

### The Daurian Starling *Agropsar sturninus* from Himachal Pradesh, India

The Daurian Starling *Agropsar sturninus* is a small, short-tailed, sexually dimorphic, and gregarious species of starling (Feare & Craig 1998). It breeds in eastern Mongolia, south-eastern Russia, north-eastern and central China and North Korea; and winters in Southeast Asia and Greater Sundas (Craig & Feare 2020). This note reports the first sighting of the Daurian Starling from Rakchham Chitkul Wildlife Sanctuary (WLS) in Himachal Pradesh, India.

In May 2025, HC, PM, BS, and PV visited Kinnaur District for birding. On the afternoon of 19 May 2025, they began scanning a patch of Sea-buckthorn *Hippophae rhamnoides* trees along the bank of Baspa River at Rakchham. The patch was c.800 m long and up to 70 m wide (31.388°N, 78.354°E; c. 3,120 m asl) [97]. This site marks the boundary of Rakchham Chitkul WLS and is surrounded by coniferous trees, village fields, and scattered houses. HC first spotted an unfamiliar bird on the branches, which was slightly smaller than Brahminy Starling *Sturnia pagodarum*, with creamy white underparts and glossy upperparts [98]. The lower mantle and back were glossy purple and there was a distinct glossy purple nape patch. The wings were a mix of glossy green and brown, featuring a prominent white scapular band. Based on its distinctive appearance, HC immediately identified the bird as an adult male Daurian Starling. It was photographed for about an hour before the group left the site. The following morning, the bird was again observed in the same area by the same group, and later that evening by AB. CA arrived at the site on the morning of 21 May 2025 and observed the bird until the afternoon [99]. The starling occasionally flushed into nearby tall conifer trees when disturbed by a helicopter or by the close approach of people, but otherwise remained bold and allowed close-up photography. The bird was actively feeding on the apetalous flowers of *Hippophae rhamnoides*, while ignoring the berries. It was frequently feeding on thin branches, holding two different branches with its feet for balancing itself while feeding [100]. Upon finding an insect, it was eagerly devouring it. Throughout the three days, it was observed within a 200 m stretch in this larger patch of *Hippophae* sp. After that, it was not seen again in the locality.

Until recently, the Daurian Starling was considered a vagrant in the Indian Subcontinent (Hume 1874; Abdulali 1965; Ali & Ripley 1987; Grimmett et al. 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), with only a handful of records from the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Sharma & Sangha 2012) and one from Tamil



Photo: C. Abhinav

97. Habitat shot at Rakchham, Kinnaur District, Himachal Pradesh.



Photo: Himanshu C

98. Daurian Starling at Rakchham on 19 May 2025.



99. Daurian Starling at Rakchham on 21 May 2025.



Both photo: C. Abhinav

100. Daurian Starling at Rakchham on 21 May 2025.

Nadu (Robson 1996). However, following numerous records since 2012, it is now considered as a regular winter visitor to the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Sharma & Sangha 2012; Kumar et al. 2024; Praveen 2025; Rawat et al. 2025), and as a sporadic visitor to Kerala and Tamil Nadu (Dilip K. G & Arun 2016; Praveen 2025). Outside these regions, the species remains a vagrant, with scattered records from Goa (Baidya & Bhagat 2018), West Bengal (Dutta 2017; Patra 2024, 2025), Sikkim (Bhutia 2018), and Arunachal Pradesh (Hussain 2019; Ganeshan 2022). The species has also been recorded in the Western Himalaya. It has been recorded on 17 June 2022 near Hanle at 4,302 m asl, in eastern Ladakh (Rawat et al. 2025). Another individual was sighted at Chuchot, Leh District, Ladakh at 3,219 m asl, from 06 June 2024 to at least 16 June 2024 (Mish 2024; Rawat et al. 2025). In Uttarakhand, a pair was observed in Chamoli District at 1,451 m asl on 16 May 2021, and a female was seen on 20 May 2022 (Kumar et al. 2024). The latter is the closest known record to the present sighting. Further north-west, in the Indian Subcontinent, the species has been reported from the Turikho Valley, Chitral, Pakistan, (probably the earliest known record of the species from the region) where a male was collected from a flock of 17 birds at 3,350 m asl on 16 July 1902 (Fulton 1904).

Although our record from Himachal Pradesh lies significantly west of the typical range of the species, it is not unexpected considering prior records from the northern regions of the Indian Subcontinent. All records from this part of the subcontinent occurred between mid-May to mid-July, and above 3,000 m asl, except for records from Chamoli (1,451 m asl). We found no previous records of the Daurian Starling from Himachal Pradesh in the literature, on social media, or in citizen science platforms. This appears to be the first documented record from Himachal Pradesh, and thus part of the limited number of observations from the Western Himalaya.

The Daurian Starling arrives at its northern breeding grounds in May, and departs from Russia in late July, and from Korea between September and October (Craig & Feare 2020). The individual observed in Rakchham Chitkul WLS was likely a migrant; however, its presence in the far west of the known breeding range raises interesting questions. It is intriguing that the latest five records have been reported from the Western Himalaya over the past five years, following a gap of more than a century. Whether these sightings represent vagrant individuals or indicate that some birds from the southern parts of the Indian Subcontinent might migrate through the Western Himalaya remains uncertain.

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## A case of possible cloacal protuberance in a Pale-billed Flowerpecker *Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*

The Pale-billed Flowerpecker *Dicaeum erythrorhynchos* occurs in India, southern Nepal, extreme western Bhutan, Bangladesh, western and central Myanmar, and also in Sri Lanka (Cheke & Mann 2020). It is a common and widespread resident in India (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). It is a small bird, with a pale, pinkish bill, grey-olive upperparts and pale underparts, showing no sexual dimorphism. The breeding period of the species is variable: In northern India and Nepal, its egg-laying period is from January–June, and in southern India it is from February–May (Cheke & Mann 2020), with a possibility of the species being double-brooded, laying a second clutch of eggs in August–September (Ali & Ripley 1999).

On 06 June 2017, we were birding in Aranmula (9.323°N, 76.699°E), Kerala. While documenting birds on our eBird Checklist (Chirukandoth 2017), it was observed that there was high activity of Pale-billed Flowerpeckers, with four birds continuously vocalizing and actively chasing each other through the canopies, possibly in a courtship display. An individual was observed perched on the lower branches of a shrub in the open and was photographed. It was noticed that there was a pinkish