

# First photographic record of Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris* from the Indian Subcontinent

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66. Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*.

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On my way back from a trip to Sikkim, a bird was spotted and photographed at Teesta Bazaar (a small town in Darjeeling district of West Bengal, on the right bank of Teesta River), on 26 March, 2011. The bird was a thrush and it was seen foraging in a bamboo grove just adjacent to the river. It was not identified at the time but several photos were taken and one of these was posted on the Indian Birds Photography website (<http://indianbirdphotography.blogspot.co.uk>) requesting help with identification. Recently, Tim Inskipp suggested that the bird in the photo was a Fieldfare *Turdus pilaris*. Based on the description provided by Rasmussen & Anderton (2005) the diagnostic features that can be discerned from the photos are the bluish-grey head, weak white supercilium, white under parts washed rusty-ochre on heavily spotted throat, breast and flanks; black lores and neck-patch and brown legs [65, 66].

The species breeds in northern and central Europe east to west and central Siberia and Transbaikalia. It winters in western and southern Europe and south-western Asia; vagrants have occurred in Arabia, China (Kansu), Japan, and North America (Clement & Hathway 2000).

In the Indian Subcontinent, a number of old reports of its occurrence exist, but doubt has been expressed about their authenticity. Jerdon (1862) noted that, 'The Fieldfare of Europe has been recently found, though once only, at Simla, in the N. W. Himalayas. Adams records that it is tolerably common in the oak and pine-forests of Cashmere, but only, I presume, in the winter.' However, the only relevant publications by Adams (1859a, b) made no mention of the species, whereas for the Mistle Thrush *T. viscivorus* he noted, 'In the forests and in sequestered valleys of the Cashmere ranges, particularly pine or oak forests; pretty common.' It seems likely that Jerdon transcribed the information incorrectly. Oates (1890) noted that, 'The Fieldfare, according to Jerdon, has occurred once at Simla, and Adams records it from Kashmir. The only specimen I have ever seen from India is one obtained by Dr. Jameson at Saharanpur, and presented by him to the Indian Museum, from which it passed to the British Museum.' Ticehurst (1940) noted that, 'Jerdon says it had been once recently

found at Simla, and quotes Adams as saying that it is tolerably common in Kashmir. This latter record is palpably erroneous and no doubt, a confusion with *atroregularis*. The Saharanpur specimen is a very old one and is in the British Museum. It is possible there is some mistake over the locality.' Ali & Ripley (1998) stated that it was, 'Accidental. One record (undated) from Saharanpur, U.P. (an error in the locality is however not to be excluded).' Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) treated the species as hypothetical in the Indian Subcontinent, stating that it was a, 'Supposed winter vagrant, N India (one specimen, Saharanpur, W Uttar-BMNH; specimen a very old mount and locality probably in error). Old anecdotal reports Simla and Kashmir are probably erroneous (Ticehurst 1940).' Note that Ticehurst (1940) did not state that the locality of the Saharanpur specimen was 'probably in error' or that the Simla report was 'probably erroneous.' More recently, two individuals were sighted on 20 April 2001 at Firozpora, Banaskantha district, Gujarat (Joshua *et al.* 2005).

The present is the first photographic record of the species from the Indian subcontinent, thereby eliminating any doubt as to the occurrence of the species.

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Photo: Mayukh Banerjee



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