

October 1991 by Balachandran and Alagar Rajan (1994). Based on their earlier bird ringing experiences Balachandran and Alagar Rajan (1994) also suggested that some individuals of this species had been mistaken for the *Lanius cristatus cristatus* on the assumption that the plumage difference (greyish white head for *lucionensis* and brown for *cristatus*) was due to age. On January 22, 1999, two individuals of *L.c. lucionensis* were caught and ringed at Parambikulam Wildlife Sanctuary in the Western Ghats of Kerala. Though this species was recorded in 1876 by Hume (1876) in Kerala, it is not listed in the BIRDS OF KERALA by Ali (1969). Hence, this record is not only the second authentic record for Kerala, but from the Western Ghats too. Hume (1876) stated that the plumage characters of the only specimen collected from Kerala did not agree with the specimens obtained from China and the Andamans. The Philippine Shrikes caught at Parambikulam matched with the birds ringed at Point Calimere. However, the Philippine Shrikes caught and observed at Andamans in February 2000, varied in plumage characters

from the mainland (Point Calimere and Parambikulam) specimens. The fore-crown of the individual caught at Andamans was paler than the individuals caught at Parambikulam and Point Calimere. The paler fore-crown of the bird handled at Andamans suggests that the wintering population of the Andamans may be from a different geographical population.

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11. SIGHTING OF BLACK-THROATED THRUSH *TURDUS RUFICOLLIS ATROGULARIS* IN THE DESERT NATIONAL PARK, JAISALMER, RAJASTHAN¹

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At about 1150 hrs on December 03, 2006, while returning from the Sudasri, Desert National Park to Jaisalmer, after birdwatching in the morning, John Penhallurick and I saw a Black-throated Thrush *Turdus ruficollis atrogularis* foraging close to the road near Sam village. We observed and photographed the bird for about five-six minutes. Fortunately, the bird was not shy and allowed close approach to be well observed. The bird was identified as a first winter male Black-throated Thrush.

Black-throated Thrush occurs in winter across Pakistan from the North Western Frontier Province (NWFP) through Baluchistan to the Makran Coast, Sind; the Himalayas and adjacent plains from the Indus Valley and Gilgit eastward through Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Assam and Bangladesh. Its extension into the plains is governed by winter conditions. The species

has occurred fairly often south to Jhang, Ludhiana, Bharatpur and Gorakhpur and has been recorded as far south as Anantpur, Andhra Pradesh and once in Jakhau, Kutch (Ali and Ripley 1998).

Individual birds are occasionally found at great distances from their range. The appearance is invariably correlated with weather, as some individuals wander, especially during hard winter weather (Elkins 1998). The sighting near Sam in Desert National Park represents the first record from the Thar Desert of Rajasthan. Though the sighting of the species near Sam is far to the south of its normal winter range, it is not surprising. The species is known for straggling (Grimmett *et al.* 1998), and has occurred as vagrant to many parts of the Western Palearctic and Middle East in the autumn and early winter (Clement and Hathaway 2000).

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12. 'NEW BIRD DESCRIPTIONS WITHOUT PROPER VOUCHER SPECIMENS': FURTHER TO KANNAN¹

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Kannan's (2007) review of the issues surrounding the description of the Bugun Liocichla *Liocichla bugunorum* (Athreya 2006) is wide-ranging, fair-minded and good-natured, but in missing a few points and dwelling perhaps too long on others, it requires a little further perspective.

I have deliberately put the main title of my commentary here in inverted commas in order to indicate that it is Kannan's, not mine. This is because I do not share the view that the Bugun Liocichla was described without a proper voucher specimen. This is the first crucial point, which Kannan at first admits, but then spends much time questioning. If it is the case that 'an animal or a part of an animal' is required to serve as the type of a new species under the rules of the International Commission on Zoological Nomenclature (ICZN), then the feathers, including diagnostic ones from the tail, provided by Athreya must be allowed to constitute a 'proper voucher specimen'. Further debate on the issue is irrelevant: Athreya broke no rules, and Kannan's view that feathers are of limited value, and his comment that 'Without a proper voucher specimen, the taxonomic status of the newly reported Liocichla will always be open to doubt', are both, I think, off the mark. The same can be said of all the criticisms and complaints that followed in the wake of the description of *Laniarius liberatus*, for which feathers and blood vouchsafed the existence of the animal from which they came (and which, incidentally, have now been successfully used to demonstrate that *liberatus* is a colour morph: Nguembock *et al.* 2008). A recent exchange (Dubois and Nemésio 2007; Donegan 2008) covers these issues in far greater detail, but reaches the same conclusion.

Kannan points out that photographs can be insufficient to reflect all true characters, yielding a fraction of what is gleanable from a specimen, and can even be doctored or deteriorate. It is, however, worth remembering that photographs can sometimes tell us taxonomically useful things that museum skins cannot, unless the collector has noticed and documented them (eye and bare-part colour in

particular, but also jizz). In any case the point about photographs is their great value as supporting evidence, while the point about science is its repeatability — within weeks of the announcement of the new species, birdwatchers and biologists were making their way to Eaglenest to see it for themselves. Athreya's use of photographs was essentially supplementary (although of course they supplied the most convincing testimony of all), and it is worth noting that many modern descriptions of new bird species carry photographs in this support role.

However, there is a crucial issue here, untreated by Kannan or indeed by Athreya (although I mentioned it to the latter in our correspondence), which is that recently a new species of animal was described, in no less a journal than *Science*, using only photographs as the type material (Jones *et al.* 2005). It would be interesting to know how Kannan's museum ornithologists have reacted to this development, rendered all the more surprising by its support by representatives of ICZN (Polaszek *et al.* 2005). To me, this seems a far more problematic circumstance: digital photographs can easily be altered, and I cannot see how this does not expose taxonomy to fraud. Nevertheless, the facts are that (1) since 2005 the notion that photographs alone can form the basis of new species descriptions appears to have received strong (albeit not yet formal) endorsement from ICZN, and (2) photographs of Athreya's undescribed liocichla were circulating on the internet in that year and early 2006. This meant that anyone could have downloaded those photographs and published what in some quarters would have been considered a valid description prior to Athreya, the discoverer and therefore rightful describer of the species. Apart from his concern over the impact that collecting a specimen might have had, Athreya himself gave three reasons for proceeding with his description in the way he did, all relating to conservation; to them may be added this point, that someone else could easily have trumped him, particularly as the time needed for



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