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Rosy Starling *Sturnus roseus*: a new species for Thailand

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On Friday, 28 March 1986 I was driving north along the shore road at Khao Sam Roi Yot National Park, Prachuab Khirikhan province (12°08'N 99°59'E). I stopped to look at some waders on the lagoons and, whilst scanning with my binoculars, examined a line of starlings Sturnidae on a telephone wire some 40 m away. The small flock was comprised of about 30 Common Mynas *Acridotheres tristis*, six Asian Pied Starlings *Sturnus contra* and another individual which immediately caught my attention because it was bright pink.

I observed the bird for about 30 secs before it took off and flew east with the rest of the flock. I obtained the following brief description: size and structure similar to those of the Asian Pied Starlings alongside, but perhaps a little smaller; head, throat and upper breast, wings, tail and undertail-coverts black; mantle, upper breast and belly bright salmon-pink; bill yellow.

From this brief observation I concluded that it was an adult Rosy Starling *Sturnus roseus*. Although I searched for 15 minutes amongst the dunes in which the bird had disappeared it was not seen again.

An adult Rosy Starling, presumed to be a different individual, was seen by P. D. Round, in mid-May 1986, in the aviary of Siam Farm, an animal trading company in Bangkok. The proprietor of the company mentioned that the bird had been trapped in Langsuan district, Chumphon province, c. 200 km south of Khao Sam Roi Yot.

The species breeds from central and south Russia, and occasionally in south-east Europe, across central Asia to the Altai mountains and south to northern Afghanistan (Sibley and Monroe 1990). It winters in the Indian subcontinent (Ali and Ripley 1987). It is nomadic in its behaviour, frequently

occurring outside of its normal range and, since it migrates on a north-west to south-east axis, its occurrence in Thailand is perhaps not surprising.

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Plain Sunbird *Anthreptes simplex* feeding on arils of acacia seeds

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Three Plain Sunbirds *Anthreptes simplex* were seen on the edge of the Universiti Pertanian Malaysia forest reserve near Ayer Hitam, c. 20 km south-west of Kuala Lumpur, Peninsular Malaysia on 20 July 1993. They were identified by their olive upperparts, grey throat, dull yellow underparts, red eyes and short dark bills. Only one bird had a dark patch on the forehead, which I did not see reflecting light. As they moved amongst the phyllodes of acacia trees (*Acacia mangium*) they behaved more like warblers than sunbirds. When I watched them more closely I realised that they were taking the orange-red arils which attach the seeds to the pods. Although they were swallowing the arils I could not see if they also consumed the seeds. One bird was present for at least 20 minutes.

The aril in acacias is a fleshy appendage which has grown from the apex of the ovule along the seed stalk. It is often brightly-coloured and is frequently consumed by insects such as ants; it can contain high concentrations of fat and protein (Glyphis *et al.* 1981). Honeyeaters (Meliphagidae) and a few other birds in Australia consume the red or yellow funicles of several acacia species (Forde 1986). *Acacia cyclops* has been introduced into South Africa from Australia and its arils and seeds are eaten by a variety of birds there (Middlemiss 1963). *Acacia mangium* is native to northern Australia and has been planted widely in South-East Asia for timber and pulp.

I know of no account of birds consuming acacia arils in South-East Asia, nor of sunbirds eating them anywhere. However, Plain Sunbirds and

Purple-naped Sunbirds *Hypogramma hypogrammicum* have been recorded eating the fruits of *Poikilospermum* (Urticaceae) in East Malaysia, and fruit may be an important food of both species (Lambert 1991). Ornithologists in the region should look for other birds using this new food source.

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The distribution of nests of the Black-and-Red Broadbill *Cymbirhynchus macrorhynchus* along a river in Sarawak

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The Black-and-red Broadbill *Cymbirhynchus macrorhynchus* constructs a gigantic pear-shaped nest, usually overhanging a river or stream (Medway and Wells 1976, Smythies 1981) and is most easily seen when travelling by boat. During the course of fieldwork in the Sri Aman Division of Sarawak in June and September 1993, counts were made of the number and distribution of Black-and-red Broadbill nests along the Lingga River. Counts were from the town of Pantu on the River Seterap to its confluence with the River Kelauh and thence down the River Lingga until the point it meets the River Lupar - an overall distance of about 30 km.

During June 1993 a total of 27 nests was counted and they were distributed as follows:

two nests in the approximately 5 km freshwater zone above the estuary in the River Seterap suspended from *Pandanus* vegetation along the bank.

23 nests in trees of tidally inundated swamp (rain) forest along the river edge in the tidal reaches of the River Seterap, a distance of about 10 km - three of the nests had birds in attendance.

two nests in the well developed and tall (up to 25 m) mangroves in the upper reaches of the Lingga River estuary.

No nests were recorded in the mangroves of the last 10 km or so of the Lingga River.

During September 1993 only 14 nests were counted and all were in the riparian swamp forest of the River Seterap. None was observed in the *Pandanus* or in the mangroves. Also none of the nests was attended.

From the distribution of nests the species appears to prefer nesting in the riparian swamp forest. Although the observed distribution could be due to the greater availability of suitable branches overhanging the water in this forest, compared with *Pandanus*, which offers fewer possible nest sites, this is unlikely to be the reason for few nests occurring in the mangroves. The mangroves offer a greater variety of potential over-water nest sites but the vegetation behind the mangroves often consists of secondary forest or subsistence agriculture. The distribution of nests is perhaps more closely related to the food requirements of the birds. Suitable fruit and/or insects for feeding to mates or young in the nest (Lambert 1989) may only occur in the swamp forest areas. It is also possible that the availability of freshwater in swamp forests may be important.

Nest records for the Black-and-red Broadbill in Borneo are between December and August (Fogden 1965, Lambert and Woodcock in prep.); from Peninsular Malaysia between February and August (Medway & Wells 1976, Lambert and Woodcock in prep.); from Thailand between April and June, and from Sumatra from March to June (Lambert and Woodcock in prep.). Hence the absence of birds around nests during September is not surprising. However, the reasons for the disappearance of nests between June and September are obscure. Three other nests of this species occurring along a forest stream near Lingga persisted over the same period. As this is a relatively dry time of year, the loss is unlikely to have been due to flooding. Also, despite the large tidal range (4 to 5 m), all nests were well above the height of high water springs. It is possible that nests were dislodged by wind or heavy rain or that they fell victim to predators. Jeyarajasingam (1983) records the sudden disappearance of the nest of a Silver-breasted Broadbill *Serilophus lunatus* which contained young, probably due to predation. A considerable number of potential bird, reptile and mammalian predators is present in the Lingga area, such as various raptors, *Varanus*, snakes, civets and monkeys. No published records or observations of such predation could be traced. However, the nests of tropical birds are frequently predated, and the often nocturnal predators are seldom seen. Removal by humans also cannot be ruled out, although appears unlikely in this environment.