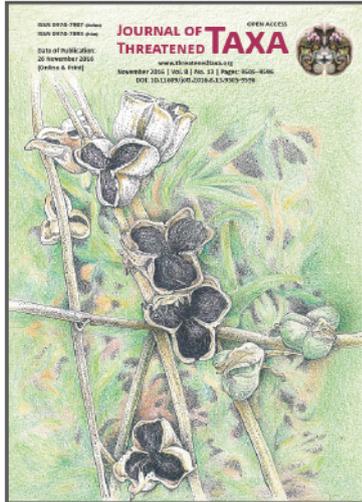


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Journal of Threatened Taxa

The international journal of conservation and taxonomy

www.threatenedtaxa.org

ISSN 0974-7907 (Online) | ISSN 0974-7893 (Print)

SHORT COMMUNICATION

THE STATUS OF THE BRAHMINY STARLING *STURNIA PAGODARUM* (GMELIN, 1789) (AVES: PASSERIFORMES: STURNIDAE) IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

Soe Naing, Nah Lah Pwai Paw, Beatrix Lanzinger, Pipat Soisook, Malcolm J. Pearch & Paul J.J. Bates

26 November 2016 | Vol. 8 | No. 13 | Pp. 9574–9578
10.11609/jott.2803.8.13.9574-9578



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ISSN 0974-7907 (Online)
ISSN 0974-7893 (Print)

Journal of Threatened Taxa | www.threatenedtaxa.org | 26 November 2016 | 8(13): 9574–9578

THE STATUS OF THE BRAHMINY STARLING *STURNIA PAGODARUM* (GMELIN, 1789) (AVES: PASSERIFORMES: STURNIDAE) IN SOUTHEAST ASIA

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Abstract: To date, the status of the Brahminy Starling *Sturnia pagodarum*, in Southeast Asia has been unclear. The origins of the few reported sightings, where commented upon, have often been listed as 'uncertain' or 'unknown' with the implication that some, maybe all, are escaped captivity birds. The current paper brings together data on distribution, date of observation, and number of individuals to illustrate a pattern that clearly supports the view that records from Myanmar, Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore should be treated as 'winter vagrants'. With one exception, they are all of five birds or less and have been observed from October to March. The paper includes the first authenticate record from Myanmar, which is the 1115th wild bird species listed for the country. However, the status of a single record from Cambodia is treated with caution since it represents a considerable range extension and was observed on 01 April, which is relatively late in the season. For these reasons, it is here listed as 'origin uncertain' until further data are available.

Keywords: Brahminy Starling, distribution, first record, Myanmar, Southeast Asia, winter vagrant.

Currently, the status and distribution of the Brahminy Starling *Sturnia pagodarum* (Gmelin, 1789) in Southeast Asia is not clearly understood. In peninsular Thailand, *S. pagodarum* (which is referred to the genus *Sturnus* Linnaeus, 1758 by some authors, see Lekagul & Round (2005), Robson (2008, 2014), Zuccon et al. (2008), and Birdlife International (2012, 2016)) was included as 'a very rare visitor' based on a single record of four individuals observed in March 1977 (Lekagul & Round 2005). Wells (2007) recorded it as a vagrant in Thailand and Singapore and suggested that the geographical distribution and seasonal spread of records were supportive of 'a natural migration overshoot', although they could 'have been assisted'

DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.11609/jott.2803.8.13.9574-9578> | **ZooBank:** urn:lsid:zoobank.org:pub:F09C4467-4BF3-43DB-9DDD-C54BADCD6BDB

Editor: P.O. Nameer, Kerala Agricultural University, Thrissur, India.

Date of publication: 26 November 2016 (online & print)

Manuscript details: Ms # 2803 | Received 20 May 2016 | Final received 01 November 2016 | Finally accepted 05 November 2016

Citation: Soe Naing, Naw Lah Pwai Paw, B. Lanzinger, P. Soisook, M.J. Pearch & P.J.J. Bates (2016). The status of the Brahminy Starling *Sturnia pagodarum* (Gmelin, 1789) (Aves: Passeriformes: Sturnidae) in Southeast Asia. *Journal of Threatened Taxa* 8(13): 9574–9578; <http://dx.doi.org/10.11609/jott.2803.8.13.9574-9578>

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Funding: The Rufford Foundation, UK contributed to the training of the Myanmar ornithologists.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no competing interests.

Acknowledgement: The authors are most grateful to Si Si Hla Bu, Rector of Myeik University who facilitated this research and Philip Round (Mahidol University) and Ingkayut Sa-ar (Bird Conservation Society of Thailand) for contributing many of the records from Thailand. We are also grateful to all who recorded this species in the field including: Andy Colthorpe, Andy Pierce, Chukiat Nualsri, Ike Suriwong, Krit Rerkwirin, Maanode Taengtum, Masato Nagai, Neil Lawton, Pathomphol Charoenjai, Pinit Saengkaew, Stijn De Win, Voraporn Ariratanond, and Wayne Allan. We thank Dr Thein Aung, Chairman of the Myanmar Bird and Nature Society for his information on the Myanmar bird list and The Rufford Foundation for their financial support for the training of ornithologists in Myanmar. Finally, we are most grateful to one anonymous reviewer for his/her most useful comments and the provision of valuable additional information on distribution.



(presumably meaning that some individuals may have escaped from captivity). Robson (2008, 2014) listed the species as a winter vagrant to western and southern Thailand. Birdlife International (2012) suggested that its origin was 'uncertain' in both Myanmar and Thailand and omitted it from Singapore and Malaysia. Birdlife International (2016) included it as native to mainland China, considered its status in Myanmar and Thailand as 'unknown', and made no mention of records from Cambodia, Malaysia or Singapore. In contrast, Birdforum (2015) suggested that individuals found in northeastern India, Myanmar, Thailand, Singapore and China may be escaped cage birds; a view partially supported by Dirk Tomsa's comments on a single individual observed in Singapore on 15 September 2016; Dirk commented "very likely to be an escapee, not a wild bird. That said, there are a few records from Malaysia, so it's not entirely impossible that this is a genuine vagrant" (eBird 2016).

In Myanmar, with the exception of Blyth (1875) who recorded the species from Arakan (= Rakhine), but without details, there appears to be no published records of *Sturnia pagodarum*. Oates (1883) quoted Blyth's record but Smithies (1986) did not and omitted the species. It is of interest therefore to record a recent sighting of two individuals of *Sturnia pagodarum* from the campus of Myeik University, Tanintharyi Region (12°28.120'N & 98°36.534'E: Fig. 1, locality 8). These birds were photographed (Image 1) by Soe Naing in October, 2012, both singly and as a pair. They were feeding on the ground in an area given over to the cultivation of peas and okra. Nearby were patches of heavily degraded forest, a creek, and some disused buildings. The habitat and behaviour are consistent with that recorded elsewhere in their range, which extends from Afghanistan through Pakistan, India and Bangladesh to China and south to Sri Lanka, where it is a winter visitor (Birdlife International 2012).

The new record from southern Myanmar complements seventeen locality records from Thailand. These are listed in Table 1 and mapped in Fig. 1. They extend from Kanchanaburi Province in western central Thailand, south to Pattani Province on the Malaysian border. They are primarily based on sight records by a variety of individuals, which have been collated by Phil Round (pers. comm. 2015). A number of these records, including some with photographs, have also been posted on the BCST (Bird Conservation Society of Thailand) website (BCST 2015a) and on the website <http://eBird.org>; a minority are listed in Wells (2007). In addition to Thailand, there is one record from Siem Reap Province, Cambodia (eBird 2007) and two recent



Image 1. Brahminy Starling *Sturnia pagodarum* photographed in October, 2012 within the campus of Myeik University, Tanintharyi Region, Myanmar.

records from Malaysia, namely from Chuping in Perlis on 28 December 2014 (Dig Deep 2015) and 17 January 2015 (Anonymous 2015). There are three records from Singapore (Table 1).

It is of interest to note that all sightings of *Sturnia pagodarum* in southern Myanmar, Thailand, Malaysia and Singapore, for which information is available, are from October to March, and are of five birds or less. The only exceptions are the record from Cambodia, which is 1 April and the most recent record from Singapore, which is 15 September (Table 1). This would support the opinion of Robson (2008, 2014) that this species is a winter vagrant to the area. Although it is known that this species has been kept in captivity in various countries for over 100 years (Farrar 1901; Birdlife International 2015), it is not a recognised cage bird in Myanmar (Thein Aung pers. comm. 28 November 2015) or in peninsular Thailand (Pipat Soisook pers. comm. 19 November 2015).

We therefore suggest that *Sturnia pagodarum* be added to the official bird list of Myanmar. As such, it would be the 1115th bird species recorded from Myanmar based on the unpublished but official list of the Forest Department (Ministry of Environmental Conservation and Forestry, Myanmar), which has been submitted recently to Birdlife International (Thein Aung pers. comm. 28 November 2015).

We further suggest that 'winter vagrant' replace 'origin uncertain' as its status for Thailand and Myanmar in the IUCN Red List (Birdlife International 2012) and that the records from Malaysia and Singapore should also be recognised as 'winter vagrant'. The status in Cambodia is also most probably 'winter vagrant'; however, in view of there being only one reported record; the comparative geographical isolation of this record; and

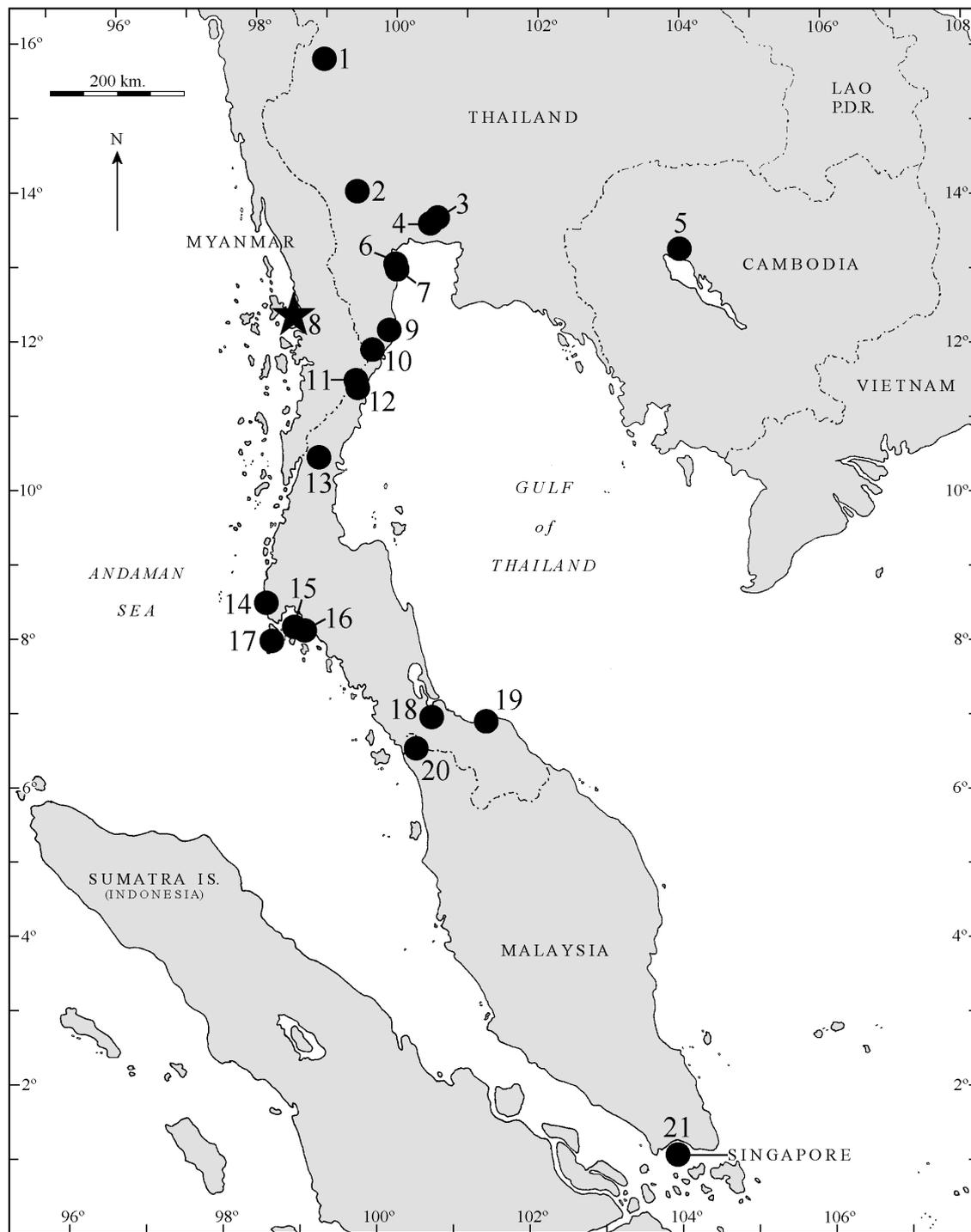


Figure 1. Locality records of the Brahminy Starling *Sturnia pagodarum* in Cambodia, Thailand, Malaysia, and Singapore (black circles) and the first confirmed record from southern Myanmar (black star). Localities and details are listed in Table 1. Map drawn by Malcolm Peach

the date observed, 1 April, being relatively late in the season, this record is here treated as ‘origin uncertain’ until further data are available.

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Table 1. Records of *Sturnia pagodarum* from Cambodia, Thailand, Myanmar, Malaysia and Singapore

Loc. No.	Locality	Province	Country	Coordinates	Date	No. of birds	Record/Recorder
1	Mae Krasat, Thung Yai Naresuan Wildlife Sanctuary,	Kanchanaburi	Thailand	c.o. 15°44'N & 98°59'E	2.i.2000	4	Pathomphol Charoenjai
2	Kanchanaburi Town - 'just west of'	Kanchanaburi	Thailand	c.o. 14°01'N & 99°31'E	28.i.2002	1	Wayne Allan
3	Krung Thep Maha Nakhon	Bangkok	Thailand	13°46'N & 100°30'E	10.i.2011	1	John Alexander (ebird, 2011a)
4	Samut Sakhon	Samut Sakhon	Thailand	c.o. 13°33'N & 100°16'E	10.xii.2008	1	Maanode Taengtum
5	Ch'rear	Siem Reap	Cambodia	13°18'N & 103°53'E	1.iv.2007	1	Howie Nielsen (e-bird, 2007)
6	Pak Thale	Phetchaburi	Thailand	13°09'N & 100°04'E	22.xi.2012	2	Richard Dunn (ebird, 2012a)
7	Laem Phak Bia, Ban Laem	Phetchaburi	Thailand	13°02'N & 100°05'E	12.xi.2010	1	Unknown observer
	Laem Phak Bia (garbage dump), Ban Laem	Phetchaburi	Thailand	13°02'N & 100°05'E	2.i.2011	1	Wich'yanan "Jay" Limparungpattanakij (ebird, 2011b)
	Laem Phak Bia, "abandoned buildings wetlands" Ban Laem	Phetchaburi	Thailand	13°02'N & 100°05'E	15.i.2011	2	Khemthong Tonsakulrungruang (ebird, 2011c)
	Laem Phak Bia, "abandoned buildings wetlands" Ban Laem	Phetchaburi	Thailand	13°02'N & 100°05'E	19.xi.2012	2	David Beadle (ebird, 2012b)
	Laem Phak Bia, Ban Laem	Phetchaburi	Thailand	13°02'N & 100°05'E	16-30.xi.2012	2	BCST (2012)
	Laem Phak Bia, "abandoned buildings wetlands" Ban Laem	Phetchaburi	Thailand	13°02'N & 100°05'E	19.xi.2012	2	Nick Upton (ebird, 2012c)
	Laem Phak Bia, Ban Laem	Phetchaburi	Thailand	13°02'N & 100°05'E	24.xii.2014-20.i.2015	1	BCST (2015b)
	Laem Phak Bia, Ban Laem	Phetchaburi	Thailand	13°02'N & 100°05'E	9.i.2015	1	Neil Lawton
	Laem Phak Bia, Ban Laem	Phetchaburi	Thailand	13°02'N & 100°05'E	15.i.2015	1	Masato Nagai
	Laem Phak Bia, Ban Laem		Thailand	13°02'N & 100°05'E	20.i.2015	1	Philip Round, Andy Pierce
8	Myeik University	Tanintharyi Region	Myanmar	12°28'N & 98°37'E	x.2012	2	Soe Naing
9	Hat Sam Phraya, Khao Sam Roi Yot	Prachuap Khiri Khan	Thailand	c.o. 12°09'N & 99°59'E	28.iii.2003	1	Andy Colthorpe
10	Ao Noi	Prachuap Khiri Khan	Thailand	c.o. 11°54'N & 99°58'E	25.ii.2015	1	Wayne Allan
	Ao Noi	Prachuap Khiri Khan	Thailand	c.o. 11°54'N & 99°58'E	28.ii.2015	2	Wayne Allan (BCST, 2015b)
	Ao Noi	Prachuap Khiri Khan	Thailand	c.o. 11°54'N & 99°58'E	3.iii.2015	4	Wayne Allan (BCST, 2015c)
	Ao Noi	Prachuap Khiri Khan	Thailand	c.o. 11°54'N & 99°58'E	5.iii.2015	5	Wayne Allan (BCST, 2015c)
11	Ban Bo Pai, Bang Saphan Noi	Prachuap Khiri Khan	Thailand	c.o. 11°30'N & 99°31'E	10.iii.1977	1	specimen TISTR (Wells, 2007)
12	Bang Berd, Bang Saphan	Prachuap Khiri Khan	Thailand	c.o. 11°30'N & 99°31'E	16.x.2008	1	Pinit Saengkaew
13	Chumphon Provincial Sports Stadium, Muang	Chumphon	Thailand	c.o. 10°30'N & 99°11'E	29.xi.2008	1	Chukiat Nualsri
	Chumphon Provincial Sports Stadium, Muang	Chumphon	Thailand	c.o. 10°30'N & 99°11'E	26.ii.2010	2	Chukiat Nualsri
14	Thai Mueang Golf Course	Phang-nga	Thailand	c.o. 08°30'N & 98°17'E	9.i.2010	2	Ike Suriwong
15	Krabi Resort, Ao Nang	Krabi	Thailand	c.o. 08°06'N & 98°37'E	5.iii.1992	1	Philip Round (Wells, 2007)
16	Ban Chai Thale, Hat Thai Muang	Phang-nga	Thailand	c.o. 08°02'N & 98°49'E	3.i.1993	1	Krit RerkwiriN & Voraporn Ariratanond (Wells, 2007)
17	Kamala Beach	Phuket	Thailand	c.o. 07°57'N & 98°17'E	30.xii.2005	1	Andy Colthorpe, Stijn De Win
	Kamala Beach	Phuket	Thailand	c.o. 07°57'N & 98°17'E	1.i.2006	1	Andy Colthorpe, Stijn De Win

Loc. No.	Locality	Province	Country	Coordinates	Date	No. of birds	Record/Recorder
18	Hat Yai (Water Treatment Plant)	Songkhla	Thailand	7°07'N & 100°29'E	19.xii.2002	1	Taweewat Supindham (eBird, 2002a)
	Hat Yai (Water Treatment Plant)	Songkhla	Thailand	7°07'N & 100°29'E	22.xii.2002	2	Taweewat Supindham (eBird, 2002b)
19	Pattani	Pattani	Thailand	c.o. 6°53'N & 101°15'E	?	?	Pipat Soisook
20	Chuping	Perlis	Malaysia	c.o. 06°32'N & 100°17'E	28.xii.2014	1	Dig Deep (2015)
	Chuping	Perlis	Malaysia	c.o. 06°32'N & 100°17'E	17.i.2015	1	Anonymous (2015)
21	Kent Ridge	*	Singapore	c.o. 01°18'N & 103° 47'E	x.1971	"singles"	R. Gregory-Smith (Wells, 2007)
	Singapore 'by the Gelang (Geylang) River'	*	Singapore	01°17'N & 103°52'E	7.xi.1998	?	Ollington & Loh (1999) cited in Wells (2007)
	Singapore 'gardens by the bay'	*	Singapore	c.o. 01°18'N & 103°53'E	15.ix.2016	1	Dirk Tomsa (eBird, 2016)

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ISSN 0974-7907 (Online); ISSN 0974-7893 (Print)

November 2016 | Vol. 8 | No. 13 | Pages: 9505–9596
Date of Publication: 26 November 2016 (Online & Print)

DOI: 10.11609/jott.2016.8.13.9505-9596

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