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An incidence of brood parasitism: Observations of a juvenile Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* in Bhavnagar

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On 1 September 2020, in the morning at around 09:45 hrs, I was passing through Malnath Hills, Bhavnagar. I noticed one juvenile cuckoo (*Cuculus* sp.) perched on a tree branch, begging continuously for food. Since cuckoos are brood parasites, I waited to confirm the foster or host parent species. There were no other birds around it but about after 30 minutes, one Long-tailed Shrike (*Lanius schach*) appeared with some insect prey and fed the young cuckoo. I watched and photographed the cuckoo and the shrike for around two and a half hours, during which it was fed for a total of six times in different locations, ranging from bushes just two feet off the ground to in trees at about 20 ft height. Once, between a long interval in feeding by the parent, the juvenile cuckoo caught a caterpillar on its own. I took many photographs and tentatively identified the cuckoo as a juvenile Common Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*), also known as the Eurasian Cuckoo.

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After reviewing the photographs at home, I confirmed the identification as a juvenile of the Common Cuckoo and one of its known host/foster parents is the Long-tailed Shrike. The identification of the cuckoo was confirmed by the yellow eye ring, dark eyes, white nuchal or nape patch and white tips to feathers of upperparts and rump.

I would also like to share two other interesting observations: At one point, the juvenile cuckoo was mobbed by Red-vented Bulbuls (*Pycnonotus cafer*) and instead of being frightened and

flying away, the cuckoo was calling and begging for food from the bulbuls with open gape and fluttering wings! It eventually flew away when it was pecked at by the bulbuls.

The other observation was that I could see two shrikes at most times, one feeding and the other within the vicinity but I was surprised to see that the shrikes had an active nest. They were observed around three to four times carrying food to the nest but I was unable to hear any calls of the chicks neither could I see whether the nest was occupied since it was at a height of more than 15 ft. This raises an interesting question; was there a second brood of the shrike pair? It is possible that the eggs of the first brood were destroyed by the cuckoo. After the cuckoo had left the nest (fledged), the shrike pair could have started nesting again. This would probably be due to favorable conditions due to a heavy monsoon this year. However, the exact reasons for this are not known. But, it is interesting to note that the cuckoo was being fed while the host parents were probably feeding the chicks of the second brood. Unfortunately, since the nest could not be observed, I could not confirm these observations.

Dharmakumarsinhji (1955) had stated that he had no authentic records of the Common Cuckoo breeding in Saurashtra but the species was seen in fairly large numbers post the monsoon season. In Grimmett *et al*. (2011), the Common Cuckoo is shown to be an isolated summer visitor to Kachchh, North Gujarat and South Gujarat. However, Ganpule (2016) gave it as an autumn passage migrant and monsoon breeding migrant to Gujarat. In the latest checklist of the birds of Gujarat (Ganpule 2020), the Common Cuckoo is given as a monsoon breeding migrant. Hence, the Common Cuckoo does breed here and this observation is further evidence of its breeding in Saurashtra. Praveen & Lowther (2020) give a list of host species for Common Cuckoo and the Long-tailed Shrike is a well documented host species; the breeding of Common Cuckoo in the Indian Subcontinent, away from the Himalayas, is referred to, with confirmed breeding records from Rajasthan and Maharashtra. Gujarat is not listed in this work and this sighting further confirms that the Common Cuckoo breeds in Gujarat too. There are very few records of the Common Cuckoo breeding in Gujarat and this is probably the first record or the first direct observation for Bhavnagar area.

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Photographic record of simultaneous moult of flight feathers in Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* from Jamnagar

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I visited Jamnagar, Gujarat, during 14–16 December 2017, for a field trip of the Basic Course in Ornithology which is conducted by the Bombay Natural History Society, Mumbai. As a part of this course, various bird habitats are visited.

I, along with the participants, stayed at Jamnagar and visited nearby areas including the famous Lakhota Lake in Jamnagar to understand the diversity of birds there. I visited Lakhota Lake on 14 and 15 December 2017. On 15 December I saw three Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*) swimming and diving in the lake waters. I observed them for a few hours and noted that they swam across the lake but did not resort to flying, at which they are good. I tried to take videos and pictures of the bird in the hope to get an image showing them flapping their wings.