

Orange-cheeked waxbills at Bishan

Subjects: Orange-cheeked waxbill, *Estrilda melpoda* (Aves: Passeriformes: Estrildidae).

Subjects identified by: Contributors.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, Bishan Park; 15 August 2016; around 1515 hrs.

Habitat: Urban parkland.

Observers: Contributors.

Observation: Three individuals of around 10 cm (in length) were observed on a grass lawn. They were brownish-grey with bright orange-red beaks and orange cheeks. Despite their balding heads, the birds were otherwise fully feathered with pronounced tails (Figs. 1 & 2). They were actively feeding on grass seeds, nipping these off with their beaks, and sometimes leaving seeds stuck to the beaks (Fig. 2). The observers could approach the birds to within a distance of about 2 m; any closer and they would fly a short distance away. There were a few scaly-breasted munias (*Lonchura punctulata*) in the vicinity, but they were not interacting with the waxbills.

Remarks: The orange-cheeked waxbill is a native of western Africa (Sinclair & Ryan, 2003). It has been introduced to many places, including Bermuda, Guadeloupe, Martinique, northern Mariana Islands, Saipan, Puerto Rico, Spain, the United States, Taiwan, Japan and Singapore (Brazil, 2009; Birdlife International, 2012; Yong et al., 2016). In Singapore, this species has been recorded from Bishan Park (Chng & Tan, 2011), Lorong Halus (Andy, 2012; Owyong, 2015) and Pandan River (Yap, 2011).

The three examples in the present observation appear to have been recently released. Their balding heads could have resulted from poor husbandry, but may also be due to the birds undergoing moult. The number of non-native bird species in Singapore has also been observed to have increased in recent years (Owyong, 2015a). Concerns have been raised over the possible impact of non-native seed-eaters such as the orange-cheeked waxbill on native bird species occupying similar ecological niche, such as the scaly-breasted munia (Owyong, 2015a, 2015b; Yong et al., 2016).

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Fig. 1. Two orange-cheeked waxbills on the grass. Note their balding heads.



Fig. 2. One of the orange-cheeked waxbills with grass seeds on its beak.

Photographs by Tan Heok Hui

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