

## Submission to Bird Australia Rarities Committee

**Species:** Eyebrowed Thrush *Trudus obscurus*  
**Location:** Horsburgh Island, Cocos (Keeling) Islands, Indian Ocean  
**Observation Date:** 19-27 December 2015  
**Submission Date:** 20 August 2018  
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### Circumstances

Between 19 and 27 December 2015 a small invasion of the Eyebrowed Thrush *Turdus obscurus* occurred on the Cocos (Keeling) Islands, Indian Ocean (CKI). Between two and five birds were recorded at four locations on four separate days by Geof Christie and Pam Jones. The observations are summarised in Table 1.

**Table 1. Summary of Eyebrowed Thrush observations in December 2015**

Date	Number	Location	Photos?
19 <sup>th</sup>	1	Trannies Beach turn off, West Island	Yes
20 <sup>th</sup>	1	Shell Depot, West Island	No
25 <sup>th</sup>	2	Oceania House, Home Island	Yes
27 <sup>th</sup>	1	Maxi's Cafe, West Island	Yes

Trannies Beach turn-off and the Shell Depot are only about 750 m apart at the top of West Island. They are about 8 km from Oceania House (across the lagoon) and 6 Km from Maxi's Cafe. It is therefore possible that the birds moved between these locations (a minimum of two birds) or that they were all separate birds (a minimum of five). The observations are therefore submitted to BARC as a single set of records.

### Descriptions

The descriptions are taken from the photographs (Plates 1-7). The Plates depict typical *Turdus* thrushes with longish orange-yellow tarsi; dark beak with yellow base to lower mandible; fairly uniform grey-brown or dingy-brown top of head and upperparts; warm orange-buff flanks; a distinctive facial pattern made up of conspicuous white supercilium and subloral – subocular stripes separated by a dark loreal stripe; more obscure pale submoustacial and dark malar stripes; and a pale throat.

#### *19 December, Trannies Beach Turnoff*

Pale tips to the greater secondary coverts (Plate 1) and the obvious submoustacial and malar stripes (Plate 2) indicate a first cycle bird with retained juvenile coverts (Wells 2007). The head appears slightly greyer than the scapulars (Plate 1), perhaps indicating a male, but this is a qualitative judgement about which we cannot be certain.



**Plate 1. First cycle Eyebrowed Thrush at Trannies Beach Turn-off, CKI, 19 December 2015**  
(Photograph: Geof Christie).



**Plate 2. First cycle Eyebrowed Thrush at Trannies Beach Turn-off, CKI, 19 December 2015**  
(Photograph: Geof Christie).

*25 December, Oceania house*

Plate 3 Shows two birds, a first cycle bird with pale tips to the greater secondary coverts (left), and an adult (right). Plate 4 shows an adult male with a very grey head, a grey throat and obscured submoustacial and malar stripes, and a rich orange-buff breast. Plate 5 shows an adult male, probably the same bird as in Plate 4 (only two birds were noted in the field), but the facial pattern may be a little more marked. Plate 5 shows the first cycle bird (cropped from Plate 3); it appears to be browner headed and less striped compared to the Trannies Beach bird (Plates 1 and 2), with more extensive pale tips to the greater coverts.



**Plate 3. Two Eyebrowed Thrushes at Oceania House, CKI, 25 December 2015**  
(Photograph: Geof Christie).



**Plate 4. Adult male Eyebrowed Thrush at Oceania House, CKI, 25 December 2015**  
(Photograph: Geof Christie).



**Plate 5. Adult male Eyebrowed Thrush at Oceania House, CKI, 25 December 2015**  
(Photograph: Geof Christie).



**Plate 6. First cycle Eyebrowed Thrush at Oceania House, CKI, 25 December 2015**  
(Photograph: Geof Christie).

*27 December, Maxi's Cafe*

This appears to be a first cycle bird with a pale throat and obvious submoustacial and malar stripes,



**Plate 7. Eyebrowed Thrush at Maxi's Cafe, CKI, 27 December 2015**  
(Photograph: Geof Christie).

## Identification

To an experienced observer the subject birds are obviously a thrush (Turdidae). Among thrushes, the combination of the complex facial pattern and the orange-buff, unstreaked flanks is diagnostic (Cramp 1989; MacKinnon & Phillips 1993; Beaman & Madge 1998; Dunn *et al.* 1999; Mullarney *et al.* 1999; Robson 2000; Rasmussen & Anderton 2005; Wells 2007; Brazil 2009; Menkhorst *et al.* 2017). The subloral – subocular Stripe is particularly distinctive.

Within Australia the only vaguely similar species recorded is the Island Thrush *Turdus poliocephalus*, of which ssp. *natalis* occurs on the relatively close (~980 km distant) Christmas Island. *T. p. natalis* was even introduced to the CKI shortly before 1900, and though now extinct there, there was an estimated population of about 500 birds on Horsburgh in 1941 (Woinarski *et al.* 2014). Island Thrush has similar body plumage to Eyebrowed Thrush, but lacks the complex facial pattern and bicoloured bill.

Farther afield, Redwing *T. iliacus* has a vaguely similar head pattern but has heavily streaked underparts in all plumages. Grey-backed Thrush *T. hortulorum* has similar body plumage but lacks the complex facial pattern. American Robin *T. migratorius* has a darker head (hooded appearance) and a different pattern of white in the face. Everett's Thrush *Zoothera everetti* is darker with a streaked facial pattern and an all-dark bill. Grey-sided Thrush *T. feae* has a similar head pattern but lacks the buff flanks. The closely related Pale Thrush *T. pallidus* and Brown-headed (Red-bellied) Thrush *T. chrysolaus* lack the complex head pattern.

*T. obscurus* is monotypic with no significant geographical variation (Cramp 1989; Birdlife International 2018; Gill & Donsker 2018).

## Status

BARC has accepted one record of Eyebrowed Thrush from Malanda Qld in February 2011 following Cyclone Yasi (BARC Case 719), which was the first report for Australia. Menkhorst *et al.* (2017) list this record and two more:

- Multiple from CKI in December 2011.
- Adult male from Port Headland WA in December 2014 (contemporaneous with this occurrence).

There is also another report from Horsburgh Is, CKI in December 2014, which is being submitted separately but concurrently with this submission.

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