Records of a Naumann's Thrush *Turdus naumanni*, and a Naumann's x Dusky Thrush *T. naumanni* x *T. eunomus* hybrid from north-eastern India

Binanda Hatibaruah, Roon Bhuyan, Rajiv Kalmadi, Dipankar Baruah, Neeraj Bharati, Deepak Brid, Ashutosh Nahardekh & Samir Singla

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Website URL: http://www.indianbirds.in/pdfs/InPress_HatibaruahETAL_Naumann'sThrush.pdf
Binanda Hatibaruah, Natun Rangagora Gaon, P.O. Rangagora, Tinsukia 786125, Assam, India. E-mail: binanda144@gmail.com [BH]
Roon Bhuyan, Mother Teresa Road, Guwahati 781024, Assam, India. E-mail: roonbhuyan@gmail.com [RB]
Rajiv Kalmadi, No. 9, Guruswamy Road, Chetpet, Chennai 600031, Tamil Nadu, India. E-mail: riturajivarch@gmail.com [RK]
Dipankar Baruah, House No. 1, 7th East Bylane, R. G. Baruah Road, Guwahati 781024. E-mail: dipankarbaruah2@gmail.com [DBH]
Neeraj Bharati, 304, Alexandra C, Grand Omaxe, Sector 93B, Noida 201301, Uttar Pradesh, India. E-mail: neeraj.idl@gmail.com [NB]
Deepak Brid, House No 14, Wildlife Institute of India, Chandrabani, Dehradun 248002, Uttarakhand, India. E-mail: deepakbrid@yahoo.com [DBD]
Ashutosh Nahardeka. E-mail: riturajivarch@gmail.com [AN]
Samir Singla, 2067/2B Banyan House, 471 MKN Road, Alandur, Chennai 600016, Tamil Nadu, India. E-mail: samir@unclesamskitchen.com [SS]
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The status of Naumann's Thrush *Turdus naumanni* in the Indian Subcontinent was unclear until Dalvi *et al.* (2017) clarified that all photographic records from the Eastern Himalayas were of hybrids with the Dusky Thrush *T. eunomus*. This note describes two birds that were reported in the 2018–2019 season, and their identification.

On 17 December 2018 some of us (BH, RB, DBD, and DBH) saw a bird at 0955 hrs while it was feeding on the ground on an open trail in a tropical evergreen forest patch inside the Digboi Oil Fields (27.42°N, 95.72°E; *c.*165 m asl), Assam. The bird was extremely confiding and we watched it from distances of 05–15 m for more than 45 mins before we decided to leave the area. The bird was seen at the same spot on the trail, when we returned a half hour later. All of us took a number of photographs **[4–6]** and they were circulated in the social media, where most people felt the bird was a pure form Naumann's Thrush.

All pics: Roon Bhuyan

4. Adult male Naumann's x Dusky Thrush at Digboi.

5. Adult male Naumann's x Dusky Thrush at Digboi showing flanks that lacked bright orange.

6. Adult male Naumann's x Dusky Thrush at Digboi showing underparts that lacked bright orange.

To confirm our identification, we transmitted a few photographs to Peter Clement, through Praveen J. Peter responded that the bird was a hybrid, with some traces of a Dusky Thrush's *T. eunomus* features in its plumage. According to him, the bird was an adult male as it had lots of bright rufous on the scapulars and well-marked pale fringes to the flight feathers. However, the underparts were too dark for a Naumann's, and it should have been much brighter and uniformly orange if it was a pure form. Underpart colours are presumably influenced by the darker centers found on a Dusky. The forehead, crown, and upperparts also seemed greyer than brown (though the forehead and crown may have been wet), which is again a Dusky feature. In summary, the bird looked like another hybrid, though Naumann's features outnumbered those of a Dusky's (Peter Clement, *in litt.,* e-mail dated 29 December 2018).

This is also the first photograph of a Naumann's x Dusky hybrid from a low altitude region in winter—all prior photographs have been from altitudes above 1800 m in spring. However, one of the earlier winter sight records was from a similar altitude in Manas (Dalvi *et al.* 2017). We present the full array of photographs below so that future workers could use them for comparison. They also add to the caution one must exercise in analyzing the plumages of putative Naumann's Thrushes.

On 11 February 2019, BH, RK, NB, AN, and SS visited Mandala Pass (Arunachal Pradesh, India) for birding. After crossing the pass at 0900 hrs, we reached a small area (27.26°N, 92.24°E; c.2800 m) where domestic cattle had been allowed to graze, as we could see a lot of droppings. We approached the area on foot and noticed a lot of bird activity on the ground. Along with a few pipits Anthus sp., we saw a large number of thrushes *Turdus* sp., moving around, including Black-throated- *T. atrogularis*, Red-throated- *T. ruficollis*, and a few Dusky Thrushes. While we were scanning and photographing them, BH noticed one thrush that looked different. It had reddish-brown markings on its lower belly and flanks, a rufous wash to the base of its tail, and a prominent pale supercilium which extended way beyond the eyes. We took several photographs of that bird from different angles **[7–11]**. We observed the birds for nearly an hour during which time it may have fed for about 15 mins. The Red-throated Thrushes repeatedly tried to chase away the other thrushes, but this individual kept to itself, not much bothered by our presence, except facing away from us while moving about and feeding.

Binanda Hatibaruah

7. First winter Naumann's Thrush at Mandala.

Binanda Hatibaruah

8. First winter Naumann's Thrush at Mandala showing small dark spots on upper breast.

Binanda Hatibaruah

9. First winter Naumann's Thrush at Mandala.

Rajiv Kalmadi

10. First winter Naumann's Thrush at Mandala.

Rajiv Kalmadi

11. First winter Naumann's Thrush at Mandala.

We sent these pictures too to Peter Clement who confirmed that the bird was a first winter female Naumann's Thrush (Dalvi *et al.* 2017 reproduced pl., 42 from Clement & Rose 2005; illustrations numbered 121b and 121). The overall tones of the crown and upperparts of the bird were light brown and the pale panel in the wing was sufficiently well indicated. The coverts had no bright, rich brown, or coppery tinges like those of a Dusky. There was a suggestion of an orange-tinged feather showing on the scapulars in the photos, which also indicated Naumann's. From what can be seen of the tail, it appeared to have the right pattern of warm or rufous-brown at the base, becoming browner on the rest of the tail, bearing no trace of any dark brown of Dusky. According to Clement, the pale supercilium, the light brown cheeks and ear coverts, together with the pale moustachial and dark malars, were right for a first winter female. The presence of a few small black arrow-head spots on the breast and one or two on the flanks were the remnants of its juvenile plumage, and were, presumably, in the course of being abraded, revealing more of the orange tones **[7]**. A hybrid with Dusky was considered, and the "difference between these dark/blackish spots on *naumanni* and the larger blackish chevron shaped spots on intergrades is one of size in that the spots are smaller, more individual or in rows on *naumanni* whereas on intergrades the whole colour tone of the underparts (or at least the centers to most feathers) are darker or deeper (not orange) and influenced by the mixed gene-flow. These dark spots, fairly small though they are, should have ideally worn down by mid-winter, but it may be due to individual variation" (Peter Clement, *in litt.,* e-mail dated 13 February 2019). We also transmitted the images to Paul Holt, via Pritam Baruah, who also agreed with this identification, as a pure form, though he preferred to leave the sex as unknown due to variability in the sexes. Though the ten or so dark brown spots visible on its left flank are odd, or anomalous, he felt it is within the considerable variation in Naumann's (Paul Holt, *in litt.,* e-mail dated 14 February 2019).

Hence, the Mandala bird seems to be the first definite photograph of a Naumann's Thrush from the Indian Subcontinent—and the only one, apart from the sight record by Peter Clement, from Bhutan (Dalvi *et al.* 2017).

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Observations on some nesting birds of the Tso-Kar Basin, Ladakh

Tanveer Ahmed, Pankaj Chandan & Afifullah Khan

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Tanveer Ahmed & Afifullah Khan*, Department of Wildlife Sciences, Aligarh Muslim University, Aligarh 202002, Uttar Pradesh, India.
[*Corresponding author. E-mail: afifkhan@rediffmail.com.]
Pankaj Chandan, WWF-India, 172-B, Lodhi Estate, New Delhi 110003, India.
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A large number of migratory waterfowl breed in the Tso-Kar Basin (Chandan *et al.* 2005; Hussain & Pandav 2008; Ahmed *et al.* 2014), and hence it is designated as an Important Bird Area (Islam & Rahmani 2004). Ornithological studies in the region have largely focussed upon the Black-necked Crane *Grus nigricollis* either to assess the status of its breeding population (Hussain 1986; Pfister 1998; Chandan *et al.* 2014), or its ecology (Khan *et al.* 2014; Chandan *et al.* 2014). Other studies have highlighted the status of water, and terrestrial, birds (Hussain & Pandav 2008; Namgail 2009; Ahmed *et al.* 2014). We spent the summer of 2013 visiting different parts of the Ladakh landscape (Jammu & Kashmir) collecting ecological data on the flora and fauna of Ladakh. We visited the Tso-Kar Basin four times between May and June 2013.

Study area

The Tso-Kar Basin (35.28–33.35ºN, 77.88–78.08ºE; 4530 m asl) is within the Changthang Cold Desert Wildlife Sanctuary and is located about 125 km south-eastwards of Leh, Ladakh. The Zanskar Range forms its southern border, the Sumdo rivulet (a tributary of River Indus) the eastern, and Tanglang La (5360 m asl), the second highest pass in the world, the northern. The basin has two large waterbodies adjacent to each other, namely, Tso-Kar, and Tsartsapuk Tso (Fig. 1). Tso-Kar is a dumbell-shaped brackish waterbody, while Tsartapuk Tso is an irregularly shaped fresh waterbody encompassing areas of about 19.5 sq km and 2.5 sq km respectively. The basin is considered colder and drier than other parts of Ladakh. Severe arid conditions exist here throughout the year, and rainfall seldom exceeds 50 mm annually (Kaul 1983). The Tso-Kar Basin is rich in flora and fauna as compared to other similar climatic regions of the world (Kaul 1983; Humbert-Droz 2000; Pfister 2004; Hussain & Pandav 2008; Rawat & Adhikari 2005; Namgail *et al.* 2009). The vegetation of the Tso-Kar Basin is represented by scrub, desert steppe, and marsh meadows (Rawat & Adhikari 2005). The area is inhabited by nomads and semi nomadic communities known