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Cover Page Footnote

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NEW RECORD OF ASIAN PIED STARLING (*GRACUPICA CONTRA CONTRA*) FROM KALAR KAHAR (PAKISTAN)

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ABSTRACT

A pair of Asian Pied Starling or Pied Myna (*Gracupica contra contra*) was sighted in reed vegetation present around Kalar Kahar Lake (northwestern Salt Range, Pakistan). Subspecies has been sighted for the first time west of Sialkot and Lahore. Further studies are required to determine the status of the population of the subspecies in Kalar Kahar to suggest an extension in distribution range of the species.

INTRODUCTION

Asian Pied Starling or Pied Myna (*Gracupica contra*), family Sturnidae was previously included in genera *Sturnus* and *Sturnopastor*. Recent molecular studies suggested its placement in a separate genus leading to reinstatement of the older genus; Zuccon et al. (2008). According to Lovette et al. (2008), Asian Pied Starling is a bird found at the foothills of Indian subcontinent up to some 700 m above sea line (asl), often seen close to human settlements, especially in areas with access to open water (Ali and Ripley, 1986). *Gracupica contra contra* is a common bird of the Gangetic plains, extending south into Andhra Pradesh in the west and Bangladesh in the east (Rasmussen and Anderton, 2005). The western range of distribution of this sub-species mainly remains within territorial limits of India (Ali and Ripley, 1986); (Rasmussen and Anderton, 2005).

There are indications that population of *G. c. contra* is expanding its western distribution range (Feare and Craig, 1998). Populations of this subspecies were previously established in Rajkot (22°18'34.54 NL, 70°49'32.71E) by Raol

(1966) and in Bombay (19° 4'34.37 NL, 72°52'39.55oE) by George (1971). The westward extension of its distribution range into Rajasthan (27° 1'25.70 NL, 74°13'4.56 E) has been ascribed to changes in irrigation and farming pattern (Sharma, 2004).

Sighting of this species was rare in Pakistan, limited to its eastern border districts of Narowal (32° 6'25.56 NL, 74°52'6.74 E) and Sialkot (32°29'23.76 NL, 74°31'38.45 E:) (Feare and Craig, 1998). Presence of a breeding population of the subspecies has been reported from Lahore (31°32'38.63.NL, 74°18'44.85.E:) (Murtaza, 1997). There is an unconfirmed report on sighting of birds of this sub-species in Islamabad (33°43'3.09.NL, 73° 5'24.04 E:) (BirdLife International, 2009). This paper reported sighting of the bird from Kalar Kakar, a town located between Lahore and Islamabad.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

Kalar Kahar (32°46'30.78 NL, 72°42'29.42 E) is a small picnic town in the northwestern parts of the Salt Range (District Chakwal, Pakistan), located at crow flight distance of some 218 and 207 km northwest of Narowal and Lahore,

respectively, and 112 km south of Islamabad (33°43'3.09.NL, 73° 5'24.04 E) (Figure I).

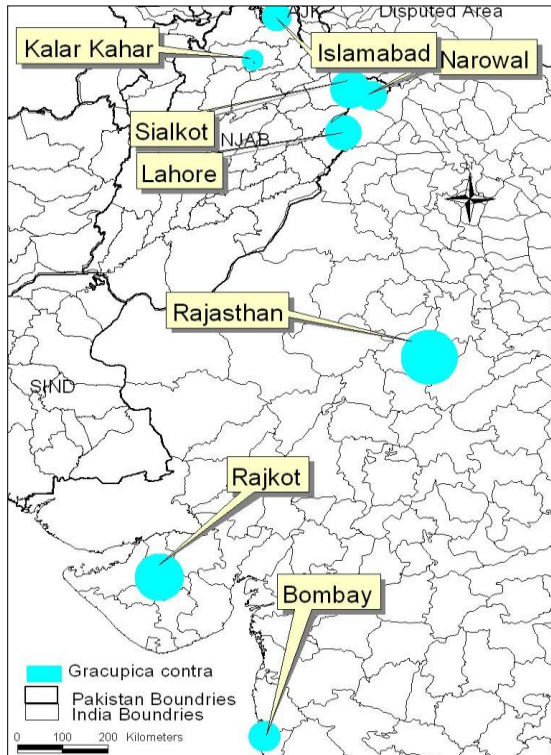


Figure 1: Map of the Area showing Asian Pied Starling (*Gracupica contra*) reported.

This town is present in a natural depression in the midst of a cup-shaped valley, surrounded by low hills, working as a catchment area, falling at 615 m asl without a natural drainage. The salt lake of Kalar Kahar is surrounded by concentric circles of different types of reed vegetation.

The area was visited at regular intervals during different parts of 2011 for sighting avifauna under CBR Bird Watcher Club, and photographs of the unusual records were taken.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION

A pair of Asian Pied Starlings was recorded perching on reed vegetation present around Kalar Kahar Lake on November, 2011 (Figure 2). Birds persisted in the area throughout the day and remained together perching on reed vegetation around

the lake. Sex of these birds could not be confirmed in the field. The species/subspecies was identified using the existing literature (Robert, 1996; Mirza, 2007)

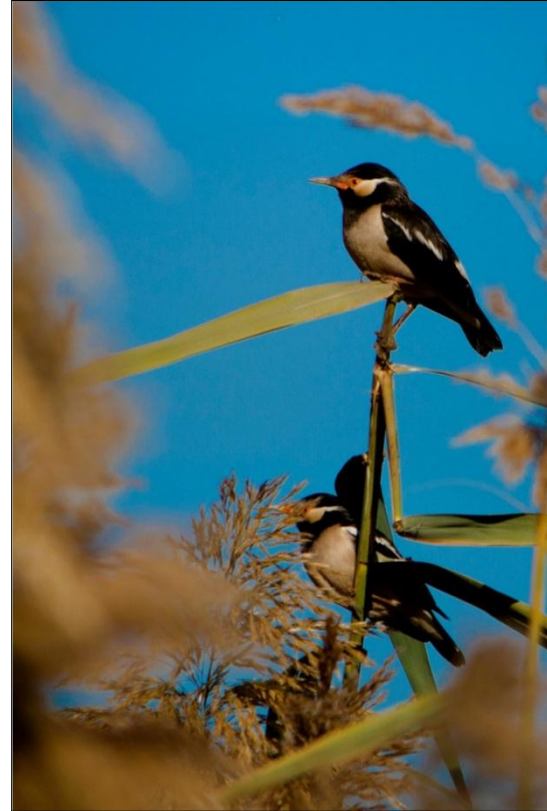


Figure 2: Asian Pied Starling *Gracupica contra* from Kalar Kahar.

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