

NOTES

First sighting of the House Crow *Corvus splendens* on Nosy Be

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The House Crow *Corvus splendens* is native to Iran, the Indian subcontinent, and different portions of southeastern Asia (Birdlife International, 2020). As a result of inadvertent introductions associated with increased global sea traffic and trade, as well as deliberate introductions (Long, 1981), it has been widely introduced or self-established on coasts, especially around ports, of the Indian Ocean, Red Sea, and Persian Gulf, and is increasingly being found at other sites in Eurasia and on islands off southeastern Asia, and even the Americas (Invasive Species Specialist Group, 2020).

The species shows great ecological flexibility, as well as a strong association with humans, to the extent that no populations are known to live independently of man (Nyari *et al.*, 2006). Monitoring its spread is of particular importance because introduced populations often present major problems to humans and native wildlife (Invasive Species Specialist Group, 2020), as well as ecological damage mainly through predation on smaller vertebrates.

In the Malagasy Region, it became established on Mauritius, and there have been sporadic records on Seychelles, La Réunion, and Rodrigues. It was first recorded on Madagascar in 2014 at Toamasina (Linders & Langrand, 2014). Information on the status and habits of *C. splendens* in the Malagasy Region before its arrival on Madagascar were summarized by Safford (2013). Here, we report the first sightings of *C. splendens* at a second location on Madagascar, Nosy Be.

By chance, we located a single adult in the center of the main town on Nosy Be, Hellville between 28 November and 5 December 2018. The bird

was betrayed by an unfamiliar call from a mango tree *Mangifera indica* (family Anacardiaceae) at 13°24'20.3" S, 48°16'18.8" E). On seeing us, it moved quickly from tree to tree and then disappeared until it was found on the roof of a large building, when it was easily identified using field guides and photographed (Figure 1). This shy and inconspicuous behavior resulted in few local people noticing this new arrival although two witnesses reported having seen two individuals around the city since 2016.

We revisited Nosy Be between 1 and 5 July 2019, and searched in the same area, including all surrounding trees with a dense foliage, from 06h 00-07h 00 and 17h 30-18h 30 each day. We did not find any individual of this species and none was reported to us by local people.

House Crows can move as a result of disturbance of nest or roost sites, and may travel up to 20 km per day to feeding areas (Feare & Mungroo, 1990), so we cannot state whether a population is still present somewhere on Nosy Be.

The presence of *Corvus splendens* on Nosy Be could be explained by its arrival on a ship having made port at a regional site this species is known to occur. If this is indeed the case, the likely candidate would be a port in east Africa, from where ships regularly reach northwestern Madagascar. Deliberate introduction is a possibility but the opportunity or motivation for such a (hypothetical) release are unclear.

Establishment of *C. splendens* on Madagascar presents risks to native wildlife (not only birds) as well as having likely socio-economic costs, as has been suggested for the population in Toamasina. We support the call for eradication of this species in Madagascar (Linders & Langrand, 2014), combined with biosecurity measures to prevent re-establishment.

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Figure 1. Adult *Corvus splendens* on a building in Hellville, Nosy Be, Madagascar (3 December 2018). (Photo by Lily-Arison Rene de Roland.)

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