

Records of Superb Starling (*Lamprotornis superbus*) in Florida

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Figures 1, 2. Two views of a Superb Starling at Pompano Beach, Broward County, Florida on 21 July 2007. This bird, perhaps one of a pair, often sang and built a nest in a native palm in a shopping center parking lot. It shared this habitat with, among others, a family of Gray Kingbirds (*Tyrannus dominicensis*), a nesting pair of Common Mynas (*Acridotheres tristis*), and a female-plumaged bishop (*Euplectes* spp.)—a fairly typical scene in southeastern Florida's urban jungle. Photographs by Bill Pranty.

Abstract

This paper digests all known reports and records of Superb Starling (*Lamprotornis superbus*) in Florida, including a documented nesting in Broward County.

Overview

Florida is the exotic avifauna capital of North America, with more than 200 species reported outside of captivity, and with nearly four "new" species reported annually (Pranty 2004). Through 2003, 97 species of exotic birds had been documented in the state by archived specimen or photographic evidence (Pranty 2004), and this number now exceeds

100. One of the most recent exotics to be documented in Florida is Superb Starling (*Lamprotornis superbus*, sometimes placed in the genus *Spreo*), the subject of this note (Figures 1, 2).

Superb Starling, one of 21 "glossy starlings," is a monotypic species common in parts of Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Sudan, Tanzania, and Uganda (Feare and Craig 1998, Clements 2000). It is generally found in arid country such as thorn scrub, but it ventures to the Kenya coast and is also found in gardens and other cultivated habitats (Feare and Craig 1998). Superb Starlings are cooperative breeders (Rubenstein and Lovette 2007), and

family groups of 20 or more birds may be found year-round (Feare and Craig 1998). The adult is distinctive with its black head, glossy bluish nape and upperparts, glossy bluish-green wings, tail with boldly black-tipped uppertail coverts, and white undertail coverts; a stark white breast band separates the glossy bluish-black breast from the rusty belly. The bill, legs, and feet are blackish gray, and the irides are whitish and conspicuous against the black face. The sexes are similar, but the male's breast band is said to be wider than the female's. Juveniles have non-glossy plumage, dark irides, a pale yellow bill, and lack the breast band (Feare and Craig 1998).

Table 1. Recent reports of Superb Starlings in Broward County, Florida. The three birds photographed during 2007 may represent the first documented records of Superb Starling outside the species' native range in east-central Africa.

Date(s)	City	Comments	Observer(s)
21 Jul 2003	Hollywood	One at North Beach Park	B. Roberts
ca. Jun 2004	Hollywood	One near the greyhound racetrack	D. Bogos
13 Jul 2004	Hollywood	One along Hallandale Beach Boulevard west of the Intracoastal Waterway	D. Bogos
ca. 1 Dec 2004	Hollywood	One near US-1 and Washington Street	C. Chinelly
ca. 2005–8 Sep 2007	Hollywood	Two (one banded, the other unbanded) thought to be nesting along Hallandale Beach Boulevard east of the Intracoastal Waterway; birds had been present "2–3 years"	L. Manfredi, P. Cunningham, J. Steel et al.; photographs of both birds
7 Jul–1 Sep 2007	Pompano Beach	One (unbanded), possibly two, building a nest in a cabbage palm along Atlantic Boulevard east of US-1	D. Howard, B. Roberts, E. J. Reed, B. Pranty, photographs of one bird

Superb Starlings in captivity and in Florida

Owing to their stunning plumage, Superb Starlings are widely found in animal exhibits and aviculture. In mid-2007, more than 120 Superb Starlings were held in 36 registered exhibits in the United States and Canada, including two exhibits in Florida: one female at Disney's Animal Kingdom and four starlings (one adult of unknown sex and one pair with their juvenile) at Miami MetroZoo (ISIS 2007). Additionally, one website (SFS 2007) contained recent advertisements by aviculturists in Alabama, Connecticut, Florida, New York, Pennsylvania, and Washington who offered to buy or sell Superb Starlings (at up to \$200 each). Because neither Long (1981) nor Lever (1987) lists any exotic populations of Superb Starlings in the world, and because I was unable to locate any reports by searching the Internet, the Florida observations may represent the first Superb Starlings reported outside their native range.

Except for two previously unpublished reports from the Kendall area, Miami-Dade County, during the 1980s that may represent the same individual (B. Kelley, in litt., July 2004; M. Wheeler, pers. comm., September 2007), Superb Starlings were first noted in Florida in 2003 and apparently have been observed annually since then (Table 1). All recent observations have been within 3 km of the Atlantic Ocean in Broward County, along Florida's heavily urbanized southeastern coast. Five of the six recent locations have been from Hollywood, with the sixth location (representing several sightings of the same two birds) from Pompano Beach, 25–30 km farther north. A minimum convex polygon drawn around the Hollywood observations suggests an occupied range of about 730 ha. Two of the reports are documented by photographs, and the remaining reports clearly describe the species: no other glossy starling has the combination of whitish irides, rusty

underparts, and white breast band. Prior to 2007, all of the sightings of Superb Starlings were of single birds seen once each at various sites in Hollywood. During 2007, evidence of breeding (or at least nest-building) was observed at Hollywood and Pompano Beach. The Hollywood location contained two territorial birds suspected of nesting in a Coconut Palm (*Cocos nucifera*), while at Pompano Beach, one or two starlings were observed singing and building a nest. The nest, observed solely from the ground, was 4–4.5 m up in the upper fronds of a Cabbage Palm (*Sabal palmetto*) and appeared to be composed mostly of dried grass. The six sightings of Superb Starlings scattered geographically and temporally within urban regions of Broward County suggest the presence of a small to perhaps moderate-sized population. Habitat around each of the sites occupied in the past five years is similar to surrounding areas and amounts to thousands of hectares of apparently suitable habitat. Surveys of the region are needed to determine the true status of the Florida's most recent exotic colonist.

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