

First update to the Gujarat checklist: December 2017

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This paper is the first update to the Gujarat checklist published in 2016 (Ganpule 2016), which listed 574 species documented within the boundaries of the state, along with the Union Territories of Diu & Daman, and Dadra & Nagar Haveli.

The records of the following species have been reviewed:

Variable Sunbird (*Cinnyris venustus*): The Variable Sunbird is resident in Africa; mainly in sub-Saharan Africa. There are no records of the species from India (Praveen *et al.* 2016). In September 2009, an adult male Variable Sunbird was photographed in Jamkhambhaliya, Jamnagar district, by local bird watcher Jeetu Jam (Jam 2009), who took three photos of the bird. The photographs clearly show all the diagnostic features of Variable Sunbird; metallic green throat, black breast band, yellow belly, black lores and metallic purplish upperparts, and the image was sent to Clive Mann and Krys Kazmierczak for confirmation. Both agreed that this was unlike any sunbird from India and was a Variable Sunbird.



Jeetu Jam

This sighting was discussed in detail with senior birders from Jamnagar in a BCSG workshop which was held there. While everyone agreed that the identification was correct, it was felt that since it was not known whether this individual was an escapee or not, it should not be included in the Gujarat checklist. Though the Variable Sunbird is nomadic and known to be migratory (Cheke & Mann 2017), its occurrence in Jamnagar district is quite extraordinary. The species is not kept as a pet and there are no records of it from any zoo in India (Anonymous 2009-2010), and an online search for the species in zoos in India proved negative. Hence, the possibility that this was an escapee was very less. Ship assisted passage is a possibility but looks unlikely in this case, as the diet of

this bird is mainly nectar from flowers, insects and spiders (Cheke & Mann 2017), which would be difficult (but not impossible – insects could be available) to obtain on a ship. However, the nearest region from Gujarat where it is resident is Somalia, which is more than 2000 kms away, with the Arabian Sea in between. An issue which was also considered is that Reliance Industries Ltd., Moti Khavdi, near Jamnagar, has a large collection of birds in its aviary and the possibility of an escapee from this collection had to be considered. However, it was learnt that they do not have any sunbirds in their aviary as per information gathered from them and also that they clip the wings of all the birds in their collection (Vinayak Parmar, *pers. comm.*). This individual was behaving like a wild bird, singing away, and did not have clipped wings. Hence, this was more like a truly wild individual. But, in view of the ongoing discussions regarding this individual and since no decision has yet been taken, the Variable Sunbird is not included in the Gujarat checklist at present though the identification is beyond any doubt. It may be included or excluded in the future based on a decision taken by a committee or by BCSG.

Long-tailed Skua (*Stercorarius longicaudus*): A probable Long-tailed Skua was seen and photographed in Amreli district (Joshi & Adhyaru 2016). However, there is only a single photo available, which is not very clear for the bird to be conclusively identified. As explained in the editor's note, it was not included in the Gujarat checklist since identity of this bird could not be confirmed beyond any doubt. Hence, at present, this record is considered to be a probable Long-tailed Skua.

Water Pipit (*Anthus spinoletta coutellii*): This subspecies of the Water Pipit, called Caucasian Water Pipit, was noted in the Little Rann of Kachchh in February 2017 (Ganpule 2017). While this is currently treated as a subspecies of Water Pipit, based on a preliminary genetic analysis and differences in plumage and flight calls, there is a proposal to split it and treat it as a separate species (Fijen 2014, Garner *et al.* 2015). If this is split in the future and treated as a separate species, then it will be an addition to the state checklist. However, at present, it is treated as a subspecies of Water Pipit in the Gujarat checklist.

Since the publication of the Gujarat checklist, the following species have been added:

Species added

575. Goosander (*Mergus merganser*): As stated in the checklist, this species is mentioned as 'rare straggler off Gujarat waters' (Anonymous 1887) and for Kachchh by Ali (1945). While the record by Anonymous (1887) is rather vague, the record mentioned by Ali (1945) is based on a sighting by Stoliczka (1872) from Kachchh. Stoliczka, during his travels in

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Kachchh, mentions that he was 'tolerably certain' regarding the occurrence of this species from Kachchh and gave the location as a 'large lake near Dinodhar hill or a lake southwest of Charvar range'. This sight record is included in Appendix 'A' in Ali (1945) for Kachchh. Based on feedback received from senior bird watchers here, it was proposed to include this species in the Gujarat checklist since the sight record has been accepted in Ali (1945). Hence, this species is added retrospectively in the checklist.

576. Siberian Thrush (*Zoothera sibirica*): An individual seen well and photographed in Porbandar Bird Sanctuary (Vargiya *et al.* 2016).

577. Rosy Minivet (*Pericrocotus roseus*): A well documented sighting from Vansada National Park in Dang district (Patel 2017).

578. Buff-bellied Pipit (*Anthus rubescens*): Sighting from Greater Rann of Kachchh (Ganpule *et al.* 2017).

579. Masked Shrike (*Lanius nubicus*): A Masked Shrike was seen and photographed at Govaldev, near Vyara, in Tapi district, on 18 December 2016, and was seen 3-4 times, lastly on 8 January 2017 (Bharti 2017). This sighting was well documented and verified, and is an addition to the avifauna of Gujarat and India.

580. Short-tailed Shearwater (*Puffinus tenuirostris*): Two recent records from Gujarat. A bird was seen and photographed at Nalsarovar, on 30 April 2017, while an injured bird was recovered from Mahuva coast, Bhavnagar district, on 20 May 2017; the first and second record for Gujarat respectively (Shah *et al.*, in print).

581. Slaty-legged Crane (*Rallina eurizonoides*): An adult and a juvenile were photographed near Madhuban Dam, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, and this species is an addition to the avifauna of Gujarat (Mishra 2017a).

582. Loten's Sunbird (*Cinnyris lotenia*): A male Loten's Sunbird was photographed near Madhuban Dam, Dadra & Nagar Haveli, and it is an addition to the avifauna of Gujarat (Mishra 2017b).

Thus, the Gujarat checklist is now 582 species.

A lot of feedback was received upon the publication of the checklist. Birdwatchers gave their inputs regarding certain species and the following species are worth mentioning:

Details for certain species included in the checklist

Snow Goose (*Anser caerulescens*): A very detailed discussion regarding the sighting of Snow Goose from Surendranagar district by Mundkur *et al.* (1992), is given in Praveen *et al.* (2014), wherein this species was excluded from the India

checklist due to 'being of unknown origin'. While there was no doubt regarding the identification, doubts were expressed that it could be an escapee from captivity and expert opinion was divided. This contentious species was included in the Gujarat checklist based on inputs received from various bird watchers who saw this individual in the field. Its behaviour was like a wild bird and it was seen with a flock of Bar-headed Goose (*Anser indicus*), and hence presumed to have migrated here. It was accepted as a wild vagrant and included in the state checklist.

Rock Martin (*Ptyonoprogne fuligula*): As explained by Praveen (2016), this species was not included in the India checklist (Praveen *et al.* 2016). Rasmussen & Anderton (2005) cite an 'old record' from Kachchh which 'requires substantiation'. As correctly pointed out by Praveen (2016), Stoliczka (1872) does not mention the Rock Martin in his list of birds from Kachchh, and the inclusion of any record of this species by Ali & Ripley (1987) based on this reference is debatable. However, the Rock Martin was included in the Gujarat checklist based on Butler (1879). While no record of a specimen collected by Butler (1879) could be traced, this species, along with Eurasian Crag Martin (*P. rupestris*) and Dusky Crag Martin (*P. concolor*) are listed by the author, who gives the Rock Martin for 'Sind, Cutch (=Kachchh)' and as a 'cold weather visitant, not uncommon along the coast'. Thus, it is unlikely that the author made an error in identification, as the similar Eurasian Crag Martin is also mentioned separately. Further, the species could indeed occur in Kachchh as it is resident in Sindh, Pakistan, which is adjoining Kachchh. Since Butler (1879) specifically mentioned Kachchh in the locality, this record was accepted in the Gujarat checklist.

Brown-necked Raven (*Corvus ruficollis*): This is another species which was not accepted in the India checklist (Praveen *et al.* 2016). Like the Rock Martin, this is also resident in Sindh, Pakistan. This species was first mentioned for Gujarat by Ali (1945), who saw Ravens twice in Kachchh and mentioned that they could be Punjab Ravens (*C. corax subcorax*) or Brown-necked Ravens. However, the identification was not confirmed. It was included in the Gujarat checklist based on a sight record from Kachchh; Khacher (1993) mentioned a sighting of this species in Kachchh by Shivraj Kumar Khachar. This sight record was accepted and this species was also included in the previous checklist of birds of Gujarat (Parasharya *et al.* 2004), and was retained in the current checklist based on this record.

Blue-bearded Bee-eater (*Nyctornis athertoni*): A few birders pointed out that this record was given in Ali (1954) as 'confirmation is desirable'. However, Ali (1954) reported hearing its distinctive call in the forests in Navsari district, but noted 'no specimen obtained nor completely satisfactory sight record'. The call of this species is very distinctive and

the possibility that this was misidentified by a senior and experienced ornithologist like Ali is very less. Thus, it was included in the Gujarat checklist.

Mongolian Finch (*Eremopsaltria mongolica*): This 'improbable for Gujarat' species was included in the checklist based on a photographic record from Dhola-Veera, Khadir, Kachchh, in November 2007 (Ganpule 2013). This record was published first in 'Vihang' (Ganpule 2010), with senior ornithologist L. Khacher commenting that this was certainly not a Desert Finch (*Rhodospiza obsoleta*), but could be a probable female Trumpeter Finch (*Bucanetes githagineus*). Hence, the identification could not be confirmed at that time. The identification was later discussed in detail and was confirmed by Arend Wassink and Rajah Jaypal, both very experienced ornithologists, who agreed that it was a Mongolian Finch based on the weak pale bill, pale legs and whitish panels on coverts, along with strongly patterned wings and tail. Hence, this species was included in the Gujarat checklist.

Jouanin's Petrel (*Bulweria fallax*): In the Gujarat checklist, this was included based on a record by Sinclair (1979) from the Gulf of Kachchh. However, as explained in Vargiya *et al.* (2017), this record does not fall within Indian limits. Hence, the individual recovered from Porbandar (Vargiya *et al.* 2017) is the first record of the species from Gujarat and the sight record off Veraval coast (Naik 2016) is the second record for Gujarat.

Scarlet Minivet (*Pericrocotus flammeus speciosus*): Included in the checklist based on a record from Kachchh (Himmatsinhji 1982). However, now Orange Minivet (*P. f. flammeus*) and Scarlet Minivet (*P. f. speciosus*) are treated separately. The Orange Minivet occurs in south Gujarat, while the Scarlet Minivet is resident in the Himalayas, Eastern Ghats and in Central India, up to western M.P. and except for the Kachchh record, no other sighting is given for Gujarat (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). The details of whether it is a *flammeus* or *speciosus* are not mentioned in the record from Kachchh and no description is given. Thus, it is possible that the Kachchh bird could have been Orange Minivet rather than Scarlet Minivet. However, Scarlet Minivet is retained in the checklist based on unpublished records from south Gujarat, where individuals similar to Scarlet Minivet, with scarlet red (rather than orange) underparts have been noted. This requires further study and Scarlet Minivet records should be carefully evaluated and a considered decision is needed to be taken in the future. It is retained in the checklist for now based on records from south Gujarat.

Fieldfare (*Turdus pilaris*): This was included in the checklist based on a record from north Gujarat (Joshua *et al.* 2005). However, doubts were raised regarding this sighting by

Khachar (2005), who suggested keeping this record (and other doubtful records) in a separate list pending verification. This record is mentioned in Bannerjee & Inskipp (2013), who photo documented this species recently in India. So, there remains no doubt that the Fieldfare does occur in the country. Though not photographed, this species is retained in the Gujarat checklist at present and can be re-evaluated in the future.

Discussion

After the monumental work done by Praveen *et al.* (2016) in making the checklist of birds of India, now, for the first time, we have an authentic, peer reviewed and widely accepted country checklist. Ideally, state checklists should be derived from the country checklist. But, for Gujarat, Parasharya *et al.* (2004) made the first detailed state checklist in 2004. In the recent Gujarat checklist (Ganpule 2016), three species, viz., Snow Goose, Rock Martin and Brown-necked Raven are included, which have not been listed in the India checklist. As explained by Praveen (2016), there is no need to align both the checklists as long as the associated documentation is well aligned. The details for these three species are given here. Thus, acceptance criteria vary between the two checklists; Gujarat checklist accepting the Snow Goose as a wild vagrant and the Rock Martin and Brown-necked Raven on the basis of records by experienced bird watchers. Another point to be considered is that there are a few differences in the two checklists due to the different taxonomies adopted; BCSG follows Grimmett *et al.* (2011) while the India checklist is based on Howard & Moore, 4th edition (Dickenson & Remsen 2013). For example, Persian Shearwater (*Puffinus persicus*) is given as a separate species in Grimmett *et al.* (2011), while in the India checklist, it is treated as a subspecies of Tropical Shearwater (*Puffinus bailloni*). While both are included in the India checklist under a single species, the Gujarat checklist treats them as two separate species. Thus, a few differences remain between the Gujarat and India checklists.

Bird watching as a hobby is increasing, and with the advent of good digital cameras and field guides, sharing of photographs on the social media makes identification of some tricky species easier. It can be seen that seven species have been added to the Gujarat checklist in the last one and a half years, which is quite fantastic. In view of the rapidly growing bird watcher community in Gujarat and the proliferation of good digital cameras, it is hoped that more species will be added in the coming years.

Checklists are dynamic and need to be reviewed and updated regularly. As there are frequent taxonomic updates, more publications regarding identification criteria for species difficult to identify become available, and new information is

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obtained, the checklist needs to be kept up to date with the latest additions and taxonomic changes. Thus, it is hoped that regular updates – probably every two or three years – will be given in this journal to keep the Gujarat checklist updated.

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