

The first record of a live Oriental Turtle Dove *Streptopelia orientalis* in Cyprus

COLIN RICHARDSON

Summary: An adult Oriental Turtle Dove *Streptopelia orientalis* seen and photographed near Paphos, south-west Cyprus, in March 2017 constitutes the first live record of this species for the island and follows a poorly documented record of a dead bird found in December 2016. It was identified to the race *meena* of central and southern Asia.

On the morning of 19 March 2017 I set off for the coastal plain, 15 km south-east of Paphos in south-western Cyprus, in search of visible bird migration. Just after 0700 I entered the agricultural area at Mandria, within the Paphos Plain Important Bird Area, a known migration site, and immediately encountered a group of five or six doves feeding on the road about 10 metres in front of me. I stopped the car and watched them through 8x32 binoculars as they continued feeding. There were three or four Eurasian Collared Doves *Streptopelia decaocto* and two rather dark 'turtle doves'. One of the dark birds appeared to be a Eurasian Turtle Dove *Streptopelia turtur*: it was the right size and shape and was probably the bird reported to me 10 days earlier by Kevin Spearing, who lived nearby. His sighting was an exceptionally early migration date for the species for Cyprus, but after seeing a photograph of his bird later that day, I concluded it was a rather dark Eurasian Turtle Dove and this was confirmed later by Yoav Perlman and Killian Mullarney. I studied the second dark turtle dove carefully for about 30 secs and it looked very interesting indeed. I reached for my camera but within a few seconds all the birds took off and scattered and no photo could be taken. I kept my eye on the dark dove, which flew off heavily in a similar way to a feral pigeon. It showed a number of flight features including rounded wings and white tail tip, but was quickly lost to view. Although the view was brief I was fairly sure this was an Oriental Turtle Dove *Streptopelia orientalis* of the race *meena*, so alerted the BirdLife Cyprus Bird Recorder and other birders I knew but despite a wide search, the bird was not located again that day. I returned the next day, the 20 March 2017 at 0730 and luckily found the bird perched in a tree about 200 m from where I had first seen it the previous day. This time I stayed quietly in the car and watched it through my binoculars, before taking 35 photographs, four of which are included here. The bird remained until 23 March (as reported by Alan Whitehead and Matt Smith).

DESCRIPTION

When I first found the bird feeding on the ground on 19 March, I could see it was larger and bulkier than the adjacent Collared Doves and when it flew I noticed the broad, blunt wings and white tail tip associated with Oriental Turtle Dove of the subspecies *meena*. The following description is based on my photos and a 10-minute view, as the bird sat on a tree branch 15 m away and 5 m off the ground. Identification references used in this section are Beaman & Madge (1998), Harris *et al* (1996) and Svensson *et al* (2009).

First, I aimed to age the bird. The neck patch was prominent, indicating it was an adult, because the neck band is usually absent on juveniles of both species. There were 4-5 black bars on a blue-grey background. (Eurasian Turtle Dove typically has 3-4 black bars on a generally white background, although this feature can be quite variable on some birds). Overall it was darker than Eurasian Turtle Dove and slightly larger and bulkier than the Eurasian Collared Doves seen feeding with it the previous day. Rarely, some Eurasian Turtle Doves can be just as dark (as was the bird it was seen with the previous

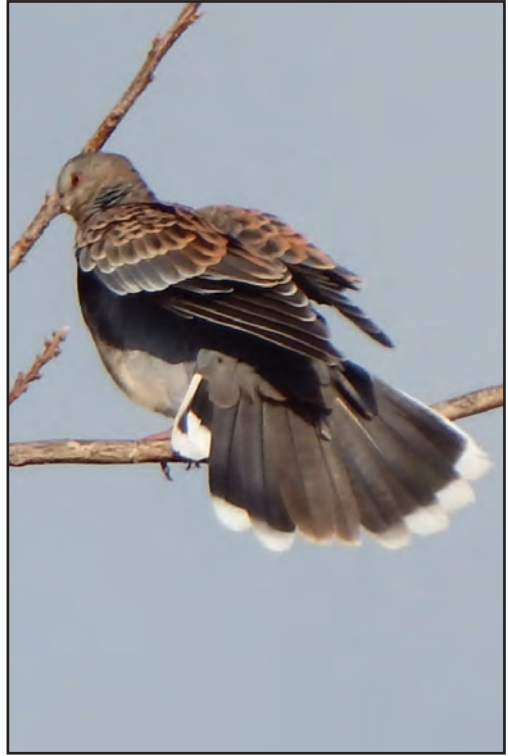


Plate 1. Oriental Turtle Dove *Streptopelia orientalis*, of the subspecies *meena* (also known as Rufous Turtle Dove) at Mandria (Paphos), Cyprus on 19 March 2017. © C Richardson

day) although conversely it is known for the overall tone of *meena* to occasionally approach that of Eurasian Turtle Dove. This bird had extensive dark grey/brown rounded centres to the scapulars, inner wing coverts and tertials, bordered by diffuse pale rufous fringes (in Eurasian Turtle Dove the dark feathers are narrower and more pointed, with clean rufous fringes). The back, visible between the wings at rest and seen well on one of the photographs when it preened, was a clean bluish grey (it is brownish tinged in most Eurasian Turtle Doves) and there were two indistinct wing bars, created by the pale tips and fringes to the grey outer median and greater coverts (Eurasian Turtle Dove has no noticeable wing bars). The primaries were tipped light grey (usually pale rufous on Eurasian Turtle Dove). The belly and undertail coverts, seen in flight and while the bird was preening, were darker than those of Eurasian Turtle Dove. The narrow, though distinct, circular red eye-ring was quite different from that of Eurasian Turtle Dove, which diagnostically has a diamond-shaped pink-red patch around the eye. The bill was a creamy-grey colour (dark horn in Eurasian Turtle Dove). In combination, these features strongly suggested Oriental Turtle Dove, but to determine the race, I checked further. The nape and hindneck were brown (dark greyish brown on nominate race *orientalis*, and pale grey on Eurasian Turtle Dove) and, seen well on one of the photographs, the tail feather tips and outer shafts were bright white, (pale blue-grey in nominate, white in Eurasian Turtle Dove). These features are all characteristic of *meena* (also known as Rufous Turtle Dove) and support the identification of the bird as Oriental Turtle Dove of the race *meena*.

Status, distribution and movements

Oriental Turtle Dove has six recognised subspecies: *S. o. orientalis* breeds in central Siberia through Transbaikalia, Amurland and Sakhalin to Kuril Is, Japan and Korea, and south through much of China to the Himalayas, northern Assam, Yunnan, Guangdong, Hainan and northern Vietnam; it mainly winters in south & east Asia. *S. o. meena* breeds in open woodland of central Asia, the southern part of western Siberia to western Altai, south to Turkestan, Afghanistan, Kashmir and Himalayas east to central Nepal. Its breeding range extends marginally into the Western Palearctic, in the Ural Mountains, and it is strongly migratory, wintering in S & SE Asia (del Hoyo *et al* 1997, Baptista *et al* 2018, Blair *et al* 2018). There are two non-migratory southern subspecies on the Indian subcontinent and two others on East Asian islands. Its wintering grounds are less well-known, but most head southwards to India. It also occurs widely as an accidental visitor across Europe and the Middle East (Mitchell 2017).

Status in the region

Both *meena* and *orientalis* occur as vagrants to the Western Palearctic, including to most W European and Scandinavian countries, plus Faroe Is., Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Poland, Serbia and Ukraine. The subspecies is undetermined in many of these records and their occurrences in the west are all dated September to March (Mitchell 2017). It is an uncommon passage migrant to the north Caspian region and a vagrant to the east Mediterranean region and the Middle East. There are no known records in Lebanon, Syria and Jordan but there is one record in Iraq (RF Porter and I Andrews pers comm) and three in Turkey (KA Boyla pers comm, *Dutch Birding* 40: WP Reports, Kirwan *et al* 2008). Of the 12 records in Israel, 10 were in Sep-Nov and two in Feb-Mar, and all were of the *meena* subspecies except one in November 2002 (Y Perlman pers comm). The sighting published here constitutes the first record of a live bird in Cyprus and is currently the first with adequate published provenance and supporting evidence. It has been accepted by the Birdlife Cyprus Rarities Committee (BCRC) (Stylianou 2019). In Cyprus a bird shot in the Larnaca area on an unspecified date in mid December 2016 was later identified from

photographs as an Oriental Turtle Dove ssp. *meena*; the published details (Stylianou 2017 a, b) lack a description, photographs, provenance and the finder's name.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to thank Killian Mullarney and Yoav Perlman who provided early assessment of the bird's identification from photos. My thanks also go Ian Andrews, Kerem Ali Boyla, Yoav Perlman and Richard Porter who advised on the species' status in neighbouring countries and to Martin Hellicar at BirdLife Cyprus for checking the accuracy of the text. I am very grateful to Peter Flint who provided additional references and made a number of helpful comments on the text, particularly regarding identification and status.

LITERATURE CITED

- Baptista, LF, PW Trail, HM Horblit, P Boesman & EFJ Garcia. 2018. Oriental Turtle-dove (*Streptopelia orientalis*). In: del Hoyo, J., Elliott, A., Sargatal, J., Christie, D.A. & de Juana, E. (eds.). *Handbook of the Birds of the World Alive*. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona. [retrieved from <https://www.hbw.com/node/54152> on 12 November 2018]
- Beam, M, & S Madge. 1998. *The Handbook of Bird Identification for Europe and the Western Palearctic*. Helm, London.
- Mitchell, D. 2017. *Birds of Europe, North Africa and the Middle East, An Annotated Checklist*. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona, Spain.
- Blair, M, S Preddy & AA Alenezi. 2018. *The OSME Region List of Bird Taxa, Part A: Non-passerines. Version 4.3+ September 2018*. OSME, Tring, UK.
- Harris, A, Shirihai, H & D Christie. 1996. *The Macmillan Birder's Guide to European and Middle Eastern Birds*. Macmillan, London.
- del Hoyo, J, A Elliott & J Sargatal. (Eds.) 1997. *Handbook of the Birds of the World*. Vol. 4. Sandgrouse to Cuckoos. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona.
- Kirwan, GM, K Boyla, P Castell, B Demirci, M Özen, H Welch & T Marlow. 2008. *The Birds of Turkey*. Christopher Helm, London.
- Stylianou, J. 2017a. *Systematic List for December 2016*. The Monthly Checklist & Society News, January 2017: 13-31. BirdLife Cyprus, Nicosia.
- Stylianou, J. 2017b. First record of Oriental (Rufous) Turtle Dove *Streptopelia orientalis* for Cyprus. *Cyprus Bird Report 2016*: 171. BirdLife Cyprus, Nicosia.
- Stylianou, J. (Ed.). 2019. *Cyprus Bird Report 2017*. BirdLife Cyprus, Nicosia.
- Svensson, L, Mullarney, K & Zetterström, D. 2009. *Collins Bird Guide. 2nd Edition*. HarperCollins, London.

Colin Richardson, Petravounos 10, 8520 Marathounta, Paphos, Cyprus.
richar@cytanet.com.cy