

The diplomat that he was, Sir Malcolm restrained his pen from telling his readers that Christina would have been a permanent Miss Universe, only if it had entered her mind to simply once step upon that pageant's stage! At another occasion, and in another book, Sir MacDonald had written, "such activity by any woman would have aroused curiosity amongst the incorrigibly inquisitive Indians, but that she should be a Chinese female greatly magnified their astonishment. The peasants were amazed that an exquisite, sylph-like girl with strange, slanting black eyes and an ivory complexion should climb the rickety ladder to a lofty hide and sit all day alone there, contemplating only a bird's nest a few feet away – like some particularly eccentric and unusually beautiful Sadhu. Her fame spread and in bucolic gossip she became a sort of legendary figure..."

But her temperament was as fiery as her figure was beautiful, and that marriage had ended in a bitter divorce; Wan having to pay her alimony of over one thousand pounds Sterling. Of course that did not diminish Wan's love for ornithology, as shortly after he had sent a hefty cheque to his dear friend Salim Ali to buy a station wagon to help with his field surveys in India, accompanied with a note, "do let me know if this will suffice because there is more credit, where this came from". In hind-sight, I think this is what philanthropy was truly meant to be.

The affable diplomat then mentioned how gracious Mr Nehru had been to permit Christina unlimited access to photograph a white-eye nesting in his compound, "where the little bird sat hatching two eggs while the Prime Minister sat in his study a hundred yards away conducting the highest affairs of state." And he elaborates, "One of my favourite birds is the white-eye. It is a dapper little creature measuring only four inches long from the tip of its beak to the end of its tail, and its colouring is pleasing. Its upper body is golden-yellow tinged with green, parts of its wings are dark brown, its chin and throat are bright yellow, its breast is light grey, and the yellow motif is repeated on its abdomen. But its most distinguishing mark is a white ring round each eye, which gives it the appearance of wearing a pair of white horn-rimmed spectacles". And the current reprint's cover is adorned by an outstanding colour photograph of a white-eye. Regrettably, the reprint is in the "economy" class, sans any other visual, and I am particularly disappointed that readers would not see another species which occupied "the domain of my good neighbour, General Thimayya..."

The reception ended after forty-five minutes, to the dot, but imagine my joy when Sir Malcolm walked up to me and invited me to travel with him to the British Embassy's guest suite where he was lodged, and have a look at (a) his album of Christina Loke's great many, eye-catching bird photographs, and (b) his soon to be released second book "Birds in the sun", a sequel to his first, but with a huge difference, that is, illustrations by Christina in breath-stopping colour photographs. And that is when I also learnt that during that single assignment, Christina had shot more than four thousand images, of which, the pick (about eighty in black and white, and over fifty in colour, only!) were used by Sir Malcolm in his two bird books. As I turned the album-leaves, he talked of many related details. I had never known such courtesy, before. 🐦

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## Letter to the Editor

### Sightings of Tickell's Thrush *Turdus unicolor* from Ranthambhore area, Sawai Madhopur District, Rajasthan, India

The Tickell's Thrush *Turdus unicolor* is an endemic bird of the Indian Subcontinent. It is a fairly common winter visitor to peninsular India (Kazmierczak 2000; Grimmett *et al.* 2011) but has been rarely documented from Ranthambhore or its adjoining areas in Rajasthan. Andheria (2000) has reported the Tickell's Thrush as 'rare' from Ranthambhore.

On 07 November 2012, a myna-sized grey bird, similar to a *Turdus* thrush, was sighted foraging in the leaf litter under the manicured shrubs of *Putranjiva* sp., in the garden of a hotel touching the boundary of Ranthambhore National Park (26.01°N, 76.38°E; c. 277 m asl), at a distance of c. three to five metres from PP. The bird was observed for around 15 mins, and was photographed [61]. It had a uniform olive-grey back, with slight scalation on the mantle, and a white belly, with light streaking on the throat, chest, and flanks. The bird also featured a yellow-coloured eye-ring. The beak was blackish, with a yellow gape. The legs were pale pinkish. The next day, an individual was seen at the same location, with similar features, and was probably the same individual. Based on its yellow gape (vs black), shorter tail, and olive-greyish back (vs plain grey), this bird was separated from the similar Black-throated Thrush *T. atrogularis*.

On 29 January 2013, another individual was sighted at the same location by PP [62]. This time it was initially confused with a female Indian Blackbird *T. simillimus*, but our doubt was eliminated by the presence of a clear white vent on the bird, indicating a Tickell's Thrush.



Photos: Pranad Patil

61. Tickell's Thrush on 07 November 2012. 62. Tickell's Thrush on 29 January 2013.

These two sightings, in successive years, indicate that the bird might be a regular, albeit uncommon, visitor to the Ranthambhore area.

### Acknowledgements

We would like to thank Krys, and Oriental Bird Images, Dharmendra Khandal, Sachin Rai, Adesh Shivkar, and Rajneesh Suvarna for their valuable comments, and confirmation of our tentative identification of these birds. We are grateful to Parvish Pandya for his constructive comments to improve an earlier draft of this manuscript.

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