

## NOTEBOOK

# First description of the song of Yellow-throated Laughingthrush *Garrulax (Dryonastes) galbanus*, Nagaland, north-east India

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On 13–14 April 2015, DPE and JB searched for the Yellow-throated Laughingthrush *Garrulax (Dryonastes) galbanus* (Plate 1) in steep valleys around Pungro village, Kiphire district, Nagaland, India. The species had been reported in this area several times in recent years, although it appears to be wary of anthropogenic disturbance probably

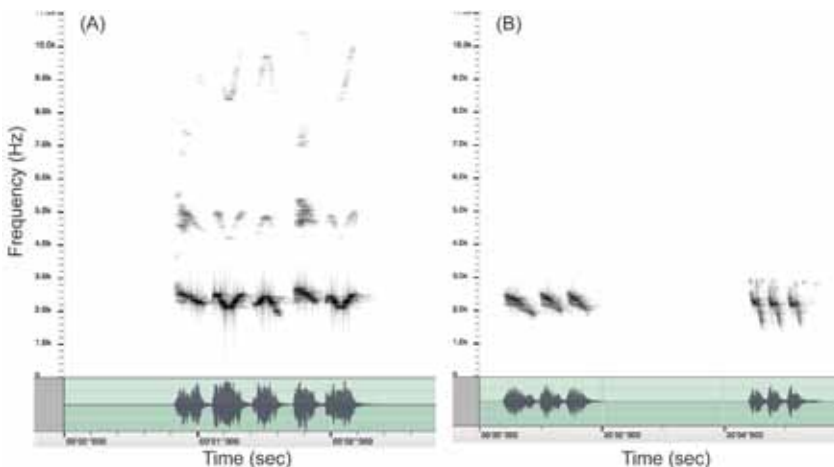
**Plate 1.** Yellow-throated Laughingthrush *Garrulax (Dryonastes) galbanus*, near Pungro village, Nagaland, India, 29 April 2014.



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because, in common with most forms of wildlife in Nagaland, it is hunted for food (Haralu 2010, Sykes 2011). It is a range-restricted taxon, found only in north-east India (south Assam, Nagaland, Manipur and Mizoram), south-east Bangladesh and adjacent west Myanmar (Collar & Robson 2016).

Eventually, at 08h15 on 14 April, a small flock of 3–4 Yellow-throated Laughingthrushes was found by the roadside about 12 km from Pungro, close to the junction with the track to Pungren village, in an area of scrub, bushes, tall seeding grasses and scattered trees (Plate 2). The birds moved quickly and quietly through the undergrowth and out of view; about 10 minutes later, DPE heard a song he did not recognise, which superficially sounded like a laughingthrush, and secured a poor-quality recording which he immediately played back. Shortly afterwards, two Yellow-throated Laughingthrushes quietly flew through the undergrowth and crossed the road. After further playback, the two birds returned (they were subsequently joined by a third) and this time sang from undergrowth a few metres away. A number of excellent audio recordings were obtained (XC289254, XC289255, XC289256, XC289257); access to these recordings on Xeno-canto is prohibited due to the risk of misuse by irresponsible visitors and trappers.



**Figure 1.** Sonograms of *Garrulax (Dryonastes) galbanus* (A) and *Garrulax (Dryonastes) courtoisi* (B), revealing the substantial differences in the songs of the two species and supporting their taxonomic separation.



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**Plate 2.** The roadside site with dry scrub, bushes, scattered trees and seeding grasses where we found and recorded Yellow-throated Laughingthrush, near Pungro, Nagaland, 14 April 2015.

The song of the Yellow-throated Laughingthrush has not previously been recorded or described—only soft twittery (probably contact) calls have been reported (Sykes 2011, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Here we describe the species's loud, melodious song (Figure 1A). The song consists of five equally spaced whistled notes lasting 1.5 seconds; each note being 0.2 seconds in length (mainly 2–3 kHz). The first and fourth notes were slightly tremulous and down-slurred compared with the second and fifth, that were up-slurred, piercing whistles; the third note was equally piercing although down-slurred. The motif would best be described as *brrrt-peewit-peow-brrrt-peewit*, regularly repeated at about 5-second intervals.

Traditionally, the genus *Dryonastes* has been subsumed in *Garrulax*, but differs in some small details of morphology (Collar & Robson 2016). The taxon *galbanus* is closely related to, and until recently treated as conspecific with, *Garrulax (Dryonastes) courtoisi*. Morphological differences between these taxa are discussed in detail by Collar (2006) and Wilkinson & He (2010). Our description of the song of *galbanus* allows comparison with that of *courtoisi* using JAE's song recordings. In contrast to *galbanus*, the song of *courtoisi* is a short, monotonous series of notes, alternating between two different motifs. One motif is a short

series of 2–5 soft, tremulous notes, *brrrrt-brrrrt-brrrrt-brrrrt-brrrrt*, similar to the opening note of *galbanus* but slightly softer, longer and less down-slurred (Figure 1B, left-hand motif). Each note lasts 0.3–0.4 seconds (2–3 kHz). The second motif is a short series of three harder, down-slurred whistled *tchoo-tchoo-tchoo* notes, lasting about 0.9 seconds (1.5–4 kHz) (Figure 1B, right-hand motif). The motifs seemingly alternate randomly, with an interval of 2–4 seconds. These very distinct differences in the acoustics of *courtoisi* and *galbanus* support the view that these taxa be accorded species rank.

## References

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