

Brood protection by Greater Painted-Snipe *Rostratula benghalensis*

Raza H. Tehsin

106, Panchwati, Udaipur 313004, Rajasthan, India.

Udaipur, the city of lakes, has *nullahs* that drain the excess water of the lakes. Our house is situated near one such *nullah*, which drains the excess water of Pichola Lake and Fateh Sagar. Nowadays this *nullah* carries more sewage than water. I have been watching aquatic birds and waders in this *nullah* for several years.

On 13.ix.2003 I was watching a Greater Painted-Snipe *Rostratula benghalensis*

skulking at the edge of the water, using every bit of cover. Two chicks were following it in the same manner. It approached a small bush just near the water's edge when a feral pig waded towards it from the opposite bank. The adult froze. Both the young birds came towards its legs, one on the right side and another on the left. The parent opened its wings partially and sat on the ground, retracting them. It

then stood up slowly, lifting both the chicks under its wings and froze in that position. The dangling legs of the chicks were clearly visible through field glasses. The pig crossed the *nullah* and passed within four feet of the bush without noticing the snipe. When the pig had moved on, the snipe deposited both the chicks on the ground and moved towards the safety of dense bushes.

Pied Tit *Parus nuchalis* in Pali District, Rajasthan, India

Raza H. Tehsin, Saadat H. Tehsin and Hasnain Tehsin

106, Panchwati, Udaipur 313004, Rajasthan, India.

From 28.v.2004-5.vi.2004 we toured extensively in Pali District, Rajasthan. Most of our exploration was in Kumbhalgarh Wildlife Sanctuary and adjacent areas. This is a semi-arid region and geological formations consist mostly of acidic volcanic rocks. The area is covered with thick thorny undergrowth and is strewn with huge boulders.

During this tour we spotted eight pairs

of the endemic and 'Vulnerable' Pied Tit *Parus nuchalis*. We were able to take photographs of some of the birds and also film them. Given its 'Vulnerable' status, we feel that every sighting should be recorded.

On 28.v.2004 one pair was observed near a waterhole at Maalgarh-ki-Chowki, which is near the famous Ranakpur temple.

On 31.v.2004, three pairs were observed from 10:00-11:45hrs near Jobha village. On 4.vi.2004, two pairs were observed from 10:30-14:00hrs at a waterhole constructed by the forest department near the Sumer Forest rest house. On 29.vi.2004 (11:30-12:00hrs), two pairs were observed at the waterhole near the temple at Sumer.

Fea's Thrush *Turdus feae* (Salvadori, 1887) at Lava, West Bengal, India.

Anand Prasad

Middlewood, Roeburndale West, Lancaster LA2 9LL, U.K. Email: swamianandprasad@yahoo.com

On 3.v.1999 I was birding in an area about 4km from Lava, West Bengal on the road that goes down to Kalimpong, at roughly 2,000m a.s.l. At this spot there is a semi-open area with two hairpin bends. Here there were many Striated Bulbuls *Pycnonotus striatus*, a White-throated Bulbul *Alophoxix flaveolus* and a Rufous-bellied Bulbul (Mountain Bulbul) *Ixos mccllellandii* (previously named *Hypsipetes mccllellandii*). Looking for more views of these species, whilst cutting through the shortcut path at the top hairpin through some bushes, I flushed some White-collared Blackbirds *Turdus albocinctus* feeding low down. Suddenly I also flushed another smaller thrush-sized bird, which flew to a low perch close by. I had enough time to get my binoculars on it and to see it was an unknown bird to me. Luckily when it flew, it was only to a tree about 25m away where it sat still long enough for me to have good views and to take notes and make a drawing

while it was right there.

The bird was judging by shape and jizz an obvious *Turdus*-like thrush. The markings except around the eye area were very simple. The upper-parts including the whole of the closed wing, the nape, ear coverts and upper-tail were a uniform olive-brown except the crown, which was slightly more reddish. The wings had no obvious wing bar. The under-parts including the flanks, chin and throat were a uniform light grey. Where these two colours met around the neck-sides they were blended with no strong contrast.

The facial pattern was however, striking. The lores were very dark, contrasting with a clear white full supercilium, which extended from the bill to the rear of the eye and curved down slightly around the ear coverts. Below the eye was a half-moon eye crescent, which continued unbroken in a line to the bill and so, enclosed the dark lores area with white.

The bill and legs were a nondescript

dull colour. Other features noted were the small size compared to White-collared Blackbird, a broad tail and a fairly pointed bill.

All these features were noted from the perched bird. I had poor flight views.

The bird was seen at about 15:30hrs in very changeable conditions: drizzle very quickly followed by sun, and a light breeze. Weather had been like this for at least a week. The habitat was deciduous. The area was surrounded with large trees but the bird was actually feeding in or beneath bushes, which were also on the edge of a clearing. This was right beside a steep ravine.

On returning to Lava to study Grimmett, et al. (1998) I could see that the distinctive head pattern around the dark lores was a feature of only two thrush species, Fea's Thrush *Turdus feae* and Eyebrowed Thrush *Turdus obscurus*. Very clear views of the light grey flanks were obtained, furthermore the uniform olive brown upper-parts with

the more reddish crown eliminate the possibility of Eyebrowed Thrush, confirming the identity of the Lava bird as a male Fea's Thrush. The white throat pattern and white central belly shown in the illustration by Harris in Grimmett, et al. (1998) was not noted in the Lava bird although the bird was seen only from the side-view.

Fea's Thrush is a globally threatened species classified as Vulnerable 'because it has a small, declining population as a result of deforestation in its breeding and wintering grounds,' (BirdLife International 2001). There are very few recent published records from India. This record is a first for West Bengal and represents an expansion of the wintering range westwards in the subcontinent. Lava is in my opinion fast becoming degraded, by excessive logging and by herdsmen with their cattle.

The updated note in Ali & Ripley (1996) mentions records from Nepal and Point Calimere and the Nilgiris, Tamil Nadu, south India but these are errors, I can find no reference for these records and there is no mention of them in Grimmett, et al. (1998) and Inskipp & Inskipp (1991).

Here should be the drawing but too file became too big to send, see separate photo and insert here.

Drawing of field-sketch of Fea's Thrush (Grey-sided Thrush), Lava, showing pattern around the eye.

Previous records from Indian subcontinent (extracts from BirdLife International 2001).

Assam Hemeo peak (sometimes misspelled "Hemes Peak"), North Cachar hills, pre-1873 [Godwin-Austen 1876, Hume 1888, specimen in Natural History Museum (BMNH)].

Meghalaya Mawiyngkhung (Mawryngkneng), Khasia hills, November 1951 [female in Field Museum of Natural History (FMNH)], December 1953 (male in FMNH); Shillong, October 1877 [Hume 1888, two specimens in BMNH (three listed by Whistler (Undated))]; Cherrapunji, undated (Hume 1888).

Nagaland regular in the Naga hills, winter 1872-1873, with one collected at 3,050 m on Japvo peak, January 1873 (Godwin-Austen 1874, Hume 1888).

Manipur eastern hills of Manipur, near the region of Phalel, three specimens listed from pre-1881 (Hume 1888), although no specimens traced.

There are unconfirmed reports from

Dumpep, Shillong, Cherrapunji and unspecified localities in the Khasia hills of Meghalaya, based upon 16 clutches taken in 1900-1930 that are stored in BMNH). Bakers (1894-1907) records from Assam at Hungrum (Hungroom), North Cachar, 1,900 m. are now considered suspect. Reports of breeding in India and Myanmar (Baker 1907, 1922-1930, Wickham 1929-1930) are also highly suspect.

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