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Cover: Oil painting of Humpback Whale *Megaptera novaeangliae*. © R. Mahesh.



First photographic record of Naumann's Thrush *Turdus naumanni* Temminck, 1820 from Assam, India

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Naumann's Thrush *Turdus naumanni* Temminck, 1820, is a medium-sized (23–25 cm; 63–81 g) species belonging to the family Turdidae with a breeding range spanning central and eastern Siberia (Clement & Hathway 2000; Abhinav et al. 2022). Historically, considered conspecific with Dusky Thrush (*T. eunomus*), it was formally recognized as a distinct species (An et al. 2024), though confusion persists due to hybrid forms (Hatibaruah et al. 2019). The species winters across southeastern Russia, China, Korea, and Taiwan (Clement & Hathway 2000), with vagrants occasionally reaching western Europe and, more rarely, southern Asia.

Within India, *T. naumanni* remained largely unrecognized until its formal addition to the national checklist (Praveen et al. 2021). The most comprehensive assessment by Abhinav et al. (2022) documents only two confirmed records of pure species from India: an unconfirmed sight record from Ladakh (16 January 1982) and a photographed first-winter female from Shey, Ladakh (13 December 2021). In contrast, multiple hybrid individuals (*T. naumanni* × *T. eunomus*) have been documented across the subcontinent, with an apparent influx during the winter of 2018–2019 in northeastern India (Abhinav et al. 2022). Within Assam, prior records

include a sight record from Manas National Park, Baksa District (6 January 2006), and an individual of hybrid or uncertain status from Digboi Oil Fields, Tinsukia District (17 December 2018) (Hatibaruah et al. 2019; Abhinav et al. 2022). The present record from Panbari Village, Dhemaji District (13 January 2026) thus constitutes the first photographically confirmed record of a pure individual from the state.

On 13 January 2026, at 0830 h, a single individual of the species was observed and photographed in grassland habitat mixed with rice paddy field at Panbari Village, Dhemaji District of Assam (27.540° N, 94.434° E; elevation ca. 105 m). The bird was encountered in open grassland interspersed with shrubs, actively foraging on the ground for invertebrates, a behaviour typical of wintering thrushes in this region. The bird was observed at the same spot for more than a month. Detailed photographs were taken to enable diagnostic assessment of plumage characters. These images (Image 1c–f) were subsequently submitted to eBird and Indian Biodiversity portal (<https://indiabiodiversity.org/>) and BirdCount India (<https://birdcount.in/>) and expert members confirmed the species as Naumann's Thrush, based on the following key diagnostic features:

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Image 1 . Naumann's Thrush *Turdus naumanni* recorded from Dhemaji District of Assam: a—Map showing the sighting location (red star) | b—Feeding habitat with green circle indicating the individual's position | c-f—Field photographs illustrating diagnostic morphology from multiple angles | c—Right lateral view | d—Left lateral view | e—Dorsal view | f—Frontal view, supporting species identification and absence of hybrid characters. © Pulakeswar Basumatary.

(1) rufous-orange wash extensively covering the breast, flanks, and undertail coverts; (2) pale supercilium extending from lore to nape; (3) brown-rufous (not black) streaking on the upper chest and malar region; (4) pale brown (not dark brown) upperparts with rufous

tones on the rump and tail; (5) whitish central belly contrary to the extensive dark markings in Dusky Thrush or Naumann's × Dusky hybrids; and (6) absence of the pronounced golden-rufous wing panel diagnostic of hybrids (Clement & Hathway 2000; Hatibaruah et al.

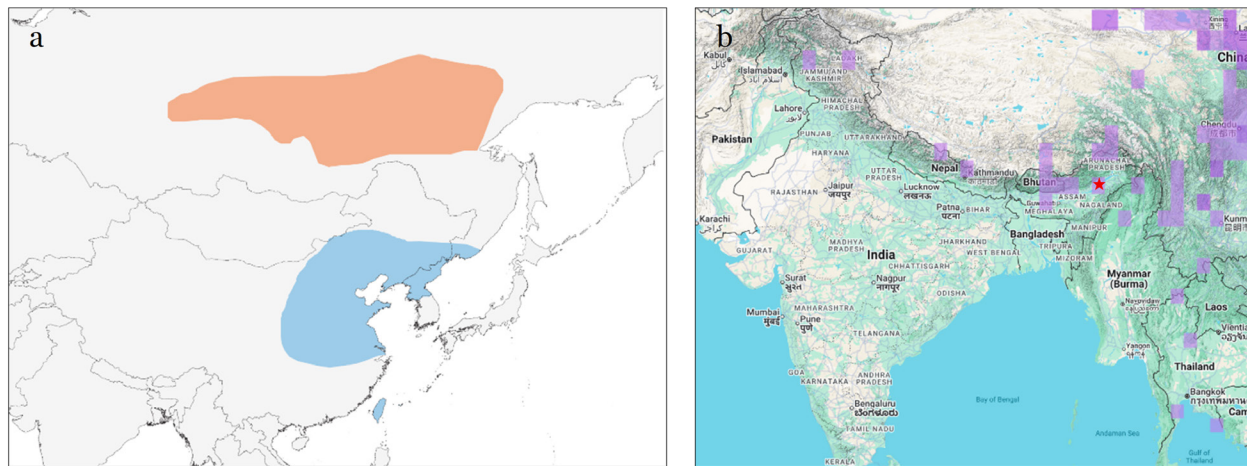


Image 2. Distribution map of the species according to a—the global breeding (orange) and nonbreeding (blue) range of *Turdus naumanni* as depicted in Birds of the World (Lynx Edicions & BirdLife International 2026) | b—eBird sighting records across India and Assam shown in purple. The present record location (Panbari Village, Dhemaji) is indicated with red star on the map.

2019; Abhinav et al. 2022). Based on the paler and less saturated rufous-orange colouration on the breast and flanks, visible pale fringes producing a slightly scalloped appearance on the breast feathers, and comparatively duller upperpart tones relative to males, the individual was identified as a female (Clement & Hathway 2000; Abhinav et al. 2022). Furthermore, the retained median coverts bearing pale buff-white tips contrasting with the replaced greater coverts, and the moderately worn primaries, indicate this to be a first-winter (first-year) individual, likely hatched in the preceding summer (Clement & Hathway 2000). Additionally, images were posted on the Facebook group 'Ask ID of Indian Birds', Assam Bird Monitoring Network (ABMN) and many Bird ID groups where it was identified as Naumann's Thrush with no feature of hybridization. Weather conditions at the time of observation were clear with moderate temperature (approximately 18–24 °C), following several days of cooler overnight temperatures (5–10 °C), a pattern typical of trigger conditions for vagrant arrivals in northeastern India.

Dhemaji District supports high avifaunal diversity, with more than 334 bird species recorded across the district according to eBird regional data (eBird 2026). The adjoining locations of the observation site also demonstrate substantial species richness, with approximately 155 bird species documented from the specific hotspot (eBird 2026). This record from Dhemaji represents noteworthy distribution data for several reasons. First, it constitutes the first confirmed photographed record of the species specifically from Dhemaji District. Second, it occurs at substantially lower

elevation (ca. 105 m) compared to most previous Indian records, which are concentrated between 1,500 and 3,300 m elevation (Abhinav et al. 2022), suggesting ecological flexibility regarding wintering elevations. Third, the timing of this record in mid-January corresponds to the documented peak occurrence window for the species in northeastern India (December–February; Abhinav et al. 2022). The record thus aligns with the hypothesis that this Palearctic species has become increasingly regular in the region during winter months, particularly in years with severe continental weather patterns that may trigger irruptive movements southward (Abhinav et al. 2022).

Future monitoring of open grassland habitats and cultivated areas in the Brahmaputra Valley during winter months may reveal additional occurrences of this species and other rare Palearctic thrushes too, further refining understanding of vagrance patterns and range dynamics in the eastern Himalayan foothill's region. The present record underscores the importance of systematic documentation with photographic evidence for distinguishing between pure individuals and hybrid forms, a challenge particularly acute for species recently recognized in the region and still poorly understood in its distribution ecology in India (Image 2).

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