

Caspian Plover in Kachchh

Jaysukh Parekh: Suman Remedies, C/17 R.T.O. Relocation Site, Bhuj 370001, Kachchh. nisusuman@gmail.com



Jaysukh Parekh

The Caspian Plover (*Charadrius asiaticus*) breeds in Central Asia and winters in eastern and southern Africa (Wiersma *et al.* 2017). It is a long distance migrant and there are only a few isolated records of this species from India (Grimmett *et al.* 2011).

On 17 October 2016, I went for birdwatching and photography in Banni area, Kachchh, when I saw a group of 5 to 7 birds, which were new for me. I took photographs and I was sure that I had not seen it earlier. After checking reference books and photographs on the internet, I identified them as Caspian Plovers (*Charadrius asiaticus*). The Caspian Plover can be easily confused with Greater Sand Plover (*Charadrius leschenaultii*) in the field and good photographs and proper views are needed to confirm its identity. The Caspian Plovers were seen from 17 October 2016 till 24 October 2016.

The birds were foraging in an area with very short, dry grass with scattered small plants. The ground was wet in certain parts as there was a lake around one km away from the place where the birds were feeding. They were foraging within a distance of 5 to 10 mtrs. They were seen feeding along with Greater Short-toed Larks (*Calandrella brachydactyla*) and were not concerned by the cattle there. However, when disturbed, the Caspian Plovers flew away with a fast, erratic flight and went far.

I observed the feeding method of these birds. They used the typical stop-run-peck foraging behaviour seen in *Charadrius* plovers, running rapidly and stopping only when prey is located (Wiersma *et al.* 2017). Here, they were observed feeding

on invertebrate prey almost 3-4 inches underground. The birds used to locate the prey and then use their sharp beaks to dig into the ground and catch it. The prey here was probably Snails and also insects. A short video of its feeding behaviour can be seen at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q7PcEhk9IR8>.

On 1 March 2017, I went to the same area again with my son Nirav. At around 10:00 hrs, two Caspian Plovers flew in to the area and started to forage. I was surprised to see that one bird was in almost full breeding plumage and the other was in non breeding plumage. I got good photos of the birds. They were foraging in cattle dung, searching for insects. I went to the area again on 2 and 4 March 2017, but was unable to find the birds again.

I had visited this area many times between October 2016 and March 2017, but did not see the Caspian Plovers. So it seems that the birds stayed here only for a few days in October and for a day in March, indicating that the species could be an autumn and spring passage migrant. This was my first sighting of the Caspian Plover in Kachchh, and it was very exciting.

[There are four previous records of the Caspian Plover from Gujarat; from Chhari-Dhandh in Kachchh in February 2007 (Sorensen & Tiwari 2009), Little Rann of Kachchh in January 2008 (Deomurari 2009), Jamnagar in February 2009 (Patel 2009) and Little Rann of Kachchh in November 2014 (Shah Jahan, eBird). The individual in Jamnagar was seen for more than one month at the same location and photographed by many bird watchers. The previous records from Gujarat are from the winter months, while the above records are from the passage migration season. More sightings will help in understanding the status of this species in Gujarat. Hence, birdwatchers are requested to look out for the Caspian Plover here and send their sightings – Eds]

References

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