

Few interesting observations on nesting Indian Pitta *Pitta brachyura* at Hingolghadh, near Rajkot

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are preferred for making nests; the pittas usually use trees of different species for making nests. The use of electric poles for nesting has not been reported earlier for this species. There is no shortage of trees for nesting here in the area but it was not clear why the electric pole was chosen by the pitta for making the nest on these two occasions. It is also noteworthy that breeding was successful both times when the nest was made in the electric pole.



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The Indian Pitta (*Pitta brachyura*) is a regular monsoon visitor in Hingolghadh Nature Education Sanctuary, near Rajkot. It arrives at the end of May and departs around October, after completing its breeding. We have been observing the breeding of the India Pitta at Hingolghadh for the past few years and we (the first and second author) had conducted a detailed study on the breeding of the species at this location, the results of which were reported earlier (Theba *et al.* 2019). We report here a few interesting observations on the nesting of the Indian Pitta at Hingolghadh.

On 16 July 2013, a pair of India Pitta had built a nest behind a metal box placed on an electric pole (Photo 1). The nest was at a height of approximately 6 feet. The pair successfully completed all breeding activities at this unusual nest site. The metal box was the box in which the electricity meters are installed. The space behind the box was used by the pitta pair for making the nest and it was odd to see the Indian Pitta nest on the electric pole. On 13 August, 2015, one pair had built a nest in a groove of a concrete electric pole and successfully completed all breeding activities, with the chicks fledging (Photo 2). Thus, the nesting on the electric poles was seen by us on two separate occasions. The Indian Pitta prefers to build its nests in forks of tree trunks (Solanki *et al.* 2018), and trees

On 18 August 2017, a pair of Indian Pitta had built a nest near the campsite and successfully completed breeding. Then, another nest was built besides this nest, possibly by the same pair, and breeding was again successful, with the chicks fledging in the second nest too. At the same time, the first nest, which was empty and not used by the pitta pair, was used by a pair of Scaly-breasted Munia (*Lonchura punctulata*) for breeding. The Scaly-breasted Munia pair added some grass and other materials and repaired the nest and started breeding in the old nest. This was quite unusual, as the munias and the pittas were seen nesting side-by-side, with the former using the old nest of the latter (Photo 3).

In July 2019, a pair of Indian Pitta had built a nest in a Neem tree near the campsite but before the female laid eggs, a Rat

Snake (*Pythas mucosa*) attacked the nest, which was abandoned by the birds. Thereafter, they built another nest on the roof of the campsite and successfully laid eggs. The eggs subsequently hatched and the pair was seen feeding the chicks. On 21 July 2019, we noted a Brahminy Starling (*Sturnia pagodarum*) feeding the chicks of the pitta (Photo 4). As per the first author's previous observations, the Brahminy Starling is known to attack the nest of the pitta, often killing the chicks or making them fall out of the nest. So, this interspecific feeding, by the Brahminy Starling, of the India Pitta chicks, is indeed very interesting. Interspecific feeding of chicks of Indian Paradise Flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi*) by Oriental White Eye (*Zosterops palpebrosus*) and by Red-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*) has been documented earlier from Gujarat (Balar 2009, Mori & Malaviya 2016). However, the interspecific feeding of chicks of Indian Pitta by a Brahminy Starling has not been known earlier and this is probably the first such documentation from Gujarat.

The breeding of the Indian Pitta in Gujarat has been studied in detail recently (Solanki *et al.* 2018, Theba *et al.* 2019). However, the observations presented here are different and show that there is still a lot to be learnt about the breeding of the Indian Pitta in the state.

References

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Road kill of a Black Bittern *Ixobrychus flavicollis* near Narmada Main Canal, Narmada District

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The Black Bittern (*Ixobrychus flavicollis*) is a blackish or dark brown plumaged bittern, with a brown-and-white striped throat bordered by yellow (Grimmett *et al.* 2011, Heron Conservation 2020). It is usually seen flying away into thick vegetation of reeds such as *Typha latifolia*. The Black Bittern is a 'Least Concern' species as IUCN states that its decline is not believed to be sufficiently rapid to approach the threshold under the population trend criterion and the population size is very large. However, the population trend is declining (BirdLife International 2017). It is one of the largest bitterns with an extremely large range as it is distributed in India, Southeast Asia, Indonesia, Philippines, Australia, and New Guinea to the Solomon Islands (Grimmett *et al.* 2011, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012, Heron Conservation 2020).

In the Indian subcontinent, the Black Bittern is a resident and patchily distributed (Ali 2002). As per Kazmierczak (2000) and Grimmett *et al.* (2011), it is a winter visitor in Sindh in Pakistan and these reference books show isolated records in Gujarat while Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) do not report its occurrence in Gujarat. The species was not recorded in Gujarat by Ali (1954). However, Khacher (1996) and Mukherjee *et al.* (2002) reported all the three species of bitterns breeding around Pariej Tank while Mistry & Parasharya (2016) have reported road kills of Black Bitterns around Pariej Wetland (in Kheda District). The status of Yellow Bittern, Cinnamon Bittern and Black Bittern was studied by Patel *et al.* (2017) in Central Gujarat and in South Gujarat by Patel *et al.* (2018). But Patel *et al.* (2018) did not report the species from Narmada District. We report here the road kill of a Black Bittern near Narmada Main Canal and it is probably the first record of the species from the Narmada District.

On 10 May 2020, while travelling on the road beside the Narmada Main Canal (21° 50' N, 73° 44' E) of Narmada District in South Gujarat, we observed a dead bittern on the