

## Acknowledgements

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## Status of Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus* in Bangladesh

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Bangladesh remains one of the least heavily ornithologically inventoried countries in Asia, although this situation is now being reversed by a growing band of experienced local ornithologists under the auspices of the Bangladesh Bird Club and other organisations. JPB, ACL and RM spent most of March 2010 in coastal regions of Bangladesh undertaking an extensive survey for wintering Spoon-billed Sandpipers *Eurynorhynchus pygmeus* (Bird *et al.* 2010).

Between 16 and 19 March SUC, RM, JPB and ACL surveyed intertidal habitats around the Feni River estuary in the extreme north-east of the Bay of Bengal. On the evening of 17 March JPB and ACL were making their way back to the road across coastal grazing marshes at Char Fakura (22°47'N 91°21'E) when ACL found two Red-throated Pipits *Anthus cervinus* (images available on request) creeping through cattle pasture. The two observers were afforded prolonged views of the two birds (one of which was in adult-type plumage with a rusty-red breast and face). Aware that the species has rarely been recorded in Bangladesh, ACL obtained a number of digiscoped images to document the event. The birds were not associating with any other species although a single Rosy Pipit *Anthus roseatus*, five Richard's Pipits *A. richardi*, 10 Oriental Skylarks *Alauda gulgula* and 150 Pacific Golden Plovers *Pluvialis fulva* were present in the vicinity. ACL returned to the site after summoning SUC but the observers only managed to obtain brief flight views of the two birds.

The following day RM, JPB and ACL visited Char Chandia (22°48'N 91°24'E) and encountered another 15 Red-throated Pipits associated with a large flock of 350 'Eastern' Yellow Wagtails *Motacilla [flava] tschutschensis* and 80 Short-toed Larks *Calandrella brachydactyla*, with smaller numbers of Citrine Wagtails *M. citreola*, Oriental Skylarks, Richard's Pipits and Pacific Golden and Little Ringed Plovers *Charadrius dubius* also present in the same fields.

**Identification** A small, compact, relatively short-tailed pipit about the same size as Olive-backed Pipit *A. hodgsoni*. Winter-plumaged individuals were relatively nondescript: creamy-buff/-white underparts with dark streaks and quite heavily streaked buff-and-

black mantle, a streaked rump and crown. Although the first two individuals were located visually, many subsequent individuals were detected by the species's distinctive call, a squeaky, drawn-out *pssih*. Separation from other similar birds was relatively straightforward, the chief confusion species present in the region being Rosy Pipit. The two are separable at all times of year by Red-throated's short thin bill with a pale yellow base, as opposed to the robust, all-dark bill of Rosy Pipit; the narrower supercilium and pale lores of Red-throated Pipit, in contrast to Rosy's longer, more prominent supercilium with a 'drop' at the rear. The mantle of Red-throated Pipit was less heavily streaked than those of western populations with which we were familiar (see Alström & Mild 2003) and consequently more similar to Rosy Pipit, which is a more 'heavily built' bird overall. The summer-plumaged birds differed from summer-plumaged Rosy Pipits in their reddish (rather than pale pink) throat, upper breast and supercilium.

**Behaviour** The choice of habitat is typical for Red-throated Pipits, which preferentially forage in areas of short turf browsed by ungulates and, as here, often form mixed assemblages with *flava* wagtails (Cramp 1988, Alström & Mild 2003, pers. obs.) The birds typically foraged singly, presumably to avoid competition with both conspecifics and allospecifics. On several occasions they were observed feeding on larval insects, apparently crane-fly larvae (family Tipulidae), which have previously been recorded as an important item in the species's diet from both breeding and wintering areas (Cramp 1988).

**Status in Bangladesh** Although considered likely to occur by Rashid (1967), there are just four previous published records of Red-throated Pipit from Bangladesh (totalling eight individuals), all recorded during wetland surveys in the north-eastern haors during February–March 1992 (Thompson *et al.* 1994). Considering the abundance of suitable habitat in the delta region and the ubiquity of migrant flocks of *flava* wagtails, the 17 individuals we found may well represent the 'tip of an iceberg' of the number of individuals potentially passing through the region. Our records suggest that the Feni River delta may be a regionally important wintering or

passage site for a species that is uncommon to rare anywhere in the west of the Indian Subcontinent (Grimmett *et al.* 1998). Red-throated Pipit is one of many Siberian passerines with a significant migratory divide; despite breeding right across the Palaearctic tundra, there are no regular wintering areas between the Middle East and Myanmar (Alström & Mild 2003, Irwin & Irwin 2005). We encountered large migrant/wintering flocks of *flava* wagtails regularly during March in the Cox's Bazar region at the beginning of the month, and at Nijhum Dweep at the end of the month, but did not encounter any other Red-throated Pipits. It is perhaps significant that the large flock on 18 March were also associating with Short-toed Larks, as this is itself classified as a 'rare winter visitor' to Bangladesh (Siddiqui 2008), suggesting that flocks of both species may be transients rather than winterers. These areas at the western corner of the Meghna River Delta are poorly surveyed at any time of year, and especially so after February, when increasingly inclement weather makes surveying difficult.

Thus it seems most likely that these groups of Red-throated Pipits (and Short-toed Larks) represent transient individuals on a previously unrecognised migration route from their nearest westernmost regular wintering areas in Myanmar, through eastern Bangladesh to breeding grounds at high latitudes. The scant Subcontinent records from northern India, Nepal and Pakistan (Grimmett *et al.* 1998) are suggestive of a return route north-westwards avoiding the hostile topography of the Tibetan Plateau. Further surveys at peak migration periods will be required to understand the status of this species properly both in Bangladesh and further afield.

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## What is *Psittacus borneus*?

ROSEMARY LOW

Walters (1998) made the case for replacing *Eos bornea* with *E. rubra* as the scientific name for the Red Lory. *Psittacus borneus* was the name that Linnaeus gave to a parrot depicted in a 1751 plate by George Edwards entitled 'Long-tailed Scarlet Lory' (reproduced on the cover of *Forktail* 13). Walters wrote that 'For many years *Psittacus borneus* puzzled authors', since its plumage coloration did not adhere exactly to that of the Red Lory, then called *Eos rubra*. However, after Count Salvadori suggested it might be a variety of that species, Lord Rothschild seized on the idea favourably and thereafter the accepted name of Red Lory was *Eos bornea*, since Linnaeus's name preceded *rubra* by 30 years.

Walters (1998) consulted me about the Red Lory when he was preparing his paper, but I was unable to give him any information relating to the bird shown in Edwards's plate. However, after recently re-reading his paper I believe that I can now answer the question: what is *Psittacus borneus*? As a lory keeper of nearly 40 years' experience, during the past four years I have acquired four Black-winged Lorries *Eos cyanogenia*, two of which had abnormally coloured plumage which included small areas of green, especially in the wings,

and had a generally dull appearance. In this respect they resembled Edwards's plate of the 'Long-tailed Scarlet Lory'. These two birds were suffering from nutritional deficiencies when I received them, but at the next moult changed into fine specimens with normal, vibrant plumage. I therefore think it highly likely that Salvadori was right and that Edwards's plate depicts a Red Lory, but one which had received a poor diet.

Although I feel confident that this insight solves the question over the identity of Edwards's 'Long-tailed Scarlet Lory', I do not venture to say whether the Red Lory should again revert to the name *Eos bornea*, and leave that for students of nomenclature to consider.

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