

# Unusual mass-movement of Streaked Spiderhunter *Arachnothera magna* in Namdapha National Park, Arunachal Pradesh, India

Manoj Sharma & Alka Vaidya

Sharma, M., & Vaidya, A., 2010. Unusual mass-movement of Streaked Spiderhunter *Arachnothera magna* in Namdapha National Park, Arunachal Pradesh, India. *Indian Birds* 5 (6): 174–175.

Manoj Sharma, Village Shankarpur, Ramnagar, Distt. Nainital 244715, Uttarakhand, India. Email: [treeswift@gmail.com](mailto:treeswift@gmail.com)

Alka Vaidya, J-145, Lokmanya Nagar, Mahim, Mumbai 400016, Maharashtra, India. Email: [chitralka@gmail.com](mailto:chitralka@gmail.com)

Manuscript received on 30 July 2009.

**S**treaked Spiderhunter *Arachnothera magna* (Fig. 1) is 'a chunky, entirely streaked sunbird-like species with an exceptionally long, fairly straight bill and heavy orange legs' (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005). The species is distributed from Himachal Pradesh, central Nepal, Sikkim, West Bengal (Darjeeling and Jalpaiguri districts), Bhutan, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Assam (Cachar district), Meghalaya, and the hills of Bangladesh to Chittagong Hill tracts (Ali & Ripley 1969).

The call of Streaked Spiderhunter is described as 'chirrick, chirrick' (Kazmierczak 2000) and 'chittup or chitturup, occasionally given singly or as triplet, and may be given in flight' (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005). The species is known to be fond of the nectar of wild banana flower (Grimmett *et al.* 1998).

Streaked Spiderhunters are 'found singly or in pairs, sometimes in mixed parties' (Cheke *et al.* 2001). Ali & Ripley (1969), Grimmett *et al.* (1998), and Wells (2007) also subscribe to these views about the species' social units. At least 22 birds have been seen moving along a ridge on a November morning in west Yunnan, China (del Hoyo *et al.* 2008). In Bhutan, 'in January–February, it is often found at flowering *Bombax* trees, sometimes in flocks of upto 30' (Spiereburg 2005).

On 9 November 2005, between 1325–1400 hrs, we came across large numbers of flocks of 5–15 Streaked Spiderhunters on the junction of the road coming from the direction of Gibbon's Land, and going to Gandhigram, and the road going downhill to Deban forest rest house in Namdapha National Park, Arunachal Pradesh, India. The forest on the hillside along which these flocks of birds were observed was full of wild banana plants (Fig. 2).

The birds were flying uphill from the direction of the Noa Dehing River (Fig. 3), and continuing along the steep forested hillside above the road. The loose flocks were flying uphill across more than 150 m of visible hillside, emerging here and there at an interval of 20–30 seconds. The birds were flying from tree to tree in a strong, swift and somewhat undulating flight. They were using tall treetops for brief stopovers. The average distance of trees that the

birds were using was not more than 10–20 m. These flocks of birds were stopping for 5–10 seconds in each tree that they visited on their uphill movement. The birds were hopping from branch to branch while crossing the tree canopy, traveling in the general direction they were following. There was no attempt to feed while the birds were in the trees. The birds were calling *chirrick*, *chirrick* in flight and also while in the trees. At times there were two or three flocks visible within the area being observed. The elevation of the site was *c* 440 m. The uphill movement was still continuing when we left the place. It was interesting to note that during the entire period of our observations, not a single bird was observed flying downhill. A brief inspection of the area ahead, and along the road going towards Gandhigram revealed that such uphill movements were taking place in that area as well. Sudhir Deorukhakar (*pers. comm.*), who was staying at Deban forest rest house, informed later that on the same day at 14:40 hrs he too observed this phenomenon in the same area as our observations. During our 35-minute observation we counted more than 60 flocks, and estimated they may have contained more than 600 individuals; but it seems that the congregation of Streaked



Fig. 1. Streaked Spiderhunter *Arachnothera magna*.

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Spiderhunters in that small area could have been much larger than that. On 12 November 2005, between 0830–0900 hrs, while walking along the road from Deban forest resthouse to Gibbon's Land, MS saw similar movement of small flocks of Streaked Spiderhunters in an area that lies 200–500 m from the earlier place, and towards Gibbon's Land. These flocks were observed flying at an average interval of 30–40 seconds, emerging here and there and consisted of 5–10 birds. It was estimated that 40–50 such flocks, with upto 300 birds, were observed. Once again all the birds were flying uphill.

Congregations of such large numbers of Streaked Spiderhunters, in small areas, have never been recorded before, and need further study.

### Acknowledgments

We want to thank Harkirat Singh Sangha for painstakingly reviewing various drafts of this note and Dr Sudhir Deorukhakar for sharing his observations. We also thank Bombay Natural History Society for organizing the member's tour to Namdapha National Park. Isaac Kehimkar's help and guidance during the tour were invaluable.

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Fig. 3. View of the Noa Dehing River valley.

Alka Vaidya



Alka Vaidya

Fig. 2. Forest, full of wild banana plants, on the main road between Gibbon's Land and Gandhigram, close to the junction from where a road goes to Deban forest resthouse.