

of the nest in its beak and shook it vigorously, dislodging two eggs that fell out of the nest. It then dismantled the nest until it had completely lost its striking cup shape. All this was done even while the orioles attacked it in vain. The koel then flew from the tree, producing 18–20 syllables of its water bubbling call. The Black-headed Orioles chased it for a long distance, but later returned to the nest site.

During this year's breeding season (evening of 12.vi.2006) we observed a single Black-headed Oriole chasing a female Asian Koel from its nesting site (orchards within Matri Sadan Ashram, Haridwar) indicating the possibility that the Black-headed Oriole could be one of the host species of the Asian Koel.

Asian Koel is a well-known brood parasite. However, not all its hosts are known (Desholm & Wegeberg 1997). In the Indian Subcontinent, House Crow *Corvus splendens* and Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos* are its usual hosts (Grimmett et al. 1998). Additionally, orioles have also been reported as occasional hosts (Ali & Ripley 1969). In Malaysia, Black-collared Starling *Sturnus nigricollis* and five species of Myna (Sturnidae) (Glenister 1959) and in Australia, 21 avian species have been reported as hosts of the Asian Koel (Brooker & Brooker 1989).

In the present observation, the behaviour of the Asian Koel seems quite strange. Neither did it lay eggs in the oriole's nest nor feed upon its eggs. Is it possible that the Asian Koel tried to deposit its egg(s) in the nest of Black-headed Oriole but due to vigilance could not—hence its aggression?

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## New records on the wintering range of Variable Wheatear *Oenanthe picata opistholeuca* from northern India

Arun P. Singh

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Arun P. Singh, Entomology Division, Forest Research Institute, P.O. New Forest, Dehradun 248006, Uttaranchal, India. Email: [singhap@icfre.org](mailto:singhap@icfre.org).

The Variable Wheatear *Oenanthe picata* occurs as three regional forms, *O. p. capistrata*, *O. p. picata* and *O. p. opistholeuca*, variously considered as morphs or distinct species that have different ranges and require further taxonomic study. The species is known to occur as a summer visitor (March–September) to Afghanistan, northern Pakistan and Kashmir, 600–3,300 m (mainly 1,800–2,400 m) and winters in southern Afghanistan, eastern Pakistan and western India, straggling into Nepal, and the Indian states of western Madhya Pradesh and northern Maharashtra. Its habitat includes barren rocky country, along steep riverbanks, sparsely vegetated stony plains, ravines and sand dunes, old fields and around settlements, from sea level to 12,000 m, where it is locally abundant. The male of the race *opistholeuca* is entirely black apart from rump, base of tail and vent, female is dark brown in place of black. Its wintering range has been depicted as the northern areas of Pakistan (see map) and does not include any part of India (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005).

However, I have three sightings of *O. p. opistholeuca* from northern India within the last two decades. These sightings

are from the low-lying areas of Himachal Pradesh and Uttaranchal (see map), as described below.

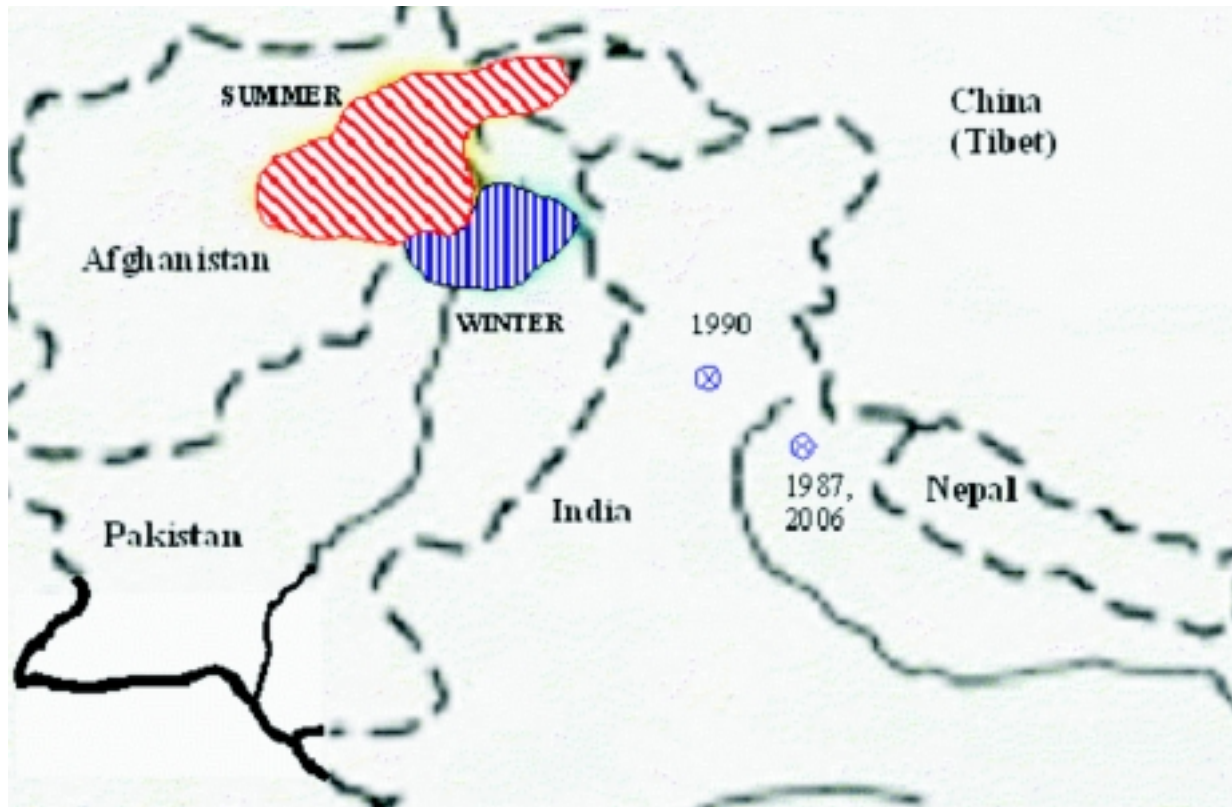
1. Tons River valley (30°21'N 78°00'E) adjoining the New Forest campus, Dehradun valley, Uttaranchal. A male was observed feeding on a dry riverbed in scrub along a ravine on 3.i.1987 and 8.i.1987 (Singh 2000).
2. Bairchha village (31°08'N 76°40'E), Nalagarh district, Solan, Himachal Pradesh. The site is located at the base of the Himalayan foothills and bordering Punjab. Here a male was recorded feeding on the ground, perching on large boulders in open, dry scrub during peak winter (January 1990). It was observed for about a week at the same place.
3. New Forest (30°21'N 78°01'E), Dehradun, Uttaranchal. A female was recorded in the Forest Research Institute, main building (a large structure) and its front lawns (big) from January to February 2006 (peak winter) at one place. For foraging, it preferred to remain within the reach of the building that it chose as a shelter for hiding upon threat perceived from raptors like Shikra *Accipiter badius* and for roosting.

The call 'check-check', was heard at times. Here it's habitat was shared with Brown Rock-Chat, *Cercomela fusca*.

These observations suggest that during peak winter, the range of *O. p. opistholeuca* extends to the lower west Himalayan foothills of India.

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Map depicting the distribution range of *Denanthe picata opistholeuca* (source: Rasmussen & Anderton, 2005) in the Indian Sub-continent along with sites where it has also been recorded in India during winter.

## Addition of Grey-headed Starling *Sturnus malabaricus* to the avifauna of Keoladeo National Park, India

Taej Mundkur, Laxmikant Mudgal & Alan Martin

(Photo by Taej Mundkur)

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Taej Mundkur, Wetlands International – South Asia, Swarankit, Plot No 6, Mahatma Housing Society, Kothrud, Pune City 411038, India. Email: [tajmundkur.wi@vsnl.net](mailto:tajmundkur.wi@vsnl.net)

Laxmikant Mudgal, Laxman Vaitka, Fatehpur Sikri Road, P.O. Barso, Bharatpur 321001, Rajasthan, India. Email: [l.k.mudgal2004@yahoo.com](mailto:l.k.mudgal2004@yahoo.com)

Alan Martin, The Wetland Trust, Alureds Oast, Northiam, East Sussex, TN31 6JJ, United Kingdom. Email: [alanmart@globalnet.co.uk](mailto:alanmart@globalnet.co.uk)

**O**n the morning of 21.x.2005, we briefly visited Keoladeo National Park at Bharatpur in Rajasthan state, and were observing and photographing birds along the stretch of the main road where there are a large number of trees that form a canopy. In an *Acacia nilotica* tree while observing a flock of Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* and Bank Myna *Acridotheres ginginianus* feeding noisily, we

noticed a single Grey-headed Starling *Sturnus malabaricus* with the group.

The bird was observed clearly for a short while and it was photographed. The photographs confirm that the bird had a distinctive grey head and upperparts, lighter forehead, rufous under parts and a chestnut and grey tail. From this it is clear that it is the northern race of the Grey-headed Starling *S. m. malabaricus*.