

First record of Wire-tailed Swallow *Hirundo smithii* for China, with notes on Alexandrine Parakeet *Psittacula eupatria* and Rose-ringed Parakeet *P. krameri*

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Ruili, Dehong county, in extreme south-west Yunnan, China lies very close to the border with Myanmar and it has recently become the focus of several birding trips (e.g. Hornskov 1999, Hornbuckle 2002). Visiting foreign birders have even found the first records for China of a number of species, including Black-backed Forktail *Enicurus immaculatus* (Jan H. Christensen at Jiele Reservoir in early 1992 [*vide* Hornskov 1999] and seen by several other observers, including PIH, on subsequent visits) and Rufous-chinned Laughingthrush *Garrulax rufogularis* (one on 11 March 1999: Dymond and Thompson 2000). I spent nine days birding around Ruili during 8–16 January 2004, and I was fortunate enough to record the first Wire-tailed Swallows *Hirundo smithii* for China, and two parakeet species of uncertain origin.

Wire-tailed Swallow

At least five adult Wire-tailed Swallows were seen over the Zhong Mian river between Wanding and Li Xin, west of Ruili, at 24°05'N 98°03'E and 785 m, at about 10h30 on 10 January 2004. Using 10× binoculars and a 30× telescope, I watched them, on and off, for about 20 minutes. I knew that they were not in the standard field guide to the region (MacKinnon and Phillipps 2000) and suspected that they were previously unrecorded in China. Consequently I took some field notes and photographed three of the birds as they were perched on wires together with Barn *H. rustica* and Striated Swallows *H. striolata*. I was familiar with the species from experience at numerous sites in India.

The birds were similar to Barn Swallow, but their noticeably smaller size and daintier appearance with a distinctive, truncated, square-cut rear end, and proportionately broader-based (and perhaps shorter) wings and weaker flight all drew my attention. All five birds had gleaming white underwing-coverts that contrasted very sharply with the dark underside of the flight feathers. The rest of the underparts, including the chin and throat, were also white and unmarked. A smallish, apparently forward-tilted chestnut cap was well demarcated from both a bluish facial mask (extending narrowly through the eye onto the lores) and from the glossy, rich blue upperparts. The upperparts from the nape to the rump were noticeably glossier and bluer than those of Barn Swallow, especially on the mantle, scapulars and upperwing. A wispy, filamentous, elongated shaft extended from both of the outermost tail feathers for a distance of about 1.5 times the basal width of the wings. These streamers were often difficult to discern in flight but were readily apparent when the birds perched on overhead wires. All five birds appeared very similar, although there were slight differences in the lengths of the tail streamers, perhaps related to differences between the sexes.

Wire-tailed Swallow is considered to be a rare or uncommon resident, subject to local movements, in Myanmar (C. Robson *in litt.* 2004). It has been recorded from Bhamo in Kachin state, northern Myanmar (c.50 km from the Chinese border and c.65 km from Ruili) where Harington (1909–1910) found that it was the common swallow of the district, although he saw no signs of nesting.

Alexandrine and Rose-ringed Parakeets

One Alexandrine Parakeet *Psittacula eupatria* was seen with a party of nine Rose-ringed Parakeets *P. krameri* at Nongmo Hu (Ruili Lake), at 24°00'N 97°50'E and 770 m at 17h45 on 12 January 2004. I was previously familiar with both species. I observed them with the same optical equipment as mentioned above, and also photographed them.

The distinctive raucous flight calls of the Alexandrine Parakeet was the first thing that attracted my attention, but it was a full two minutes or so before I eventually located a single bird that was perched, with a Rose-ringed Parakeet, near the top of a distant stand of tall bamboo. The two birds remained visible for about five minutes before both dropped out of sight, and I assumed that they had gone to roost. They were probably over 800 m away but, even at this range, using a telescope on up to 60× magnification, I was able to confirm my initial tentative identification, obtain a couple of poor images and make a few rudimentary field notes.

Both species were obviously 'green-headed parakeets'. The Alexandrine was clearly the larger of the two (by perhaps as much as 15–20%) and had a proportionately much larger head, relatively broader 'shoulders' and a tail that appeared thicker throughout its length. It also had a very conspicuous massive red bill. It took me a long time to confirm the presence of red 'shoulder-patches', these feathers being concealed much of the time by overlapping scapulars. At this range I was unable to see whether the Rose-ringed Parakeet had a narrow loreal stripe and a black collar that extended completely around the back of the neck, and that the Alexandrine Parakeet lacked these features. However, both were confirmed c.15 minutes later when I again heard what I assumed was the same Alexandrine Parakeet. It was flying towards me and was now with a group of nine Rose-ringed Parakeets. Fortunately all ten birds alighted in a tree less than 100 m away. I was able to observe them for a couple of minutes before they flew off south (presumably to roost). In flight views the Alexandrine Parakeet's extensive red lesser-covert 'shoulder-patch' was clearly visible. When the bird was perched, I confirmed the lack of black on the bird's lower mandible. I could also see that the narrow black stripe that extended from the bird's chin and curved back

around the side of the neck was short, and that it did not extend around the back of the neck as it did on the Rose-ringed Parakeets. Instead there was a fairly prominent pinkish hind-collar that was broader than that on the accompanying Rose-ringed Parakeets.

Alexandrine Parakeet is considered to be a scarce or locally common resident in Myanmar (except south Tenasserim) (C. Robson *in litt.* 2004). It has also been recorded at Bhamo, where Fea apparently noted it sometime in 1885–1886 (see Salvadori 1887) and described it as ‘found generally in numerous small groups’. There is also a specimen of Alexandrine Parakeet collected at Bhamo in the Natural History Museum, Tring, U.K. (S. Schoedel *in litt.* 2004). Robson (*in litt.* 2004) considered Rose-ringed Parakeet to be a locally common resident in Myanmar (except south Tenasserim) but there appear to be no historical records of Rose-ringed Parakeet from Bhamo or elsewhere in Kachin state, although the species was recently encountered there by van der Ven (2001). Rose-ringed Parakeet is recorded as a resident in eastern Myanmar, in the northern Shan States (as are the other two species) in a distribution list lacking details in Smythies (1953). The next closest records are to the south-west, in central Myanmar, from Shwebo (Sagaing Division), where it was found to be common by Roseveare (1949).

Rose-ringed Parakeet was described by Cheng (1987) as ‘very rare in the wild’ in China; he listed it from Hong Kong, Macao and Zhuhai in Guangdong. Unfortunately he did not make it clear whether he regarded these records as relating to a native or a feral population, but Carey *et al.* (2001) noted that ‘in the absence of records in China away from the Pearl River region, there is little doubt that the populations in Hong Kong and nearby are all of captive origin’. The Hong Kong population, introduced early in the 1990s, remains the only one in China about which there appears to be any information, although free-flying birds have also been seen in Macao in recent years (Liu Yang *in litt.* 2004). Rose-ringed Parakeet remains a popular cage bird throughout China, and it is possible that my Ruili sightings of this and Alexandrine Parakeet relate to free-flying escaped birds. This origin is perhaps all the more likely as N. Farrell (*in*

litt. 2004) reported what were probably the same birds (‘between eight and ten’) in this area on two dates between 28 January and 4 February 2003, and again ‘about eight’ there around 22 February 2004.

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Cooperative provisioning of nestlings in the White-crested Laughingthrush *Garrulax leucolophus*

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Most species of laughingthrush (Garrulacinae) are strongly social birds and some have long been suspected to be cooperative breeders, although none was identified as such in a recent review by Ligon and Burt (2004). Unlike some confirmed social breeders (e.g. *Turdoides* babblers, found in open, arid or semi-arid habitats, and relatively easily observed), laughingthrushes are usually shy denizens of dense, moist forest which renders detailed observation difficult. I present here the results of brief and opportunistic observations of a White-crested Laughingthrush *Garrulax*

leucolophus nest in Huai Kha Khaeng Wildlife Sanctuary, Uthai Thani province, Western Thailand (15°36′N 99°16′E), which indicate that the species is a cooperative breeder.

I was watching at least five White-crested Laughingthrushes in relatively open deciduous woodland at the sanctuary headquarters on the afternoon of 12 August 2005, when one member of the group flew in to a large, untidy cup-nest that I had not previously noticed. The nest was situated in a small leafy tree, close to the trunk, at a height of about 5 m, and contained two well-