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14. RECENT SIGHTINGS OF SPECKLED PICULET (*PICUMNUS INNOMINATUS* BURTON) IN PAKISTAN

Roberts (1991) describes the speckled piculet in Pakistan as extremely rare and local, occurring in deciduous forest at low elevations, at only a few sites. The speckled piculet has been recorded in the Murree Hills and Margalla Hills, near Islamabad, and the Malkandi Reserve in the Kaghan Valley, NWFP. Breeding has been recorded in Pakistan, egg-laying taking place from early to mid-May and brooding lasting only 11 days.

Details of recent sightings

1. Margalla Hills, Islamabad: During a week long stay in Islamabad in May 1994, we spent several days birding in the nearby Margalla Hills, an area of dry deciduous scrub forest (600 m above msl). During one of these visits on 11th May, 1994, PW drew PB's attention to a very

vocal male speckled piculet feeding in the bare branches of a small tree. Both observers saw the bird well and were already familiar with the species from elsewhere in its range.

There are only two previous sightings of this species in the Margalla Hills (singles in July 1977 and April 1982), despite fairly extensive coverage by birders over a number of years (Roberts, 1991). Roberts (1991) concludes that the species must be an occasional visitor to the Margalla Hills and this sighting therefore constitutes only the 3rd published record of speckled piculet at this site.

2. Palas Valley, District Kohistan, (35° 30' N 72° 40' E): Whilst walking up the main river valley in Palas Valley, Kohistan dist. (1300 m above msl) on 22nd May, a very vocal pair of speckled piculets were located by DS, low down

in a *Quercus baloot*. On closer examination, a nest-hole was located in one of the smaller branches. Calls from within indicated the presence of young.

This is the first record of this species for the Palas Valley and represents a slight north-westerly range extension in Pakistan.

This small woodpecker is often overlooked in mixed species flocks (Ali and Ripley, 1983) and may in fact be commoner than it appears to be throughout its range in Pakistan. It would seem likely that suitable areas in the foothills of the western Himalayas hold undetected breeding populations.

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15. MIMICRY BY GREY DRONGO *DICRURUS LEUCOPHAEUS*

In my orchard at Vashishta, 3.5 km up the valley above the now overcrowded hill station of Manali in Himachal Pradesh, I have the pleasure of the company of several mid-altitude Himalayan birds. Among these are a couple of pairs of rather aggressive, highly visible and vocal grey drongos *Dicrurus leucophaeus*. On the morning of 9th May, 1996 while walking to the house I heard lora-like piping whistles. To my astonishment and delight, I traced the sounds to a drongo perched atop a pear tree. The bird continued the whistles which almost sounded like tentative attempts at mimicry — not sure of itself the bird burst into

its metallic, challenging calls to pause and then try out the whistles, some longer and more high pitched than others, sounding like the familiar loras warming up to full vocalisation in late March and April. It is at this time that the grey drongos are coming into prenuptial vigour just prior to leaving the plains. Both loras and drongos share the common flower-laden coral, flame of the forest and other trees during that period.

July 10, 1996

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16. RECORD OF THE SIGHTINGS AND BREEDING OF PIED MYNAH
STURNUS CONTRA AT LAHORE

The HANDBOOK (Ali and Ripley, 1987) reported the pied mynah (*Sturnus contra*) as missing west of a line from about 76°E (Ludhiana and Hissar) thus excluding Pakistan from its

distributional range. However, Dr. Rees Davies reported it to T.J. Roberts as far back as 1965. This and subsequent records by Z.B. Mirza in 1982 and Dr. Mubashir Hasan in 1985, all from



Benstead, P. J. et al. 1997. "Recent sightings of speckled piculet (*Picumnus innominatus* Burton) in Pakistan." *The journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 94, 568–569.

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