

Eastern Marsh Harrier *Circus spilonotus* photographed in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, southern India

Gnanaskandan Kesavabharathi & Chandrashekar Sundaram

Kesavabharathi, G., & Sundaram, C., 2016. Eastern Marsh Harrier *Circus spilonotus* photographed in Chennai, Tamil Nadu, southern India. *Indian BIRDS* 11 (3): 75–76.

Gnanaskandan Kesavabharathi, No. 2B Mithila Block, Saibrindavan Apartments, Ramakrishna Nagar, 2nd Main Road, Adambakkam, Chennai 600088, Tamil Nadu, India. E-mail: gnanaskeshav@gmail.com [GK]

Chandrashekar Sundaram, No. 18, Thilakar Street, Krishna Nagar Extension, Ullagaram, Chennai 600091, Tamil Nadu, India.

E-mail: mailchandar@gmail.com [CS]

Manuscript received on 20 February 2016.

The Eastern Marsh Harrier *Circus spilonotus* was formerly considered a conspecific of the Western Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*. It has been considered a winter visitor to parts of north-eastern India, but is a vagrant elsewhere (Ali & Ripley 2001; Grimmett *et al.* 2001; Naoroji 2006). In fact, Rasmussen & Anderton (2005) listed this species as hypothetical since there were no established specimens from South Asia. However, they included it in the second edition of their work (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012) on the basis of a recent photograph (see below). While sub-adults of the species are harder to separate from either the Western Marsh-, or the Pied Harrier *C. melanoleucos*, identification of adult birds is generally straightforward. Here we report a first sighting of an adult male Eastern Marsh Harrier, with photographic evidence, from Chennai, Tamil Nadu.

On 06 February 2016, we sighted an Eastern Marsh Harrier male flying on the periphery of a lake near Irungattukottai, Chennai (13.02°N, 79.98°E); CS photographed it [92–94]. Whenever the bird perched, other harriers mobbed it. It was a bulky bird, about the size of a female Western Marsh Harrier, which was flying next to it.

It had a pronounced head, and a dark, wide ear covert patch. Its under wing was white, with warmer streaking on the coverts. Other identifying features were: the upper wing coverts were speckled black, white, and buff; blackish outer primaries; greyer secondaries, contrasting with a darker mantle; a conspicuous white rump; a grey tail with dull brown barring, and also a darker trailing edge on the upper wing. The structure of the head, wider wing base, plain under wing, and the overall plumage pattern

Photo: Chandrashekar S



92. Eastern Marsh Harrier, Chennai.



93.



94. Eastern Marsh Harrier showing upper wing pattern.

Photo: Gnanaskandan K

helped us eliminate the closely resembling immature male, and adult female Pied Harrier.

Historically, Jonathan Eames reported one bird on 08 February 1991, from Periyar Tiger Reserve (9.46°N, 77.24°E), Kerala (Robson 1991) exists, but there is no field description with it that supports the observation. Apart from this, there are no other records of this species from southern India. Tim Inskipp lists several photographs of this species from Odisha (Inskipp 2015), and these appear to be the most southerly records from India. However, none of these records have been written up formally, and many of them comprise sub-adults; none were adult males. A sub-adult male photographed in Boshipota [=Basipota] (22.67°N, 88.30°E), Howrah, West Bengal, on 16 February 2011 (Das 2011a, b), is the basis for its inclusion in Rasmussen & Anderton (2012), and this appears to be the closest documentation. Apart from this, Naoroji (2006) photographed a female of the species

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

We would like to thank Dipu K., & Praveen J., for confirming the identity of the species, getting its distribution pattern, previous literature, and helping us writing up this note.

References

Das, A., 2011a. Website URL: http://orientalbirdimages.org/images/data/eastern_marsh_harrierdsc_7581.jpg. [Accessed on 23 February 2016.]

Das, A., 2011b. Website URL: <http://www.indianaturewatch.net/displayimage.php?id=210483>. [Accessed on 23 February 2016.]

Robson, C., 1991. Recent reports: India. *Oriental Bird Club Bulletin* 13 (July): 49–50.

Grimmett, R., Inskipp, C., & Inskipp, T., 2011. *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*. 2nd ed. London: Oxford University Press & Christopher Helm. Pp. 1–528.

Inskipp, T., 2015. Checklist and bibliography of birds of Odisha. Unpublished. Draft 19 May 2015.

Naoroji, R., 2007. *Birds of prey of the Indian Subcontinent*. 1st ed. New Delhi: Om Books International. Pp. 1–692.

Rasmussen, P. C., & Anderton, J. C., 2005. *Birds of South Asia: the Ripley guide: attributes and status*. 1st ed. Washington, D.C. and Barcelona: Smithsonian Institution and Lynx Edicions. Vol. 2 of 2 vols. Pp. 1–683.

Rasmussen, P. C., & Anderton, J. C., 2012. *Birds of South Asia: the Ripley guide: attributes and status*. 2nd ed. Washington, D.C. and Barcelona: Smithsonian Institution and Lynx Edicions. Vol. 2 of 2 vols. Pp. 1–683. 📖

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

Pritam Baruah, Shashank Dalvi, & Praveen J.

Baruah, P, Dalvi, S., & Praveen, J., 2016. Status of Kessler's Thrush *Turdus kessleri* in western Arunachal Pradesh, India. *Indian BIRDS* 11 (3): 76–77.

Pritam Baruah, House 3, Padma Path, R. G. Baruah Road, Guwahati 781024, Assam, India. E-mail: pritambaruah@hotmail.com [PB]

Shashank Dalvi, Alumnus of WCS-NCBS Master's Programme, F-21, NCBS, GKVK, Bellary Road, Bengaluru, Karnataka, India.

E-mail: shashank.da@gmail.com [SD]

Praveen J., B303, Shriram Spurthi, ITPL Main Road, Brookefields, Bengaluru, Karnataka 560037, India. E-mail: paintedstork@gmail.com

[Corresponding author] [PJ]

Manuscript received on 18 February 2016.

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