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Some Observations on Migration of Red-Throated Thrush *Turdus ruficollis* through Mishmi Hills, Arunachal Pradesh, India

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ABSTRACT

The Red-throated Thrush is a winter migrant to Indian subcontinent. The species, especially its migration and the routes has been poorly covered by published materials. In this note observations on fairly large-scale migration through Mishmi Hills has been reported.

Key words: Red-throated Thrush, *Turdus ruficollis*, migration, Mishmi Hills.

INTRODUCTION

The Red-throated Thrush *Turdus ruficollis* is a winter visitor to Indian subcontinent and breeds in parts of Siberia, Mongolia and China (Ali and Ripley 1983, Collar 2019, Clement and Hathway 2000). Its range is mainly confined to northeastern (NE) India, Bhutan and Nepal only (Grimmett *et al.* 2011, Arlott 2014) with a smaller number of records west of Nepal (Abhinav and Rawal 2019). It may be mentioned here that it was earlier treated as a race of Dark-throated Thrush. For Arunachal Pradesh, Choudhury (2006) listed it as Dark-throated Thrush.

There has not been any published detail on migration and the routes of the Red-throated Thrush in northeastern India. I here, report of observations on fairly large-scale migration through Mishmi Hills as witnessed in 2004 with supplements from 2019 and recent photographic records.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

The observations were made with bare eyes as well as through a pair of binoculars. It was more as incidental observations owing to landslide and resultant

blockage of the road. Observations were noted in a field note book.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

In late March 2004, due to heavy early monsoon rain and resultant landslide I got stuck up in Mishmi Hills beyond Mayodiya Pass from 26 March to 2 April 2004. Initially I camped at 29th Mile Border Roads Task Force camp at Awali village, 500 m asl on the Ithun River, a tributary of the Dibang River, then at the Circuit House at Hunli and subsequently at 65th Mile labour camp. Hunli is located on a ridge and on almost three sides there were valleys. Hunli is at 1250 m asl. It was like a vantage position between Mayodiya Pass – Mehao Peak and the Ithun River Valley. Every morning I used to leave the Circuit House and drove to 65th Mile camp to enquire about the road block and return in the evening. This continued for five days.

There were gaggles of geese (largest was of about 250 geese, mostly Greylag *Anser anser*) and ducks in flocks flying north off and on. They flew at any time but mostly at night, evenings and mornings. At Awali, innumerable Black Redstarts *Phoenicurus ochruros*, Pied Wagtails *Motacilla alba* and Common

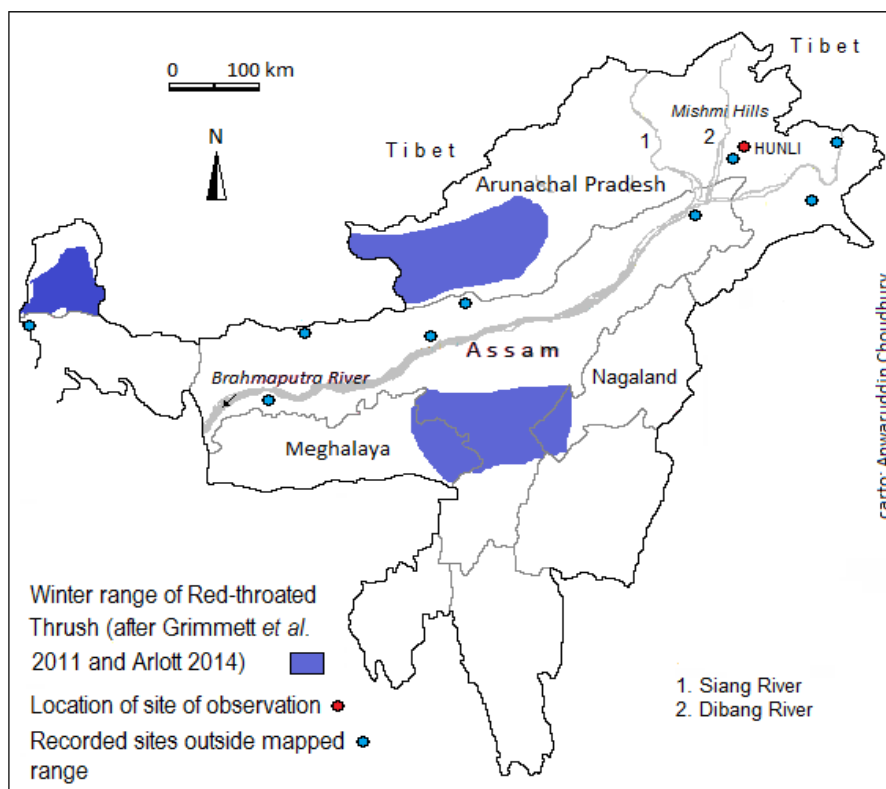


Figure 1. Map showing the range of Red-throated Thrush in NE India.

Stonechat *Saxicola torquata* were on passage, almost whole day (observed for two days). They were in singles but seen all around.

But it was some thrushes, which were not flying very high but low and perching in the poles and shrubs around the helipad of Hunli caught my attention. They were not in flocks as such but in loose formation, mostly singly and sometimes in twos (may be loose flocks) but continuously on the move. If a group of loose individuals left helipad and its surroundings, immediately another group replaced them and it continued. They were also observed above 65th Mile Camp at 2500 m asl. On observation I found them to be Black-throated and Red-throated Thrushes. At Hunli, they were totalling 30 to 35 birds each time, at least during my short observations of around an hour every morning, and majority were Red-throated species. On 29 March, I decided to count their relative proportion and came early from 65th Mile Camp to spend the evening near the helipad. Till dusk (after which there were birds but specific identification was difficult due to poor visibility), I counted 42 of which 35 were Red-throated species within an hour.

Mishmi Hills has two movement routes for migrating birds, these are the Dibang and Lohit rivers (Choudhury 2000) and the main districts include Dibang Valley, Lower Dibang Valley, Lohit and Anjaw. There were 26 observations in Lower Dibang Valley (eBird 2021a), two in Dibang Valley (upper

(eBird 2021b) and three in Anjaw (eBird 2021c). Many observations by different individuals were actually single observation done as a group. The total for the state of Assam till date was only 14 in eBird (eBird 2021d)! There were only 12 photos from whole of India in Oriental Bird Club images, another popular public domain (OBC 2021). This indicates that the species is relatively uncommon. However, these observations did not comment or report on migration.

It seems that after 2004, the subsequent information in the form of sighting or photograph was available in public domain only from around 2016 onwards as birdwatchers started to move in (only a handful of records from Mishmi Hills). Those observations were found out to be quite significant. Grimmett *et al.* (2011) and Arlott (2014) provided range maps (shown in blue in Fig.1). The map showed the Red-throated Thrush's range in NE India as Sikkim, western Arunachal Pradesh and the hills south of the Brahmaputra around Barail Range. They did not show eastern Assam or Mishmi Hills and also not the entire central and eastern part of Arunachal Pradesh (Fig. 1). The map in Rasmussen and Anderton (2012) showed Mishmi Hills but that was hypothetical as till then there were no records in public domain. Secondly, although short observation hours, there were relatively more Red-throated species than the Black-throated one although latter is more frequently seen in winter in the entire region. Presence of relatively more Red-throated species was observed on all eight days.

In 2019, from 24 March to 14 April I camped at Pasighat in East Siang district, which is located on another vital bird migration route through the Siang River. I did not come across any of these thrushes migrating although I must have missed some. Hence, Dibang Valley districts, which are also vital migration route of Common Cranes *Grus grus* (Choudhury 1994), is also a major route for these thrushes. Considering the fact that there are relatively a smaller number of records of Red-throated Thrushes in Assam (two museum records, 14 observations in eBird and a handful of sightings by me) and not too many in Arunachal Pradesh as well, probably Dibang river forms a major migration route for the species.

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