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Indian Blackbird *Turdus simillimus* breeding in Mt. Abu

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Indian Blackbird *Turdus simillimus nigropileus** is a common visitor to the hills of Mt. Abu (24°34'N, 72°39'E; 1,219m a.s.l.), Rajasthan, India. It arrives as early as 10.iii. However, it is common from May to September. No breeding record of this species exists from Gujarat and Rajasthan. We report here a first nesting record of the Indian Blackbird from Mt. Abu on 11.vii.2004. Males were heard singing from June to September from the top of the canopy of tall trees.

The most common areas for observing Indian Blackbirds in Mt. Abu are AVM School premises, St. Mary School area, Anil Mathur's garden, Honeymoon Point area, Achalgarh, Sunset road, etc.

Indian Blackbirds have four races in the Indian Subcontinent (Rasmussen and Anderton 2005). Butler (1875) mentions the Indian Blackbird as a breeding visitor to Mt. Abu, but confesses that he "was never fortunate enough to find a nest." In a footnote to that statement, A. O. Hume states, "This is quite the most northerly point attained by this species; it is unknown throughout the whole region with which we are dealing [Gujarat and Rajasthan] No one has yet taken the nest." Prakash and Singh (1995) did not come across Indian Blackbirds in Mt. Abu during their survey from January

1993 to August 1994. Devarshi and Trigunayat (1989) mention the occurrence of Indian Blackbird in Mt. Abu (1983-1988) but do not comment on nesting.

On 11.vii.2004, one nest of Indian Blackbird was seen in Anil Mathur's garden (Rising Sun retreat) at Mt. Abu. There were two chicks inside the nest. On 26.vii two chicks left the nest. A second brood was raised in the same nest after about 15 days, but this time the nesting was not successful. The nest was built in a Rubber tree plant at a height of 3m in a fork of the tree and the nesting tree was close to human habitation. The birds tolerated human presence and kept bringing food to the young even when there were people around the nesting tree.

Both the parents took part in raising the chicks, feeding them mostly with insects and caterpillars. On several occasions they were seen carrying food in their beak at Kodara dam and AVM area in August 2004 but nests (?) could not be located.

This species is absent from Mt. Abu during winter. Indian Blackbirds were even not seen at the foothills of Mt. Abu. They are breeding visitors to Mt. Abu where they are common above 1,219m from May to early September.

This note is to document the breeding of Indian Blackbirds in Mt. Abu.

References

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J. K. Tiwari worked with Bombay Natural History Society's Bird Migration Study Project and Grassland Ecology Project (1989-1995). He is presently setting up a Centre for Desert and Ocean in Kutch, for nature education, halophyte afforestation and ornithological research and conservation.

Anil Mathur, M.Sc. Zoology (fisheries), is a keen naturalist who owns an eco-resort in Mt. Abu.

*Rasmussen and Anderton (2005) have split this taxon from the earlier conspecific taxon *Turdus merula*, and have grouped the following forms under *T. simillimus*: *T. s. nigropileus*, *T. s. simillimus*, *T. s. bourdilloni*, *T. s. kinnisii*. They state that, "All forms grouped herein differ markedly and in the same ways in plumage, proportions, wing formula, vocalisations, and egg colour from northern forms previously treated under *T. merula*. Despite their heterogeneity in plumage, they undoubtedly form a monophyletic group. While the *nigropileus* group (including *mahrattensis* and *spencei*) is the most divergent in terms of plumage colouration, the Sri Lankan *kinnisii* is the most distinct in other ways, including its small size, plumage texture, near lack of sexual dimorphism, and vocalisations, and is probably better treated as a distinct species. A formal taxonomic revision is underway by P. Alström and co-workers," (p. 364).

Recoveries from the Newsletter for Birdwatchers – 8

Zafar Futehally

Although the *Newsletter* had started appearing in 1960 as a smudgy cyclostyled sheet, it was only in 1962 that it was formally "born" and acquired a proper identity. On 16.xii.1961, at the Annual General Meeting held traditionally under the mango tree in the editor's garden, there were 23 persons present (quite a record), while suggestions for the formation of an Indian Ornithological Society were also received from several who were unable to attend. These included Dr J. C. George and Dr R. M. Naik (both from Washington), Mrs Jamal Ara (Ranchi), Mrs Desiree Proud (British Embassy, Nepal), Major W. W. A. Phillips

(England), Dr J. P. Joshua (Liberia), Mr Yusuf Patel (West Africa), and a telegram from R. A. Stewart Melliush, one of our strongest supporters from Madras. It was heartening that this amateur effort had so many well-wishers in different parts of the world. There was much discussion about the desirability of forming an Indian Ornithological Society. As I have said earlier in this column the BNHS was then opposed to this move as they believed that it might further erode their already limited membership. The meeting discussed the option of creating a Bird Wing in the BNHS rather than creating a new Society. The

Chairman, Dr Sálím Ali, summed up the views expressed and concluded that, "the contention was that a little more spade work should be done before an ornithological society was formed... For the time being the *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* would be kept going..."

One constructive decision at the meeting was the establishment of an editorial board, whose members covered the various regions of the country, and the following members were chosen: Dr Salim Ali (Bombay), K. S. Lavkumar (Rajkot), Y. S. Shivraj Kumar (Jasdan), Dr R. M. Naik (then at Michigan State University) Mrs Usha