

## Purple-backed Starling *Sturnus sturninus*: a new species for Nepal

SUCHIT BASNET and BADRI CHAUDHARY

On 10 May 2002, we saw a pair of starling-like birds at Koshi Tappu Wildlife Reserve at 75 m (26°38'N 87°00'E). The two birds were observed flying from the Koshi Camp marshes at Madhuban to a large pipal tree *Ficus religiosa* in the south-west corner of Koshi Camp. Both birds were watched from a distance of about 20 m with a 30x Optolyth telescope and 8x32 Leica binoculars. The birds were observed very well feeding on green pipal berries for about 20 mins in very good light at 06h40. They were identified as male and female Purple-backed Starling *Sturnus sturninus* using Grimmett *et al.* (1998).

One of the birds, which we presumed was a male, had the following features: the head was light grey with a dark patch on the nape; the bill was fine and dark; the mantle looked dark purple and showed a glossy tinge; the wings were glossy green-violet with two distinct white wing-bars, a small fulvous patch below the double wing-bar, and three to four white dots on the tertials; the tail was short, with white at the sides and light grey on the underside; the belly showed a small area of white; and the rump and undertail-coverts were fulvous or light brown.

The second bird, which we presumed to be a female, was very similar, but the mantle and back were duller and black-brown, and the rump and undertail-coverts were greyish-white. The birds fed silently during the period of observation.

The presence of Asian Pied Starlings *Sturnus contra* and Chestnut-tailed Starlings *Sturnus malabaricus* close to these two birds provided a good opportunity for comparison. The two Purple-backed Starlings were nearly the same size as Chestnut-tailed Starling, and much smaller than Asian Pied Starling. The lack of chestnut underparts, and the wing pattern described above, eliminated Chestnut-tailed Starling, whereas the size difference and lack of orange orbital skin, yellowish bill, and blackish head and throat eliminated Asian Pied Starling.

On 11 May 2002 at 06h40, we again saw similar birds in the same area. This time we counted five males and one female. We observed these birds at c.2 m height, at a distance of c.15 m with the same optical equipment. These resembled the original pair in plumage and behaviour.

These constitute the first records for Nepal. The species breeds from north-eastern Mongolia to north-eastern Russia, northern China and northern Korea, wintering in South-East Asia. Its status in Pakistan and India is described as vagrant by Grimmett *et al.* (1998).

### REFERENCE

Grimmett, R., Inskipp, C. and Inskipp, T. (1998) *Birds of the Indian subcontinent*. London: Christopher Helm.

Suchit Basnet and Badri Chaudhary, Koshi Camp (P) Ltd., PO Box 21016, Kathmandu, Nepal. Email: birdlife@mos.com.np

## Red Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicaria* in Rajasthan: the second record for India

HARKIRAT SINGH SANGHA and R. G. SONI

On 7 May 1995, RGS photographed a wader on an effluent depression at Jor-Bir, near Bikaner, Rajasthan, India (28°04'N 73°23'E). At the time, the bird was identified as Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*, and the print was subsequently labelled as such. The photograph was later scrutinised by HSS who reidentified the bird, with reference to Hayman *et al.* (1986) and Beaman and Madge (1998), as Red Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicaria*. Realising the rarity of the species in the Indian subcontinent, HSS sent copies of the photograph to S. Madge and K. Kazmierczak who confirmed the identity.

The forehead, throat, and underparts were white. A blackish-grey cap extended onto the hindneck, and a

dark mark through and behind the eye also extended on to the hindneck. The upperparts and wings retained some dark juvenile feathers, and the bird was aged as a first-winter by the considerable amount of grey admixed in the upperparts. The short, straight, thick bill was yellow at the base.

The Red Phalarope is a very rare bird in the Indian subcontinent, with only one record mentioned in Ali and Ripley (1980), Grimmett *et al.* (1998) and Kazmierczak and van Perlo (2000): a specimen 'in winter plumage' collected by Blyth in a Calcutta market on 11 May 1846 (Hume 1878). The species was not recorded again from the subcontinent until 1987 when an adult moulting out of breeding plumage was recorded