

Submission to Bird Australia Rarities Committee

Species: Rosy Starlings *Pastor roseus*
Location: West and Home Islands, Cocos (Keeling) Islands, Indian Ocean
Observation Dates: 9 November 2016 to 24 January 2017
Submission number: 1134
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Circumstances

From November 2016 to January 2017, GC and PJ recorded at least two Rosy Starlings on West and Home Islands in the Cocos (Keeling) Islands. One was seen and photographed on intermittent occasions at the southern end of the West Island airstrip. The last sighting was about 12 km away on Home Island, almost 2 months after the previous sighting and involved two birds instead of one. As it is not known whether this pair included the original bird and a new one, or two new ones, we suggest it is most simple to treat all of this season's birds as a single set of records. Observations are summarised in Table 1.

Table 1. Summary of observations.

Location	Date	No.	Plumage	Photos
West I: southern end of the airstrip	9-11-2016	1	Juvenile	Yes
West I: southern end of the airstrip	28-11-2016	1	?	No
West I: southern end of the airstrip	29-11-2016	1	Moulting to formative	Yes
West I: southern end of the airstrip	30-11-2016	1	Moulting to formative	Yes
West I: southern end of the airstrip	1-12-2016	1	?	No
West I: southern end of the airstrip	4-12-2016	1	Moulting to formative	Yes
Home I.: rubbish tip	24-01-2019	2	1x fresh formative; 1x adult basic	Yes

The bird on the airstrip was not found during visits there on 10, 11, 14, 17, 23, 25 and 27 November, and 14 December.

Description and Identification

Refer to the photographs below. The bird at the airstrip was in juvenile plumage, which slightly resembles juvenile Common Starling *Sturnus vulgaris* (Figure 1). However, it can be distinguished from Common Starling and all other starlings by the pale, plain, milky tea plumage overall, lack of dark lores and a short, bicoloured bill with a pink tip (e.g. Menkhorst et al. 2017; Rasmussen & Anderton 2005; Beaman & Madge 1998).



Figure 1. Rosy Starling in juvenile plumage at the southern end of the West Island airstrip, on 9 November 2015. Photo by Geof Christie and Pam Jones.

During the period the airstrip bird underwent a complete moult from juvenile to formative plumage (*sensu* Howell 2010) or to first adult plumage (*sensu* Cramp & Perrins 1994). This produced a radical transformation of its appearance as it acquired a black head, wings and tail, contrasting with pinkish brown back, rump, breast and belly (Figures 2 and 3).



Figure 2. Rosy Starling molting from juvenile to formative plumage at the southern end of the West Island Airstrip, 29 November 2015. Note the mix of brown juvenile and black formative remiges. Photo by Geof Christie and Pam Jones.



Figure 3. Rosy Starling moulting from juvenile to formative plumage at the southern end of the West Island Airstrip, 4 December 2015. Photo by Geof Christie and Pam Jones.

The bold pink-and-black pattern of the formative and adult plumages is distinctive (e.g. Menkhorst et al. 2017; Rasmussen & Anderton 2005; Beaman & Madge 1998; Figures 4 to 6).



Figure 4. Rosy Starlings at Home Island rubbish tip on 24 January 2016. The left bird appears to be an adult, with relatively narrow pale margins to the black wing feathers. The right bird is near the end of the pre-formative moult. Photo by Geof Christie and Pam Jones.



Figure 5. Rosy Starling at Home Island rubbish tip on 24 January 2016. This bird is near the end of the pre-formative moult, with some retained juvenile remiges. Photo by Geof Christie and Pam Jones.



Figure 6. Rosy Starling at Home Island rubbish tip on 24 January 2016. This bird appears to be an adult, with relatively narrow pale margins to the glossy black wing feathers and rather bright plumage. Photo by Geof Christie and Pam Jones.

Status

BARC has accepted five records of Rosy Starling from Australia: from WA (case 437), NSW (cases 520 and 1077), NT (case 979) and the Cocos (Keeling) Islands (case 474) in November to December 2005. This would be the third record from the CKI. We are concurrently submitting five records from the CKI including this one (Table 2).

Table 2. Records we are now submitting to BARC for Rosy Starling from CKI

Location(s)	Date(s)	Submission No.
West Island town	9 November 2011	1133
West Island airstrip Home Island tip	November to December 2016 24 January 2017	1134
West I Quarantine Station	14 April 2018	1135
West Island town	24 to 26 December 2018	1136
West I Quarantine Station	11 September 2019	1137

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Contributions and Acknowledgments

GC and PJ saw and photographed the birds, and documented them in their monthly bird report newsletters. DJ compiled the submission. Thanks to Ian McAllan for comments on this submission and information about the status of birds on the Cocos (Keeling) Islands.

References

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