

## **A Sight Record of Eyebrowed Thrush (*Turdus obscurus*) in British Columbia.**

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### **Introduction and Distribution**

The Eye-browed Thrush (*Turdus obscurus*) is a highly migratory, but secretive passerine that breeds in dark taiga in lowlands and montane forests in north-east Asia from the Kamchatka Peninsula, northern end of Sakhalin Island, on the Kuril Islands, Ussuriland, northern China, northern Mongolia, and west to central Siberia (Hamilton *et al.* 2007, Brazil 2009). Breeding in Japan is suspected but unproven (Brazil 1991). The Eye-browed Thrush is a common migrant throughout Japan, Korea, and Taiwan (Brazil 2009). This species winters in mature forests and evergreen forests from Taiwan, southeastern China, to Northeastern India, south through parts of Burma, into Thailand, Laos, Vietnam, Malaysia, into western parts of Indonesia, Sarawak, Philippines, and in the eastern Indian Ocean on the Andaman and Nicobar Islands (Clements 2000, Brazil 2009).

In North America, the region that the Eye-browed Thrush occurs regularly is in Alaska where it is a rare spring and casual fall migrant in the Western and Central Aleutian Islands (West 2008). This species is also a casual vagrant migrant in the spring and fall at St. Paul Island, St. Matthew, and St. Lawrence Islands (West 2008). Elsewhere in the state the Eye-browed Thrush is an accidental spring migrant vagrant to Wales, Nunivak Island, and northern Alaska at Barrow (West 2008). The best places to find this species in the state are on Shemya Island or Adak Island or at Gambel in the fall (West 2008).

Anywhere along the west coast of North America south of Alaska, the Eye-browed Thrush is an accidental migrant vagrant with 1 confirmed record of an adult male photographed at Galileo Hill, in Kern County, on May 28, 2001 (Hamilton *et al.* 2007, Tietz and McCaskie 2017). There is also a sight record for British Columbia, accompanied by good field notes, from the fall on Haida Gwaii (Toochin *et al.* 2014). There are no records for Eye-browed Thrush from Washington State (Wahl *et al.* 2005, WRBC 2016) or for Oregon (OFO 2016). It has been recorded in fall northwestern Hawaiian Islands (Hamilton *et al.* 2007).

The Eye-browed Thrush is a rare fall migrant vagrant throughout Europe (Lewington *et al.* 1992).

### **Identification and Similar Species**

The identification of the Eye-browed Thrush is covered in most standard North American Field Guides. This is a relatively small thrush species measuring 22 cm in length and has an average weight of 61 grams (Brazil 2009, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). Some immature and female

plumages of American Robin (*Turdus migratorius*) can cause identification confusion with the Eye-browed Thrush. It is important to note that the American Robin is a larger thrush species measuring 25 cm in length and has an average weight of 77 grams. Some paler female and 1<sup>st</sup> winter birds have prominent eye strips and a prominent malar stripe with a dark throat (Lewington *et al.* 1992, Sibley 2000, Dunn and Alderfer 2011). On birds such as these the orange breast is often lighter coloured, but it is normally more extensive (Lewington *et al.* 1992, Sibley 2000, Dunn and Alderfer 2011).

Adult males have a blue-gray hood, with a prominent white supercilium above black lores, a narrow white streak from the base of the bill to below the eye, a short white malar and chin streak (Brail 2009). The bill small, slightly curved and is overall black with a yellow base to the lower mandible (Lewington *et al.* 1992). The upperparts are mid-brown, darkest on the wings (Brail 2009). The underparts are orange-brown, particularly on the breast and flanks, and white from the central belly to the vent (Brail 2009). The outermost rectrices usually show distinct white tips (Lewington *et al.* 1992). The legs and feet are pale (Brail 2009). In flight, the underwing lings are gray (Brail 2009).

Adult females lack blue-gray hood with the crown, ear-coverts and neck gray-brown, with blackish-gray malar and more extensive white on the chin and throat (Lewington *et al.* 1992). The bill is similar to the adult male, but has more yellow the lower mandible that extends onto the lower edge of the upper mandible (Lewington *et al.* 1992). The orange-brown on the flanks and upper-breast-sides are not as bright as found on adult male birds (Brazil 2009).

1<sup>st</sup> year birds resemble adult females, but are more gray on the head and less white on the chin and throat (Brazil 2009). These birds have distinct white tips to the outer greater coverts which are retained from juvenile plumage and are not present on adult birds (Lewington *et al.* 1992). The rectrices are usually obviously more pointed than found on an adult, with the outermost feathers showing no, or only ill-defined, whitish tips (Lewington *et al.* 1992). It is not possible to sex 1 year birds with certainty, although there is a tendency for males to be grayer on the head with less white on the throat, particularly in the spring (Lewington *et al.* 1992).

The contact and flight calls are a thin “zieeh”, “see”, “tsui”, or “seep”. Also gives a thin “sip-sip” or “zip-zip”, and occasionally a deeper chuckling “tuck-tuck” or “kyott-kyott” (Brazil 2009). This species can also give a rattled “turr” call note (Brazil 2009).

### **Occurrence and Documentation**

The Eye-browed Thrush is an accidental species in British Columbia with the only record involving a well-documented sight record of an immature bird found by Peter Hamel and Margo Hearne from Mayer Lake, near Tlell on November 5, 1996 (Bowling 1997a, Toochin *et al.* 2014). Three American Robins (*Turdus migratorius*) flew into the tops of the nearby grove of Pacific Crab Apple (*Malus fusca*) (P. Hamel Pers. Obs.). This bird was well seen and directly compared to 2 nearby American Robins at 10 m from the observers (P. Hamel Pers. Obs.). The smaller size and plumage characteristics were carefully noted by both observers (P. Hamel Pers. Obs.).

The Eye-browed Thrush is a much rarer species in Alaska in the fall than during the spring (West 2008). Many young can mis-orientated and preform a reverse migration that will take them in the opposite direction of where they should travel (Howell *et al.* 2014). This in combination with a large Low Pressure Systems that originated in East Asia and travelled across the North Pacific Ocean could easily have pushed a lost Eye-browed Thrush west to Haida Gwaii (M. Meredith Pers. Comm.). It is well documented that birds originating in East Asia can travel across either the Aleutian Islands or the Bering Sea, then south across the Gulf Alaska, past Haida Gwaii, to end up anywhere along the west coast to California (Hamilton *et al.* 2007). The fact that Eye-browed Thrush is a regular spring migrant and does occur in the fall in Alaska, makes it highly likely that this species could occur in our region again in the future. Though this species was well described, it occurred in an era before digital cameras and therefore should be given proper consideration. It is likely that any future record for the province will be found along the west coast and photographs will almost certainly be secured.

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