

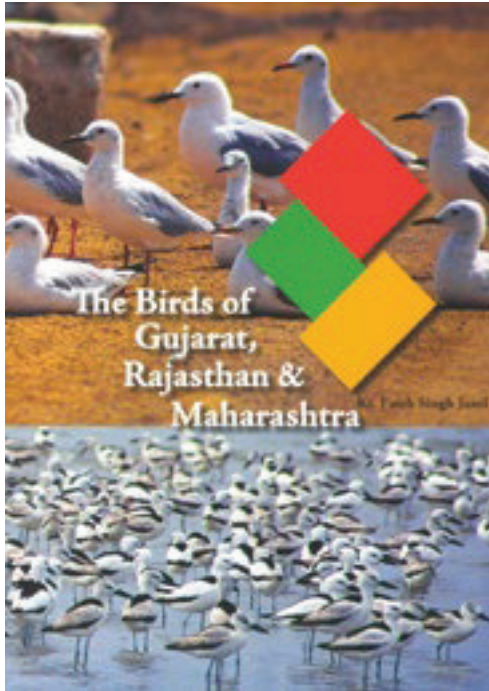
Book Review

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Title: The Birds of Gujarat, Rajasthan & Maharashtra – 253 pp.

Author: Kr. Fateh Singh Jasol

Publisher: The Ravi Shankaran Foundation, 2018.



This book, published by The Ravi Shankaran Foundation, is a guide to the birds of Gujarat, Rajasthan and Maharashtra, the three states in western India. The book is large sized; 29 cm x 22 cm, with a hard cover. The author is a member of Bombay Natural History Society, WWF and other societies and has travelled widely in India. The author explains in the introduction that the 'book is designed to be a convenient compendium of information for birdwatchers and students of the birds of the three western India states, Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Maharashtra'.

The format of the book is an introduction, followed by chapters on habitat, nesting, current sequence of bird families, list of threatened species, main notes on families for the birds of Gujarat, Rajasthan and Maharashtra, references for bird families, checklist for all the three states, summary of recent records for Gujarat, bibliography of new sightings, comprehensive bibliography, and lastly, the index.

The notes for each family give brief details for species within that family, with details of sightings of the rare/uncommon or vagrant species. For example, in the chapter on ducks, details of sightings of Large Whistling Teal (=Fulvous Whistling Duck), Common Shelduck, Marbled Teal (=Marbled Duck), Baikal Teal, Mallard, Falcated Teal (=Falcated Duck), Baer's Pochard, Scaup Duck (=Greater Scaup) and Common Merganser (=Goosander)

are given, along with references, and includes photographs of the many common species in that family occurring in these states like the Common Teal, Gadwall etc. The same format is followed for all other bird families with photographs given for many species within that family.

The checklist given at the end for the three states gives a total of 614 species, with HBK number, and regarding taxonomy, the author states 'I have consistently followed the Synopsis in identifying the species with their number in the text as well as in the Checklists so that users can cross-refer back to the Synopsis or the Handbook'. For Gujarat, the data is mainly sourced from the recent checklist published in *Flamingo* 8(3) – 12 (4) in 2016. For Maharashtra, the author states that he has relied on the checklist by Humayun Abdulali and the data is updated till November 1997. For Rajasthan, the author has relied on a number of sources, including correspondence with other bird watchers.

The book is quite useful and gives details of all the bird families along with species of interest for these three states. Since the details of sightings are given along with references, the interested reader can check the original source. However, now, with so much data available from various online sources, the data presented in the book is not up-to-date, especially for states like Rajasthan and Maharashtra. Even for Gujarat, the data given is insufficient. For example, the author states that the 'disappearance of Stoliczka's Bushchat from Kutch (=Kachchh) was lamented by Himmatsinhji'. But, now, it is well known that the Stoliczka's Bushchat, though uncommon or rare, is regularly seen in Kachchh and there are many isolated records from Saurashtra. There are also errors – in hawks, vultures, eagles and kites, the photo labelled as a Crested Serpent Eagle is an Oriental Honey Buzzard and the one given as a Greater Spotted Eagle is a Steppe Eagle; in warblers, the photo given as a Blyth's Reed Warbler is a Common Chiffchaff. There are other errors in photographs, with a few photographs not properly labelled/misidentified. The author quotes an extraordinary sighting of a Jerdon's Courser from Rajgad and Limkheda ranges of Baria Forest Division (=Devgad Baria) in Panchmahals, Gujarat; the sighting is attributed to Shri A. P. Singh, ACF Baria, and said to have been published in the *Indian Express*, Ahmedabad edition, on 17.06.94. However, there is no documented sighting of this species from Gujarat and it is a range-restricted species, not known to occur in our state.

Overall, the book is quite interesting and can be used as a ready reference for sightings of uncommon/rare or vagrant species for these three states but it does not include the details of latest sightings. It is not an identification guide but gives information of sightings for these western states. □

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Himmatsinhji was one year senior to me at Rajkumar college, Rajkot, and the friendship we developed at school continued through life till his passing away. A month before his demise, he spoke to me on the ubiquitous mobile phone, from across the Gulf of Kachchh, as I was being shown a nesting pair of Black-necked Storks *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus* in the Khijadiya Sanctuary near Jamnagar. He had been updating notes on that very species in Kachchh! While I can claim generating public awareness for the notification of the Marine National Park, and the Khijadiya Sanctuary, it is the present Jam Saheb Sataji who 'pointed' me to get the action started. It is a pity, the Jam Saheb has not written notes on the birds and other natural history of the erstwhile Jamnagar State, as his knowledge is unrivalled for its personal exposure. And as for me, I shall always consider whatever I saw and learnt in his 'territory' as material borrowed from him. Though after Dharmakumarsinhji and Himmatsinhji, I have the largest number of writings (see Pittie's bibliography later in this issue), I feel I have not done enough considering what I could have. Had I followed Salim Ali's advise and maintained a regular and detailed diary through life. So, when I remonstrated with Himmatsinhji for not having written more, pat came his wry rejoinder, "A pot calling the kettle black!" It is fitting that I conclude this piece by referring to my cousin the late Durbar Shivrajkumar Khachar of Jasdan for his very qualitative support to the cause of ornithology in Gujarat. Apart from a series of first records for our area in central Saurashtra appearing in the JBNHS, he has to his credit among the very first photographs of the Great Indian Bustard and the Lesser Florican to appear in that journal (in all he published 37 papers during 1949–1992). Both of us bird-watched together and developed a very close and affectionate association with Salim Ali. He under wrote the cost of intensive bird banding for the BNHS at Hingolghadh Sanctuary, Jasdan. He also participated in several bird banding camps with Salim Ali in Kachchh.

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Source: Khachar, L., 2010. Gujarat royalty and Indian ornithology. *Indian BIRDS* 6 (4&5): 91–92

- Lavkumar Khachar

