.	М,
riforme	Accipitrida	albicilla	tailed		LC
s	е		Eagle		
		Phylloscopus	Gray-	Boreal forests,	М,
		peliogenys	cheeke	especially those	LC
			d	with spruce and fir	
			Warbler	trees.	

Order	Family	Scientific name	Commo	Habitat	Stat
			n name		us
Passerif	l.Phyllosco	Phylloscopus	Buff-	Inhabits dense bushes,	W,
ormes	pidae	pulcher	barred	grass, and sedges.	LC
			Warble		
			r		





Fig 2: Percentage representation of migratory bird species according to their orders.

Status: R = resident; W = winter visitor; M = migrant; Bm = breeding migrant Abundance: C = common: U = uncommon

IUCN status: LC = Least Concern

A total of 53 species belong to 12 orders, and 35 families have been recorded. Our study found 45 resident birds, under 11 orders and 31 families as shown in Table 1. These resident birds include common and uncommon birds. Of all the recorded resident birds, 51% belonged to the order Passeriformes, 9% to order Columbiformes, 7% to orders Accipitriformes, Strigiformes, Piciformes, and Galliformes, 4% to order Bucerotiformes, and 2% each to orders Coraciformes, Pelacaniformes, Caprimulgiformes, and Psittaciformes given in Fig.1. All the resident birds are identified under the Least Concern status according to IUCN status. The resident birds inhabits broad terrain occupying the dense forest on steep hillsides, moving down towards heavy forest undergrowth, open deciduous to evergreen forest, moist deciduous and evergreen forest, and open shrub jungle near cultivation in the foothills. These resident birds also inhabit the paddy fields, dry, overgrown drains, compounds, and groves in the cultivation and human habitat neighborhood.

On the other hand, eight species of migratory birds were identified in the area belonging to 3 orders and 5 families. Of which 50% belonged to order Passeriformes, 25% to order Accipitriformes, and 25% to order Cuculiformes. Tab. 2a shows migratory birds wintering in village with 1 species of order Passeriformes under family Motacillidae. Tab. 2b shows migratory birds migrating during the breeding season with 2 species of order Cuculiformes under family Cuculidae, 1 species of order Passeriformes under family Hirundinidae and 1 species of order Passeriformes under family Motacillidae. Tab. 2c shows altitudinal migratory birds migrating outside the village with 2 species of order Accipitriformes under family Accipitridae. Tab. 2d shows winter migratory birds that winter outside the village 2 species of order Passeriformes under family Phylloscopidae. Fig 2 shows percentage representation of migratory bird species according to their orders. Anthus hodgsoni winters in the region, while Phylloscopus pulcher migrates from the area to its wintering ground. Cuculus poliocephalus, Coculus saturatus, Delichon urbicum, and Dentronanthus endicus were found only during their breeding season. Haliaeetus albicilla and Phylloscopus peliogenys were the altitudinal migrants migrating towards the lower altitude. These migratory birds' occupy a vast habitat.

Singh et al., (2018) studied bird diversity on the Gorakhpur University campus and found 45 bird species belonging to 23 families. The variety of trees on the campus contributed to the richness of bird species. Laruatkimi et al., (2019) studied the diversity and abundance of birds in the Reiek biodiversity spot Mizoram, Northeastern India, and found 117 species of birds belonging to 37 families and ten orders. The study found family Muscicapidae dominated with 16 species.

This is the first study that has been carried out extensively in the village and recorded. Avian populations are rapidly changing due to extensive environmental change because of ruralization. These changes will accelerate over the coming decades (Gregory et al., 2009). There is a rapid loss in the diversity of birds due to anthropogenic activities (Rapoport, 1993). Rapid forest loss in many parts of the tropics leads to the multiple forest-dependent species being elevated to higher extinction risk categories. These human activities seriously affect avian diversity and bring changes that may lead to local and even worldwide extinction of avian fauna (Sumaila et al., 2020). In addition, all the species of birds are considered edible by the indigenous people of Nagaland. Many species are legally protected under Schedule 1 (highest protection accorded within India) of the Wild Life (Protection) Act of India, which prohibits their killing and capture, dead or alive. However, it is recent in the enforcement of even the protected areas as most people are unaware of this legal status. The protected area in Nagaland covers insignificant habitat (only 1.33% of the state's geographical location). The protected regions (all wildlife sanctuaries) are Intanki (202.02 km sq.), Puliebadzie (9.23 km sq.), Fakim (6.42 km sq.), and Rangapahar (4.70 km sq.). Except for Intanki, all are tiny and hardly cover any sizeable habitat. The main threats faced by the forest birds are the destruction of the forest through the felling of trees and jhum cultivation, while all species are threatened by poaching for food and the local trade. Nagaland's closed forest (canopy cover 40% and above) is less than 20% by 2000 (Choudhury, 2001). In many developing countries, much wildlife survives outside protected areas (Bolwig et al., 2006, Hitchmough and Dunnett, 2004).

The abundance of species at a local scale in forests is mainly dependent on the regional forest structures (Balestreari et al., 2015, Czeszczewik et al., 2015, Diaz et al., 2005). Despite Nagaland being a small state, it possessed a variety of forest types distributed throughout the state, from evergreen to temperate types (Chatterjee, 2006). The addition of trees in a vegetation series disproportionately affects the addition of species (Willson, 1974). Farmland and naturally regenerating fallows sustained higher species richness than old-growth forests in shifting cultivation landscapes (Borah et al., 2022). It is commonly found that habitats with a more complex or variegated structure contain more species than more superficial habitats (MacArthur et al., 1966).

### Conclusion

This is the first study carried out in Zelome. The region showed rich bird biodiversity. Extensive environmental change is going on for rural development leading to the destruction of the habitat which may lead to the extinction of many wild lives including the avifauna. Our study has revealed that there is a need for the conservation of the forest canopy as well as rural areas. It also indicates the importance of protecting not only the natural habitats of native wildlife but also the areas where birds commonly exist. Massive steps, including conservation measures with awareness and strict action, should be taken to conserve a favourable environment for the birds to live in.

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SZ carried out the field survey and compiled data. RS conceived the study and helped to draft the manuscript. The authors have read the manuscript and agreed to its content. The authors thank the Biodiversity Management Committee, Zelome Village, for assisting with the survey. Authors have no conflict of interest. This research did not receive any specific grant from any funding agencies in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

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