

Spot-winged Grosbeak, *Mycerobas melanozanthos*: A New Species for Vietnam

On 15 February 1997, a flock of 4 Spot-winged Grosbeaks (*Mycerobas melanozanthos*) was observed in Cha Cang commune, Lai Chau Province, northwest Vietnam (22°00'N by 105°55'E), by Andrew Clark and myself. This is the first record of the species from Vietnam, although it is known from adjacent areas of Laos. The birds were at an elevation considerably lower than the normal range given in KING *ET AL.* (1975).

The Grosbeaks, 2 males and 2 females, were observed in a tributary valley of the Nam (River) Po. They were feeding on the seeds of a deciduous tree in a largely deforested area on the edge of the Muong Nhe Nature Reserve, the largest reserve in Vietnam's protected area system (COX *ET AL.*, 1992).

Description. The birds had a distinctive massive, dark bill. Both male and female had black wings, clearly marked with two convergent rows of white spots on the secondaries and greater wing coverts. The male had black head, back and upper breast, with bright yellow underparts. In the female, the underparts and upper back appeared streaked with yellow and black, and bold yellow stripes were visible above and below the eye. No juvenile birds were observed.

The known range of the Spot-winged Grosbeak stretches from Afghanistan in the west through the Himalayas to Sichuan, China (DELACOUR & JABOUILLE, 1931). In Southeast Asia, the range includes Myanmar (Burma), Laos and northern Thailand (KING *ET AL.*, 1975). In Thailand at least, the bird is a resident species (LEKAGUL & ROUND, 1991). It was recorded in northern Laos (Muong Yo, east of Phong Saly) by the Roosevelt expedition (1928–1929) (DELACOUR & JABOUILLE, 1931), but it is not listed in the *Checklist of Birds of Vietnam* (VO QUY & NGUYEN CU, 1995).

LEKAGUL & ROUND (1991) describe the habitat of this species in Thailand as "hill evergreen forests and secondary growth, usually above 1,400 m," and KING *ET AL.* (1975) state that it is a resident above 5,000 ft (c. 1,525 m), in forest habitats. The birds at Muong Nhe, however, were observed at an altitude of 700 m above sea level, in a narrow strip of sparse trees, bamboos and scrub, surrounded by *Imperata cylindrica* grassland. The two specimens collected at Muong Yo in May 1929 were taken at 2,300 ft (701 m) (BANGS & VAN TYNE, 1931), suggesting that in part of its range (or at certain seasons), the species is found at lower elevations.

In the Muong Nhe Nature Reserve, little high-altitude evergreen forest remains. The highest point in the reserve is 1,948 m, although few of the peaks in the area exceed 1,000 m a.s.l., and much of the natural forest cover of the area has been cleared, especially on exposed hills; forests formed only 30% of land vegetation in 1991 (COX *ET AL.*, 1992).

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