

Eye-browed Thrushes *Turdus obscurus* in the Cocos (Keeling) Islands during the summer of 2019/20.

Submission to BARC Case No. 1145 - 2-May-20

By Mike Carter & Geof Christie

Although not recorded on Australian territory until 2011 when the first Australian Eye-browed Thrush *Turdus obscurus* was seen on the Atherton Tablelands, Queensland, this species has since been reported at Port Hedland, Western Australia in 2014 (Menkhorst *et al.* 2019), and on Christmas Island on 10th December 2019 (BARC case # 1098). Note that some sources wrongly attributed the site of that observation to the Cocos (Keeling) Islands, where in recent years the Eye-browed Thrush has occurred annually (see e.g. BARC cases 1026, 1027, 1031 & 1062). In the summer of 2019/20 the species was particularly abundant and persistent on Cocos. While not a complete account of all reports, the following gives some appreciation of the extent of this minor invasion.



Eye-browed Thrush, West Island, Cocos (Keeling) Islands, 7th December 2019
Photo by Karina Sorell

The first to be reported was a single bird found by Geof Christie at North Point, West Island on 30th November 2019. Thereafter the species was apparently continuously present on that island until 17th December with up to four (4) being seen together (for e.g. on 6th December). Subsequently the species appeared on Home Island in January 2020 with up to five (5) being reported on 6th January (Richard Baxter) and four (4) on 7th January (Geof Christie). Whilst between August 2019 and March 2020 Geof Christie monitored the bird life on West Island almost daily, Home Island was birded only occasionally with only intermittent visits by birders mostly in December and January.

The Birds and Photographic Record thereof.

The birds were about the size of the Island Thrush *T. poliocephalus*, which is resident on Christmas Island and a species familiar to most observers of the birds that are the subject of this submission. All other information necessary to confirm their identity is contained in the photographs provided herein.



Eye-browed Thrush, West Island, Cocos (Keeling) Islands, 7th December 2019

Photos: top left by Karina Sorell, other three by Mike Carter

In addition to the authors, among others in a long list of observers to have seen these birds are Richard Baxter, Bill Moorhead, Pamela Jones, Peter Barrand, Darryel Binns, Tania Ireton, Glen Pacey, Faye Smith, Bruce Richardson, Noel Luff, Martyn Moffatt, Bill McRoberts, Norton Gill, Tony Nielson, Ann Breeze, Phillip Breeze, Jenny Spry, Joy Tansey, John Lombard, Brian Jones, Bill Betts, Rohan Clarke and Karina Sorell.

The birds spent much time foraging for food on the ground but were also seen up to 3 m high in shrubs where it is believed they were eating the berries of the butterfly bush *Premna serratifolia*, known locally as 'brambles'. They were not seen in the upper canopy.



Berries of the 'Butterfly Bush, a probable food source Photo by Mike Carter

Identification

With the evidence presented here identification to species is straight forward as there are no easily confused taxa (Kanouchi *et al.* 1998; Clement & Hathway 2000; Robson 2008; Brazil 2009; Myers 2016; Menkhorst *et al.* 2019). Judging by the brilliance of the orange breast, the white facial markings and the pale tips to the greater coverts that form an obscure short wingbar, the most photographed bird is a first year male. Not all of the five (5) or more birds that were seen were as strongly coloured.

Status in Australia

If accepted this will be the 5th record for Cocos and the 8th for Australia.

Acknowledgements

We thank all those that contributed to this report either by collection of data or by provision of photographs. These include Karina Sorell, Richard Baxter, Glen Pacey, Ian McAllan and Peter Barrand.

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