

Asian Openbill nesting at Sisva, near Vadodara

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There are nineteen species of storks in the world, of which nine species are found in India (Ali & Ripley 1987, del Hoyo *et al.* 1994). Asian Openbill (*Anastomus oscitans*) is the smallest of all and a resident species of India (Ali & Ripley 1987). This species nests colonially along with other species viz. egrets, herons, other storks and generally displays spatio-temporal clumping of nests (Burger 1981, Ali & Ripley 1987, Krebs 1987, Gopi & Pandav 2007, Pramanik *et al.* 2009). The breeding period of Asian Openbill is from June to November. It prefers large trees near wetlands for nesting (Ali & Ripley 1987, Urfi 1993).

A large colony of 75 nests of Asian Openbill was observed at Sisva village (22° 23' 807" N; 73° 10' 755" E) about 15 km north of Vadodara, on 17th June, 2014. All the nests were built on a single Banyan tree (*Ficus benghalensis*) with the canopy of about 15 meter circumference, located on the edge of a village pond. The nests were made of sticks and green twigs collected from surrounding trees such as Neem (*Azadirachta indica*), Babul (*Acacia nilotica*) and Banyan. Nests were at the height of about 30-35 ft from the ground. The colony included nests at different stages of breeding cycle. Juveniles of various plumages were noticed in majority of the nests along with the hatchlings. In some nests the adult birds were incubating the eggs. An active nest of a House Crow (*Corvus splendens*) on the same tree was an interesting observation.

Asian Openbill is one of the 'Least concerned' species (IUCN 2015). One of the known threats to its nesting sites is disturbances due to human interference (Datta & Pal 1993). However, no such human disturbance was found at Sisva. A couple of Neem and Babul in the surrounding area bore nests of other birds such as Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) (12-15 nests on 2-3 trees), Black Ibis (*Pseudibis papillosa*) (one nest)



and Indian Pond Heron (*Ardeola grayii*) (2-3 nests). This site is located 5 km away from the industrial zone of Vadodara. Asian Openbills nesting at industrial zone of Koyali, near GSFC, Vadodara has been reported earlier (Gavali *et al.*, 2006). Sisva village with a relatively low human population of 2799 (2011 census) and little disturbance through human activities might have facilitated nesting of Openbills on a large scale. Gujarat is a state dotted with thousands of villages and a significant number of adjoining small wetlands with large trees in the neighbourhood. There is a need to explore such sites to document and subsequently conserve nesting of wetland birds.

* Special thanks to Mrs. Anika Tere PhD for her help in editing this article. -Eds

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