

Photo: P. Sreenivasan



126. Long-billed Dowitcher in flight.

The legs of Long-billed Dowitcher are expected to be greenish-yellow, or lemon-yellow, but in these pictures, the legs are a shade of orange. This could be because of the mud stains, making the bare parts' colours unreliable. The longer tarsi is considered another reliable feature for Long-billed, however for a lone bird, it is tough to estimate this accurately. The width of the tail barring is considered indicative for these two species, however in this bird, from whatever is visible of the two dark bars, it cannot be said with definiteness that they are wider than the three pale bars. Hence, that feature is not used here to argue for this species but that does not tilt the argument in favour of Short-billed either.

Based on this combination of features (Lee & Birch 2005, 2006), this bird could be conclusively identified as a Long-billed Dowitcher.

The species has been observed six times in India (Sharma *et al.* 2013); twice in Gujarat, and the others from northern India. This appears to be the first time it has been reported from peninsular India. Except for a May record from Harike Lake, in Punjab, every other record has been during January and February. This is probably the earliest date on which this species has been observed in India.

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Sighting of Purple-backed Starling *Agropsar sturninus* in Vellayani, Kerala

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Purple-backed (Daurian) Starling *Agropsar sturninus* is widespread in the Oriental Region, occurring from Russia, through China up to most of the countries of South-east Asia, and the Sundas (BirdLife International, 2016). It breeds in North-eastern Mongolia, the Trans-Baikal region, the Amur Valley in China and in North Korea. Its major wintering quarters are southern China, Thailand, Malaysia, Singapore, Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam, Sumatra, Java, and Myanmar. Though it has been considered a vagrant to the Indian Subcontinent till recently (Rasmussen & Anderton, 2012), it is now known to be a more regular winter visitor to the Andaman Islands (Sharma & Sangha, 2012). Here we report the first instance of its vagrancy in Kerala.

While on a visit to the Vellayani wetlands (8.45°N, 76.97°E) near Thiruvananthapuram city, a male Purple-backed Starling was seen at 08:30 hrs, on 14 November 2015, along with other birds like juvenile Rosy Starlings *Pastor roseus*, Common Myna

Acridotheres tristis, and Black Drongo *Dicrurus macrocerus*. It had glossy purple upper parts, a small vertical nape patch, and a broken, conspicuous white wing bar. Further down its purple mantle, the broad whitish rump was visible very clearly. The pale grey head, and under parts, gave the bird a whitish look that initially attracted our attention while it perched on an electric line, in the company of other birds; and when disturbed by a moving motorbike the birds flew off and perched on a small tree. The bird moved about in the tree, in typical starling style, and after a while flew back to the electric line. Then the bird flew down to the bushes below, where it started feeding on *Lantana* fruits along with Rosy Starlings. We observed the bird for more than 20 minutes, and took several photographs [127]. It was still around after two hours when we returned. We identified it using field guides (Kazmierczak, 2009; Grimmett *et al.*, 2011).

Table. Records of Purple-backed Starling from the mainland of the Indian Subcontinent

Location	Date	Number of Birds	Reference
Turicho Valley, Chitral, Pakistan	16 July 1902	17	Fulton (1904)
Mudumalai Wildlife Sanctuary, Tamilnadu	5 March 1995	2–3	Robson (1996)
Koshi Tapu Wildlife Reserve, Nepal	10 May 2002	2	Basnet & Chaudhary (2003)
Koshi Tapu Wildlife Reserve, Nepal	11 May 2002	6	Basnet & Chaudhary (2003)
Valparai, Tamil Nadu	29 December 2008	1	Cox (2009)
Harbaria, Sundarbans, Bangladesh	26 October 2009	1	Thompson <i>et al.</i> (2014)
Modhupur National Park, Bangladesh	31 October 2010	NA	Thompson <i>et al.</i> (2014)
Bolcornem, Sanguem, Goa	21 December 2012	1	De Souza (2012)
National Botanical Garden, Mirpur, Dhaka, Bangladesh	24 April 2015	35	Mahmud (2015)

Though it is considered a winter migrant to the Andaman Islands (Sharma & Sangha, 2012), it is still a vagrant to the mainland of the Indian mainland, with a few records from the country, apart from Pakistan, Bangladesh, and Nepal, in the past 100-odd years (Table). It has also been listed for Sri Lanka (Kotagama *et al.*, 2006).

It is interesting to see this rare vagrant so far down south in the Indian peninsula. This is the fourth instance of this species occurring in southern India; and the first from Kerala (Praveen, 2015). The occurrence of this bird at Vellayani may be attributed to the cyclonic storm that lashed the Bay of Bengal during the time.

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Photo: Dilip K. G.

127. Purple-backed (Daurian) Starling *Agropsar sturninus*.

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