

RANGE EXTENSION

Recent range expansion of the Brown-headed Thrush *Turdus chrysolaus* onto the Kamchatka peninsula, Russia

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The Brown-headed Thrush *Turdus chrysolaus* is typically an island species, breeding on the Kuril Islands, Sakhalin, Hokkaido and north and central Honshu (making it the commonest breeding thrush in Japan), but becoming scarce to uncommon in south-west Honshu and Shikoku (Nechaev 1991, Stepanyan 2003, Collar 2005, Brazil 2009). Until 1991 it had never been recorded on the Kamchatka peninsula (Averin 1948, Lobkov 1986, Artukhin *et al.* 2000), in spite of being common on Shumshu Island, the second most northerly of the Kuril Islands, only 11 km from the peninsula's southern tip (Podkovyrkin 1955). The first record for Kamchatka came in October 1991 when an adult male was observed near Petropavlovsk-Kamchatskiy (Atkinson 2004). In May 1994 four birds were seen in south-west Kamchatka near the Opala River mouth (Gerasimov 1997), whilst during a bird survey on Kurile Lake, south Kamchatka, in May–September 2011, an adult male was seen and photographed on two days in May near the Ozyornaya River (Zelenskaya 2011).

I visited the Kurile Lake area (51.455°N 157.098°E) between 10 June and 1 July 2015. On 11 June I saw several Brown-headed Thrushes and, through further observations and sound recordings,

Plate 1. Adult Brown-headed Thrush *Turdus chrysolaus* carrying earthworms, Kurile Lake, Kamchatka, Russia, 30 June 2015.



I counted at least 15 territorial singing males, with an average density of 3.3 singing males per km². The birds were in willow and birch woodland near the banks of the rivers Etamynk, Khakacyn, Ozyornaya and Pervaya Severnay, by lake shores and in elfin alder woodland on mountain slopes. Lobkov (1986), who studied bird densities in the same area between 11 June and 11 July 1984, did not encounter Brown-headed Thrushes, but found Eyebrowed Thrush *T. obscurus* to be the commonest thrush in the area with a breeding density of 9.9 pairs per km². In 2015 I recorded only two singing male Eyebrowed Thrushes in the whole area; all other thrushes found were Brown-headed.

From 22 June, I noted alarm calls and agitated behaviour by pairs of Brown-headed Thrushes; however, due to the extremely high density of Brown Bears *Ursus arctos* in the area, opportunities to search for nests were limited. There were at least three nesting pairs around the camp near the headspring of the Ozyornaya River and I first noted birds collecting earthworms for their nestlings on 24 June. On 28–30 June, I saw birds carrying earthworms flying around the camp at about 20 minute intervals (Plate 1). The Kurile Lake area is the first location on the Kamchatka peninsula where the Brown-headed Thrush has been found breeding and should now be treated as the northernmost extent of the breeding range of the species.

The study area is in the Uzhno-Kurilsky Zakaznik, part of Kronotsky State Nature Reserve, a mostly natural ecosystem untouched by human activity in the last 50 years. Thus it is not possible to explain the expansion of the Brown-headed Thrush into this area as a result of any human impact on the local environment. However, strong climate change impacts, with warmer winters than in the past, have been reported from the region (Shkaberda & Vasilevskaya 2013) and may have created suitable conditions for species such as the Brown-headed Thrush to expand northwards.

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