

Short Communication

Occurrence of the Asian Koel *Eudynamys scolopacea* in Iran, with a new record from Hengam Island, Persian Gulf

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Received 25 March 2008; accepted 26 April 2008

The Asian Koel *Eudynamys scolopacea* is a fairly common species within its normal distribution in the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia, and has been assigned the status of “Least Concern” in the 2007 IUCN Red List of threatened species. Iran is located in the extreme western part of its global distribution (Clements 2007), although the species breeds as near to Iran as the Indus Valley in Sind Province, Pakistan (Roberts 1991). Porter *et al.* (1996) describe it as a rare but regular winter visitor to Iran and Oman and vagrant in the United Arab Emirates. However, most records in Oman are in the southern half of the country, with a very small wintering population on Masirah Island, and there have been very few records in the north of Oman in the area opposite Iran (I.D. Harrison *in litt.* to Editor). There are 139 records of Asian Koel in the database of Oman. Eight are from northern Oman, 61 are from Masirah Island where there is a small wintering population in a very small area of woodland, and 70 are from the southern part of the central desert and from Dhofar, southern Oman.

The Asian Koel is an unmistakable cuckoo-like bird with a relatively thick bill, short wings and rather long tail; the adult male is all black with a yellow bill, while the female has drab brown upperparts, thinly streaked and spotted with white (Porter *et al.* 1996) except on the tail, breast and abdomen which have white streaks or bars (Whistler 1986). The juvenile is similar to the female. It is an arboreal species and largely frugivorous but occasionally it also feeds on insects, flower nectar, eggs of small birds and palm tree berries (Roberts 1991).

The Asian Koel is listed as a vagrant (fewer than five records) in some of the recent literature on the birds of Iran such as Firouz (2005) and Scott & Adhami (2006), but it was not mentioned by Scott *et al.* (1975) or Mansoori (2001). There were only two records of the species in Iran in the 1970s, and these seem to have been the first records for Iran. The first of these two records was an immature female that was found in a garden in Chahbahar in Seistan and Baluchestan Province in the afternoon of 29 January 1975 by D.A. Scott (pers. comm.). This bird appeared shortly after a period of unusually severe weather with strong south-east winds, thunderstorms and torrential rain. The second record was of a bird heard calling by B. King (unpubl. data) in mangroves near Laft in Hara Protected Area, Qeshm Island, Hormozgan Province, on 25 February 1976 (D.A. Scott, pers. comm.).

The third report of this species in Iran is also from an island in the Persian Gulf. At around 11:00 hrs on 21 November 2007, an exhausted adult female Asian Koel was captured near the north Coast of Hengam Island following a period of very windy weather. Hengam Island (26°41'07.2"N, 55°53'28.7"E) is located two kilometers south of Qeshm Island, Hormozgan Province, and has an area of 9.8 km² and maximum elevation of 100 m. a.s.l. The island has a very warm, arid climate, and there is little vegetation cover. The bird had a slight injury to its right wing, but there was no evidence of any gun-shot wound, and we concluded that the bird's inability to fly was a result of exhaustion rather than any specific injury. We did not carry out any treatment on the bird, and by 11:17 hrs,

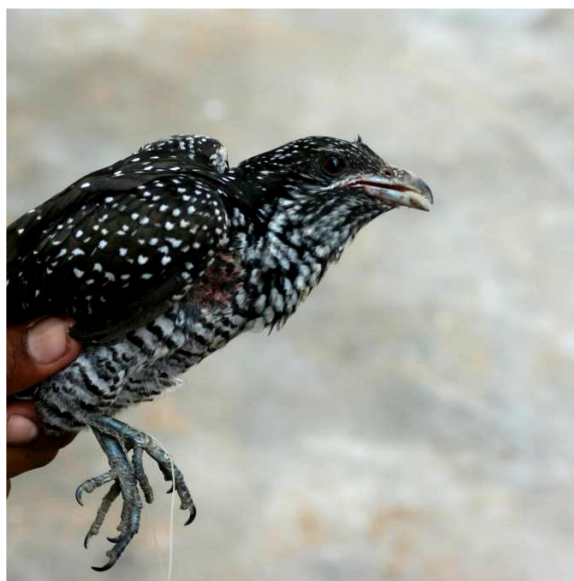


Figure 1. The injured female Asian Koel found on Hengam Island near the Iranian coast, Persian Gulf, 21 November 2007, © A. Ghoddousi.



Figure 2. The female Asian Koel on Hengam Island, 21 November 2007, © A. Ghoddousi.

it had recovered sufficiently to fly off (Figs. 1–2).

It seems that the Asian Koel remains a rare vagrant to the Persian Gulf and Oman Sea coasts of Iran. Two of the three occurrences of this species, including the one described here, were in fact after unusual weather conditions which may well have disoriented the birds – inexperienced young birds in particular are prone to becoming confused during their migration south if adverse winds or storms occur (Anonymous 2008).

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