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First record of White-cheeked Starling *Spodiopsar cineraceus* from India

Binanda Hatibaruah, Samir Ovalekar & Subhadeep Ghosh

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Binanda Hatibaruah, Naton Rangagora Gaon, P.O Rangagora, Tinsukia 786125, Assam, India. E-mail: binanda144@gmail.com [BH]

Samir Ovalekar, 3, Jayvant, 36 Mahant Road, Vile Parle (east), Mumbai 400057, Maharashtra, India. E-mail: samir7399@yahoo.com [SO]

Subhadeep Ghosh, B-107 Legend Apts, Vakola, Santacruz (E), Mumbai 400055, Maharashtra, India. E-mail: subhadeep_g@yahoo.com [SG]

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On a recent birdwatching trip to Arunachal Pradesh we observed and photographed one unidentified starling (Aves: Sturnidae) at Dirang in West Kameng District (27.36°N, 92.24°E Alt: 1600m), on 17 April 2017 at 1600 hrs. The bird was later identified from the photographs as a White-cheeked Starling *Spodiopsar cineraceus*, a species that had never been recorded in India earlier [103].

The lone bird was seen, in flight, following a flock of Spotted Doves *Streptopelia chinensis* on a farmland (mixed cultivation of rice and corn) bordered with groves of bamboo. The starling and the doves alighted in a field of corn, which had recently been harvested. We saw it foraging by walking on the ground and probing the soil with its bill to capture insect prey. Its back was dark brown; it had a black crown, and a greyish belly contrasting with a darkish breast [104, 105]. There was a conspicuous white patch extending from the sides of the crown to the cheek, under the eye and up to the base of the lower mandible. Its beak was bright orange, with a dark base on the lower mandible, and its legs were bright orange as well. Though the sexes of the White-cheeked Starling are distinguishable in the field, individual variations in plumage characteristics are reportedly high, often precluding a positive identification of gender unless a pair is seen together (Yamaguchi 2011). We re-visited the site on 18 April 2017 from 1500 hrs to 1730 hrs, but could not locate the bird.

The White-cheeked Starling breeds in eastern Asia from south-eastern Transbaikial to the Ussuri River, southwards through central and eastern Mongolia, Manchuria, northern China west to eastern Qinghai and the Sichuan Provinces, and eastwards

to Korea, the southern parts of Sakhalin, southern Kurile Islands, and Japan. The species is notably migratory, wintering in southern China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan and has been known to straggle into Myanmar, Thailand and the Philippines (Feare & Craig 1999). In China it is common throughout its breeding range (Cheng 1987), and is seen in flocks of thousands in its regular range. This is also a bird of flat lowlands, although locally common up to 1200 m.



103. White-cheeked Starling in Arunachal Pradesh.



104. White-cheeked Starling feeding in an open field.



105. White-cheeked Starling showing greyish belly contrasting with a darkish breast.

Pics: Subhadeep Ghosh

There are no previous records of the White-cheeked Starling from the Indian Subcontinent (Ali & Ripley 1987; Grimmett *et al.* 2011), and Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) treat it as possible in the extreme north-eastern part of the region. As such, this species is not included in the India Checklist (Praveen *et al.* 2016). Our report, therefore, makes it the first confirmed record of the species from India.

Given its propensity towards vagrancy in winter, evident from the isolated reports from South-east Asia, we believe that the bird we saw was probably also a vagrant.

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Editorial comment: The White-cheeked Starling *Spodiopsar cinereus* is accepted into the India Checklist, based upon this note.

Records of Mishmi Wren-babbler *Spelaornis badeigularis* in the Anini area, northern Mishmi Hills

Pamela C. Rasmussen, Binanda Hatibaruah, Ravi Mekola & Shashank Dalvi

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Pamela C. Rasmussen, Department of Integrative Biology and MSU Museum, East Lansing, MI 48824 USA and Bird Group, The Natural History Museum, Tring, UK. E-mail: rasmus39@msu.edu [PCR]

Binanda Hatibaruah, Natan Rangagoragaon, Tinsukia, Assam 786125, India. E-mail: binanda144@gmail.com [BH]

Ravi Mekola, Kerah Ati, Po/ps Roing, Lower Dibang Valley, Arunachal Pradesh 792110, India. [RM]

Shashank Dalvi, Alumnus of the Post Graduate Program, Wildlife Biology and Conservation WCS-India Program National Centre for Biological Sciences, Bangalore 560065. E-mail: shashank.da@gmail.com [SD]

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The Mishmi or Rusty-throated Wren-babbler *Spelaornis badeigularis* was long known only from a single specimen (USNM #390355) collected on 05 January 1947 at about 1900 m at Dreyi (Ripley 1950), SE Lohit Frontier Division (28.05°N, 96.20°E; Lozupone *et al.* 2004; Fig. 1). After many years, during which the Mishmi Hills were inaccessible to ornithologists, permit regulations were relaxed and the species

was rediscovered on 18 November 2004 by King & Donahue (2006) near the 'km 44' sign along the Roing–Hunli road, Rt. 313. King & Donahue (2006) eventually encountered a total of 17 individuals at various locations between 1700–2400 m asl as far north as between Mayodia Pass and Hunli, but noted that they seemed much less common on the northern side of Mayodia Pass.