

## Black-necked Grebe in Bharuch district, south Gujarat

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On the evening of 9 September 2016, I was going with my son Aarsh to Telva village, 15 km from my village Untiyadra, in Bharuch district. We were going to see nine Sarus Cranes (*Grus antigone*) at that place which had been reported earlier. When we were passing by the village lake of Ghodadra (21° 30' N, 72° 55' E) of Hansot Taluka, Aarsh drew my attention to a grebe (*Podiceps* sp.). The grebe was definitely not a Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) since it was slightly bigger in size, with red eyes and extensive dark cheeks and forehead.

The lake is divided in three parts and the grebe was seen in the first part which is adjoining the road and a mosque. The area of this part is approximately 3 acres and is clean and free of any vegetation. A few people were sitting on the bank and three - four women were washing clothes on the steps of the lake. However, the grebe was diving and swimming without any disturbance and fear. There was only one bird in this part of the lake. After taking a few record photographs, we left the place because our aim was to see the Sarus Cranes.

After arriving back home, we checked the photographs and identified the bird as a Black-necked Grebe (*Podiceps nigricollis*) in non-breeding plumage with the help of a field guide (Grimmett *et al.* 2011).

I again visited this place on the next morning for better photographs as generally there is hardly any human activity on the lake early in the morning. The bird was there but unfortunately, the morning was very foggy. I had to wait till 10:00 hrs but it remained foggy. So I visited in the evening and the scenario of the bird and human activity was the same. I noted that the second and third part of the lake was free from any disturbance and the third part had scattered vegetation and was larger. However, the grebe preferred the first part of the lake. Except this lone bird, other birds of different species were seen in the third part of the lake.

The Black-necked Grebe is winter visitor to southwest Gujarat (i.e. Saurashtra) (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). It is given as

an uncommon winter visitor for Gujarat, mainly in Charakala, with scattered reports from other parts of Saurashtra and Kachchh (Ganpule 2016). Charakala Salt pans, near Dwarka, is an internationally important site for Black-necked Grebe as it supports high concentrations of the species since 1996 (Balar & Balar 1999). The highest count of about 1405 Black-necked Grebes was recorded at Charakala on 12 January 2003 by Jadhav *et al.* (2003). Parasharya & Mukherjee (1998) have reported the species at three places in central Gujarat; one bird at Nalsarovar on 25 January 1996, one at Vadadhla in Vadodara district on 17 January 1993, one at Kanewal in Kheda district on 12 January 1998. Grimmett *et al.* (2011) show an isolated record for south Gujarat, but the details for this sighting could not be traced. Hence, the current sighting confirms its occurrence in this region.

Earlier, the species has been recorded south of southern Gujarat, at Pune (Mahabal & Lamba 1987) and in western Maharashtra as a rare winter visitor (Prasad 2004). A record east of south Gujarat, at Nashik, Maharashtra is known (Raha *et al.* 2005). It has also been reported in Thane district in November 2017 on the website 'eBird'. Hence, this sighting in Bharuch district is not unexpected, but this photographic documentation proves that it occurs here.

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