

What are they called?

Scientific:

Aplonis santovestris

Common English:

Mountain/Santo/Vanuatu
Starling

French: Stourne des
montagnes

Bislama:

Vernacular (local name):

Mataweli (Nokovula,
Santo)

What do they look like?

These birds can grow up to 17cm long. They have a black-brown forehead with white eyes and a firm black bill. They are a rusty/reddish brown colour all over, with a slightly paler belly and darker wingtips. The tail is short and darker.

They differ from the rusty-winged starling also found on Santo, as they have no grey patches and white eyes, not black.

A little bit about them:

They are medium sized bird found on the highest peaks of Santo island, usually between 1200-1700m elevation. They are reported to nest in holes in trees, low to the ground.

The birds have been seen feeding on insects, fruit and seeds. They are usually seen no more than 5m above the forest floor, although occasionally perch in the canopy. They fly quickly and directly in the sub-canopy.



Source: Handbook of the birds of the world Alive

Did you know?

- The mountain starling is the rarest of the endemic species in Vanuatu!



Source: www.beautyofbirds.com

Santo Mountain Starlings are classified as Vulnerable (VU) on the IUCN Red List.

Why are they threatened?

- Predation by invasive species such as rats, cats, dogs and pigs. As they are not native to Vanuatu, birds have no natural defense against them
- Habitat loss caused by the clearing of land for development.
- Sometimes hunted for food.

What they do for us?

- They disperse seeds from the fruit they eat, in their droppings.
- Their foraging and scratching on the forest floor cycles nutrients in the forest ecosystem.
- They are iconic birds of Vanuatu because they are not found anywhere else.

What can we do for them?

- ✓ Enforce regulations in existing protected areas, and identify other nesting and breeding sites and take conservation measures to protect them.
- ✓ Increase awareness of the threats to this species and discourage hunting.
- ✓ Castrate and spay pet cats and dogs to reduce feral animals preying on adults, chicks and eggs.

Want to know more?

- ❖ Book: ***Birds of Melanesia*** by Guy Dutson
- ❖ Visit: www.iucnredlist.org

