

Dusky Thrushes in Shetland

On 24th September 1968, while I was driving towards the north end of Whalsay, I saw what I at first took to be a Redwing running through the grass at the roadside. I stopped and looked at it from about 70 yards through 12 x 50 binoculars, and as the bird stood still could just see its head, neck and upper back. I immediately realised it was not a Redwing when I saw that the prominent markings above and below the eye were white rather than buff. Within seconds the bird moved into full view, caught a slug, broke it up and ate the pieces, and at that point I noticed chestnut on the closed wing. As it flew along the road, settling again 50 yards further on, I saw chestnut on the wings and brownish-chestnut on the rump.

I then drove slowly along until I was about 50 yards from the bird, when it again began running and then stopped to break up and eat another slug. This time I had an excellent view and was able to make a rough sketch and note the main plumage features, which included a dark breast-band, whitish chin and throat, and brown streaks on the flanks and lower belly. I thought that it appeared slimmer than a Redwing. I then flushed the bird and noted that it showed a buffish chestnut underwing, more like that of a Song Thrush than a Redwing. After consulting the *Field Guide* I was now sure that this bird was a Dusky Thrush.

My detailed description is as follows:

Forehead, crown, nape and hind neck dark brown, feathers of hind neck edged ash-grey; very prominent white eyestripe from lores over eye to back of head; lores and ear coverts black-brown, very dark in contrast to eyestripe and cheeks; cheeks, sides of throat and sides of neck creamy white, with a few dark spots on sides of throat and neck; mantle and scapulars dark brown, edged ash-grey, scapulars with shade of chestnut: back and rump brownish, much chestnut on rump noticeable when flying away; upper tail-coverts and tail brown; lesser coverts brownish, edged ash-grey; median and greater coverts chestnut, edged ash-grey; primary coverts brownish-chestnut; secondaries chestnut fading to brownish on inner feathers; primaries brown; under wing-coverts and axillaries buffish-chestnut; rest of underwing light brownish, chin and throat creamy white; centre breast and belly whitish; breast spotted black-brown forming noticeable breast-band from shoulder to shoulder, dense at sides and very faint in centre; sides and flanks spotted rusty/black; bill black-brown; legs and feet brown.

I later telephoned R. J. Tulloch, and he and Dennis Coutts arrived on Whalsay the following day. In spite of an extensive search the bird was not seen again.

JOHN H. SIMPSON.

(This is the second Scottish and fourth British record of this Asian thrush. The first Scottish bird was a first-winter

female, trapped on Fair Isle in October 1961 (*Fair Isle Bird Obs. Bull.* 4: 209). This bird has not been described fully, and R. H. Dennis has kindly supplied the following notes from the observatory records.—Ed.)

A Dusky Thrush was discovered near the Haa on Fair Isle on the morning of 18th October 1961. It was briefly seen in the same area that afternoon but next day had moved to the northern part of the island where it was finally caught at dusk in the Vaadal trap. It was taken to the Bird Observatory to be ringed, and as it was already dark was roosted overnight in the bird-room. It was released next morning and spent the day near the Observatory; it was last seen on 21st near the Vatstrass Burn.

Peter Davis wrote in the log for 18th October that "in the field it was a handsome, if sober-coloured bird, reminiscent at first glance of a large, pale-looking Redwing, with a similar but more conspicuously marked head pattern. The upperparts were of a drabber olive-brown than a Redwing's, slightly more rufous on the rump and upper tail-coverts, the tail dark brown, the underwing rufous, and there was a long rufous-buff wing-patch made by the edgings of the greater coverts and secondaries. The breast had a double gorget of close streaking with finer streaks between and the throat was clear creamy-buff between two clear blackish chin-stripes (under the moustaches). The flanks also were well streaked with blackish colour and washed greyish-brown, the belly creamy white and the under tail-coverts prominently white at the sides."

A full laboratory description is filed at the Observatory and is as follows:

Entire upperparts, forehead to upper tail-coverts, greyish-olive brown, with very slightly paler edges to each feather giving a mottled appearance; feathers of crown and forehead with dark brown centres also; rump slightly warmer colour than rest with red-chestnut centres hidden by tips and fringes; supercilium long, rather broad, whitish washed grey-brown; lores, ear coverts and cheeks uniform grey-brown; moustachial streak broad, whiter than supercilium, speckled brown; malar stripe below formed by blackish-brown tips to white feathers, curving round to sides of neck and merging into sides of spotted gorget; centre of chin and small area at centre of throat (between chin stripes) creamy white; below this an extensive dark rusty-brown pectoral band obscured by long whitish fringes of feathers, most of which had small dark notches at tip; some greyish-buff suffusion of white fringes on lower part of gorget; belly pure white; under tail-coverts rusty-brown with very broad white tips and edges to feathers, more white than rusty; flanks showing mainly white, blotched rusty and black with grey-brown wash, especially towards rear; flight feathers and greater coverts all dark brown with paler outer fringes, whitish on primaries, rusty-buff on secondaries and tertials; corresponding greater coverts similar, those of secondaries with fairly clear whitish tips; tertials also tipped whitish; median and lesser coverts

greyish-olive brown with rather paler fringes, lessers very much as mantle; underwing warm chestnut wash, paler than Redwing; tail dark brown, all feathers with rusty edging near base only, narrow whitish edging on rest; bill dark horn, turning yellowish at base of lower mandible; legs dark red-brown; eye dark brown. Aged and sexed as 1st-year female. Weight, 84.2 gms. Measurements: wing 128 mm; bill 22.5 mm; tarsus 34 mm; tail 90 mm. 3rd primary longest, 2nd 4 mm, 4th 2 mm, 5th 8 mm, 6th 19 mm, 7th 26 mm and 8th 30 mm shorter; 3rd, 4th and 5th emarginated on outer webs; 1st primary minute, 9 mm shorter than primary coverts.

ROY H. DENNIS.

Subalpine Warblers in Shetland and Orkney

On 22nd April 1968 John Bruce telephoned to describe a warbler he had seen in his garden at Skaw, Whalsay. I was on the scene within half an hour and eventually found the bird feeding in a disused cabbage patch overrun with reeds and dockens and surrounded by a drystone wall.

I watched it for some time through 12 x 50 binoculars at about 25 yards range and identified it as a Subalpine Warbler, apparently a male. I saw all the characteristic plumage features and took full field notes.

I could not find the bird during the next few days, but saw it—or a similar bird—about two miles from the first locality on 30th April and daily until 5th May; on one occasion it was watched at close range from an open window and several other people saw it. The bird was very active and kept flitting from bush to bush, sometimes down amongst the grass and rhubarb, and sometimes climbing along a drystone wall and feeding amongst the lichen on the stones. It frequently cocked its tail like a Wren, especially when feeding on the stones.

On 5th May I saw another Subalpine Warbler in a different part of the island. This was probably a female, being a duller bird with only a faint moustachial stripe.

JOHN H. SIMPSON.

(Full field notes have been supplied. There are several previous spring records of this species from Shetland and Fair Isle.—Ed.)

I watched a Subalpine Warbler for about ten minutes, at ranges down to five yards, on Auskerry on 29th May 1968. Its most striking feature was the pinkish chin, throat, breast and belly, reminiscent of a Dartford Warbler. In size and shape it was much like a Whitethroat, though the tail was often cocked in Dartford Warbler fashion.

Apart from the pinkish underparts mentioned above, plumage details were: blue-grey head and nape, less blue