

TWO ORIENTAL TURTLE-DOVES (*STREPTOPELIA ORIENTALIS*) REACH CALIFORNIA

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The Oriental Turtle-Dove (*Streptopelia orientalis*), also known as the Rufous Turtle-Dove (e.g., Cramp 1985) or the Eastern Turtle-Dove (Goodwin 1983), is a widespread polytypic Asian species that breeds from the Ural Mountains to the Pacific coast of the Russian Far East, including Sakhalin and the Kuril Islands. It also breeds in Japan (south to the Ryukyu Islands) and on Taiwan. It breeds south to west-central Asia, the Indian subcontinent, Myanmar, and northern Indochina. In the Russian Far East its breeding range extends east to the Sea of Okhotsk and as far north as 64° N in the Lena River valley (Wilson and Korovin 2003). Although the species is resident in parts of its range, it vacates the entire northern portion of the breeding range (e.g., all of Russia) in the fall (Wilson and Korovin 2003). These migratory birds winter mostly within the range of residency farther south. Over large portions of northern, central, and western China, the species is only a passage migrant (see range map in Wilson and Korovin 2003).

We report here on two records from California, both in the late fall and early winter: 29 October 1988 at Furnace Creek Ranch, Death Valley National Park, Inyo County, and 9–31 December 2002 at Bolinas, Marin County (California Bird Records Committee 2007); archived photos and a videotape of the latter bird are stored with the record (2003-036) in the files of the California Bird Records Committee (CBRC) at the Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology in Camarillo, California.

The first California record at Furnace Creek Ranch involved a bird initially seen in flight early in the morning. Since the identification was uncertain, a small group (Dunn, N. Bruce Broadbooks, Brian E. Daniels, and Douglas R. Willick) searched for it and found it perched in the central date orchard, eventually getting close views in good light for some 5 minutes. Dunn identified it then as a Rufous or Oriental Turtle-Dove, a species he had seen previously in Japan and Thailand. While it was in view the observers reviewed the identification. This discussion included elimination of the smaller and paler European Turtle-Dove (*Streptopelia turtur*), another highly migratory Old World species recorded on three occasions in spring and summer on the east coast of North America (Saint Pierre Island, Massachusetts, and Florida) and more than 200 times from Iceland (Pranty et al. 2008).

We left the bird sitting and went in search of other birders; subsequently, we had only one view of the bird (in flight). At the time observers considered the bird a likely escapee, but ultimately Dunn chose to submit the record to the CBRC. The record circulated for a full four rounds before it was finally rejected in 1993 on identification grounds (Heindel and Garrett 1995). Initially, most committee members, including Dunn, questioned the bird's origin as a vagrant but accepted the identification. Ultimately, three of the ten members accepted the record, four accepted the identification, but questioned the origin, and three members questioned the identification. Those who questioned the identification did so because the descriptions (only Dunn and later Broadbooks and Guy McCaskie submitted details, and McCaskie's views were of the bird in flight only) lacked detail sufficient to substantiate a first state record. With the appearance and acceptance (San Miguel and McGrath 2005) of the Bolinas bird (below), the CBRC chose to re-review the earlier record; it was accepted after one circulation, although one member still questioned the identification, and another questioned the origin (Cole et al. 2006).

California's second Oriental Turtle-Dove was found by Doug Gallagher in his yard in Bolinas on 9 December 2002 (Figure 1). The next day he stopped in Hansen's art

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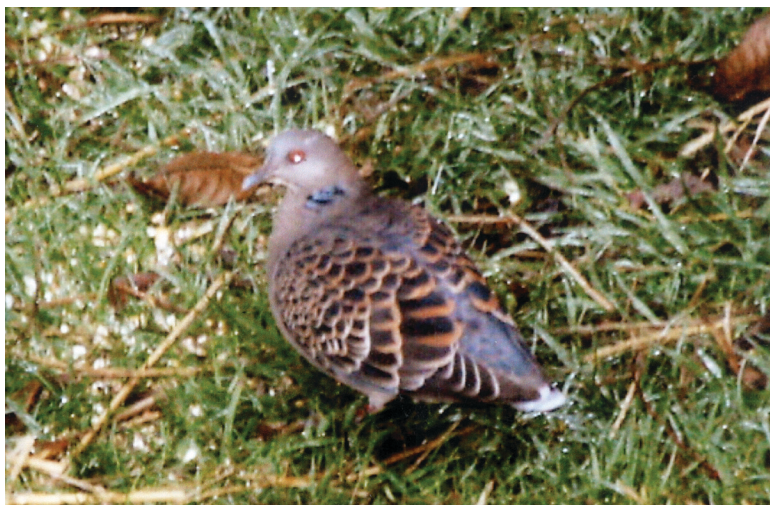


Figure 1. Oriental Turtle-Dove (*Streptopelia orientalis*) at Bolinas, Marin County, California, photographed on 9 or 10 December 2002. Note the stocky shape, the black-and-white neck stripes forming a solid patch, the fringed coverts, the dark gray rump, and the pale gray tail tip. The blackish and rounded covert centers with rufous fringes on most of the wing coverts and on the tertials distinguish the Oriental from the smaller European Turtle-Dove (*S. turtur*) and, in combination with the darker coloration, including a dark blue-gray rump, indicate that this individual is of the eastern *orientalis* group of subspecies rather than one of the more western and southern races (including *meena*). Note also the darker and fresher pale-fringed inner primaries contrasting with the browner and worn older outer primaries, indicating a hatch-year bird.

Photo by Ryan Gallagher

gallery in Bolinas and indicated that he had found an unfamiliar dove. Hansen and Gallagher checked the yard, and after about 15 minutes found the bird sitting on a branch. The bird was facing the observers, and when it turned its face, showing its red eye, Hansen postulated that it could be a White-winged Dove. But then it turned sideways showing the beautiful scaled upperparts, and Hansen recognized it as the same species that Dunn and others had seen in Death Valley over a decade before. Fortunately, Hansen documented the sighting with a video camera as he and Gallagher watched it for 20 to 30 minutes. Because the bird was on private property, only one small group that afternoon was given permission to see it. If it remained, Gallagher was open to letting in groups after 1 January. Those who saw it that afternoon included Peter Pyle and Steve N. G. Howell, both of whom submitted written descriptions (Howell also took and submitted photos), David F. DeSante, W. David Shuford, Richard W. Stallcup, and Lang Stevenson. Although it was occasionally seen after 10 December, it did not remain until January, being last seen on 31 December.

Detailed views of the Bolinas bird by Howell and Pyle revealed two generations of feathers, including the primaries (primaries 7–10 browner and more worn, primaries 1–6 darker and fresh with pale tips). These molt limits indicated that this individual was a hatching-year bird. The bird also had only a half-grown tail, causing some to

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wonder whether the bird was an escapee from captivity, but alternatively interpreted as evidence of a recent encounter with a predator. CBRC members Luke Cole and Michael M. Rogers investigated the status of the species in captivity (CBRC files); several aviculturists they contacted indicated that the species was now only rarely kept in captivity in the United States, though they thought the Bolinas bird was still likely an escapee. Ironically, despite their conclusions about the Bolinas bird, their statements that it was rarely kept helped allay many of the CBRC's concerns regarding origin. Lewington et al. (1991) reported the species to be kept in captivity in many places in Europe. The record passed 8–2 on the second round, the two negative votes accepting the identification but questioning the origin.

Elsewhere in North America the Oriental Turtle-Dove has been recorded on seven occasions; not surprisingly, five of these records come from western Alaska in late spring and summer. In chronological order these are 23 June–18 July 1984, St. Paul Island, Pribilofs (archived photos at University of Alaska Museum [UAM], Fairbanks; Gibson and Kessel 1992), 20–26 July 1986, in the Bering Sea aboard a ship that was “usually within 50 miles (80 km) of the Pribilofs” (archived photos at UAM; Gibson and Kessel 1992), 20 May–12 June 1989, Attu Island, Aleutians (archived photos at UAM; published color photo in *Birding* 23:192, 1991; Gibson and Kessel 1992), 10 June to at least 3 July 1995, Unalaska Island, Aleutians (archived photos at UAM; published black-and-white photo in *National Audubon Society Field Notes* 49:964, 1995; Gibson and Byrd 2007), and 21 May–3 June 1996, Attu Island, Aleutians (archived photos at UAM; Gibson and Byrd 2007). In addition, there are two records from western Canada during the summer: 14–25 August 1992, Tofino, Vancouver Island, British Columbia (Paterson 1992, Campbell et al. 2001:628; color photos published in both sources) and 30 June 2008, Whitehorse, Yukon (North American Birds 62:577, 2009; color photo on page 644).

Although the Alaska and Canadian records are from late spring and summer, the two California records are for late fall and early winter, matching the timing of occurrences in Fennoscandia and northwestern Europe (Lewington et al. 1991). Some of the records from Sweden involve birds returning for multiple winters. Near the northern end of the breeding range in the Urals and western Siberia, fall migration of the subspecies *meena* and *orientalis* begins during the last third of August and peaks in mid-September, and a few stragglers occur as late as early October (Wilson and Korovin 2003). Farther south in Hong Kong, where the species does not breed and where there are only a few summer records, fall arrival of *orientalis*, the only recorded subspecies, is not until the last week of October, with most birds arriving after the second week of November (Carey et al. 2001). Carey et al. (2001) termed the Oriental Turtle-Dove a common passage migrant and winter visitor with maximum counts in excess of 700 birds.

The Oriental Turtle-Dove looks like no other North American dove or pigeon. It is illustrated in at least one North American field guide (Dunn and Alderfer 2006) and in many European and Asian guides. Within the Old World the most similar species is the European Turtle-Dove; the identification of these two species is thoroughly covered by Lewington et al. (1991), Hirschfeld (1992), Cottridge and Vinicombe (1996), Harris et al. (1996), Beaman and Madge (1998), and Gibbs et al. (2001). Briefly, the European Turtle-Dove is distinctly smaller and paler and has more pointed, less rounded, dark centers to the wing coverts and scapulars with broader rufous fringes. The Oriental Turtle-Dove is 25–75% heavier, giving it a bulkier look in the field, accentuated by its shorter tail and proportionately shorter, more rounded wings (Cottridge and Vinicombe 1996).

The Oriental Turtle-Dove is strongly polytypic. Five (Peters 1937, Vaurie 1965) or six (Goodwin 1983, del Hoyo et al. 1997, Gibbs et al. 2001, Dickinson 2003) subspecies are generally recognized, the difference being that more recent treatments (cited above) recognize *erythrocephala*. There is a closely allied eastern group of

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subspecies that consists of *orientalis* in most of the range, breeding west in Russia to about 87° E and south and east to Mongolia, Yunnan, and northern Indochina, *stimpsoni* from the Ryukyu Islands, and *ori* from Taiwan. The latter two races are both very similar to nominate *orientalis*, and their validity has been questioned (Gibbs et al. 2001). To the west and south are three races, *meena* from western Siberia to northern Pakistan and central Nepal, *agricola* from the eastern Himalayan region of northeastern India to Myanmar, and *erythrocephala* of peninsular India. Two of the races, western *meena* and eastern *orientalis*, both breed quite far north and are highly migratory. Both have strayed well to the west, especially to Fennoscandia, but also to northwestern Europe, including the Faeroe Islands, where one apparently wintered (Dutch Birding 28: 172, 2006), southern Europe, the Balkans, and the Middle East (Lewington et al. 1991, Shirihai 1996). Wilson and Korovin (2003) suggested that because of morphological and vocal differences these two groups (*meena* and *orientalis*) might be separate species and that further detailed studies, including DNA analysis, are warranted. Rasmussen and Anderton (2005) described the vocalizations and indicate that the Himalayan birds (*meena* and *agricola*) all sound very similar and are quite different from recordings of the nominate race made in Japan. Eastern *orientalis* intergrades with *meena* in central Siberia between Achinsk and the Ob River and with *agricola* from northwestern Yunnan and northern Myanmar west through the foothills and lower mountains of the Himalayas to Sikkim (Vaurie 1965), although Rasmussen and Anderton (2005) listed *orientalis* as only a vagrant to India. Wilson and Korovin (2003) found *orientalis* in the Novokuznetsk district of the Kemerovo region (about 87° E, western Siberia) and *meena* from the Urals to be closely similar in habitat selection for breeding and in the timing of their migrations.

Distinguishing *meena* from nominate *orientalis* is reasonably straightforward given decent views. Lewington et al. (1991), Hirschfeld (1992), Cottridge and Vinicombe (1996), Harris et al. (1996), Beaman and Madge (1998), Gibbs et al. (2001), and Wilson and Korovin (2003) provided details on their identification. The latter is slightly larger and bulkier and is overall darker and richer in coloration with a browner crown and back and broader and redder fringes to the blacker-centered scapulars and inner wing coverts; it has a bluish-gray, not brownish, rump. Most references (e.g., Vaurie 1965, Goodwin 1983, Cramp 1985, Hirschfeld 1992, Cottridge and Vinicombe 1996, Harris et al. 1996, Gibbs et al. 2001, Wilson and Korovin 2003) have emphasized tail-tip color as a key feature distinguishing the eastern races of the Oriental Turtle-Dove from the more westerly and Indo-Himalayan subspecies, but that difference has been questioned by Leader (2004, illustrated with color photos of spread tails), who indicated from his experience with nominate *orientalis* in Hong Kong and northeastern China that tail-tip color, as in *meena*, varies from white to dull gray and thus can be used only as a supporting character. He concluded that other characters, such as those detailed by Hirschfeld (1992) and Harris et al. (1996), especially size and structure, are much more useful.

Of the nine North American records of the Oriental Turtle-Dove to date, eight have been documented with photographs. The characters of all the birds are consistent with the eastern group of races, and parts of the description of the Death Valley bird also indicate that it was likely a member of the eastern group. Within the eastern group of races—given that the nominate race is widespread and northern populations are highly migratory while the other two are resident on the Ryukyu Islands and Taiwan—it seems highly likely that all North American records pertain to the nominate race, but to date there is no specimen to confirm this.

We thank Daniel D. Gibson, who carefully looked over the rough manuscript and offered many helpful comments and advice. We thank Doug Gallagher for initially finding the Bolinas bird and letting some in to view it and to his son, Ryan Gallagher, for providing the best photographic documentation. Paul E. Lehman and Kimball L. Garrett reviewed the manuscript and offered many useful comments for which we

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are grateful. We also thank Brian E. Daniels for sharing his memory concerning the sighting of the Furnace Creek bird. We also thank the members of the California Bird Records Committee for their comments, many based on the members' own thorough research.

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Accepted 20 November 2009

THANK YOU TO OUR SUPPORTERS

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