

The conditions were perfect with no wind, no cloud cover and with the light coming from behind. The whole period we watched the bird, it stayed on the same bare branch even after the Spot-winged Starlings left. We obtained eight digiscoped photographs. These are rather poor but do show the diagnostic head markings. The bird flew while we were busy with camera and field guides, and we were unable to record additional field marks in flight.

Our field notes provided the following description. The bird had the typical shape of a starling; it was smaller than the Spot-winged Starlings around it, and less elongated in shape, creating a stockier look. Its head was creamy-white with a rather big dark eye with a thin, pale eye-ring. The bill was rather long, pointed and black. On both the sides of the head was a brick-red cheek/ear-covert patch with extensions towards the throat and upper breast. The flanks were grey and the belly largely white. The white underparts started from the undertail-coverts, continued on the belly and ended in a point on the upper breast. The legs were greyish. The wings were glossy-black with a white, elongated shoulder-patch. The upperparts were dark grey to black, with no gloss observed, merging into a pale grey rump with a dark wedge in the middle.

Back at our accommodation we consulted our last available field guide, Grimmett *et al.* (1998), but this did not help either. It was only when we got home two weeks later and consulted other books including Robson (2000) and Feare and Craig (1998) that we identified the bird as a male Chestnut-cheeked Starling *Sturnus philippensis*. The identification was straightforward as there are only a few species of starling in Asia, none of which shows the combination of a dark upperparts and wings, pale head and a brick-red cheek/ear-covert patch. This is the first record of Chestnut-cheeked Starling in India and the Indian subcontinent.

This species breeds quite commonly in northern and central Japan and adjacent islands in Russia, but not on the Asian mainland. The wintering area spans the region between southern Japan and the Philippines. Due to the rather low numbers in the known wintering areas it appears

that the main wintering grounds have yet to be discovered (Feare and Craig 1998). On migration it is mostly seen in Japan but it also passes through eastern China, with good numbers on Taiwan. The first birds arrive in southern Japan in late March, moving north until they arrive in the breeding areas in April to early May. In their wintering areas, the last birds are usually seen in late April (Feare and Craig 1998).

Vagrants have been recorded in eastern Russia, northern Sulawesi, the Moluccas, peninsular Malaysia, Singapore and apparently in the U.S.A. (Feare and Craig 1998). In Thailand, their occurrence is quite recent, with several records in the last few winters (reports on the Bird Conservation Society of Thailand website, [www.bcst.or.th/eng/sighting.htm](http://www.bcst.or.th/eng/sighting.htm)). As Thailand is part of the wintering grounds of Spot-winged Starling it is quite possible that the Chestnut-cheeked Starling joined a flock of the former on their way back to India. Spot-winged Starlings breed in the foothills of the Himalayas in Nepal and further west. They winter from Assam east to north-western Thailand; westward migration through Assam and Nepal is in the period March–April. On their wintering grounds they often form mixed flocks with other starlings and mynas, and this suggests a way in which the Chestnut-cheeked Starling we observed may have found its way to India.

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Pierre van der Wielen, Rosmolen 67, 1703 NE, Heerhugowaard, The Netherlands. Email: [pvd.wielen@planet.nl](mailto:pvd.wielen@planet.nl)

## First record of Rufous-bellied Woodpecker *Dendrocopos hyperythrus* in Lao PDR

ROLAND EVE

On 20 March 2006, I recorded a Rufous-bellied Woodpecker *Dendrocopos hyperythrus* in dry dipterocarp forest south-west of Ban Tapouak village, Xekong province, Lao PDR, (15°33'35"N 106°42'02"E, 240 m) during a biodiversity survey project (Poulsen *et al.* 2006). The weather was clear and sunny and the bird was seen at a distance of c.15 m over a period of several minutes. It was watched drumming on a dipterocarp snag (c.25 cm in diameter) in good light. It was identified by its

conspicuous plain rufous underparts, contrasting grey around the eyes and on the lores, fine black and white barring on the upperparts, and a white-spotted black cap, indicating it was a female. No other woodpecker species has this combination of white-barrred black upperparts and rufous underparts.

The fact that the bird was seen showing territorial behaviour (drumming) suggests that the species breeds in the area. There is also a long-distance migrant population

that breeds in north-east Asia and winters southwards (Valchuk 2000), conceivably into Lao PDR. Four other woodpecker species were recorded the same morning at the same site, namely Grey-capped Pygmy Woodpecker *D. canicapillus*, Greater Flameback *Chrysocolaptes lucidus*, Black-headed Woodpecker *Picus erythropygius* and Laced Woodpecker *Picus vittatus*, amounting to a total of five species in this relatively small forest site.

This represents the first record of this species for Lao PDR. Previously, it had been listed for the country, through its collection by Harmand in 1875 at 'Kouys'. At this time 'Kouys' (= the land of the Kouy people) lay within Lao PDR, and Oustalet (1899) therefore published the record as from Lao PDR. Shortly afterwards, boundary changes meant that the whole Kouy territory now lies within Cambodia (Duckworth *et al.* 1999, Thomas and Poole 2003), although the Kouys records continued to be listed for Laos (e.g. King *et al.* 1975) until 1999. Rufous-bellied Woodpecker is recorded from Pakistan through the northern part of the Indian subcontinent, Myanmar, Thailand and Indochina, with a northerly extension through China to the Russian Far East (Robson 2000, Valchuk 2000). Across this species's vast range it occupies a wide variety of habitat, but the race *D. h. annamensis* which Kloss (1925) named from southern Vietnam and to which Lao (and the recently re-discovered Cambodian) birds presumably belong, evidently occurs only in dry dipterocarp forest, and seems to have a restricted distribution even within that habitat (W. Duckworth *in litt.* 2006).

Roland Eve, WWF Laos, P.O.Box 7871, House No. 39, Unit 05, Saylom Road, Saylom village, Chanthabouly district, Vientiane, Lao PDR. Email: roland.eve@wwfgreatermekong.org

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

I greatly thank Will Duckworth for reviewing and editing this note.

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# Differences in the diet of three Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* pairs nesting in Chukotka, north-east Russia

R. PROBST, M. PAVLICEV and R. SCHMID

Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* is distributed almost worldwide and its breeding range encompasses virtually all major climatic zones. It feeds mainly on medium-sized birds, which are often caught in mid-air. While much is known about its breeding and diet in some parts of its range (e.g. Europe and North America: Ratcliffe 1993), comparatively little information is available from the north-eastern Palaearctic even though it breeds regularly in this region (Stepanyan 1990, Ferguson-Lees and Christie 2001). Here we report our observations on the diet of nesting pairs of Peregrine Falcons in Chukotka, Russia.

## METHODS

During the course of two expeditions in 2001 and 2002 to south Chukotka, north-east Siberia, prey remains of

nesting Peregrine Falcons were opportunistically collected at one inland and two coastal locations. One pair was found about 20 km south of the capital Anadyr (Anadyr Bay, 64°44'N 177°30'E), one in the vicinity of the remote Cape Navarin (62°18'N 179°09'E), and another inland along the river Anadyr (65°29'N 173°18'E; Fig. 1).

The pair in the Anadyr Bay was first spotted on 3 June 2001 but neither adults nor juveniles were seen during a stay of about three hours, two months later (5 August). We concluded that a breeding attempt was unsuccessful, presumably because the falcons had been disturbed during our absence by the building of a fisherman's hut at the base of the breeding cliff. Feather remains of plucked prey were taken during our first visit. These samples were collected from the upper edge and vicinity (up to 150 m) of the nesting cliff, which was about 30 m high at this location.