

on 08 February 1991, flying in Kaziranga National Park (26.58°N, 93.17°E).

Considering its status, we feel this is a well-documented record of an adult male Eastern Marsh Harrier for India, particularly since it is from southern India.

## Acknowledgements

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# Status of Kessler's Thrush *Turdus kessleri* in western Arunachal Pradesh, India

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Kessler's Thrush *Turdus kessleri* is a breeding endemic of the eastern, and north-eastern parts of the Tibetan Plateau, "E Qinghai and SW Gansu S to N Yunnan" (Collar 2016), while non-breeding birds occur in south-eastern Xizang, China, and also in the Himalayas of Nepal & Bhutan (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Collar 2016). Until recently, the only form of documentation for South Asia has been through sight records, while the Sikkim (Meinertzhagen 1927), and Nepal specimens were found to be fraudulent (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Discounting Meinertzhagen's Sikkim record, there have been no historical reports from within Indian limits, though it was hypothesised to occur in northern Arunachal Pradesh (Ali & Ripley 2001). Mandelli collected it in November, just north of Sikkim, across the border in Tibet (Blandford 1877). Here, we list a set of recent reports from western Arunachal Pradesh, India, including the first report, which is ours.

PB & SD birded in the Dirang, and Sela Pass, area while on a birding trip to north-eastern India in December 2007, and January 2008. At this time, a single male Kessler's Thrush was spotted in Dirang on 28 December 2007 (27.35°N, 92.23°E; 1700 m asl). SD & PB saw a large thrush flying from a patch of scrub and perch in the open, on an isolated pine tree. Through binoculars the following field marks were easily noted on the individual: black wings and hood, chestnut belly, pale breast contrasting with hood and belly. When the bird dived into the adjoining valley we briefly glimpsed its whitish mantle. These marks identified the bird clearly as a male Kessler's Thrush, excluding four other regularly occurring thrushes from the region:

Tickell's Thrush *T. unicolor*, Chestnut Thrush *T. rubrocanus*, Black-breasted Thrush *T. dissimilis*, and Tibetan Blackbird *T. maximus*. No photography was attempted. This is generally a species found at higher elevations (>2700 m). The severe winter must have forced it to a lower elevation, as was the case with several other highland birds occurring below their typical wintering altitudes in western Arunachal (SD unpublished data)—exceptional flocks of Chestnut Thrushes, in 100s, at c.1400 m (normally >1800 m), Grey-headed Bullfinch *Pyrrhula erythaca* at c. 1000 m (normally >1800 m), White-throated Redstart *Adelura schisticeps* at c. 2000 m (normally >2800 m), and Ward's Trogon *Harpactes wardi* at 1400 m (normally c. >2000 m)—are noteworthy of mention.

Other bird tours were alerted of this sighting, and supporting photographic evidence came up in 2011 when a male [95] was photographed at Sela Pass (Table 1), the image of the same bird is on *Oriental Bird Images* (OBI), and was the basis for its inclusion in Rasmussen & Anderton (2012). Since then, on 21 March 2012, there has been another record of a large flock of 75 birds documented in a trip report (Anonymous 2012; Table 1). Till date, all other records have come from the Sela Pass area, above 4000 m asl. This species remains very rare at Sela Pass: an informal inference of observations to field days, during December–March, yields a paltry ratio of five out of 30+trips (PB=3, SD=10, local guides=20).

Robinson (1989) reported the Kessler's Thrush from Nepal on three different occasions in January–February 1986 at altitudes above 4000 m; perhaps the first report of this species

Table 1. Reports of Kessler's Thrush from Dirang, and Sela Pass, western Arunachal Pradesh

No	Date	Observer	Reference	Remarks
1	28 December 2007	SD & PB	Present work	Sight record
2	20 February 2008	Sujan Chatterjee	Sujan Chatterjee, in e-mail dated 08 February 2016	Presumed to be a single bird. Further details not available.
3	05 February 2011	A tour group of eight birders from England led by Leio De Souza.	Anonymous (2011); Robson (2011); Rasmussen (2013)	Three adult male birds [95]. Also, photographed by Chris Knox and included in the trip report and OBI
4	21 March 2012	A tour group of six birders from Denmark lead by local guides	Anonymous (2012); Krabbe (2012)	A flock of 75+ birds with Tibetan Blackbird, possibly on northward migration. Photograph in the report. and in Krabbe (2012).
5	April 2013	Jainy Kuriakose	Pers. comm. 17 March 2016	A single bird seen during third week of April.



Photo: Leio De Souza

95. Kessler's Thrush *Turdus kessleri* at Sela Pass.

from South Asia. Jepson (1991) provides several additional Nepal records with the lowest altitude being 3,440 m. Inskipp *et al.* (2000) list two unpublished references of Kessler's Thrush from Thrumshingla National Park, Bhutan, from 3200 m—both in 2000. Yet another online trip report exists in the same year (Southerland & Southerland 2000). Some of these reports are listed in Robson (2000a). There are subsequent reports from Nepal (Giri & Choudhary 2000a, b; Robson 2000b), and possibly more, which remain unreported. We have not made any attempts to be comprehensive.

It is no surprise that the species might be overlooked; Sela Pass, and adjoining areas were hardly visited, at the time, by birdwatchers in winter, for birding is generally difficult. The species could also occur in the higher reaches of northern Sikkim, and eastern Arunachal Pradesh during winter as these parts adjoin the known range of this species in Tibet.

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## In Memoriam

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