

Blue-cheeked Bee-eater nesting in Kachchh

Shivam Tiwari: Centre for Desert and Ocean, Moti Virani, Kachchh 370665. shivam.cedo@gmail.com

Jugal Kishor Tiwari: Centre for Desert and Ocean, Moti Virani, Kachchh 370665.

Bharat Kapdi: Epicentre Home Stay, Near Lodai, Kachchh.



Jugal Kishor Tiwari

The Blue-cheeked-Bee-eater (*Merops persicus*) is considered as a passage migrant in Kachchh (Ali 1954). However, some adults in full breeding plumage are seen earlier than other migrants; we have been seeing such birds every year since August 2005. We documented adults feeding juveniles in the nest at three different locations in Kachchh from 16 July 2017 till 3 August 2017. Past records of its nesting from Gujarat are also discussed here.

The Blue-cheeked Bee-eater is shown to be a passage migrant in Gujarat, and breeding in southern Saurashtra and in a small area in Kachchh (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). For Gujarat, Dharamakumarsinghji (1947) documented the nesting of the species in the outskirts of Bhavnagar. According to him, the Blue-cheeked Bee-eater is a regular monsoon breeder in Bhavnagar (specific breeding areas not mentioned). Ali (1954) mentions it as an autumn passage migrant in Kachchh, though states that its status in Gujarat is not clear and it breeds in Bhavnagar. However, Khacher (1976), on his way to 'Flamingo City' near Nir, in Kachchh, saw a group of six Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters and an embankment nearby where approximately eighty nest holes (not active then) were seen. Himmatsinhji (1981) noted a juvenile being fed on an electric wire, near Devisar Tank, Bhuj. Thus, there are scattered records of its breeding in Gujarat.

On 16 July 2017, we came across a nest near Dhinodhar hill, Banni, where Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters were competing for the nest with Green Bee-eaters (*Merops orientalis*). The bee-eaters were seen chasing each other and trying to enter and occupy the nest hole.

On 20 July 2017, one nest was observed by the third author in Lodai village area. This is in eastern Banni, around 30 kms from

Bhuj. He saw an adult perched with prey in its beak, and then going inside a hole in a mound, and coming out empty beaked. He saw the bird doing so a few times. He visited the nest site on 25 and 28 July 2017 and confirmed breeding there.

On 1 August 2017, we saw a pair of adult Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters in breeding plumage, near Jathavira village. We observed them catching insect prey and sitting on perches but not consuming the prey. We went farther away and waited, and the adult birds flew from the perches to their nest, where a juvenile bird was peeking out of the nest with its beak open.

The nest had two fledglings, one of which was already out of the nest. The pair was observed feeding both the offspring, one outside on the perch and the one inside the nest, with different winged insects, mostly comprising of dragonflies.

On visiting the nesting site the next day, we located two other active nests in the vicinity of the first nest. The other two nests were about 100 meters away from the first nest. All nests were active and adult birds were observed catching insects and perching and then proceeding to feed their offspring.

Conclusion

It can be inferred from our observations that the Blue-cheeked Bee-eater breeds in the Banni area of Kachchh. The breeding season here is June-August, with nesting observed in holes made in mounds. It is pertinent to point out here that as far as we know, there have been no recent observations or published literature regarding the Blue-cheeked Bee-eater nesting in Saurashtra, and there are no photographs posted on the social media or birding websites regarding its breeding there.

The Blue-cheeked Bee-eater is shown as breeding in north-western India (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). A search of the popular websites 'Oriental Bird Images' (OBI) and 'Internet Bird Collection' (IBC) was made and we found two photos of nesting of the species outside Gujarat in the recent times. Tiwari (2015) came across an active nest of Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters, with many adult plumage birds in Jhanjrola, Gurgaon District, Haryana, while Singh (2015) came across active nests of Blue-cheeked Bee-eater near Mangar, Haryana.

From the literature survey, and our observations of active nests of the Blue-cheeked Bee-eater in Kachchh, it can be inferred that apart from its status as an autumn passage migrant, the species still breeds in Gujarat at favorable locations from June till August. A detailed survey of suitable habitats is required since it is possible that it may be breeding in other areas of Kachchh and Saurashtra.

Bee-eater...

References

- Ali, S., 1954. The birds of Gujarat – Part I. *J Bombay Nat Hist Soc.* 52(2): 374-458
- Dharmakumarsinhji, K. S., 1947. Breeding of the Blue-cheeked Bee-eater (*Merops superciliosus persicus* Pallas) in Bhavnagar State. *J Bombay Nat Hist Soc.* 46 (4): 723–724
- Grimmett, R., Inskipp, C., & Inskipp, T. 2011. *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent.* 2nd ed. Christopher Helm & Oxford University Press. London.
- Himmatsinhji, M. K., 1981. The Bluecheeked Bee-eater *Merops superciliosus* (Linnaeus) in Kutch. *J Bombay Nat Hist Soc* 77 (2): 328–329

Khacher, L. J., 1976. The Bluecheeked Bee-Eater *Merops superciliosus*, its status in Kutch and Saurashtra. *J Bombay Nat Hist Soc* 72 (2): 543–544

Singh, S., 2015. http://orientalbirdimages.org/search.php?Bird_ID=367&Bird_Image_ID=106919&Bird_Family_ID= [Accessed on 1 October 2017].

Tiwari, A., 2015. <http://www.hbw.com/ibc/video/blue-cheeked-bee-eater-merops-persicus/blue-cheeked-bee-eater-activity-and-habitat-peak> [Accessed on 1 October 2017]. □

Sighting of Grasshopper Warbler in Kachchh

Samir Ovalekar: 3, Jayvant, 36 Mahant Road, Vile Parle (East), Mumbai - 400057. samir7399@yahoo.com

Subhadeep Ghosh: B-107 Legend Apts, Vakola, Santacruz (East), Mumbai - 400055. subhadeep_g@yahoo.com

Veer Vaibhav Mishra: Centre for Desert & Ocean CEDO, Village Moti-Virani, Ta: Nakhatrana, Kachchh 370665. vvaibhavam2008@gmail.com



Subhadeep Ghosh

The Grasshopper Warbler (*Locustella naevia*) is a winter migrant to India, mainly to SW Ghats and central India, and can be observed in passage across the peninsula in suitable habitats, including in Gujarat (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

On a recent bird watching trip to Kachchh, we were en route to Fot Mahadev, near Nakhatrana, Kachchh, in the morning on 23 September 2017. We observed and photographed a Grasshopper Warbler on a farm fence made of dry branches of *Acacia* sp. trees. The bird appeared from within the dense and darker part of the bramble near the ground and proceeded to move quickly up, but mainly across the branches to an approximate height of 2 feet from the ground. It appeared to be hunting for insects/prey. The structure and plumage of

this individual left no doubt regarding the identification of this individual. We had enough opportunities to click a few photographs showing different angles of the bird before we lost sight of it.

We later attempted a call playback but even though the individual responded (providing another confirmation of its identification), it was not seen again.

Based on the lack of streaking on the throat / breast and some hint of speckles on its throat, we felt this may have been a first-winter individual. However, we are not sure regarding the age of this bird.

Although there have been various sightings of the species in the state recently; near Amreli (Joshi 2015), near Porbandar (Zala 2017), in the Little Rann of Kachchh (Ganpule 2017), the previous record from Kachchh was from the Bhuj area, when a specimen of Grasshopper Warbler was collected in September 1959 (Ali 1960). Though the recent sighting from Little Rann of Kachchh is also from the Kachchh district, our sighting from mainland Kachchh comes after almost 57 years and is an important record for the region.

Acknowledgements

We thank Prasad Ganpule for confirming the record for Kachchh and for encouraging us to write this note.

References

- Ali, S. 1960. Additions to the birds of Kutch. *J. Bombay Nat Hist Soc.* 56 (3): 635
- Ganpule, P., 2017. Sighting of Moustached Warbler, Red-throated Pipit and Grasshopper Warbler in the Little Rann of Kachchh. *Flamingo.* 15 (2): 17–18