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Asian Pied Starling: A new addition to Avian diversity of Todgarh Raoli Wildlife Sanctuary, Rajasthan, India

C. S. Purohit¹, Mohan Singh², Partap Singh³, Abhinav Bharti⁴

¹Botanical Survey of India, Andaman & Nicobar Regional Centre, Port Blair, India

²Dept. of Zoology, Jai Narain Vyas University, Jodhpur, Rajasthan, India

³Dept. of Zoology, Govt. Dungar PG college, Bikaner, Rajasthan, India

⁴Raoli Range, Todgarh-Raoliwls, Rajasthan Forest Department, Rajasthan, India

Corresponding author: mssolanki12298@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with first sighting of Asian pied starling (Family: Sturnidae) and a new addition to avian diversity of Todgarh-Raoli wildlife sanctuary. It is the first confirmed photographic records from this sanctuary. Taxonomic description, distribution, vernacular name, present status, location map and photographs are provided here for its easy identification and is an updation of avian diversity of Todgarh-Raoli wildlife sanctuary.

Key words: New addition, Avifauna, Asian pied starling, Todgarh-RaoliWLS.

INTRODUCTION

India is known to harbor about 1313 bird species which represent about 12.5% of world's avifauna (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). Out of this, 634 bird species have been reported from Rajasthan state. In Todgarh-Raoli wildlife sanctuary 143 bird species had earlier been reported (Koli 2014; Sharma *et al.* 2015). This Sanctuary is situated between 73°40' to 74°10' east longitudes and 25°20' to 26°0' north latitudes which bears one of the most fragile ecosystems of Rajasthan *i.e.*, Aravalli Hills. It covers an area of about 495.27 km² and extends in three revenue districts *viz.* Rajsamand, Pali and Ajmer in the south-western part of Rajasthan State. It is one of the protected areas expressing full range of habitat of Aravalli ecosystem. These habitats provide shelter to wide range of fauna. It is significant bio-geographically also as the

sanctuary makes an ecotone between hilly forests of Aravallis and Thar Desert situated in the north-west. Numerous ornithological studies on diversity have been carried out in Rajasthan. However, protected areas have been less explored with regard to avian diversity. During our study on floral diversity, we came across certain new bird species which have hitherto not been reported from here.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The present study was an aim to document and update the diversity of birds from Todgarh-Raoli wildlife sanctuary. During the survey of sanctuary from year 2015 to year 2019, we have sighted 4 different bird species of family Sturnidae and one of them was new addition to avian diversity of WLS. All the bird species have been identified by using various

published literature and field guides (Ali & Ripley 1986; Beaman & Medge 1998; Grimmet et al. 1999).

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The family Sturnidae represents 10 species from Rajasthan. Out of this, 3 species had earlier been reported from this sanctuary (Koli 2014). During the survey and critical study, we find the photographic evidence of presence of Asian Pied Starling belonging to family Sturnidae, which is first record from this sanctuary.

Gracupica contra Linnaeus, 1758.

Taxonomic description: The bird is black and white with prominent white cheek patch and scapular line. It has orange orbital skin and pointed yellowish bill. During flight, white upper tail coverts contrast with black tail. There is no sexual dimorphism and the juveniles have black of plumage replaced by brown, and the white cheeks are washed with brown and less distinct. The breast band in juveniles is also not clearly defined (Fig. 1).



Fig. 1. Asian Pied Starling sighted in sanctuary

Distribution: According to Ali & Ripley (1983) three subspecies of Pied starling occur in India, but according to Grimmet *et. al.* (2005), two subspecies of *Gracupica contra* occur in India. *G. superciliaris* is confined to Manipur while *G. contra* is widely distributed in North, central and East India. The natural or original distribution range of this species extends over wide range in central south and south-east Asia through the countries Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan and Thailand.

In Rajasthan: According to Sharma (2004) the species is advancing west of 76⁰E longitude. He

reported occurrence of the species in Jaipur, Bhilwara, Jhunjhunu, Udaipur, Ajmer (Kishangarh, Nasirabad, Ajmer city), Chittorgarh, Sirohi, Pali (Sadri, Pali city), Barmer, Bikaner, Jodhpur, Jaisalmer, Nagaur, Sikar, Hanumangarh, Alwar, Tonk, Bundi and Kota. Though Sharma (*loc. cit.*) reported it from Bikaner, during our bird surveys from last 15 years, we have only observed the vagrants in the year 2014 and never after that. The species is one of the most adaptable species among starlings in term of food and feeding behaviour and nest site selection. There is no doubt the species will soon extend its range of distribution in whole of the Desert due to changes in ecological conditions being brought by Indira Gandhi Nahar Canal and Global Climate Changes.

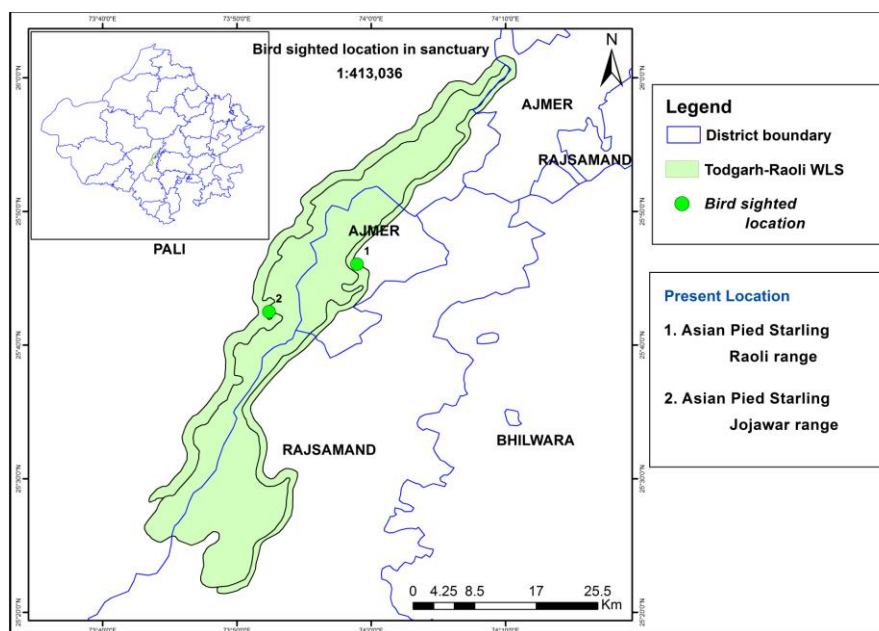


Fig. 2. Map of Asian Pied Starling in sanctuary

Vernacular name: Ablaki Myna

Status: Least concern (IUCN red list).

Note: It is found in association with cattle egret on the foraging in grazing grounds along with some others bird species. They are seen picking up grubs, caterpillars, worms, beetles and other insects. This species is predominantly insectivores and ground feeding. It is found in flocks during non-breeding season, commonly in association with other Mynas, near villages and human habitations. It is potential control agent of hairy caterpillar's pest in tea plantation of north-east Asia. Considering the new reports and the expansion in its distribution range, it is conjectured that the species will extend to North-west and Western part of India.

Location with GPS: Todgarh-Raoli wildlife sanctuary, Raoli Range, Tilakheda, 05. Sept. 2019, 25°46'3.767"N, 73°58'56.099"E, 495.2m; Jojawar Range, Saran forest naka, 25°42.496'N & 73°50.586'E, 378m (Fig. 2).

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