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The White-cheeked Starling *Spodiopsar cineraceus*: A new species for Bhutan

Terrestrial and aquatic birds congregate in and around the open sewage lagoon (27.44°N, 89.65°E) located south of Thimphu city (2,265 m asl; c. 10 ha), including a large stretch of the Wangchhu River that flows adjacent to the lagoon. Sewage lagoon supports a variety of bird species (Zimmerling 2006; Tere & Parasharya 2013) due to the easy availability of food like zooplankton (Hamilton et al. 2005), and there is also the constant influx of organic human waste. About 118 resident and migratory species are recorded by bird watchers from the area (eBird 2021).

At 0700 h on 30 November 2021, a flock of birds was observed foraging on the strip of grassland surrounding the sewage pond. Initially, from 150 m, it was not possible to identify the birds even through binoculars. Upon getting closer, it was clear that a single bird was unique among the flock of White Wagtails *Motacilla alba* feeding on the grassland. It was medium-sized, with a short tail, and a pointed bill resembling a Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* and an Asian Pied Starling *Gracupica contra*, which are commonly found in the southern region of Bhutan (Spierenburg 2005). Later, using the camera Nikon D7200 with a 500 mm lens attached, the bird was photographed [109]. From the photographs, and Grimmett et al. (2019), every feature of the bird was checked to confirm that it was s White-cheeked Starling *Spodiopsar cineraceus*. Some of its distinct features were its dark grey-brown plumage with black-streaked white cheek patch, and dirty white forehead and the area below its eye. The legs and bill were orange, and its white rump was visible when it flew. The species is confirmed as a new record for Bhutan, as it is unlisted in (Pittie 2009), and in the author's unpublished annotated checklist of birds of Bhutan.

In South Asia, the White-cheeked Starling has only been reported from Arunachal Pradesh (see elsewhere in this issue). This record of the species in Bhutan would be one amongst the

growing numbers of westerly records for this species, and the sixth for South Asia.

I am extremely grateful to my five-year-old son, Tenzin Thinley Tobgyel, for accompanying me for bird watching at the sewage lagoon where the starling was spotted.

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Status of the White-cheeked Starling *Spodiopsar cineraceus* in Arunachal Pradesh, India

On 26 January 2021, during the 15th Ziro Bird Walk along the main valley of Ziro (27.35°N, 93.49°E; 1,513 m asl), we encountered a starling that looked unusual to us. It seemed to have a mixture of the features of a Great Myna *Acridotheres grandis* and a Common Myna *A. tristis*. KM took some photographs, on the basis of which the bird was identified as a White-cheeked Starling *Spodiopsar cineraceus* [110]. The White-cheeked Starling breeds in north-eastern Asia and migrates to Japan, South Korea, south-eastern China, Hong Kong, and Taiwan in the winter, with stragglers reaching Myanmar, Thailand, and the Philippines (Craig & Feare 2020), and of late, India. Though unrecorded in the past (Choudhury 2006), there is an increasing number of records in the recent years from Arunachal Pradesh (Table 1; Fig. 1). In fact, all reports from India, till date, are from Arunachal Pradesh. It appears that the vagrancy of White-cheeked Starling into Arunachal Pradesh, from China, and Myanmar, is on the rise and the species may turn out to be a regular, though scarce migrant, in the future.



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109. White-cheeked Starling in Bhutan.



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110. White-cheeked Starling in Arunachal Pradesh.