

# Sighting of 'Ehrenberg's Redstart' *Phoenicurus p. samamisticus* in Thol Bird Sanctuary, Gujarat, India

Hardik Bhatt

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Hardik Bhatt, 15/1 Bimanagar Society, Opp. Umia Vijay, Satellite Road, Ahmedabad 380015, Gujarat, India. E-mail: [hardik.bhatt4@gmail.com](mailto:hardik.bhatt4@gmail.com)  
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On 16 February 2018, at 0915 hrs, I was in Thol Bird Sanctuary (23.141°N, 72.407°E) near Ahmedabad, Gujarat. I happened to come across an area with thorny trees where I heard a peculiar call. I could see some bird movement but it was too dense to see clearly. So I settled down and waited at a distance. After about five minutes, a redstart *Phoenicurus* sp., came out and perched on a nearby tree. It started preening and was aware of my presence, but was quite wary. It immediately struck me that the bird was different from a Black Redstart *P. ochruros* and I took some photos [63] while it was perched on the tree for a few seconds and I also managed to record its call.

A detailed description of this individual is given here: a redstart with a prominent white band across its forehead, with white extending beyond the eyes. It had a grey crown and mantle, black throat (with black not extending onto upper breast), orange underparts with white centre of belly and vent, and a very prominent white wing patch.

I shared the photos with other birders here and it was identified as a Common Redstart *P. phoenicurus*, of the *samamisticus* race. This race of the Common Redstart is also known as 'Ehrenberg's Redstart'. It breeds from Turkey and Greece, eastwards to the Caucasus Mountains, Iran, Uzbekistan, and Tajikistan, and winters in north-eastern Africa and the south-western Arabian Peninsula (Collar & Christie 2018). It differs from the nominate race in having a prominent white wing patch at all ages; the nominate race can also show some white in the wings, but it is never as extensive or solidly white as seen in *samamisticus* (Small 2009). Here, it can be seen from the photos that the wing patch is a brilliant white, extending from the tertials, across the secondaries, till the second outermost primary, leaving no doubt about its identification as *samamisticus*. It is probably an adult male. Though a Black Redstart can also show a white wing patch, it

lacks features like grey mantle, black on throat not extending onto the upper breast, prominent white band across forehead extending beyond the eyes, and white centre of belly and vent.

Grimmett *et al.* (2011) show only one record of the Common Redstart of the nominate race for India—from Leh and Ladakh. This record is of three individuals, which were trapped and photographed at Tikse in May 1982 (Delany *et al.* 2014), which was the first record of the species from India. However, there are no documented sightings of *samamisticus* so far from India. Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) state about this race, 'not yet genuinely recorded but a likely summer visitor to NW Afghanistan'; it is stated that a specimen of *samamisticus* in BMNH, labelled 'Daulatpur, Sind' originated in Iran and thus, this is included in the 'rejected species' list for the avifauna of the Indian Subcontinent and Afghanistan (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Appendix 2). So, there are no records of *samamisticus* from India or the Indian Subcontinent.

This sighting of a Common Redstart from Thol Bird Sanctuary, near Ahmedabad, is an addition to the avifauna of Gujarat as the species is not included in the recent checklist of birds of Gujarat (Ganpule 2016) or in the first update to the Gujarat checklist (Ganpule 2017). Though the nominate race of the Common Redstart has been noted in India before, the race *samamisticus* or 'Ehrenberg's Redstart', is an addition to the avifauna of India and the Indian Subcontinent.

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63. Ehrenberg's Redstart in Thol Bird Sanctuary. Photo on left showing the prominent white wing patch.