

is believed - it may well have been overlooked due to its strictly nocturnal habits and the low density of populations. It may occur further south in sanctuaries such as Kalakkad (Tamil Nadu) and Periyar (Kerala), where similar habitat exists. A thorough, systematic survey is needed to ascertain the true status and distribution of this subspecies.

The Periasolai area in the Nelliampathies, where the type specimen was collected in a coffee estate, was largely 'wet evergreen forest' (Hussain and Khan 1978), but is now a vast clearing with tapioca plantations (K. Subban, Tamil Nadu Forest Department, verbally). Much of the Nelliampathy Hills are now denuded but the Anamalais, with two wildlife sanctuaries covering over 1,250 km², enjoy better protection, especially with the recent elevation of Karian Shola to the status of a National Park. This must be important for the survival of this rare owl, which is only known from the Anamalai-Nelliampathy hills.

I thank Natarajan for first reporting the species to me and for presenting the photograph to me; Arul Jothi for his description from the February sighting; and to V. Santharam, K. K. Neelakantan and Z. Futehally for their comments and suggestions.

This note is dedicated to the late Professor Neelakantan for his contributions to the ornithology of Kerala. He reviewed this manuscript but, unfortunately, did not live to see it in print.

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R. Kannan, Hornbill Project, Indira Gandhi Wildlife Sanctuary, Top Slip 642 141 (via) Pollachi, India.

Black-billed Magpie *Pica pica*: a new species for Thailand

GEORGE V. WATOLA

On 7 and 8 April, 1989, Julia Watola and I watched a Black-billed Magpie *Pica pica* at Doi Ang Khang, north Thailand. It was present at 10h00 on both occasions, perched in a small leafless tree about 30 m from the road. When we stopped to observe it more closely, it flew off giving a chatter I knew as

characteristic of the species.

The bird's size, slightly larger than Green Magpie *Cissa chinensis*, black and white plumage, and long graduated tail made it unmistakable. I had no doubt as to its identity, being familiar with the species in Britain and Europe.

I observed it through 8x40 binoculars and took brief notes on a mini-cassette recorder. The black head and breast, white belly and scapulars, and white wing flashes in flight were all noted. There do not appear to be any similar species in South-east Asia mentioned in King *et al.* (1975).

At the time I did not realise the significance of this record, having seen Eurasian Jays *Garrulus glandarius* on Doi Inthanon a few days before, and I had erroneously assumed that Black-billed Magpies had a similar status in Thailand. I had also seen the plate of Black-billed Magpie and *Corvus* species in King *et al.* (1975) and this reinforced my view! On reading King *et al.* (1975) more closely on our return home, I was surprised to see that the Black-billed Magpie had not actually been recorded in Thailand, and was found only as close as northern Laos and eastern Myanmar.

P. D. Round (*in litt.* 1989), stated that the Black-billed Magpie is not found in the Shan States across the border in Myanmar, but it 'could be a species extending its range with deforestation'.

While this is the first record of Black-billed Magpie for Thailand, the ever-increasing records of new species for that country may indicate that lack of observers rather than vagrancy is responsible for the limited sightings of some species. There have been hardly any observations of birds in Myanmar and Laos in recent years, and some open country species such as the Black-billed Magpie may be more widespread than realised.

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George V. Watola, Pentre Farm, Cefnlllys Lane, Llandrindod Wells LD1 5PD, U.K.



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