

Breeding of Watercock near Surat

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During my search for Watercock (*Gallicrex cinerea*) in the areas surrounding Jahangirpura, on the outskirts of Surat city, I saw and photographed one male Watercock at Dandi Road on 23 July 2016 at around 15:40 hrs. On the next day, a male and one female Watercock were sighted and photographed in flight at Admor village, near Surat. Thereafter, whenever I got time, I visited the place for observation of this Watercock pair. However, this location is about 20 km away from my home and so I again started searching for Watercock nearer my home and found Watercocks at five locations on the Jahangirpura – Hazira road.

One of the locations was just 4 kms away from my home. On 24 August 2016, after returning from my duty at SMIMER Hospital, I went to the place at around 15:30 pm. After a long wait, I saw a chick from far and my first impression was that it was a chick of a Purple Swamphen (*Porphyrio porphyrio*). I photographed it and when I zoomed the photo in my camera for observing the details, I was shocked to see a female Watercock at the corner of the photograph. So I waited for some time and then photographed both the female Watercock and the chick together.

This area is besides the main road, so there is lot of noise of vehicles here. The female Watercock was constantly calling and trying to keep the chick near her. Then the mother Watercock went nearer to its chick and gently steered it into the grass when both disappeared. The total observation time was around two minutes and I could take many photographs.



Breeding Records: Watercock is a regular and common summer visitor to the irrigated area of Bharuch and Surat districts of Gujarat, arriving in the first week of May, when males are in breeding plumage and they stay here till mid-September. It is very much possible that they are nesting here (Patel 2015). Watercock is widely distributed in Gujarat. However, there are only two published records of its breeding in Gujarat; one is a historical record by Lester in and the second is by Uday Vora in 1995 at Velavadar National Park (Mashru 2017). Lester (1897) collected eggs from a shikari in Kachchh, who did not see the bird; the measurements and colour of eggs coincident with the description of Watercock eggs given by Barnes (1891). Except these, no published records of nesting, eggs or chicks of Watercock from Gujarat are known. Surprisingly, there are no recent photos of the chicks even on birding websites or in the social media. Hence, this photographic evidence of breeding of Watercock in south Gujarat is important. Here, it is worth mentioning that Jugal Patel has seen more than 85 Watercocks during the monsoon of 2016 in a radius of 15 km from his village; observations are mainly from Bharuch and Surat districts (*pers. comm.*). Hence, this is further evidence that the Watercock is a common summer visitor to Surat - Bharuch districts, and breeds here.

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