

Besra *Accipiter virgatus* in Girnar, near Junagadh

Naman Doshi: Soorsanagam Residency, B/h Alkapuri Society, Junagadh 362001. namankdoshi@gmail.com



Naman Doshi

On 19 June 2019, I was bird watching at my regular place in Bhavnath, Girnar, near Junagadh. At around 09:15 hrs, I heard a call of a bird in flight. The call was loud in beginning, followed by rapidly repeated *tchew-tchew-tchew*. I had never heard this call before and knew this was something different. Though the bird was not visible, other small birds such as Red-wattled Lapwings (*Vanellus indicus*), Jungle Babblers (*Turdoides striata*) and Red-vented Bulbuls (*Pycnonotus cafer*) were alarmed. Thus, I assumed it to be a raptor and the closest bird I could think of was that it was some *Accipiter* species. So I started hearing calls of all possible *Accipiters* on my mobile phone and confirmed that the call was matching to the call of a Besra (*Accipiter virgatus*). At around 09:35 hrs, I again heard the same call and started looking for the bird and it appeared, flying from the back of a small hill, coming closer, and I was able to take some photographs for identification. After coming home, I shared the photographs and the call recordings with Nirav Bhatt and Viral Joshi, and they confirmed that it was a Besra. In the photographs I managed to take, the compact structure, tail with broad tail bands and the underpart streaking were all similar to what is seen in Besra. The loud *ki-weeer* in the beginning followed by rapidly repeated *tchew-tchew-tchew* is a call which Besra makes while displaying. This indicates possibility of the presence of more than one individual in that locality.

The habitat in which I found this bird consisted mainly of teak trees, with a small lake in the center which holds water throughout the year, except in the last weeks of summer. The bird was seen calling in flight, and it tried to perch on one of the top branches of a *Nilgiri* tree, but could not do so as it was immediately mobbed by Jungle Crows (*Corvus macrorhynchos*). One more observation I made was that though other birds were alarmed in the beginning when the Besra flew by, there was no other instance when the birds were alarmed on seeing it. They were alarmed twice when there was a Shikra (*Accipiter badius*) in flight in the area. This is just an assumption but maybe, the surrounding birds did not consider the Besra as a serious threat.

For Gujarat, there are records of Besra from forests of Polo, Shoolpaneshwar WLS and Vansada NP (Khadakkar *et al.* 2016, Patel 2017). A Besra was recently seen and photographed in the Barda Hills, near Porbandar (Vikrantsinh Zala, photos/video posted on Facebook). There is a record of a Besra in Girnar, in 2006, in Bordevi area (Dr. Maulik Varu, *pers comm.*). This is one of the few well documented sightings of Besra from Saurashtra.

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References

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