

Grey-bellied Cuckoo in Gir and its Distribution in Gujarat

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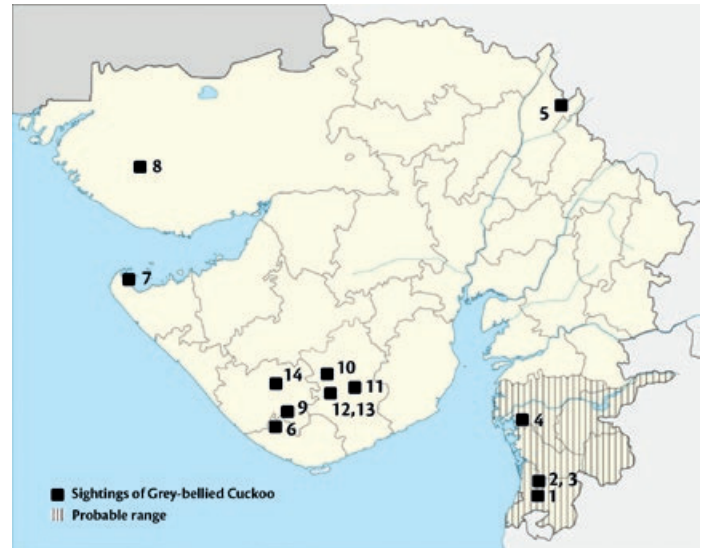
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Introduction: Grey-bellied Cuckoo (*Cacomantis passerinus*) is resident to India from the Himalayas to north India, east to Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and possibly Assam, and south through peninsular India to Nilgiris and Wynad (Kerala) and it winters south to Sri Lanka and Maldives Islands (Payne 1997). Ripley (1982) refers it to be resident with subject to local migration and/or summer visitor in some areas, in its distribution in North India. Kazmierczak (2000) shows it as resident in extreme south and east Gujarat while Grimmett *et al* (2011) show it as monsoon migrant in south and east Gujarat. Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) show it as a breeding visitor for south Gujarat. It is known to occur in Gujarat, mainly with records in summer from south Gujarat.

Observations: The first author [GB] observed and photographed an adult male Grey-bellied Cuckoo in Gir National Park area on 14 June 2014. It was identified by the overall grey plumage, cuckoo-like structure, tail with white markings etc. Another sighting on 20 June 2014 at Hasnapur Dam in Girnar WLS confirmed its presence in the area. The



dates of the sightings were indicative of the bird being a monsoon migrant (breeding migrant?) to Gir/Girnar area. The second author [VJ] has observed it around Amreli and Gir forest a number of times, the details of which are:

1. Two individuals on 15 June 2012 and another individual on 16 September 2012, near Savarkundla (21° 19' N 71° 16' E).
2. One individual on 29 Sept. 2012 near Satadhar, Gir forest (21° 17' N 70° 44' E).
3. One individual on 30 May 2015 at Sasan Gir area, near Kankai (21° 08' N 70° 47' E).

While on a short visit to Hanumangala, near Khambha, Amreli District (21° 03' N 71° 08' E) on 14 June 2015, we [PG and VJ], along with Bhanubhai Adhyaru, Ashok Mashru, Manoj Finava and Gunvant Trivedi, saw and photographed one adult male and a hepatic female. We also heard its call, as it was calling frequently.

Distribution: The status of Grey-bellied Cuckoo in Gujarat is intriguing. Ali (1952) did not find it in Gujarat. Monga & Naoroji (1983) also did not note it from Rajpipla forest during their study. However Dharmakumarsinhji (1955) gives it as "occurring in the wooded areas of Gujarat", and notes that Butler recorded it at Mt. Abu. Butler (1875) noted it as 'not uncommon' around Mt Abu but also writes that, "it occurs nowhere else throughout the whole region". Ripley (1982) has mentioned of Eastern Gujarat in its distribution. Parasharya *et al* (2004) include it in the 'Checklist of Birds of Gujarat' and describe it as 'Resident and Breeding'. Recently there have



Photo : Prasad Ganpule



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been sightings from Valsad area (Joshi 2004, 2005, 2007 – Map Ref. 1, 2, 3), Surat area (Trivedi 2005, Map Ref. 4) and from Polo forest in Sabarkantha (Naik 2013 – Map Ref. 5). Trivedi (2005) gives it as 'common' around Surat in May, June and July. A sighting from Poshitra, near Dwarka on 12 January, 2014 was reported by the third author (PG) along with Ashwin Trivedi and K. V. Zala (Map Ref. 7). Hepatic female has also been recorded in Kachchh at Fulay village near Moti Virani, Ta. Naliya on 13th Dec. 2011 (Veervaihbhav Mishra, *pers. comm*) (Map Ref. 8). All the sightings, including the sightings from Gir / Girnar area (Map Ref. 6, 14) and from around Amreli and Gir area (Map Ref. 9-13) are given in the map on the adjoining page.

Though it is premature to discuss the status and distribution of Grey-bellied Cuckoo based on these few records, it is obvious that the Grey-bellied Cuckoo is a local, as well as a breeding migrant to well forested areas in South Gujarat. The approximate area of occurrence is shown in the map. It is also a monsoon migrant to Gir forest area, with a few individuals occurring there in this season. It could be a local winter migrant (vagrant?) to other areas in the State, as the winter sighting from Poshitra, near Dwarka shows.

Though we have tried to find out as many published sightings/photos from websites as possible, we might have missed some sightings.

Conclusion: Grey-bellied Cuckoo is a monsoon migrant to south Gujarat and to Gir/Girnar forest. Isolated records from elsewhere in the state show that it could be a local

winter migrant. More data / sightings would be helpful in understanding its distribution. Birdwatchers here are urged to report their sightings of Grey-bellied Cuckoo from Gujarat.

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Faith is the bird that feels the light when the dawn is still dark. - Rabindranath Tagore