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A leucistic Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* from Cumilla, Bangladesh

On 20 May 2019, while birding at Shaluk Mura village (23.51°N, 91.17°E), Cumilla, Bangladesh, we spotted a white Eurasian Collared Dove *Streptopelia decaocto* with a narrow black crescent on the back of the neck [242]. A closer examination of the bird in the photographs revealed that it was a leucistic individual, as the pattern of white plumage, which is not chalky light brown to gray-buff when compared with a normal bird (van Grouw 2013) [242]. It was noted that it had blackish bill and eyes, and pinkish feet. Mahabal et al. (2016) who compiled all colour aberrant bird reports from India did not list any colour aberration for this species but a brown mutant was reported from Gujarat in 2009 (Trivedi 2016). This is probably the first instance of a leucistic Eurasian Collared Dove being reported from South Asia.



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242. Leucistic Eurasian Collared Dove.

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White-cheeked Starling *Spodiopsar cineraceus*, Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla*, and Buff-bellied Pipit *Anthus rubescens* in eastern Arunachal Pradesh, India

In this note we describe three interesting sightings from a trip to Walong, Anjaw District, Arunachal Pradesh, in November 2019.

White-cheeked Starling *Spodiopsar cineraceus*

On 15 November 2019, when we stopped for breakfast at Salamgam village (27.96° N, 96.40°E), Lohit District, we spotted two White-cheeked Starlings at the edge of the village (c.800 m asl) at 0800 h. One bird was feeding on the ground along with a Great Myna *Acridotheres grandis*, near the chicken coop and garbage bin, and another was seen on the wire behind a rice hotel. It had a conspicuous white patch extending from the side of its crown to the cheek, a black crown, and a greyish belly against a dark breast; bright orange beak and legs are features that separate it from other starlings [243–246]. The bird on the wire flew a few minutes later, and we photographed it in flight.



243. White-cheeked Starling showing back, nape, mantle, and side profile. Salamgam, Lohit District, Arunachal Pradesh.



244. Ventral view of a White-cheeked Starling, Salamgam, Lohit District, Arunachal Pradesh.

Both: Yagnik Sinha



245. White-cheeked Starling and Great Myna foraging beside a chicken coop. Salamgam, Lohit District, Arunachal Pradesh.



246. White-cheeked Starling in flight.

On 17 November 2019, on a hot and sunny day we explored behind the Indian Air Force helipad beside Lohit River in Walong town (c.1,150 m asl) for Black-headed Greenfinch *Chloris ambigua*. At 1125 h, a medium-sized starling-shaped bird flew over our heads, from north to south, and DA managed to click some record shots of the bird. Some of its visible features include the white patch extension from side of crown to cheek, and greyish belly against dark breast. The flight of the bird, and its underparts match with in flight photograph references from Salamgam bird [247, 248]



247. White-cheeked Starling, from Walong, Anjaw dist, Arunachal Pradesh



248. Photographed from below while in flight, from Walong, Anjaw dist, Arunachal Pradesh

All: Dibyendu Ash

The White-cheeked Starling breeds in eastern Asia, from Japan, southern Kurile Islands, southern parts of Sakhalin and eastwards to Korea, northern China, westwards to eastern Qinghai and the Sichuan Provinces, southwards through central and eastern Mongolia, Manchuria, and south-eastern Transbaikial to the Ussuri River. The species is notably migratory, wintering in southern China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan and has been known to straggle into Myanmar, Thailand, and the Philippines (Feare & Craig 1999).

Two previous records of the White-cheeked Starling exist from the Indian Subcontinent: One in April 2017 from Dirang, West Kameng District, Arunachal Pradesh (Hatibaruah et al. 2017), and another in November 2017 from Gelling, Upper Siang District, Arunachal Pradesh (Maheswaran 2017).

Our report is the first record from the Lohit- and Anjaw Districts of Arunachal Pradesh, India. As only two birds were seen in Salamgam, and one in Walong, the species is probably a vagrant in eastern Arunachal as well.

Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla*

On 18 November 2019, we wanted to check for White-cheeked Starling again in Salamgam village, and so we stopped there for an afternoon snack. However, we couldn't see any of them. While walking a little below the road, near the helipad area (c.760 m asl), at 1250 h, a rufous-orange bunting-sized bird was seen on the ground along with five to seven Olive-backed Pipits *Anthus hodgsoni*. Our presence scattered them and the bird perched on a tree a little ahead of us. We photographed it, and easily identified it as a Brambling *Fringilla montifringilla* [249, 250]. There was only one Brambling amongst that flock of Olive-backed Pipits. A little later the bird flew back to sewer area of the village and we couldn't locate it afterwards. It had an orange breast and flanks, blackish wings with white wing-bars, and a peaked crown. The bird had a black-tipped yellowish bill. It was a non-breeding male.



249, 250. Male Brambling from Salamgam, Lohit District, Arunachal Pradesh

L: Sinha and R: Ash

The Brambling has a distribution from North and north-eastern Europe in a broad band to East Russia (Chukotka), southwards to north-eastern Kazakhstan, Central and south-eastern Altai, Tuva, South Lake Baikal, the Russian Far East (Southwards to Amurland, Sakhalin, and Kamchatka). It winters in western, central, and southern Europe, North Africa, the Middle East, and south-western, central, and eastern Asia (Clement & Arkhipov 2010).

Choudhury (2006) did not list the species for the state, and Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) did not include the Himalayas east of Bhutan in its wintering range. However, there are more recent records described in De Souza (2015), an unpublished observation by M. F. Ahmed from Anini, Dibang Valley in February 2002, and a photograph from western Arunachal Pradesh along Mandala Road, near Dirang, West Kameng, Ar on 07 March 2013. Such sporadic occurrences in winter, and sparse records indicate vagrancy.

Buff-bellied Pipit *Anthus rubescens*

At 1140 h on 17 November 2019, we saw one adult Buff-bellied Pipit *Anthus rubescens* in non-breeding plumage and four in breeding plumage [251, 252] at Walong, Anjaw District. The bird in non-breeding plumage had a heavily spotted breast and flank, and a black malar stripe. The four other birds were in breeding plumage with orange-buff underparts and lightly spotted underparts and flank.



Both: Dibyendu Ash

251,252. Buff-bellied Pipit from Walong, Anjaw District, Arunachal Pradesh

Of the four recognized subspecies, three are found in North America, and '*japonicus*' in Asia. Its distribution is from northern, central, and eastern Russia in south-eastern Taymyr, the West Siberian Plateau, and eastwards of River Lena, the Yakutsk region, and Lake Baikal eastwards to the Chukotskiy Peninsula, Commander Island, Sakhalin, and Kuril Island; it winters from Japan and Korea to South and South-east continental Asia, recorded west to Israel and Turkey (Tyler & Kirwan 2019).

The Buff-bellied Pipit is not listed for Arunachal Pradesh (Choudhury 2006) but has been shown as a vagrant to Bhutan, West Bengal, and Sikkim (Grimmett et al. 2019), with two records from Bhutan (Spiereburg 2005). One winter record exists from Manipur (Kazmierczak 2000; Grimmett et al. 2011). From the bird survey in Manipur (Choudhury 2009), the bird had been mentioned as a 'stray' with previous record also referenced to Kazmierczak (2000). We are unable to trace the original source of this Manipur record. For Assam, a further search for the original source of the record in Grimmett et al. (2011), and e-mail exchange with Tim Inskipp has led to the conclusion that the Assam record was from Manas National Park (Olsen 2004). Craig Robson reported (with field notes) 25 birds from the Dibru River grasslands on 01 February 2001 (Robson 2001). Though Kumar et al. (2005) did not list any birds from Assam, Joshi (2014) mentions the species from field-work records during October 2011 to March 2012 in the Dibru-Saikhowa Biosphere Reserve.

Our report, therefore, makes it the first confirmed record of the species from Arunachal Pradesh. Given its proclivity towards vagrancy in winter, evident from the isolated reports from India, we believe that the birds we saw were probably not vagrants but must be an overlooked species, as it is hard to identify on field.

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In Memoriam

Heinz Lainer

(09 AUGUST 1943 – 09 FEBRUARY 2020)