

## A large congregation of Great Knots and sighting of Red Knot near Jamnagar

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On 27 December 2017, I visited Sachana Beach (22° 34' 7" N, 70° 10' 45" E), near Balachhadi, Jamnagar, with Dhaval Vargiya, Kishan Vinchhi, Bhargav Bhuva and Neel Sureja. When we reached there, it was high tide. After waiting for a while, with the gradual decline in water level, many waders (*Calidris* sp.) started appearing in the open sandy and muddy patches. With careful observation through binoculars, we saw a mixed flock of various waders, and I found a small group of about 15-20 Great Knot (*Calidris tenuirostris*). Within a few minutes, the count had risen beyond 100; it continued rising and to our surprise, there were more than 1200 Great Knot in this area. Most of them were busy feeding and did not get disturbed by our presence.



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During my subsequent visits to this place, I recorded the species here up to 1 January 2018 in such large numbers. Afterwards, when I visited this place again, there were hardly 10-12 birds present. However, on 26 January 2018, I again counted 832 Great Knots here with bird watcher Sunil Singhal. I immediately called my friend Yashodhan Bhatiya. He promptly came and started taking photos and video while I left. After coming home and watching the photos and video taken by him and referring to the field guides (Grimmett *et al.* 2011, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), we confirmed that

there was a single Red knot (*Calidris canutus*) in the flock of Great Knots. It was identified by its short straight bill, smaller size (compared to Great Knot), uniform grey upperparts and prominent supercilium. So I revisited this area many times to find it but unfortunately, I could not locate it again.

The Great Knot is now classified as 'Endangered' owing to recent evidence showing a rapid population decline (BirdLife International 2016). It is an uncommon winter migrant to Gujarat, not seen in large numbers and usually found in the coastal areas of the state (Ganpule 2016). It has been noted in Jamnagar and Kachchh recently in small flocks (Mori 2017). There is a previous record of a flock of around 125 individuals from Jamnagar (Ganpule *et al.* 2012). However, such a large flock of more than 1200 birds has never been noted in Gujarat, or even from India before. Thus, this is a very important documentation of such a large flock of this endangered species from Gujarat. The presence of more than 800 individuals again in late January indicates that the individuals remain in the same general area during the winter. It is heartening to note such a large flock of this threatened species in the state and indicates that Gujarat is an important wintering destination for the species.

The Red Knot is a vagrant to Gujarat. Ganpule (2016) lists only three previous records from Gujarat; two from Narara, near Jamnagar, and one from Kachchh. It was photographed from Narara earlier (Naik 2012). Thus, this is only the fourth sighting of the species from Gujarat, and the third record from Jamnagar area. This sighting of a Red Knot in a flock of Great Knots is interesting and suggests that large flocks of Great Knots should be carefully scrutinized for Red Knots. In general, Red Knot is very rare on the western coast of India and Grimmett *et al.* (2011) show only one isolated record for

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the entire western coast, from Goa. But, it has been noted four times now in Gujarat. It is possible that the Red Knot could be overlooked due to identification difficulties. Birders are urged to look for this species in the coastal areas of Gujarat.

These two important sightings, of a large congregation of Great Knots and a photographic record of Red Knot, are noteworthy records not only for the Jamnagar region, but also for the state.

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## Grey Heron preying on a Little Grebe

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Neel Sureja

On 3 December 2017 at around 07:30 hrs, a fine winter morning, I was at Vibhapar, a wetland near Jamnagar, for bird photography. In addition to the common birds observed in the area, I saw a few ducks (*Anas* sp.) in the wetland. I then noticed that a Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*) was hunting and saw it catch an immature or non-breeding Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*). It caught the grebe by its neck and gave a few vigorous shakes till the grebe was dead. It then swallowed the grebe whole. It was amazing to watch the heron swallowing the grebe. I initially identified the prey as a juvenile Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*) but then by careful scrutiny of the photographs, I saw that this grebe had a shorter neck and was smaller in size than a Great Crested Grebe. So, I concluded that this was a Little Grebe. Looking at its plumage, I thought that it was an immature or an adult in non-breeding plumage.

The diet of the Grey Heron is mainly fish, but the species is considered to be highly opportunistic; insects, mammals, birds, plant matter and carrion are taken (Martínez-Vilalta *et al.* 2018). The Grey Heron has been recorded to feed on small birds like Common Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*), chicks of other birds and ducks (ducklings), and also prey as large as Common Redshank (*Tringa totanus*) and Common Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*) (Greaves 1991, Martínez-Vilalta *et al.* 2018). A previous record from Jamnagar, of a Grey Heron feeding on a Five-striped Palm Squirrel (*Funambulus pennantii*) is known (Trivedi 2013). Thus, it has a very varied diet.

There is an instance of a Grey Heron choking on a Little Grebe; the heron caught the grebe but it could not swallow it, leading to its death by choking (McCanch 2003). But here, I observed that the Grey Heron could swallow the Little Grebe. Thus, this observation confirms that the Grey Heron can prey on the Little Grebe and swallow it successfully.

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