

## Rosy Starling *Pastor roseus*: a new species for Indonesia

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**Ringkasan:** Jalak mawar *Pastor roseus* belum pernah tercatat di Indonesia, namun pernah tercatat di Sabah, Malaysia timur sebagai jenis pengembara. Burung ini tercatat di taman dekat Ambarukmo Plaza Yogyakarta dan di area tepi pantai Pulau Serangan, Bali pada musim migrasi tahun 2013-2014. Burung ini diduga bermigrasi bersama Jalak Cina dan Jalak Filipina. Meskipun tidak dapat dipastikan, adanya penjualan Jalak mawar di Yogyakarta mengindikasikan adanya kemungkinan individu tersebut adalah burung lepasan. Namun demikian, perjumpaan ini menjadi catatan pertama bagi jenis ini di Indonesia.

### Introduction

The Rosy Starling *Pastor roseus* is a migratory species which breeds mainly in Western and Central Asia from South Ukraine, east to East Kazakhstan and West Mongolia, and south to Afghanistan and West and North Xinjiang in Northwest China (Craig & Feare 2009). It winters mainly in India and Sri Lanka, but small numbers regularly reach Southeast Asia (Wells 2007). First recorded in southwest Thailand in late March 1986 (Clark 1995), up to eight birds were seen in southern Thailand and northwest Peninsular Malaysia during the months from October to February over three seasons between 2002 to 2005 (Wells 2007). In Singapore, single birds were recorded during four winters (1991/92, 1994/95 and 1995/96) and up to four individuals during 2000/01, mostly on open coastal land-claim areas at the western and eastern ends of the main island. More recently the species has been regularly recorded at Sungei Balang, in north-western Johor, Peninsular Malaysia (Lim *et al.* 2012).

The species was first recorded from Borneo in December 1999, when a single bird was observed at Tanjung Aru on the outskirts of Kota Kinabalu, Sabah (Smythies 1999; Myers 2009). Since then there have been several records of juveniles accompanying flocks of Asian Glossy Starlings *Aplonis panayensis* on Pulau Tiga and Pulau Mantanani, islands to the north and south of Kota Kinabalu, respectively (Phillipps & Phillipps 2014). In this report we document recent observations of the species in Java and Bali, which constitute the first records from Indonesia.

### Observations

At about 17:00 hrs on 31 October 2013, SD noticed a different-looking starling while counting Purple-backed Starlings *Agropsar sturninus* near Ambarukmo Plaza (07°46'S, 110°24'E; 130 m asl) on the northeast outskirts of the city of Yogyakarta, Central Java, and c. 35 km from the coast. The bird was a little smaller than Javan (White-vented) Mynas *Acridotheres javanicus*, which were also present. Its breast and mantle were buffish-pink, contrasting with a blackish hood, glossy black wings, and a blackish tail. The bill and legs were pale yellow. It was identified as an adult Rosy Starling *Pastor roseus* (Plates 1, 2).



**Plate 1.** Rosy Starling (left) with Javan Myna (right) perched on Sawo Kecik Tree in Yogyakarta, October 2013.

When first observed, the bird was perched in a Sawo Kecik tree *Manilkara kauki*, beside the plaza building (Plate 1). After that, it joined a mixed flock of Javan Mynas and Purple-backed Starlings that roosted in a palm (Plate 2), c. 6 m high, which was c.15 m from the Sawo Kecik tree, during the night. An adult Rosy Starling, presumably the same individual, was subsequently sighted on 6, 18, and 28 November 2013, but could not be found during December 2013, despite weekly visits by SD. Five months after the last sighting, on 27 April 2014, two adult individuals of this species (Plate 3) were discovered in a cage at a market for pets and plants in the southern part of Yogyakarta, c. 11 km from Ambarukmo Plaza (Sigit Yudi Nugroho, pers. comm.).



**Plate 2.** Rosy Starling perched in palm, Yogyakarta, November 2013.



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**Plate 3.** Two captive Rose-coloured Starlings in a Yogyakarta bird market, April 2014.

At 08:00 hrs on 4 April 2014 an adult Rosy Starling was seen and photographed (Plate 4) by SJ on Pulau Serangan (08°32'S, 115°10'E), Bali. It was hunting insects on the ground in a field of short grass, where White-shouldered Trillers *Lalage suerii* often foraged. A week later, on 11 April 2014, the starling (presumably the same bird) was briefly sighted in a Casuarina tree on the edge of a road only 1.5 km from the first location.



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**Plate 4.** Rosy Starling, Pulau Serangan, Bali, April 2014

## Discussion

This paper documents the first Indonesian records of the Rosy Starling, notably from two sites that are separated by c. 540 km. Although the Bali records and last Yogyakarta record are only five months apart, they are unlikely to refer to the same individual. Both birds were sighted during the austral summer (boreal winter), corresponding with the non-breeding period of the species. Like most records of the Rosy Starling on the Thai-Malay Peninsula, Singapore, and Sabah, our records refer to coastal or sub-coastal locations. Coincidentally the bird seen at Tanjung Aru, Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, perched in Casuarina trees and tall palm trees in a public park (Smythies 1999), as did the birds in Bali and Yogyakarta, respectively. Ambarukmo Plaza is a very large shopping centre in Yogyakarta, with thousands of people and cars passing every hour. Despite being surrounded by large hotels and university buildings, the Sawo Kecik and palm trees in the small park was the roost site of thousands of Purple-backed Starlings and hundreds of mynas.

Given its association with Purple-backed Starlings, the Rosy Starling at Yogyakarta Plaza may have inadvertently joined a flock of the former species when it was migrating through the Thai-Malay Peninsula to Java. The Bali bird was alone, but it may be significant that small flocks of Purple-backed Starlings and Chestnut-cheeked Starlings *Agropsar philippensis* were recorded in Bali during the same season in which the Rosy Starling was found (Hjerppe 2015; Kusumanegara & Iqbal 2015; S. Jones, pers. obs.). Indeed, these flocks of Purple-backed Starlings were the first ever recorded in Bali, whereas the Chestnut-cheeked Starling was first recorded in Bali during the previous season (March 2013; Hjerppe 2015). Thus the Rosy Starling at Pulau Serangan may have initially arrived with a flock of either starling species, and later separated from the flock.

However, it is equally, if not more, likely that both the Yogyakarta and Bali birds originated from the rampant, mostly illegal, caged bird trade in Indonesia. The two captive Rosy Starlings in the Yogyakarta pet market were discovered only six months after the “wild” bird was sighted at the Plaza, and as the two locations are only c. 11 km away, it is possible that the latter escaped from one such cage. In July 2014, during a three-day survey of three of Jakarta’s largest bird markets, a total of seven Rosy Starlings was counted in four out of the 139 shops sampled (Chng *et al.* 2015). Captive individuals have also been seen in bird shops or markets in Malang and Yogyakarta, sourced from Pakistan, according to vendors (J. Eaton, pers. comm.). Significantly, all captive birds in Java, including the two reported above (Plate 3), were in adult plumage, as were the “wild” birds seen in Yogyakarta and Bali. Wells (2007: 444) noted that “most records (on the Thai-Malay Peninsula) were of first winterers that arrive in plain sandy brown juvenile plumage”, and recent records in Sabah were also of juveniles (Phillipps & Phillipps 2014). The lack of juveniles among the four individuals reported here adds support for a captive origin.

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