

Sri Lanka Scimitar Babbler - A Recent addition to the Endemic birds of Sri Lanka

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The number of endemic bird species, is of special interest to wildlife enthusiasts. In the recent past, as the result of taxonomic revisions, the numbers of endemic taxa progressively increased showing a trend towards further increases. A recent addition is the Sri Lanka Scimitar Babbler *Pomatorhinus melanurus*.

Many scientists considered the Sri Lankan form of Scimitar Babbler to be an endemic species. It was first identified by Blyth (1847) and described as *Pomatorhinus*

melanurus. Other authors in the 19th century (Kelaart, 1852, Tennent, 1861, Holdsworth, 1872, Legge, 1880, Murray, 1890) considered this an endemic species. However, with the introduction of the concept of subspecies, this taxon became an endemic subspecies. Subsequently, two different subspecies were described and remained in the list for long time as endemic subspecies. Nevertheless, two different forms of this species were recognized in the island even in the 19th century

(Holdsworth, 1872, Legge, 1880).

After more than a century, Rasmussen and Anderton (2005) again treated the Sri Lankan form as a separate species confirming the suggestions of 19th century authors. Collar (2006) confirmed this with more evidence in a scientifically valid publication. However, this treatment is under review by the BirdLife Taxonomy Working Group (BTWG) of BirdLife International. With this addition, the number of definitive endemic species is increased to 26.

This taxonomic revision by Collar (2006), resulted in 44 new species all of which had been identified as subspecies previously. Resulting from this study, 29 species were added to the endemic lists in several territories including one species in Sri Lanka.

The separation of *melanurus* as a species is a "split within a split". Earlier, *P. schisticeps* and *P. horsfieldi* were considered conspecific. Collar (2006) identified *melanurus* as a separate species distinct from both *P. schisticeps* and *P. horsfieldi*.

According to Collar (2006), *melanurus* differs from *horsfieldii* in its rufescent-brown nape, neck-sides and scapulars to rump with richer rufescent flanks, yellower and smaller bill, much shorter tail and weaker lateral crown-stripes. It differs from *schisticeps* in its dark eye, shorter bill, much shorter tail, dull rufescent-brown (contra olive-brown) nape to rump, and very dull rufescent brown (contra bright rufous-chestnut) neck-sides and flanks.

Many scientists identified two subspecies within Sri Lanka namely, *melanurus* and *holdsworthii* (Wijesinghe, 1994, Ripley, 1982, Phillips, 1978, Henry, 1955, Whistler, 1944). However, Collar (2006) considers these two forms to be conspecific with *melanurus*. Undoubtedly further taxonomic research will clarify this situation.

Table 1 illustrates the status of this taxon from 1852 to 2006.

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Table 1: Changes of the taxonomy of Sri Lanka Scimitar Babbler in the history

AUTHOR & YEAR	SCIENTIFIC NAME	COMMON NAME	ENDEMIC STATUS
Rasmussen & Anderton, 2005	<i>P. [schisticeps] melanurus</i>	Ceylon Scimitar babbler	Endemic Species
Harrison, 1999	<i>P. horsfieldi melanurus</i>	Indian Scimitar Babbler	Endemic Subspecies
Kotagama & Fernando, 1994, Kotagama & Wijayasinghe, 1998	<i>P.h. holdsworthi</i>	Common Scimitar babbler	-
	<i>P.h. melanurus</i>	Southern Scimitar babbler	-
Wijesinghe, 1994,	<i>P.h. holdsworthi</i>	Indian Scimitar babbler	Endemic Subspecies
Grimmett et.al. 1998	<i>P.h. melanurus</i>	Indian Scimitar babbler	Endemic Subspecies
Sibley & Monroe (1990)	<i>Pomatorhinus [horsfieldii] horsfieldii</i>	Indian Scimitar babbler	-
Ripley, 1982	<i>P.h. melanurus</i>	Slaty Headed Scimitar Babbler	Endemic Subspecies
	<i>P.h. holdsworthi</i>	Slaty Headed Scimitar Babbler	Endemic Subspecies
Phillips, 1975, 1978	<i>P. schisticeps melanurus</i>	Southern Ceylon Scimitar Babbler	Endemic Subspecies
	<i>P. schisticeps holdsworthi</i>	Common Ceylon Scimitar Babbler	Endemic Subspecies
Henry, 1955	<i>P.h. melanurus</i>	Ceylon Scimitar Babbler	Endemic Subspecies
	<i>P.h. holdsworthi</i>	Ceylon Scimitar Babbler	Endemic Subspecies
Whistler, 1944, Phillips, 1953	<i>P. h. melanurus</i>	Southern Ceylon Scimitar Babbler	Endemic Subspecies
	<i>P. h. holdsworthi</i>	Common Ceylon Scimitar Babbler	Endemic Subspecies
Ripley, 1946	<i>P.h. melanurus</i>	-	Endemic Subspecies
	<i>P.h. holdsworthi</i>	-	Endemic Subspecies
Wait, 1931	<i>P.h. melanurus</i>	Ceylon Scimitar Babbler	Endemic Subspecies
Murray, 1890	<i>P. melanurus</i>	Ceylon Black Tailed Scimitar Babbler	Endemic species
Legge, 1880	<i>P. melanurus</i>	Ceylonese Scimitar Babbler	Endemic species
Holdsworth, 1872	<i>P. melanurus</i>	-	Endemic species
Tennent, 1861	<i>P. melanurus</i>	Mountain Babbler	Endemic species
Kelaart, 1852	<i>P. melanurus</i>	Ceylon Pomatorhinus	Endemic species