

Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*—The First Record for Thailand

On 17 February 2001, at about 0700 h, PDR and JD were leading a Wings birdwatching group to the Mae Taeng Irrigation Project Site, Mae Taeng District, Chiang Mai Province (ca. 19° 09' N; 98° 56' E), in order to look at marsh and open-country birds. After the group had passed the lock gate on the irrigation canal, one of the members, Paul Julian, noticed an unfamiliar bird perched on boulders in an ornamental rockery/picnic site and drew the attention of the other members of the group to it. PDR, who had gone on slightly ahead, was called back to look at the bird. It was clearly a redstart, *Phoenicurus* sp., as shown by the general proportions, reddish tail and distinctive jinking or “elastic twanging” (shivering) of the tail. However, unlike the Daurian Redstart *P. aureus*, which is an uncommon but regular winter visitor, the present bird showed no white in the wing. In addition, it lacked the distinctive T-shaped tail pattern of Blue-fronted Redstart *P. frontalis* (a species which, in any case, does not habitually show the tail-twanging typical of most other *Phoenicurus* spp.). After watching the bird for one to two minutes through a telescope on 20 x magnification, and 7 x binoculars at a range of 30–40 m, PDR ventured a putative identification of the bird as a female or immature male Black Redstart *P. ochruros*, a species with which he was familiar from the British Isles. All observers watched the bird for another ca. 15 minutes. However, female or immature Hodgson’s Redstart *P. hodgsoni* was not fully ruled out at this stage, as the lighting conditions, and the wariness of the bird, prevented a detailed examination of the plumage. The bird kept in the shade, under the roofs of small shelters erected in the picnic area, while the observers were standing in bright sunlight. It was frequently hidden from view under the roofs of the shelters, when perched up under the beams, or, when it descended to the ground, behind boulders and fallen logs. It also frequented a sunken area with a concrete surround where it was usually obscured from view. It was very flighty and active, sometimes flying from one side of the garden to another, a distance of about 50 m.

The bird was still present at 1100 h, when the group returned to the area and watched it further for another ca. 15 minutes. PDR then telephoned Dr. Rungarit Kanjanavanit, to alert him to the bird’s presence, and also to request that he in turn inform CK, so that he might obtain photographs to corroborate the identification. RK and CK visited the site on the following day (18 February) in order to observe the bird, when CK obtained the photographs which illustrate this account.

The bird was seen on subsequent dates by Mr. Pinit Saengkaew, Mr. Uthai Treesucon, Mrs. Sopitcha Tantitadapitak and Mr. Sarthip Thongnakcokegruad, and was last reported by Mrs. Sopitcha on 7 March.

Description: According to initial observations, dark grey-brown above and greyish or grey-brown on the breast and belly, with a buffy white vent; narrow whitish median throat streak (longer than broad); slight pale greater covert wing bar, a pale eye-ring, and a trace of a pale supraloral line. The upper breast showed a slightly scaled appearance due to darker feather centres. Orange-red sides and dark centre to the square-ended tail were visible. It had a slender, all dark, bill and dark legs. The bird called occasionally, giving a soft *pwut*.

The superior resolution permitted by CK’s flash photographs (Figs. 1, 2) enables much more plumage detail to be seen. The under tail coverts are tawny-buff; there is a clear,

narrow, whitish-buff eye-ring, greyish-white median throat streak, and the feathers on the breast show blackish centres, forming a slightly mottled or streaked effect. The mantle is dark grey-brown and the wings blackish-brown. The greater covert wing bar seems to show one or two outer feathers having broader, more richly buff tips, indicating the retention of unmoulted juvenile feathers. This, combined with the blackish mottling below, indicate that the bird was a first-year male.

Craig Robson, after comparing a photograph of the bird with specimens of both Black Redstart and Hodgson's Redstart in The Natural History Museum, Tring, U.K., commented that Hodgson's Redstart could be definitely ruled out due to the darkness of the breast, the blackish wings (paler and browner/greyer on Hodgson's), the thin eye-ring (broader in Hodgson's), and the call-note. According to GRIMMETT *ET AL.* (1998) first-winter male Hodgson's Redstarts resemble females. The latter are paler, greyer on the breast than the present bird, with a large whitish belly patch (C. Robson, *in litt.*). The call-note given by the Mae Taeng bird also indicated Black Redstart, since Hodgson's Redstart usually has a rattling *prit*, and *trr* or *tschrr* when alarmed (ROBSON, 2000). Hodgson's Redstart would in any case be less likely to occur in Thailand, being only known in Southeast Asia as a scarce winter visitor to North Myanmar (ROBSON, 2000).

The Black Redstart has a wide range across Eurasia, from North Africa, the Iberian Peninsula and NW Europe eastwards to Central Asia. The more northerly populations migrate, wintering to the Mediterranean, North Africa, the Middle East and Indian Subcontinent (VAURIE, 1959). It is not possible to make a definitive identification as to the race of the bird observed at Mae Taeng, although the easternmost-distributed *P.o. rufiventris*, illustrated in ROBSON (2000), would be the most likely race to occur in Thailand. This race is distributed from about 100° E longitude in north-central China, southwards to southeastern Tibet, wintering in eastern India, Burma (VAURIE, 2000).

Acknowledgments: We thank Craig Robson for critically comparing a photograph of the Mae Taeng Black Redstart with specimens in The Natural History Museum, Tring, U.K.; for his helpful comments on identification and on drafts of this manuscript.



Figures 1 and 2. First-winter male Black Redstart *Phoenicurus ochruros*, Mae Taeng Irrigation Project Site, Mae Taeng District, Chiang Mai, 18 February 2001 (photos by Chitapong Kuawong).

REFERENCES

- GRIMMETT, R., C. INSKIPP, AND T. INSKIPP. 1998. *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*. Christopher Helm, London.
- ROBSON, C. 2000. *A Field Guide to the Birds of South-East Asia*. New Holland, London.
- VAURIE, C. 1959. *The Birds of the Palearctic Fauna. Passeriformes*. H.F. and G. Witherby, London.

Philip D. Round

Department of Biology
Faculty of Science
Mahidol University
Rama 6 Road
Bangkok 10400

Jon Dunn

RR2 Box 52R
Bishop, California 93514
U.S.A.

Chitapong Kuawong

90/1 Sridornchai Road
Amphur Muang
Chiang Mai 50100