

Black-winged Kite preying on a Spotted Crake

Meet Vala: 'Shyam', 16, Mayurnagar, Dipanjli-2, Timbavadi, Junagadh 362015. valameet1991@gmail.com



Meet Vala

On 9 December 2017, I visited a check-dam near Rajkot, on the Rajkot – Jamnagar Highway, for bird watching. I was scouting the area during mid-day and was sitting near a freshwater muddy patch with reeds, near the check dam. At around 15:00 hrs, I saw a herd of buffaloes coming into the muddy patch. Disturbed by this herd, I saw a crake moving from one patch of reeds to another very quickly. It was bigger in size than a Brown Crake (*Amaurornis akool*) and had a colourful beak. Fortunately, I managed to get record photographs for identification. I sent the images to Gaurang Bagda and it was identified as a Spotted Crake (*Porzana porzana*).

I went to the same place for whole of next week looking for this bird but could not see it. The place was a regular route for the herd of buffaloes for relaxing and grazing, as the patch was grassy and muddy. So, I assumed that the bird probably changed its location due to regular disturbance by this herd. Then, on 5 January 2018, I visited the area with Ashok Mashru and Divyesh Ghervada in the evening and saw the Spotted Crake again at sunset, at around 17:45 hrs.

On 7 January 2018, Ravi Patel and I went again in the evening for observing this individual. While we were waiting for the bird to come out in the open as per its routine, we saw that some raptor pounced on the ground behind the reeds and suddenly, all the birds nearby started giving alarm calls. We could not see anything because of the reeds. In a short time, a Black-winged Kite (*Elanus caeruleus*) came out of the reeds with some prey in its talons. We observed that it had caught something and the prey was struggling. At that time, we realised that it had caught some bird. I took a video and photos of the bird struggling in its talons. The kite then lifted the bird, which was still alive, flew and perched on a wooden

pole at the edge of a farm. I approached near to it and saw that the prey was dead. The Black-winged Kite started tearing at the prey and separated the head and swallowed it whole. After feeding for some time, I observed that it was very hard for the kite to adjust its prey on the pole and it was struggling to handle it. The kite flew and perched on the ground deeper into the farm with its prey and so, we decided to leave it alone and tried to identify the prey from photos. To our surprise, we realised that the prey was a Spotted Crake, probably the same one that we had come to observe. After some time, the kite came out again and perched on an *Acacia* sp. tree with the kill. We watched it feeding very quickly on the crake. It was moving its tail constantly and calling while feeding. I took video footage as it was too dark to take photos. We also saw a shrike (*Lanius* sp.) trying to mob the kite. We observed it for some more time but it was dark and so we left the place while it was still feeding on its prey. Looking at the plumage of the kite, we concluded that it was an immature bird, and not an adult.



Meet Vala

Two aspects regarding this observation are important: a) the presence of Spotted Crake near Rajkot and b) Black-winged Kite preying on the Spotted Crake. The Spotted Crake is an uncommon/rare winter visitor to Gujarat (Ganpule 2016). It has been noted in Rajkot previously (Mashru & Trivedi 2012), but it is generally rare here. A sighting of Spotted Crake was reported on 4 February 2018 from Nyari River, Rajkot, by Nirav Raval and Prashant Patel. Hence, these sightings re- confirm its occurrence in the Rajkot area. The Black-winged Kite is known to usually prey on insects, lizards, rodents (its main prey), small birds and occasionally small snakes and frogs; birds including doves, larks, pipits and buntings, an injured green pigeon (*Treron* sp.), Wood Sandpiper (*Tringa glareola*), White-breasted Waterhen (*Amaurornis phoenicurus*) etc. have been recorded as its prey (Naorji 2006, Kemp *et al.* 2018). A recent observation, by Vennu Madhav, of a Black-winged Kite preying

on a female Watercock (*Gallicrex cinerea*) near Kallakurchi town, Viluppuram district, Tamil Nadu, on 3 January 2018 is known (*pers. comm*). But, the Black-winged Kite has not been recorded to prey on Spotted Crake. Thus, the Spotted Crake is an addition to its diet.

Acknowledgements

I thank Dr. Gaurang Bagda for his guidance and for keeping me motivated to observe the bird on a regular basis. I am thankful to Ashok Mashru for helping me sight the bird again and to Divyesh Ghervada and Ravi Patel for their company. I am grateful to Vennu Madhav for sharing his observation.

References

- Ganpule, P., 2016. The Birds of Gujarat: Status and Distribution. *Flamingo* 8 (3) – 12 (4): 2-40
- Kemp, A. C., Kirwan, G. M., Marks, J. S., Motis, A. & Garcia, E. F. J. 2018. Black-winged Kite (*Elanus caeruleus*). Handbook of the Birds of the World Alive. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona. (retrieved from <https://www.hbw.com/node/52966> on 7 February 2018).
- Mashru, A., & Trivedi, B., 2012. Spotted Crake (*Porzana porzana*) sightings in Saurashtra, Gujarat. *Indian BIRDS* 7 (6): 162
- Naoroji, R. 2006. *Birds of prey of the Indian Subcontinent*. Om Books International, New Delhi. □

Sighting of Ruddy-breasted Crake and Water Rail in Rajkot

Ashok Mashru: A-7, Alap Heritage, Kalavad Road, Rajkot. mashruashok@gmail.com



Ruddy-breasted Crake



Water Rail

This short note describes the sighting of Ruddy-breasted Crake (*Porzana fusca*) and Water Rail (*Rallus aquaticus*) in Rajkot.

On 9 February 2018 early in the morning, Manoj Finava and I visited the Nyari River, Rajkot, to see the Spotted Crake (*Porzana porzana*) which had been reported from this area.

It was a very foggy morning. Suddenly, a ruddy coloured crake came out from the reeds for a few seconds and went back in. We could not take any photos but I identified it as a Ruddy-breasted Crake, as I had seen the species recently in Pune, Maharashtra. For confirmation, I played the call of the species from my digital book. Instantly, the bird responded with the same call. So, it was further confirmed that it was a Ruddy-breasted Crake. Subsequently, I visited the place 5-6 times and finally on 13 February 2018, I managed to take a good photograph of the Ruddy-breasted Crake, conclusively confirming its occurrence here.

On 10 February 2018, Nirav Raval and I visited this area. While returning back, I saw a beautiful bird, having slaty-coloured breast and a long red bill, walking on the rocks, crossing a patch of reeds in the river. I took some photos and identified it as a Water Rail. It was seen again and we could get good images of it on 13 February 2018. The subspecies occurring in India is *R. a. korejewi*, which differs from the nominate subspecies in being larger and paler.

The Water Rail is a rare winter visitor to Gujarat (Ganpule 2016). Recent sightings of Water Rail have been from Surat in south Gujarat, in Kachchh and from a few places in Saurashtra (Shah 2004, Jadeja & Shah 2007, Joshi & Karia 2015, Bhatt & Patel 2017). The Ruddy-breasted Crake is widely distributed in Gujarat, with sightings from central and south Gujarat (Parasharya *et al.* 2016); the authors indicate that it could be a resident breeding species here. However, its distribution in Saurashtra requires more study. Thus, this sighting in the winter months from Rajkot is important.

These are probably the first records of both species from Rajkot area and it indicates that both, the Water Rail and the Ruddy-breasted Crake, are probably more widely distributed than believed and given in the reference texts (Grimmett *et*