

Mindre meddelelser

Spotless Starling *Sturnus unicolor* in Denmark

KENT OLSEN, HENRIK HAANING NIELSEN and OLE AMSTRUP

On 18 April 2002, Bent Jakobsen discovered a uniformly black starling at Børsmose in south-western Jutland. The bird was identified as a male Spotless Starling *Sturnus unicolor*. It was subsequently seen by hundreds of birdwatchers until it disappeared on 23 May.

The occurrence of this generally sedentary species was highly unexpected and therefore received considerable attention from Danish and foreign birdwatchers during its extended stay and long afterwards, with much debate of its identity. Was it really a Spotless Starling, or could it instead have been an aberrantly coloured Common Starling *S. vulgaris*? There have been a few documented cases of Common Starlings with abnormal plumage, and several examples exist of other bird species, mainly cage birds (Clark 2001). The Danish Rarities Committee (DRC) therefore found it necessary to consult expert opinion from Denmark and abroad before the record was finally accepted as a first for Denmark and for northern Europe.

The identification was based on the assessment of the field characters by many experienced birdwatchers and the examination of an extensive archive of digital photos of the bird. The photos were particularly important in assessing the nature and extent of the gloss of the plumage.

Distribution

The Spotless Starling is mainly sedentary and restricted to Iberia, south-eastern France, the islands of Sicily, Sardinia, and Corsica, and north-west Africa (northern Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia). The species is still expanding in France (A. Flitti pers. comm.). The breeding range overlaps with that of the Common Starling in the northernmost part only (Snow & Perrins 1998). There are accidental records from the Balearic Islands, Malta, Greece, Libya, Madeira and the Canary Islands, and Ile de Noirmoutier off the Atlantic coast of France (Snow & Perrins l.c., A. Flitti pers. comm.).

Description

The overall impression was of a uniformly coloured, black starling. The visible parts of the primaries and tertiaries in the closed wing showed a light bronzy sheen at the centres, but brown edges were completely missing, and the lack of brown at the edges of the flight feathers and coverts was confirmed by examination of the many photos. All feathers were unspotted and there were no white arrow marks on the rump or upper- and

undertail coverts. These features are in contrast to all known plumages of any subspecies of the Common Starling.

When flying among Common Starlings the bird stood out because of the all-dark coverts of the underwing, in contrast to the paler flight feathers, a character not seen in the Common Starling unless it is strongly back-lighted. The underwing coverts of Common Starlings are pale greyish brown, barely darker than the flight feathers and contrasting to the dark body. No such contrast existed between the dark underwing coverts and the body of the Spotless Starling.

When the bird was seen together with Common Starlings of both sexes it appeared to be slightly bigger in body. An all-black plumage is likely to make a bird appear bigger, but not only was a difference in size noted by several birdwatchers in the field, it is also apparent from the photos, although a precise, quantitative comparison between the two species based on the photos has not been possible.

The colour of the feet is an unreliable character with much overlap between the species, but the pale pinkish



Spotless Starling, Børsmose 17/5 2002. Notice the uniformly black and completely unspotted, "oily" plumage with purple iridescence, elongated scapulars and light bronzy sheen on exposed parts of primaries. Also visible is the pale-pinkish, flesh-coloured feet. Photo: Ib Jensen. *Ensfarvet Stær. Bemærk den ensfarvede og uplettede dragt med purpurglans, og broncefarvet skin på de synlige dele af håndsvingfjerene. De lyserøde/kødfarvede fødder er også iøjnefaldende.*

Spotless Starling, Børsrose 9/5 2002. Notice the marginally bigger body size compared with Common Starling and the shiny plumage with purple iridescence. Photo: Jan Durinck.

Ensfarvet Stær. Fuglen synes lidt større end almindelig Stær, og fjerdragten iriserer i purpur.



flesh-coloured feet of the bird was at least suggestive of Spotless Starling. The present Common Starlings all had reddish-brown feet.

The bird was occasionally seen singing by itself from a high tree, but no recordings or detailed descriptions of the song exist, so knowledge of the song cannot contribute to the identification. However, while singing the bird exposed the elongated feathers on head and throat, and these appeared to be longer than those of the Common Starling.

The gloss of the plumage appeared highly variable, depending on the light conditions as is normal for structural colours. Basically the plumage appeared oily or shiny, with an essentially even, purple iridescence. A brilliant green sheen was not seen, but a metallic green gloss on breast, shoulders and upper rump was visible in sunlight. The bright green sheen on the mantle, so characteristic of the Common Starling (Jonsson 1992), hence was missing, whereas the green and purple gloss seen on the breast is known from both Spotless and Common Starlings.

Discussion

During the discussions of the DRC, bird skins of both species were examined at the Zoological Museum in Copenhagen, and many photos from various countries, taken at the same time of year, were studied.

A normal Common Starling in April has a bright green sheen on mantle and scapulars, visible even in overcast weather and emphasized by Jonsson (1992) as an important character for distinguishing the species from the Spotless Starling. The Common Starling also has a green gloss to the throat and a purple sheen to the upper breast, while the central breast and belly show a multicoloured sheen with green, dark blue and rosy pink. In addition, there is a dark blue sheen to the flanks and a light green sheen to the undertail and wing coverts. The DRC found that the characters of the bird in question matched those of the Spotless Starling: green

sheen confined to the scapulars, the sides of the breast, and the rump – in case of the breast sides in combination with a rosy pink sheen. However, some experienced birdwatchers, including members of the DRC, thought that the green sheen on the breast was more intense and brighter than seen in typical male Spotless Starlings, although this was not supported by the photographic evidence. The DRC naturally had to act on the divergent opinions and therefore focused its attention on the possibility that the bird was an aberrant Common Starling.

Defects in pigmentation or in structural colours are usually under genetic control, but can also be the result of disease, injury or diet (Clark 2001). One possibility that was extensively discussed was a melanistic Common Starling. Melanin makes feathers more resistant to wear (Clark l.c.). The Common Starling has one complete moult annually, in summer after breeding (Snow & Perris 1998), and in the following spring the feathers will be somewhat worn, but perhaps less so in a melanistic bird. But even if a melanistic Common Starling would have a black plumage, and perhaps look marginally bigger and exhibit longer feathers in head and throat than normal conspecifics, it would still exhibit the diagnostic bright green sheen of the mantle. The DRC found that a Common Starling that was both melanistic and had defective structural colours in part of the plumage was even more unlikely than a Spotless Starling, so much more as the bird had a complete and otherwise healthy plumage, with no sign of abnormal wear or other aberrations. Defects in the structural colours normally influence the plumage in general, not specific feather tracts (Clark l.c.).

Early photos of the bird in question were of poor quality and many of the initial comments therefore did not favour an identification as Spotless Starling. However, opinions generally changed as more and better photographic documentation became available and allowed a more thorough assessment of the plumage sheen under varying light conditions, and in the end the comments

from abroad were unanimously in favour of Spotless Starling. A few sceptics in Denmark still question the conclusion reached by the DRC whereas, on the other hand, the initially very sceptic Richard Gutiérrez from the Spanish Rarities Committee ended up concluding not only that the bird was a Spotless Starling, but also that it was an adult male.

Conclusion

The characteristics considered most important for the conclusion were (1) the general impression of a black and evenly glossed starling with unspotted plumage, (2) the fact that the plumage gloss was mostly evenly purple, mainly lacking the brilliant green characteristic of a Common Starling, (3) the lack of green sheen on the mantle, which in most light conditions is a good and reliable characteristic of Common Starling, (4) the complete black edges and tips of all visible feathers, with no trace of paler spots or brown edges, (5) the strong contrast on the underwing between the dark coverts and the pale flight feathers, (6) the elongated breast and neck feathers, (7) the marginally larger body size compared with Common Starlings of both sexes, and (8) the rosy pink feet, indicative of Spotless Starling.

Acknowledgements

We would like to express our gratitude to all those who gave their opinion on the identification or provided updated information on current distribution. The following should be particularly acknowledged: Amine Flitti, Andrea Corso, Anna Motis, Jon Fjeldså, Klaus Malling Olsen, Lars Svensson, Nicola Baccetti, Ricard Gutiérrez, and Sergio Nissardi. We acknowledge the help of personnel at the Zoological Museum in Copenhagen in making skinned specimens of both species available to us for detailed examination of the plumage. Thanks also to Tony Fox for helping with the manuscript.

Resumé: Ensfarvet Stær *Sturnus unicolor* i Danmark

I perioden 18. april – 23. maj 2002 blev en Ensfarvet Stær *Sturnus unicolor* set ved Børsmose nær Oksbøl i Vestjylland. Fundet skabte stor opmærksomhed blandt både danske og udenlandske ornitologer og skabte tilige en del debat om fuglens rette identitet.

På grund af artens udbredelse samt bevidstheden om, at afvigende Stære *Sturnus vulgaris* kan forekomme, har det været nødvendigt for det danske Sjældenhedsudvalg at gennemføre en særlig grundig behandling med løbende vurderinger fra eksperter i ind- og udland. Heldigvis har billedmaterialet af den pågældende fugl været ganske omfattende, især har billeder af fuglen i forskellige belysninger været vigtige i vurderingen af glansen i fuglens fjerdragt.

Den Ensfarvede Stær var sort uden lyse pletter, og fjerdragtens glans afveg fra glansen hos Stær, idet den overvejende var purpur, dog med islæt af grønligt. Især skal fremhæves manglen på grøn ryg, som er en konstant karakter hos Stær og kun i ringe grad varierer med lysforholdene. Der var sorte kanter på sving- og dækfjer samt tertialer; hos Stær er disse kanter brune og giver



Spotless Starling, Børsmose 17/5 2002. Notice the oily plumage that accentuates the elongated feathers on throat and breast. A metallic green gloss is seen on the throat and laterally on the breast, while the rest of the plumage shows purple iridescence. Photo: Ib Jensen.

Ensfarvet Stær. Et metallisk grønt skær ses på strube og brystsider, mens resten af fjerdragten har purpurfarvet glans.

indtryk af en brun vinge i kontrast til den mørkere krop. Flere observatører så en tydelig kontrast mellem sorte dækfjer og lysere svingfjer på vingeundersiden. Fuglen havde forlængede strube- og nakkefjer, og den virkede en smule større end Stær, både på jorden og i flugten. Den havde lyserøde ben og fødder.

Nogle medlemmer af Sjældenhedsudvalget mente, at den grønne glans på brystet havde større udbredelse end normalt hos Ensfarvet Stær.

References

- Clark, G.A., Jr. 2001. Form and function: the external bird. Pp. 3.1-3.38 in S. Podulka, R. Rohrbaugh, Jr. & R. Bonney (eds): Handbook of bird biology. – Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, New York.
- Jonsson, L. 1992. Fugle i Europa. – Gyldendal, København.
- Snow, D.W. & C.M. Perrins (eds) 1998: The birds of the western Palearctic. Concise edition. – Oxford University Press, Oxford.

Kent Olsen (kent_olsen@hotmail.com)
Søvej 2M, Feldballe
8410 Rønede

Henrik Haaning Nielsen
Frimervej 16
7742 Vesløs

Ole Amstrup
Tarmvej 97
6893 Hemmet

Er Perleuglen *Aegolius funereus* ved at etablere sig i Jylland?

DAVID BOERTMANN og STINNE AASTRUP

Perleuglen *Aegolius funereus* hører til de arter som DOFs Arbejdsgruppe for Truede og Sjældne Ynglefugle (DATSY) overvåger. Den yngler meget fåtalligt og nok uregelmæssigt på Bornholm (Grell 1998, Grell et al. 2004, Nyegaard & Grell 2006, 2007), men er i det øvrige land mest kendt som en sjælden træk- og vintergæst fra Skandinavien, ofte i forbindelse med invasioner (Melfoite & Fjeldså 2002). Der foreligger dog et fund af en unge i Nordjylland (Jacobsen et al. 1971), og der er publiceret oplysninger om enkelte syngende fugle i Jylland siden 1980'erne, senest i Tved Plantage i Thy i 2006 (Laursen 2006, Nyegaard & Grell 2007).

I foråret 2007 fandt vi et perleuglepar i en midtjysk plantage. Parret blev fulgt fra midt i april til begyndelsen af juli, hvor mindst to og sandsynligvis tre unger blev flyvefærdige. Sammen med en række medobservatører har vi holdt vagt ved ugerne gennem 45 skumrings-, dæmrings- og helnatsperioder fordelt over hele yngleperioden, hovedsageligt fra nærliggende skovveje, hvorfra der var frit udsyn ind til redehullet ca 50 m væk.

Observationer

Vi blev første gang opmærksom på ugerne på lokaliteten, da vi om aftenen 13. april 2007 hørte en syngende perleuglehan. Fuglen sang det karakteristiske langtrukne "ziegerroller", som hannen benytter for at lokke en tilstedeværende hun nærmere til og ind i redehullet (Glutz von Blotzheim & Bauer 1980). Fuglen sås også flyve rundt i området. Den efterfølgende aften fandt vi redehullet og så hannen kigge ud, samtidig med at hannen sås og hørtes omkring stedet. I de følgende dage sås og hørtes hannen hyppigt i skumringen, mens hunnen undertiden kiggede ud af redehullet. Sangaktiviteten faldt dog hurtigt og f.eks. hørtes ingen ugle om aftenen den 22. april. I perioden 5. maj til 16. juni var der meget lidt aktivitet ved redehullet (i det mindste mens vi var til stede), dog sås hannen jævnligt flyve over en nærliggende lysning, og ind imellem hørtes kald og kortvarig sang. Hunnen kiggede undertiden ud fra redehullet, ikke bare ved kradsen på træet, men også ved lyde som f.eks. en knækkende gren, talende mennesker eller skridt på en nærliggende grusvej. Den 17. juni om morgenen sås en stor unge kigge ud af redehullet. Den så ud til at være fuldfjedret i ansigt og hoved og blev anslået til at være knap fire uger gammel. Den 18. juni sås to tydeligt aldersforskellige unger i hullet, og 19. juni sås tre unger. Siden sås op til to unger på samme tid frem til 25. juni om aftenen, men den følgende dag var reden tom. Udfløjne unger blev kun bemærket to gange, 29. juni om aftenen (to unger hørt og en set) og 30. juni om aftenen (én unge set). Den sidste gang vi var på stedet var den

4. juli, hvor en voksen ugles varselskald hørtes 750 m fra rede træet.

Habitat

Reden var placeret i et gammelt redehul af Sortspætte *Dryocopus martius*, udhugget 10 m oppe i en stor ædelgran *Abies* sp., som var plantet i 1897. Den står i en lille skovpart med jævaldrende store ædelgraner, som vokser ret spredt, og mellem dem står enkelte meget mindre rødgraner *Picea abies*. Ædelgranerne står umiddelbart op til en stor rydning, en tæt rødgranbeplantning samt en ung beplantning af røde *Quercus rubra*. Den tætte rødgranbeplantning var formentlig dagrasteplads for hannen – det var herfra den blev hørt første gang, og herfra hørtes den også flere gange siden. Det var som sagt også her, at ungerne opholdt sig kort efter at de havde forladt redehullet. I nærheden findes bl.a. et område med blandskov og flere store græsklædte lysninger, hvorover hannen ofte sås flyve.

Diskussion

Ungerne forlader reden når de er ca fire uger gamle (Cramp 1985). Da første-æg ruges ca 29 dage, må æglægningen være begyndt omkring 22. april, knap 10 dage efter at vi opdagede fuglene.

Vores fund er det første sikre danske ynglefund uden for Bornholm, men en udfløjne unge set 18. juli 1968 ved Blokhus i Nordjylland (Jacobsen et al. 1971, E. Krabbe pers. medd.) må med stor sandsynlighed også være udklækket af et jysk ynglepar. Den kan ikke have forladt sit redehul meget tidligere end 1. juni, og perleugleunger bliver først uafhængige af forældrefuglene efter fem til seks uger (Cramp 1985). Det pågældende perleuglepar var sandsynligvis fugle, der var kommet til landet under perleugleinvasionen i efteråret 1967 (jf. Laursen 2006). Vores fund skal imidlertid nok ses i helt anden sammenhæng; nemlig som indvandring sydfra. For det første er bestanden i Slesvig-Holsten i fremgang; her var der i 2007 20 besatte territorier, 15 med egentlige yngleforsøg og fem med enlige, syngende hanner – den nærmeste af disse blot fem km syd for grænsen (Martens 2008, pers. medd.). For det andet har plantagerne i Jylland nu en alder som gør, at mange træer er tykke nok til, at Sortspætten kan udhugge redehuller i dem. Siden 1980'erne har der været en ganske stor bestand af Sortspætter i Midtjylland (Grell 1998), og deres gamle redehuller udgør fine redemuligheder for hulrugende fuglearter, inkl. Perleugle. I den lille ædelgranbeplantning, som vores Perleugle ynglede i, er der yderligere to sortspættehuller, hvoraf det ene, kun 160 m fra perleuglemeden, i en periode husede et kuld unger af skovmår *Martes martes*. Den aktive sortspætterede, der lå nærmest uglereden, var i en bøg *Fagus sylvatica* 700 m derfra.

Ifølge litteraturen (Glutz von Blotzheim & Bauer 1980, Cramp 1985) kan ynglende Perleugler i Skandinavien og Mellemeuropa findes gennem en meget lang periode, idet første-æg er lagt fra slutningen af februar til midten af maj, og til helt ind i juni i omlagte kuld eller andet-kuld.

Der kan ikke være tvivl om at Perleuglen har fine betingelser i de midtjyske skove, og arten kan meget vel være under indvandring til denne del af Jylland, hvis ikke der allerede er en lille bestand. Det sidste er ikke umuligt, for selv om en syngende Perleugle kan høres op til et par kilometer væk, lever arten diskret, og der kommer ikke mange ornitologer i de udstrakte plantageområder i den periode, hvor eventuelle ynglefugle er lettest at finde. Det var et rent tilfælde, at vi første gang hørte den syngende han i skumringen, mens vi var på vej hjem fra en svampetur. Vores mistanke styrkes desuden af, at der i 2007 til DATSY er blevet rapporteret syngende Perleugler fra mindst fire andre jyske lokaliteter (H. Tøttrup pers. medd.).

Skal en bestand få virkeligt fodfæste i Jylland, må plantagerne forvaltes så store træer med spættehuller skånes for skovning (Grell 1998). Skov- og Naturstyrelsens naturskogsstrategi giver rig mulighed herfor, i det mindste i statskovene. Vores fund var netop i en statskov, og i samarbejde med DOF-Vestjylland opsatte skovdistriktet i februar 2008 16 perleuglekasser i sine plantager. Der er desuden på privat initiativ ophængt 10 perleuglekasser i nærliggende plantager (O. Dahlgreen pers. medd.). Dette kan forhåbentlig bidrage til artens etablering, ligesom i Slesvig-Holsten, hvor en stor del af bestanden yngler i opsatte kasser (Martens 2008).

I foråret 2008 fandt vi ingen Perleugler i plantagen, hverken under lyttiture om aftenen eller ved kontrol af de opsatte reddekasser og kendte sortspættehuller.

Tak til vore medobservatører, som gennem hele perioden har rapporteret deres observationer til os.

Summary: Tengmalm's Owl breeding in Jutland in 2007

A pair of Tengmalm's Owl *Aegolius funereus* bred in a conifer plantation in Jutland in 2007. The nest was placed in an old nest hole of Black Woodpecker *Dryocopus martius*, 10 m up in a big fir (planted in 1897). The first egg was estimated to have been laid about 22 April, and at least two young left the nest during the night of 25/26 May.

This is the first confirmed breeding record of Tengmalm's Owl in Denmark outside of Bornholm. However, a pair probably bred in northern Jutland in 1968 (a

juvenile bird seen 18 July), after an invasion of birds from the north and east. The breeding record here discussed may instead be the result of immigration from the south, from the small, but now increasing, population in North Germany. The establishment of a breeding population in Jutland should be possible because the conifer plantations now have an age where the trees are sufficiently big for breeding Black Woodpeckers, the nest holes of which are often used by other hole-nesting species, including Tengmalm's Owl.

Referencer

- Cramp, S. (red.) 1985: The birds of the western Palearctic, vol. 4. – Oxford University Press, Oxford.
- Jacobsen, J.R., B.P. Nielsen & J. Rabøl 1971: Rapport fra sjældenhedsudvalget for 1970. – Dansk Orn. Foren. Tidsskr. 65: 133-139.
- Glutz von Blotzheim, U.N. & K.M. Bauer 1980: Handbuch der Vögel Mitteleuropas, Band 9. – Akademische Verlagsgesellschaft, Wiesbaden.
- Grell, M.B. 1998: Fuglenes Danmark. – Gads Forlag, København.
- Grell, M.B., H. Heldbjerg, B. Rasmussen, M. Stabell, J. Tofft & T. Vikstrøm 2004: Truede og sjældne ynglefugle i Danmark 1998-2003. – Dansk Orn. Foren. Tidsskr. 98: 45-100.
- Meltofte, H. & J. Fjeldsø 2002. Fuglene i Danmark. – Gyldendal, København.
- Nyegaard, T. & M.B. Grell (red.) 2006: Truede og sjældne ynglefugle i Danmark 2005. – Dansk Orn. Foren. Tidsskr. 98: 57-74.
- Nyegaard, T. & M.B. Grell (red.) 2007: Truede og sjældne ynglefugle i Danmark 2006. – Rapport, <http://www.dof.dk/sider/images/stories/proj/datsy/dokumenter/DATSY2006.pdf>.
- Laursen, J.T. 2006: Danmarks ugler. – Apollo Books, Stenstrup.
- Martens, H.D. 2008: Jahresbericht 2006 Raufußkauz. Pp. 11-13 i R. Albrecht, D. Berking & H.D. Martens (red.): EulenWelt 2007. – Landesverband Eulenschutz in Schleswig-Holstein e. V.

David Boertmann
Danmarks Miljøundersøgelser
Frederiksborgvej 399
4000 Roskilde

Stinne Aastrup
Engbakkevej 19
8800 Viborg