

A PROBABLE ROLLER IN AN OAKWORTH GARDEN : ONE THAT GOT AWAY

As a birder one of the things that alarms me most is a conversation that opens with the words “I’ve had this funny bird in my garden”. So no doubt Dave Barker and Howard Creber, on their autumn migration watch near Thornton Moor Reservoir in early September, felt similar trepidation when approached by a builder, who was working on a nearby house, with such a report.

However, this one was much more detailed and accurate. The man concerned, Tim Shelton of Oakworth, reported he’d had an “exotic” bird in his garden for about 4 days, some 3 months previously. He was familiar with the locally common birds, including Jay (the usual suspect for reported Rollers and Hoopoes), but had no idea what this one was, hadn’t consulted any literature, and was looking to Dave and Howard for assistance.

He then proceeded, without prompting, to describe the bird. It was about the size of a Collared Dove, and had a big head and a strong bill. Its head and sides were bright turquoise blue, with the body showing this particularly well when the bird flew, as well as darker blue underwings. Flight views also revealed the upper wings to be these two shades of blue, and the back was described as bright orange.

Dave and Howard both knew immediately which species the description fitted, and asked the man’s colleague to look up Roller on his mobile phone. Seeing the image, Tim Shelton immediately confirmed this was the bird. This has been subsequently reinforced by looking at the illustrations of both Roller and Jay in Howard’s Collins Bird Guide.

Tantalisingly, the report coincides with a well-watched and photographed Roller in Crimsworth Dean, about 7 miles south-west of Oakworth, on June 2 (around the same period), and which was last seen flying off north. It is a pity no photos were taken of the Oakworth bird, and that there were no other observers, and, as such, the record would not be admitted as proven by the BBRC, the body responsible for adjudicating on a national rarity.

Intriguingly, and as a frustrating postscript, BOG member Rod Proctor, a very experienced and well-travelled birder, saw what he knew was a Roller in nearby Oxenhope in September, but, for the same reasons, a report to BBRC would also fail. Will it be third time lucky?

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BOG Records Panel