

Scientific Note

Sighting of a siberian stonechat (*Saxicola maurus*, Pallas, 1773) a rare migratory bird in Sirajgonj and Rajshahi districts of Bangladesh

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Key words: Stonechats, Siberian Stonechat, Muscicapidae

The Stonechats are small sized passerine birds, members of the family Muscicapidae. They are mostly winter migrant of Bangladesh, feeding on flying and other insects. There are 15 species of stonechats in the world (Gill & Donsker, 2017; Sethi *et al.*, 2014), and only six species have been reported from Bangladesh (Siddiqui *et al.*, 2008; Khan, 2008; IUCN Bangladesh 2015). The stonechats are called as 'Jhar Fidda' or simply 'Fidda' in Bangla. Among the reported six species from Bangladesh, the species Siberian Stonechat have not been included in the list of birds of Bangladesh by Siddiqui *et al.* (2008) or even in the list of Indian birds by Ali (2002). However, presence of this species only from Chittagong area of Bangladesh was reported by Khan (2008) and Halder (2010).

This paper reports on the sighting of the Siberian Stonechat, *Saxicola maurus* (Pallas, 1773) at the Chalan Beel area of Sirajgonj district and the Padma River charlands adjacent to Rajshahi city. Which confirm the presence of this species in Rajshahi and Sirajgonj districts of Bangladesh territory other than Chittagong.

Recording sites of the bird: (1) Yearly two to three field trips are arranged to study the animal diversity, limnology and other resources of the Chalan Beel, since 2000 by the Department of Zoology, University of Rajshahi. In the month of December 2014 a trip was arranged at the point of Tarash upazila (24°26'N 89°22.5'E) of Sirajgonj district. While passing the area 'Magura Binod' of the upazila the bird was sighted and photographed. A single bird was sitting on a medium sized shrub by the side of a roadside canal adjacent to the waterway of the beel.

(2) Since 2005, visits to the Padma River charlands (24°22.2'N 88°36.3'E) adjacent to Rajshahi city, are made more or less once a week

during the months from last of October to June. In the month of January, 2016 this bird was seen and photographed four times. Four visits were made in January 2016 in search of this bird covering an area of approximately 6.5 km east-west (from Fultali Ghat, Kazla up to Police line 'T-bandh') and around half km north-south in the charland.

Identification of the bird: The detailed morphology and plumage colour of the photographed bird were studied and matched with the photographs provided in the literature (Stoddart, 1992; Brazil 2009) and those are found in the Internet (Bird Korea Gallery, Oriental Bird Club Images, Birding Frontier Database). Moreover, the photograph of the bird was uploaded in the flicker, a number of experienced Bird Watchers and Bird Experts of different regions of the world confirmed identification of the species. Some of these persons also send photographs of the Siberian Stonechat, which were taken by them. Consulting the literature and images the bird recorded from the Chalan Beel area and the Padma River charland, was identified as a species of the genus *Saxicola* under the family Muscicapidae belonging to the order Passeriformes. Common name of this species is Siberian Stonechat and Asian Stonechat, and its scientific name is *Saxicola maurus* (Pallas, 1773). Description of the bird as found in literature confirms that the recorded bird from the Chalan Beel is a non-breeding male, and that recorded from charlands of the Padma River consists of both male and female birds.

Identifying characters of the species: Morphological features of the sighted birds are very similar to that of the Common Stonechat *Saxicola torquata* except some few details.

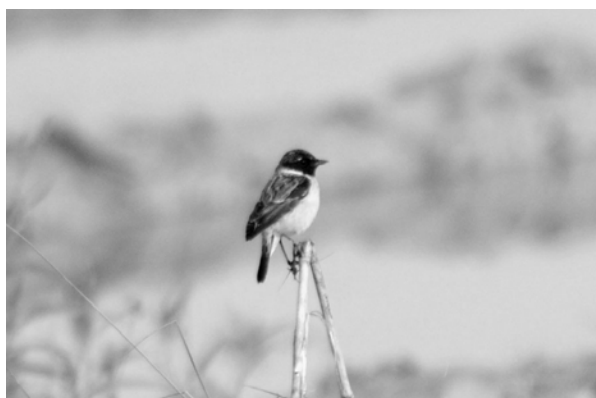
Size: sparrow;

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Field characters: pale brown throughout with lightly streaked upperparts; a distinct whitish supercilium, and a white collar around the neck and throat. The short straight bills are a little bit broader at its base (non-breeding male) (Plate 1a). However, the breeding male can be identified by its summer plumage, which has streaked black upper parts and head, a conspicuous white collar, white scapular patch and rump. The ventral side is white except a small part of the throat is orange coloured. The females has streaked pale brown upper parts and head, a white half neck band, and pale pink-yellow rump (Plate 1b). Presence of black axillaries and under-wing coverts in adult males, and un-streaked rump and upper-tail coverts in both sexes were reported by (Hellstrom & Norevik, 2014). Length of the Siberian Stonechat is similar to other stonechats that reported from Bangladesh.



(a) Siberian Stone chat at Chalan Beel



(b) Siberian Stone chat at Padma char

Plate 1: Siberian Stone Chat photographed at Chalan Beel and the Padma char

Previously the Siberian Stonechat was classified as a race or sub-species of the Common Stonechat *Saxicola torquata maura* (Sibley & Monroe, 1990). However, the recent studies on genetic evidence strongly supports the status of the reporting bird as a full species, and distinct from other two similar species e.g., the African Stonechat (*S. torquata*) and the European Stonechat (*S. rubicola*) (Wink *et al.* 2002a,b). In close observations distinctly longer primary remiges will be seen, which reveals that this bird is adapted for long-distance migration, as this long primary remiges are common among the long distance migratory passerines (Robertson, 1977; Stoddart, 1992). Literature review confirms that distribution of the Siberian Stonechat (*S. maurus*) covers most areas of the temperate Asia (Urquhart & Bowley, 2002; Wink *et al.*, 2002a,b). During the winter this species migrates to India, southern parts of Japan, Thailand and west of Northwest Africa; a smaller population had found to migrate to Western Europe, Alaska and North America (Stoddart, 1992; Urquhart & Bowley, 2002). Illera *et al.* (2008) provided details on the phylogenetic relationships, biogeography and speciation in the genus *Saxicola*.

The Siberian Stonechat has 5-6 races/sub-species at different regional habitats, and the Himalayan race (*S. m. indica*) is one of them. This bird migrates to some of the Southeast Asian countries including India, which includes Maharashtra, Haryana, Goa, and the Himalayan foothills quite near the River Ganga during the winter (unpublished reports). Khan (2008) reported the presence of this bird in Bangladesh and agreed that both the Common Stonechat and the Siberian Stonechat were described previously as two different sub-species of the species *S. torquata*, and after DNA-sequencing these birds are regarded as two different species of the same genus. However, the author did not include the Siberian Stonechat in his recent book (Khan, 2015). After examining the photographs of the bird from the Chalan Beel and the Padma River charland the Editor of the *Indian Birds* (Dr Asheesh Pittie) confirmed them as adult Siberian Stonechat, *S. maurus sub-species przewalskii* which is distributed in the Tibetan region, rather than the Indian Himalayan sub-species *S. m. indica*, or Korean and Chinese sub-species *S. m. stejnegeri*; and he also informed that all these three sub-species are winter migrants in Bangladesh.

From the literature review and the present findings it is clear that the Siberian Stonechat is a rare winter visitor, and out of six, three sub-species are members of the Bangladesh avifauna. According to Wink *et al.* (2002a) and Brazil (2009), this species was very often reported as the Common Stonechat because of several unresolved taxonomic questions due to its extensive moulting, several dimorphic features which closely resemble to that of the Common Stonechat.

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Manuscript accepted on 15.07.2015