

Status of Naumann's Thrush *Turdus naumanni* in the Eastern Himalayas

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Naumann's Thrush *Turdus naumanni* has a wide distribution in the Palearctic region, where it mainly breeds in south-central Siberia. Its southern breeding range consists of the Angara Basin, and the Lena, and Olenek deltas. During their non-breeding season they winter in south-eastern Russia, and eastern China. They also winter in small numbers in Japan, and Taiwan (Collar 2016). Small numbers of this thrush may also visit Myanmar in winter (Collar 2016) though no specific published records are extant, nor could we independently locate any. Naumann's Thrush is frequently treated as a conspecific of the Dusky Thrush *T. eunomus* as their breeding ranges show considerable overlap, and hybridisation is well-known (Clement & Hathway 2000; Collar 2016); about 15–20% of all Naumann's Thrushes wintering in Beijing, China, show some amount of hybrid influence (Jesper Hornskov, *in litt.*, e-mail dated 02 December 2016). This taxon is not included in the regional guides for South Asia (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), the Indian Subcontinent (Ali & Ripley 1987; Grimmett *et al.* 2011), or Bhutan (Spierenburg 2005) for want of any published records. It is also not included in the recently published India Checklist (Praveen *et al.* 2016).

Since 2000, there have been multiple reports of Naumann's 'type' thrushes from the Eastern Himalayas. This article summarises all reports of this species from the Indian Subcontinent and evaluates each of these records with respect to their origins. All such reports, to date, have been either from Bhutan, or north-eastern India.

India

MRR observed at least one (possibly two) Naumann's Thrush next to the range office at Bansbari gate (26.66°N, 91.00°E), Manas National Park in Assam, early in the morning of 06 January 2006. It was feeding, together with two Black-throated Thrushes *T. atrogularis*, in a large agricultural field. He noted diagnostic red scales on the underparts, and lack of red in the wing. The bird resembled an adult female of the species, but a first winter bird could not be excluded. Though no signs of hybridism with the Dusky Thrush were evident to him at that moment, detailed

notes were not taken to eliminate Dusky Thrush features with certainty. This appears to be the first sight record for India and is treated here as a Naumann's Thrush, or a hybrid.

On 15 March 2008, JO, and TZ, were on a birding tour led by SD when a lone *Turdus* thrush was seen at Sangti Valley (27.40°N, 92.30°E), western Arunachal Pradesh. It was initially suspected to be a Red-throated Thrush *T. ruficollis*. JO took two photos a picture of this bird [153, 154], which on examination matched a Naumann's Thrush. The habitat in which the bird was found consisted of paddy fields surrounded by a few trees. However, on further communication with PC via Krys K of Oriental Bird Images, it was concluded that it was possibly a hybrid between a Naumann's, and a Dusky Thrush. The bird showed a pale supercilium, and a Naumann's Thrush-like head pattern. It also showed rufous-to-brown spots, which resembled smudged streaking, on upper breast and flanks. It had darkish but not black coloured spots between mantle and wing coverts. That particular winter was atypically harsh in western Arunachal Pradesh and many higher elevation birds were moving down to lower reaches (Baruah *et al.* 2016).



153. Presumed Naumann's x Dusky Thrush, Sangti Valley.



János Olah

154. Presumed Naumann's x Dusky Thrush, Sangti Valley.

On 02 March 2016 a group of Swedish birders, led by David Erterius, and ARAR, saw a Naumann's Thrush at a location (27.28°N, 92.26°E) south of Dirang. ARAR obtained a digiscoped image [155] of this individual, which appears to be in first winter plumage. However, the sex of the bird couldn't be determined from this low-resolution photograph. It showed a pale supercilium along with distinct spotting on upper breast and flanks, a dark rufous malar stripe, and a distinct rufous tail with dark tip, visible only on the solitary ruffled tail feather. It was seen along with a flock of Dusky, Red-throated, and Chestnut Thrushes *T. rubrocanus* in an open area, where short rhododendrons, and dead conifer trees were present. Later AV, along with Lobsang T., sighted another (or the same) first year individual at the same location on 27 March 2016. This time the bird was seen along with Dusky, and Red-throated Thrushes. Photographs showed a pale white supercilium, and rufous spotting on belly and mantle. However the tail was not visible in the images [156, 157]. Though PC verified, and confirmed these photographs obtained in 2016 as Naumann's, further discussions with Jesper Hornskov revised this decision to that of it being a hybrid due to the presence of a broad white supercilium, although all other features (except



A. R. Abudur Rahman

155. Naumann's x Dusky Thrush, digiscoped south of Dirang.



156. Naumann's x Dusky Thrush with Dusky, and Red-throated Thrushes.



Pics: Alka Vardya

157. Naumann's x Dusky Thrush with Dusky, and Red-throated Thrushes.

the tail, which was not seen) clearly indicated it was Naumann's. Hence, there appear to be no definite records of a pure Naumann's Thrush from India.

Bhutan

While on a Victor Emmanuel Nature Tour to Bhutan, led by David Bishop, GE photographed [158, 159] a probable Naumann's Thrush on 09 May 2000 at Thrumsingla Pass (c. 27.40°N, 91.00°E). Though it was identified as this species then, further analysis gave reason to suspect a hybrid origin.

The underside markings and collar, are clearly rufous and the uppertail-coverts also appear to be rufous. The upper body is mottled, dark brownish (not medium-brown) with some grey and faint rufous speckles and the wing coverts are also similarly patterned. However, the head pattern resembles Dusky more than Naumann's, with a dark brown crown and auricular patch, a broad white supercilium, and a dark malar stripe, but is somewhat buffier on the throat and on the face between the malar stripe and the eye. Though this bird shows several Naumann's like features, the broad pure white supercilium would imply that it's a hybrid with a Dusky Thrush. In addition this bird is in late first winter plumage and is heavily worn or abraded in places, mainly the mantle, back, scapulars, wing coverts, and tail. This in itself is quite interesting, as this plumage will probably be maintained for another month or more, until the 'post-breeding' moult, and is not in adult plumage. This means that unless some individuals



158. Naumann's x Dusky Thrush, at Thrumsingla Pass.



Pics. Gil Ewing

159. Naumann's x Dusky Thrush, at Thrumsingla Pass.

breed in this plumage, this one wouldn't breed until its second summer (or third calendar year); so it is probably best described as being in a first summer plumage, which may be fairly typical, but would be unique amongst other thrushes, which, as far as is known, breed in their first summer (=second calendar year) (PC, unpublished data).

The second record from Bhutan was an individual seen in the same general area as the former—from the road that passes through Thrumsingla National Park, between Ura and Yongkola, by PC, A. Quinn, and B. E. Cooper. On 25 February 2005 during a stop on the short stretch of road some way below the pass, where it runs through some high-altitude woodland, the birding group was scanning rhododendrons, and low shrubs, looking towards the 100–120 m distant ridge. A flock of Black-throated Thrushes was feeding in one of the berry bushes on the slope when PC noticed that one showed reddish-orange on the breast. Through the telescope it was clear that this was a Naumann's Thrush as the reddish-orange on the breast continued as rusty-orange onto the lower breast and flanks. A detailed description taken at that time is as follows.

'Size as Black-throated Thrush. Long whitish supercilium becoming pale creamy and extending to sides of nape. Lores to eye dark brown becoming browner on lower cheeks and ear-coverts; lower cheeks and broad sub-moustachial pale creamy bordered by long dark or blackish malar stripe becoming heaviest

on sides of lower throat. Upperparts mostly brown except for reddish-brown greater coverts and edges to secondaries; rump and uppertail-coverts orange-brown becoming bright rufous or redstart on tail (mainly the outers). Breast broadly mottled bright rufous-orange with fine paler or buffish fringes becoming heavier or rusty-orange on the lower belly and flanks. Bill, dark horn tip and upper mandible, lower mandible pale yellowish.'

The upperparts were a lighter brown than the accompanying Black-throated Thrushes but with noticeable reddish-brown greater coverts and edges to the secondaries—all diagnostic features of Naumann's Thrushes. At one stage the group of thrushes flew and landed in the top of a nearby clump of pines. In flight any possibility of confusion (of it being a hybrid with Dusky Thrush) that it was anything but a Naumann's Thrush disappeared, as the tail was a deep rusty, or redstart-red. On 27 February, the group of thrushes was in the same area on the return journey but this time the Naumann's Thrush was feeding on a small open part of the hillside and all the features were again seen very well. Regrettably, on neither occasion was the bird photographed. PC has prior experience with all three thrushes involved, from southern Russia, Siberia, and central China. The bird was aged as probably first winter, by the pale supercilium and sub-moustachial stripe, as a supercilium in adults is usually more heavily or prominently orange. This appears to be the first record of a pure Naumann's Thrush from Bhutan, and Indian Subcontinent.

Markus Lilje's (Lilje 2016a, 2016b) is the third record, made during two back-to-back Bhutan tours in March, and April 2014. Both sightings were made just above the town of Sengor (27.36°E, 91.02°N), a spot slightly south of the Thrumsingla Pass towards Yongkola. On 30 March 2014, an adult bird was scoped for a long time and also photographed (Lilje 2016c). Possibly the same bird, perched on top of a fir tree, was seen on the follow up tour in April 2014 (Lilje 2016b). Though the single photograph available for our examination shows bright orange underparts, which is good for a Naumann's, the broad white supercilium, and contrastingly dark ear-coverts visible, are more of a Dusky Thrush's features. Hence, on available evidence, this should also be treated as a hybrid, though we admit that the strong light could have had an effect on this photo.

Discussion

Table 1 is a comprehensive compilation of all reports of Naumann's type thrushes from the Indian Subcontinent, arguing for its inclusion in the country checklist of Bhutan. The 'India Checklist' (Praveen *et al.* 2016) does not cover the process of inclusion of a species if it is not of pure origin, or in other words, non-hybrid birds between Naumann's and Dusky Thrushes. However, a species is generally not admitted to a national list if a record is suspected to be of hybrid origin and hence by that rule, Naumann's Thrush would need to await a better record to be considered for inclusion in the India Checklist. Identification difficulties exist in establishing that the bird is not a hybrid and hence we summarise the key field features below (see Fig. 1-2, p. 161 for plates from Clement & Hathway 2000).

Pure adults of both Dusky, and Naumann's Thrushes should present little or no real difficulty if seen well. Dusky (both sexes) are much darker brown, or blackish, on the head (including the ear-coverts and sides of the neck) and upperparts to rump and upper tail, and the tail is similarly dark with fine chestnut fringes in fresh plumage. Both sexes have a bold white supercilium, slightly

Table 1. Records of Naumann's-type thrushes from Eastern Himalayas

No	Date	Location	Country	Altitude	Observer	Hybrid	Age & Sex
1	09 May 2000	Thrumsingla Pass	Bhutan	3700m	GE	Yes	1 st Summer. Unsexed
2*	25 & 27 February 2005†	Thrumsingla Pass	Bhutan	3700m	PC	No	1 st Winter? Unsexed
3*	06 January 2006	Manas National Park	India	0060m	MRR	?	Adult female or 1 st Winter.
4	15 March 2008	Sangti Valley	India	1800m	SD, JO, TZ	Yes	1 st Winter? Unsexed
5	30 March & April 2014 ¹	Sengor	Bhutan	3000m	Markus Lilje	?	Adult winter female
6	02 & 27 March 2016 ¹	Mandala	India	3000m	ARAR, AV	Yes	1 st Winter. Unsexed

* Sight records

† Both records assumed to be of same individual

duller or off-white in females, and fresh plumage males have broad (but often variable in extent) rich orange-brown fringes to the wing coverts, and tertials. The underparts of both sexes are boldly black with broad white fringes often appearing as rows or continuous streaks of tightly packed arrow-heads.

In comparison, both sexes of Naumann's Thrush are paler brown or slightly greyer brown on the head up to ear-coverts, with their upperparts becoming warm brown to light rufous-brown (never grey or darker) on the rump, and bright rufous in the tail (with central pair slightly darker). The wings are similarly brown, but have the edges to the coverts and (more finely) the flight feathers warm brown to rufous; adult males, in fresh plumage, also have rufous edges to the scapulars. The supercilium is equally as long as in Dusky but orange or pale orange or slightly creamier-orange in some females (and often the cheeks and sides of the throat) but not white. The underparts in either sexes are extensively orange, or pale orange finely edged pale buff or whitish.

First winter birds of both Dusky, and Naumann's Thrushes resemble the respective adults but are usually paler or less boldly marked.

Hybrids, by their very nature, can show a mixture of features of either species or intermediate stages of plumage colouration. Most hybrids of all ages, to date, have shown both the head, and upperparts of one species, and the underparts of the other, or have shown almost pure head pattern and upperparts of Dusky with the black centers to the underparts replaced either with orange or an intermediate reddish-brown or the black infused with reddish. In all cases of hybrids showing predominantly Naumann's Thrush features the supercilium has been broadly white (and not creamy-orange or deeper), often with very dark or blackish ear-coverts, the tail lacking any rufous, the orange on the underparts being largely restricted to the breast (and either not extending or only weakly indicated along the flanks), whilst in others the extent of the colouration on the breast to belly and flanks is as in pure individuals but replaced by reddish-brown, and in first winter birds the orange on the breast being overlain with black spots.

With the possible exception of the winter record from Manas, all other records have come from an altitude range of 1800–4000 m in spring, between late February and early May, from eastern Bhutan and adjoining western Arunachal Pradesh. It is quite likely that this species, or hybrids, are overlooked and under-reported from the Eastern Himalayas and is possibly a rare winter visitor there. With this recent knowledge of its occurrence, more visitors birding in these parts may come across this species from Sikkim eastwards, till north-eastern Arunachal Pradesh.

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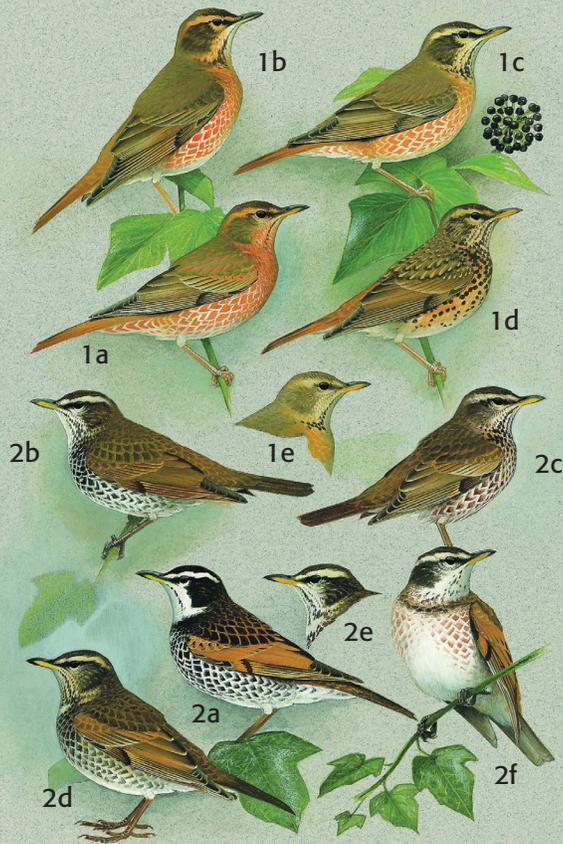


Fig. 1

Naumann's & Dusky Thrushes: Variations and Intergrades

1. Naumann's Thrush *Turdus naumanni*

- Adult male:** Brown or grey-brown upperparts, bright rufous edges to scapulars, warm brown rump to base of tail; edges to flight feathers warm brown to rufous; pale orange supercilium; underparts mostly rufous.
- Adult female:** As male but lacks rufous on scapulars and edges of flight feathers, tail less rufous; paler on chin and throat with broad dark malar, extent of rufous on underparts variable.
- First winter:** Like adult male above but supercilium paler or creamy-orange, and extent of rufous variable.
- Juvenile:** Heavily streaked with pale buff and dark brown tips above, wings and rump to tail like adult; black spotting below.
- Adult male variation:** Some males in breeding season (probably first-years) have head and face more as adult female.

2. Dusky Thrush *Turdus eunomus*

- Adult male:** Black on head and upperparts broken by broad white supercilium, chin and throat; rich brown fringes to scapulars and wing-panel; tail mostly dark brown finely edged chestnut; underparts heavily black fringed broadly white.
- Adult female:** As male but upperparts much browner and lacks heavy contrast, also reduced extent of warm brown edges, and wing-panel broken into broad brown edges to feathers; underparts similar but usually less bold.
- Naumann's x Dusky intergrade:** Variable but upperparts like Naumann's and black on underparts infused with reddish.
- First-winter male:** As adult female but wings like adult male.
- Adult male head, worn plumage:** Much paler or grey-brown.
- Adult male Naumann's x Dusky intergrade:** Head and upperparts as Dusky but underparts show reddish patches of Naumann's.

– Peter Clement

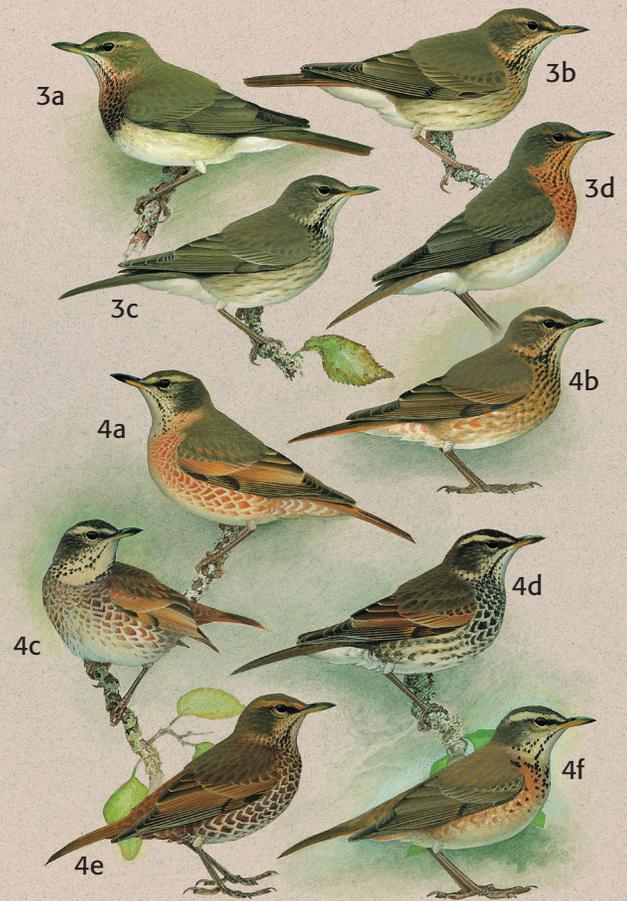


Fig. 2

Black-throated, Red-throated & Dusky Thrushes: Variations & Intergrades

3. Black-throated Thrush *Turdus atrogularis* & Red-throated Thrushes *Turdus ruficollis*

- Adult male Red-throated x Black-throated intergrade:** Normal upperparts but has red in tail and black on breast also infused with reddish-brown
- First-winter female Red-throated:** As same-age female Black-throated but with rusty-brown streaks on breast and reddish in tail.
- First-winter female Black-throated:** As same-age male Black-throated but usually with whiter throat and lighter streaks below; no red in tail.
- First-winter female Red-throated:** Can be as extensively red on throat and breast as adults.

4. Naumann's Thrush *Turdus naumanni* & Dusky Thrush *Turdus eunomus*

- First-winter male Naumann's:** Showing variable extent of pale throat and rufous on underparts.
- First-winter female Naumann's:** As same age Red-throated but more extensive spots on breast, few narrow streaks; breast and flanks with rufous or orange centres or streaks; rump to tail as adult.
- First-winter male Naumann's x Dusky intergrade:** Head and upperparts as Dusky but browner above, underparts with reddish-brown centres.
- First-winter male Dusky:** As adult male but upperparts greyer and rich brown wing-panel incomplete; black below more broken.
- Adult Naumann's x Dusky intergrade:** As adult Naumann's above but darker with rich brown wing-panel, extensively reddish-brown below.
- First-winter female Naumann's:** Variably brown to rufous-brown above, lightly spotted black on breast and reduced orange or rufous below.

– Peter Clement