

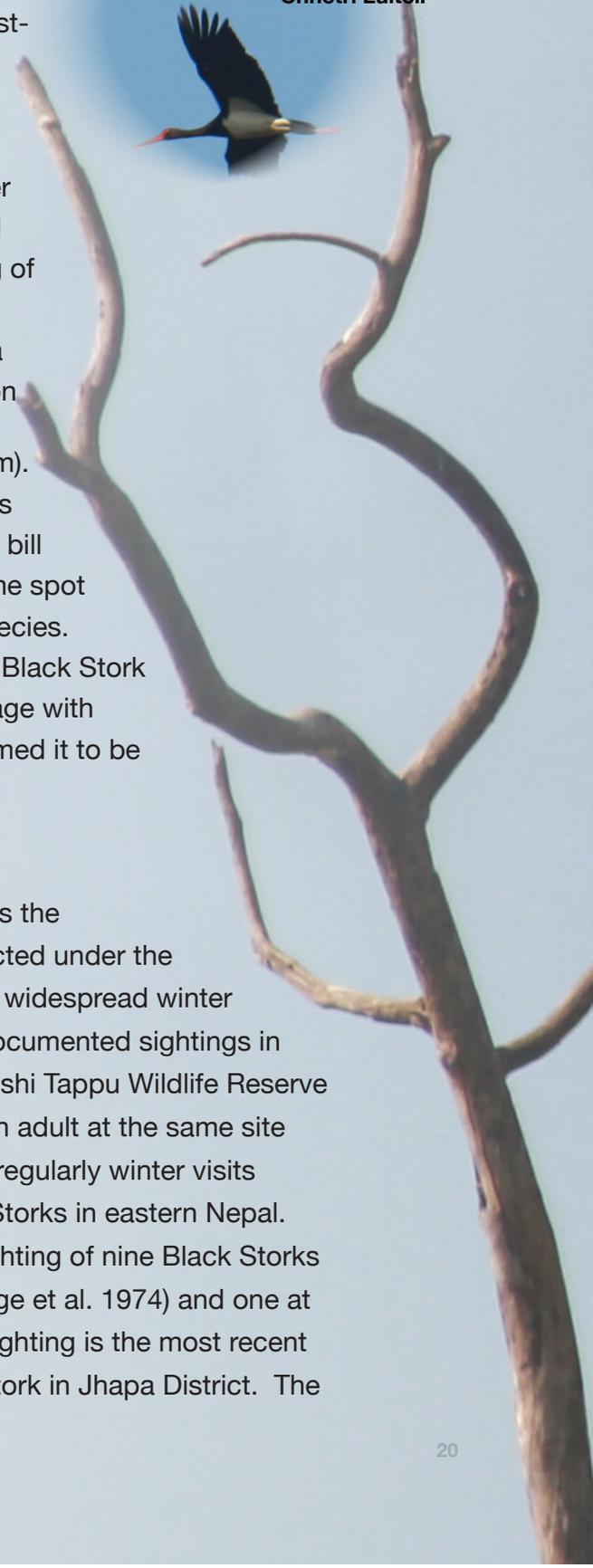
A recent sighting of Black Stork from Jhapa District, Nepal

Hataymalo Community Forest of Mechinagar Municipality 13 in Jhapa District is reminiscence of 'Charkose Jhadi', a dense forest in southeastern Nepal that runs along the East-West Highway. Amidst this tropical Sal forest is situated an artificial wetland, locally known as 'Nichajhoda Simsar'. The wetland is covered with aquatic vegetation and it apparently supports breeding water birds like Lesser Whistling-Duck *Dendrocygna javanica* and Bronze-winged Jacana *Metopidius indicus*. Herein, we report the sighting of Black Stork *Ciconia nigra* previously not seen in this area. On 25 November 2020, during a birding trip to Nichajhoda wetland we had an observation on a lone stork perching on

a dead Sal tree *Shorea robusta* (26.627°N, 88.053°E; 122 m). The bird was identified as juvenile Black Stork based on its brown head, white underparts and greyish-green legs and bill (Grimmett et al. 2016). It rested for 15 minutes on the same spot giving us an ample opportunity to photo document the species. Next, on 1 December 2020 at 1400 h, we sighted another Black Stork on flight at the same spot. The overall glossy black plumage with white underparts and long pointed red bill and legs confirmed it to be an adult Black Stork.

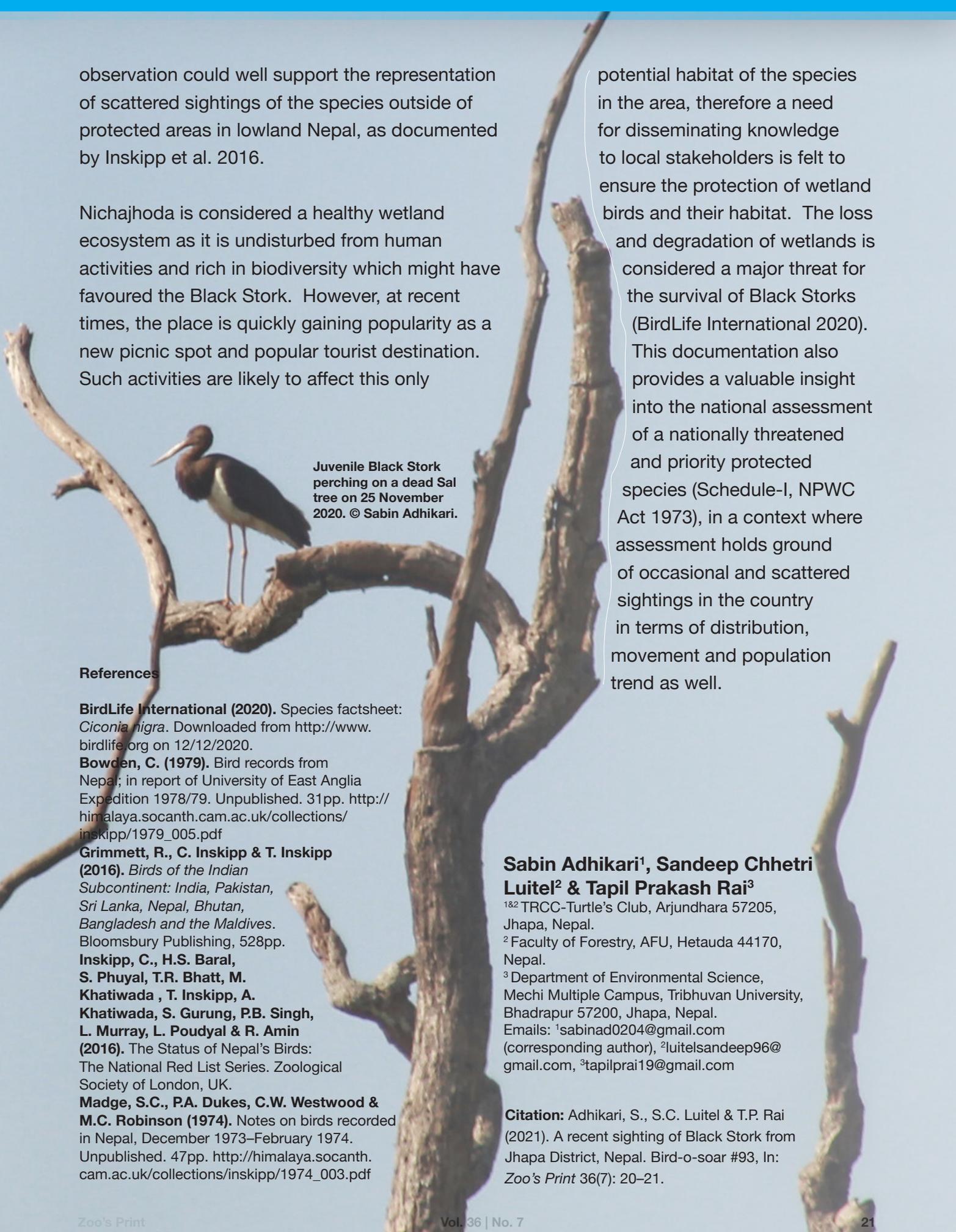
Although a Least Concern species in IUCN Red List of Threatened Species, the Nepal Red Data Book categorizes the Black Stork as Vulnerable and the species is legally protected under the National Parks and Wildlife Conservation Act 1973. It is a widespread winter visitor in Nepal below 1,000 m (Inskipp et al. 2016) with documented sightings in few and scattered pattern, and mostly concentrated at Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve in eastern lowlands. The sighting of both a juvenile and an adult at the same site could signify it as the potential locality where the species regularly winter visits outside Koshi Tappu, a well-known site for visiting Black Storks in eastern Nepal. The previous record from the closest area includes the sighting of nine Black Storks at Khunjunabari (now Khudunabari) in January 1974 (Madge et al. 1974) and one at Damak in December 1978 (Bowden 1979). The present sighting is the most recent record so far, indicating the sporadic presence of Black Stork in Jhapa District. The

Adult Black Stork during flight on 01 December 2020. © Sandeep Chhetri Luitel.



observation could well support the representation of scattered sightings of the species outside of protected areas in lowland Nepal, as documented by Inskipp et al. 2016.

Nichajhoda is considered a healthy wetland ecosystem as it is undisturbed from human activities and rich in biodiversity which might have favoured the Black Stork. However, at recent times, the place is quickly gaining popularity as a new picnic spot and popular tourist destination. Such activities are likely to affect this only



Juvenile Black Stork perching on a dead Sal tree on 25 November 2020. © Sabin Adhikari.

potential habitat of the species in the area, therefore a need for disseminating knowledge to local stakeholders is felt to ensure the protection of wetland birds and their habitat. The loss and degradation of wetlands is considered a major threat for the survival of Black Storks (BirdLife International 2020). This documentation also provides a valuable insight into the national assessment of a nationally threatened and priority protected species (Schedule-I, NPWC Act 1973), in a context where assessment holds ground of occasional and scattered sightings in the country in terms of distribution, movement and population trend as well.

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