

## Orange Headed Ground Thrush *Zoothera citrina citrina*: A Sight Record from Buttala, Monaragala District

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### Introduction

The Orange Headed Ground Thrush is a rare winter visitor to Sri Lanka. It is a beautiful thrush with a reddish yellow head, crown, nape and underparts (breast and belly), blue-gray upper parts (mantle, rump) and tail, and white under wing patch. Vent and under-tail coverts are much duller in color. This bird is between the Bulbul and the Common Mynah in size.

The Northern race of Orange Headed Ground Thrush (*Z. citrina citrina*), which breeds in Himalayas and migrates southwards in winter visits the island during the north-east monsoon. The southern race of this bird (*Z. citrina cyanotus*) is a resident in South India. It differs in having the throat white with black markings.

The bird is known in Sinhala as Hisa Thambili Thirasikaya (Kotagama and Perera, 1983) or Thambili Walawichchiya.

**Classification** (According to Henry 1998.)

Order – Passeriformes

Family – Turdidae

Genus – *Zoothera*

Species and Sub-species –  
*Zoothera citrina citrina* (Latham), 1790

### Observation

An Orange Headed Ground Thrush was observed by the author at Buttala, in Monaragala district, of the Uva province of Sri Lanka. Location of observation lied inside the premises of the Faculty of Applied Sciences of the Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka. It was about 1.5 km away from the Buttala junction on the left side of Colombo – Pothuvil main road (A4). The site is situated within the Intermediate Zone and belongs to the floristic region Eastern Intermediate Lowlands according to the map prepared by Ashton and Gunatillake (1987).

Only one individual was observed on 21/12/1998 around 11.30 a.m. The bird was observed for about 15 minutes with the aid of a pair of 7 x 35 field glasses, some times from a distance of

about 5 meters. It was a hot day with dry and sunny weather.

The same place and the area was monitored for several days after the observation, but the bird was never seen again.

### Habitat

This handsome bird is a denizen of forest, heavy jungle, and shady groves (Legge, 1983). Salim Ali (1996) describes its habitat as damp forest with plentiful undergrowth, mixed secondary forests, bamboo jungle or groves near habitations. It is a shy jungle dweller and therefore easily overlooked (Henry, 1998).

The habitat where this observation was done is somewhat different from above habitat descriptions. It was not a natural one. It was shaded with several mango trees and there was no undergrowth except the grasses covering the land. The place was cooler than exposed areas due to the vegetative cover.

### Behaviour

It was first seen feeding and searching for food while hopping on the ground. It searched for food in a great hurry among grasses, fallen tree leaves and sometimes on the exposed sandy ground. After several minutes it was exited by the attention of the author and flew up very fast to the foliage of a mango tree. It perched on a height of about 3-4 m for few minutes and flew away.

### Distribution

The Orange Headed Ground Thrush is distributed from foothills to mountains (up to 2300 m) of South Asia, from north Pakistan and India (Himalayas from Kashmir east to Arunchal Pradesh), to South-east China. From South through South-east Asia to Andaman and Nicobar islands, and also in Sumatra, Borneo, Java and Bali (Sibley and Monroe, 1990). In the winter it visits Sri Lanka, Andaman and Nicobar islands (Ali, 1996).

In Sri Lanka it is a rare winter visitor to lowlands, mainly in the south, center and west (Grimmt et al., 1998). It visits forests of dry lowlands and occasionally wet lowlands (Harrison, 1999). During the past few years this species had been recorded more frequently, most of them from the dry zone. But recently,

this bird was recorded few times in the Udawatte Kale which belongs to the wet zone (Rathnayake, 1997).

This thrush has only been procured three times in the island till 1880. The first specimen obtained in Ceylon was shot at a place called Kondawathawan, near Ampara. The second record was from open country near Jaffna, in the beginning of 1876, and the third in March 1877 on the banks of the Kirinde ganga in Hambantota district (Legge, 1983). A pair were reported in December, 1947 at Hambantota (Henry, 1998). Nanadana De Silva has recorded this bird at his home garden in Wadduwa, Kalutara in 1991 (Rathnayake, 1997). There have been several sightings in recent years of this thrush ranging from the dry zone jungles in the north at Sigiriya and in the south at Udawalawe, to a garden in Colombo, where the same bird turned up during three consecutive years. The Orange Headed Ground Thrush now appears to be a regular winter visitor in small numbers (Henry, 1998). Orange Headed ground – Thrushes has been recorded from Rathmalana in December, 1978 (Jayawardene, 1980) and from Kaduwela in January 1997 (Rathnayake, 1997), both records from the Colombo district. Dilup Chandranimal of the YZA has recorded this bird from Talpitiya, Wadduwa on November 23<sup>rd</sup> 1998 (Unpublished).

The observation described in this report could be the first record of Orange Headed Ground Thrush from Buttala area or from the Monaragala district.

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