

A Note on the Orange Headed Ground Thrush *Zoothera citrina citrina* (Latham)

M. Sandun J. Perera,

Department of Natural Resources, Sabaragamuwa University of Sri Lanka,
Buttala 91100, Sri Lanka.
sandun.perera@gmail.com

The Orange Headed Ground Thrush *Zoothera citrina* (Passeriformes; Turdidae), known in Sinhalese as 'Hisa Thambili Thirasikaya' (Kotagama and Perera, 1983) or 'Thambili Wal-awichchiya' is a winter visitor to Sri Lanka (Henry, 1971).

The Orange Headed Ground Thrush is distributed from foothills to mountains (up to 2300 m) of South Asia, from north to Pakistan and India (Himalayas from Kashmir east to Arunchal Pradesh), from east 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). The northern race of Orange Headed Ground Thrush (*Z. citrina citrina*), which breeds in Himalayas migrates southwards in winter and visits Sri Lanka during the north-east monsoon, while the southern race (*Z. citrina cyanotus*) is a resident in South India (Henry, 1971).

It was regarded in Sri Lanka as a rare winter visitor to dry lowlands, and occasionally to wet lowlands (Grimmtt et al., 1998; Harrison, 1999). Henry (1971) described it as a shy jungle dweller which is therefore easily overlooked. The species had been recorded more frequently during the recent past, owing to either an actual increase of the numbers that visit Sri Lanka or increase in the numbers of vigilant bird watchers, who encounter the bird more frequently. This article describes a sight record of the bird and attempts to review its present status.

Present Observation

An Orange Headed Ground Thrush was observed by the author in the undergrowth of a moist semi-evergreen forest patch in the Rahathangala Hill at Buttala, in Monaragala district, within the Uva province of Sri Lanka. The locality was about 1.5 km away from the Buttala junction on the right side of the A4 road (81° 15' 56" E, 6° 46' 06" N - recorded using a Garmin 12-Channel GPS receiver).

The forest patch is situated within the intermediate zone and belongs to the floristic region of eastern intermediate lowlands (Ashton and Gunatilleke, 1987).

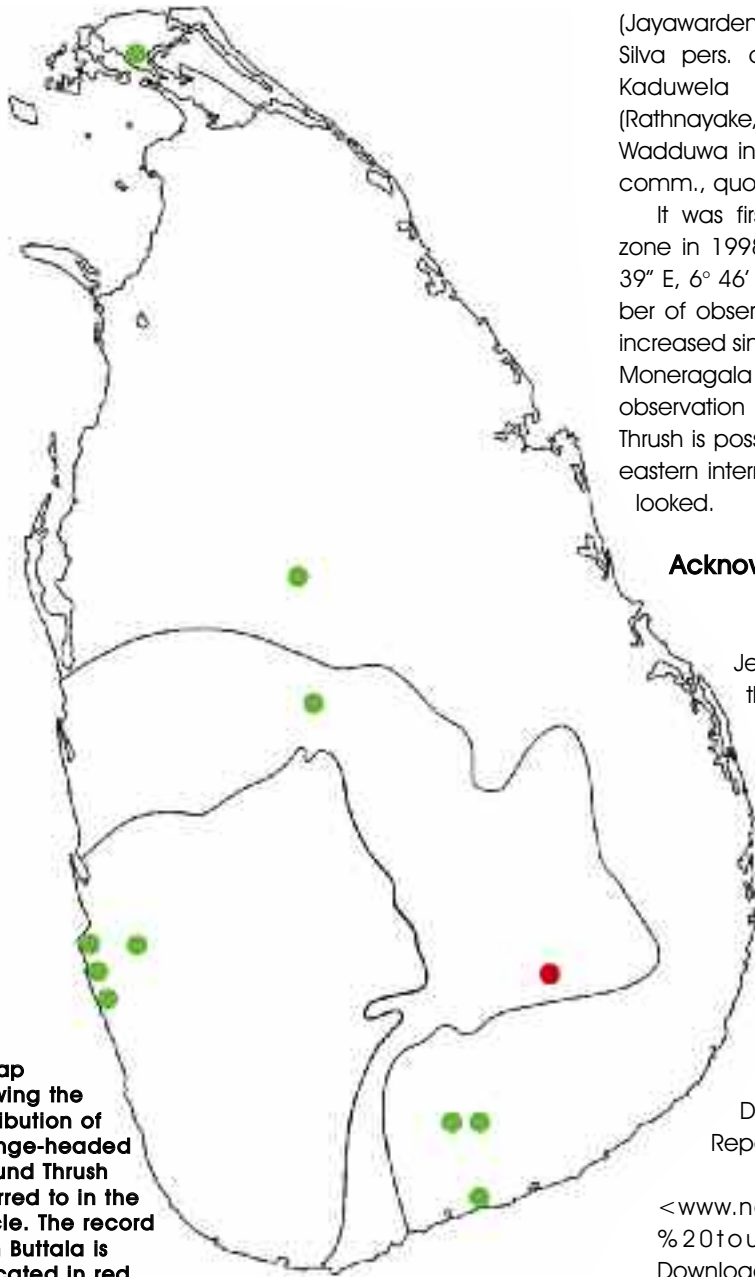
A single individual was observed for more than 15 minutes on 23rd March 2007 (almost at the end of northern winter), on a hot but cloudy evening at around 17:30 hrs., Binoculars (7 X 35) were used for identification and later the bird could be clearly observed with the naked eye at a distance of less than 5 meters. The specimen was exceptionally bright with reddish orange upperparts. The bird was recorded in moist and moderately dense undergrowth in the shade of a semi-evergreen forest. This matches the habitat description of Legge (1983), who stated 'this handsome bird is a denizen of forest, heavy jungle, and shady groves'. Ali (1996) describes its habitat as 'damp forest with plentiful undergrowth, mixed secondary forests, bamboo jungle or groves near habitations'.

It was first observed hopping about the ground and searching for food in leaf litter. The thrush then remained still for almost 10 minutes when it was disturbed by the movements of observers. Later it flew up and perched at a height of about 2 m for some time, before disappearing into the forest undergrowth.

Comments on the range of *Zoothera citrina*

Three Specimens were Collected in the island prior to 1880. The first specimen obtained in Ceylon was shot at Kondawathawan, near Ampara. The second record was from open country near Jaffna, at the beginning of 1876, and the third in March 1877 on the banks of the Kirindanga in Hambantota district (Legge, 1983). A pair was reported in December, 1947 at Hambantota (Henry, 1971).

There have been numerous sightings in recent years of this thrush ranging from the dry zone jungles in the north at Sigiriya and in the south at Uda-walawe, to a garden in Colombo, where the same bird turned up during three consecutive years (Henry, 1971). It has been sighted



A map showing the distribution of Orange-headed Ground Thrush referred to in the article. The record from Buttala is indicated in red.

recently from the dry and intermediate zones in Udawalawe National Park (Hornbuckle, 2002; Thompson, 2002), Sigiriya (Wallace and Wallace, 2001; Dukes, 2006) and Thanamalwila (Hodgson, 2004).

The Orange Headed ground thrush has also been recorded on several occasions from the wet zone. It has been sighted in Rathmalana in December, 1978

(Jayawardene, 1980), in Wadduwa in 1991 (Nandana De Silva pers. comm., quoted by Rathnayake, 1997), in Kaduwela (Rathnayake, 1997), in Udawattakele (Rathnayake, 1997; Mills, 1999), and also from Talpitiya, Wadduwa in November 1998 (Dilup Chandranimal pers. comm., quoted by Perera, 2001).

It was first recorded from the eastern intermediate zone in 1998, from Buttala, Moneragala District (81° 15' 39" E, 6° 46' 16" N) (Perera, 2001). Even though the number of observations from other areas zones have further increased since then, there are no published records from Moneragala District of the intermediate zone. The present observation suggests that the Orange-Headed Ground Thrush is possibly a regular visitor in small numbers, to the eastern intermediate zone, but has probably been overlooked.

Acknowledgements

The author wishes to acknowledge Bandara, Jeewantha, Dilini and Dayani who joined him in the field and Saman for his help with the GPS receiver.

References

- Ali, S. 1996. *The Book of Indian Birds* (Twelfth Salim Ali centenary edition-revised and enlarged). Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Ashton, P. S. and Gunatilleke, C. V. S. 1987. New light on the plant geography of Ceylon I. Historical plant geography. *Journal of Biogeography*, 14: 249-285.
- Dukes, P. 2006. Sri Lanka: Naturetrek Tour Report 4 - 20 February 2006.
- <[www.naturetrek.co.uk/reports/Sri%20Lanka%20-%20tour%20report%20\(Feb%202006\).pdf](http://www.naturetrek.co.uk/reports/Sri%20Lanka%20-%20tour%20report%20(Feb%202006).pdf)>. Downloaded on 18th April 2007.
- Grimmtt, R. Inskipp, C. and Inskipp, T. 1998. *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi.
- Harrison, J. 1999. *A Field Guide to the Birds of Sri Lanka*. Oxford University Press, New York.
- Henry, G.M. 1971. *A Guide to the Birds of Ceylon* (second edition). K.V.G. de Silva & Sons, Kandy.
- Hodgson, I. 2004. Sri Lanka: January 22nd to February 4th

- 2004 Report, Kent Ornithological Society
<<http://www.kentos.org.uk/Trip%20Reports/SriLankaJVDVol.htm>>. Downloaded on 18th April 2007.
- Hornbuckle, J. 2002. Birding in Sri Lanka & Southern India: 10 February - 5 March 2002.
<http://www.worldtwitch.com/sri_lanka_jh.htm>. Downloaded on 18th April 2007.
- Jayawardene, H.U. 1980. The Northern Orange Headed Ground Thrush - *Zoothera citrina citrina*. Loris, XV (1) : 41-42. Wild Life and Nature Protection Society of Ceylon. Colombo.
- Kotagama, S.W. and Perera, D.G.A. 1983. A Systematic Nomenclature for the Birds of Sri Lanka. Tisara Publications Ltd., Colombo.
- Legge, V. 1983. A History of the Birds of Ceylon (2nd edition). Tisara Publications Ltd., Colombo.
- Mills, I., 1999. Trip Report: Sri Lanka, March 28 - April 10, 1999.
<<http://www.camacdonald.com/birding/tripreports/SriLanka99.html>>. Downloaded on 18th April 2007.
- Perera, S.J. 2001. Orange Headed Ground Thrush *Zoothera citrina*: A sight record from Buttala, Monaragala district. Sri Lanka Naturalist, IV(2): 21-22. Young Zoologists' Association of Sri Lanka. Colombo.
- Rathnayake, A. 1997. An Observation Report on Orange Headed Ground Thrush. Sri Lanka Naturalist, I (2) : 21-22. Young Zoologists' Association of Sri Lanka. Colombo.
- Sibley, C.G. and Monroe, B.L. 1990. Distribution and Taxonomy of Birds of the World, Yale University Press, New Haven.
- Thompson, J. 2002, Sri Lanka Trip Report: 1-15 March 2002.
<<http://www.camacdonald.com/birding/SriLankaTripReport%5BJCT%5D.htm>>. Downloaded on 18th April 2007.
- Wallace M. and Wallace, G. 2001. A Report from bird tours.co.uk - Sri Lanka 8-23 November 2001.
<<http://www.birdtours.co.uk/tripreports/sri-lanka/sri6/sri-nov2001.htm>>. Downloaded on 18th April 2007.



Sudhir Shivaram