

# Ashy Drongo *Dicrurus leucophaeus* recorded in Oman

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On 24 November 2014 we arrived mid-morning at Qatbit motel (Sargeant *et al* 2008), Dhofar governorate, Oman, together with a group of Norwegian and Swedish birdwatchers (by arrangement of Klunderud Natur og Kultur). After checking in some of us started birding immediately, and TØ soon discovered a drongo just behind the motel building. He suspected it was an Ashy Drongo *Dicrurus leucophaeus* rather than Black Drongo *D. macrocerus*. The rest of us were soon alerted and we all enjoyed the bird as it hawked insects from look-out posts close to the motel building. Identification as Ashy Drongo was confirmed. For the rest of the day as well as on 25–26 November the bird was easily spotted in the same couple of trees, and only on single occasions we found it a little further away in the motel garden, but it always soon returned to the original location. When we left Qatbit at noon on 27 November we had not been able to relocate the drongo, and as it had been very stationary on previous days, we concluded that it had left the garden during the night or early morning.

## DESCRIPTION (Plates 1–5)

The bird was obviously a drongo with overall blackish plumage, perching on open branches with quite vertical carriage and with its long and deeply forked tail hanging down. Nape, mantle and scapulars were a glossy black with a slight bluish tinge, while



**Plate 1.** Ashy Drongo *Dicrurus leucophaeus*, typically perching high with wide view, Qatbit, Oman, 24 November 2014. © Thor Østbye. Note dark breast and belly with very sparse whitish fringing as well as matte tinge in contrast to glossy neck side.



**Plate 2.** Ashy Drongo *Dicrurus leucophaeus* Qatbit, Oman, 24 November 2014. © Thor Østbye. Bluish black upperparts not very different from Black Drongo. Narrow tail typical for Ashy. Most tail-feathers fresh and apparently recently moulted while outer two old and worn.



**Plate 3.** Ashy Drongo *Dicrurus leucophaeus*, frequently hawking for insects, Qatbit, Oman, 25 November 2014. © Thor Østbye

wing-coverts and primaries were a contrasting brownish black (showing that it was a first winter bird). Breast and belly were dull grey, again in contrast to the glossy black neck-side and cheek and with a few sparse off-white fringes on the central breast. Vent and undertail-coverts were paler, obviously spotted off-white. Most tail-feathers were fresh and apparently recently moulted while the outer two were old and worn (Plate 2), probably also indicating that it was a first-winter bird (although we have been unable to find relevant information on moult in Ashy Drongo).

### IDENTIFICATION

Breast colouration is important in separating Ashy and Black Drongos since first winter Black Drongos show a greater contrast between blackish upper breast with some gloss and lower breast and belly which are obviously paler and with extensive off-white fringing (Grimmett *et al* 1998, inspection of on-line and other photos). Also, we noted in the field that the Qatbit bird lacked the white rictal spot at the base of the bill (typically present in Black Drongo). A minority of our photos of the bird seem to show a pale gape line. Ashy Drongo generally displays a narrower and more deeply forked tail than Black, but the difference is not great and tail-fork is subject to abrasion and moult. It is open to discussion whether tail shape can be used to identify the Qatbit bird.

### DISCUSSION

The rather closed habitat of the Qatbit motel garden is much the same setting as the species favours in its usual range, while Black Drongo is a bird of savannah type open grassland [though a Black Drongo at Qatbit, with its barren desert surroundings, would



**Plate 4.** Ashy Drongo *Dicrurus leucophaeus* Qatbit, Oman, 24 November 2014. © Thor Østbye. No obvious white rictal spot at base of bill (see text).



**Plate 5.** Ashy Drongo *Dicrurus leucophaeus* Qatbit, Oman, 25 November 2014. © Thor Østbye. Vent and undertail-coverts heavily spotted off-white in contrast to dark greyish black belly, typical for immature Ashy Drongo.

not have much choice and would also be confined to the motel garden]. Ashy Drongo is a migratory species. Its subspecies *longicaudatus* breeds in the southern Himalayas and winters over most of India, while paler subspecies breed further east. The Oman record is of *longicaudatus*.

This is the first record of Ashy Drongo for Oman, while there are 7 records of Black Drongo (Eriksen & Victor 2013). There are 9 records of Ashy Drongo in United Arab Emirates, 2006–2015, and 7 records there of Black Drongo, while several more drongo records (1977–2016) are under review ([www.uaebirding.com](http://www.uaebirding.com)). There are 3 records of Ashy Drongo, 2010–2013, in Kuwait ([www.birdsofkuwait.com](http://www.birdsofkuwait.com)) and 2 records, 2014–2016, in Iran ([iranbirdrecords.blog.ir](http://iranbirdrecords.blog.ir)). A possible first Ashy Drongo for Israel was reported in 2014 but the record is still pending ([www.israbirding.com/checklist](http://www.israbirding.com/checklist)). The recent occurrence of Ashy Drongo in the Middle East could simply be due to better observer coverage and knowledge. If the increase is genuine it may possibly be due to the recent availability of suitable habitat (farmed areas, suburban parks, golf courses and plantations of mature

watered trees) as has been suggested for the Crested Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus* (Babbington & Campbell 2016).

#### LITERATURE CITED

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