

## Important bird sightings from Vadhavana Wetland, Vadodara District

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Vadhavana (22° 9' 43" N, 73° 29' 1" E, also referred as Wadhvana) is an irrigation tank, located about 50 km south-east of Vadodara City. It was built by Maharaja Sir Sayajirao Gaekwad in the year 1909-1910. It is spread over an area of 1430 ha. The wetland has been declared as a nationally important site in 2005. There were 76 species of water birds recorded in 2002 in this wetland (Padate *et al.* 2007). Since decades, Vadhavana Wetland has been a home to thousands of birds, both resident and migratory. A change in hydrology of the peripheral area has also created lots of reeds in the dam outskirts, which has shaped the habitats for munias, jacanas, rails, crakes and bitterns outside the dam. Out of 348 bird species reported on eBird for Vadodara District, 277 bird species are recorded in Vadhavana, which is remarkably 80% (eBird 2020).

Bird Conservation Society, Gujarat, had planned an executive committee meeting at Maharaja Sayajirao University, Vadodara, on 25 November 2018. To participate in the meeting with Ashok Mashru, I reached there a day before for birding at Vadhavana. Kartik Upadhyay was kind enough to host us for birding. We reached Vadhavana at around 16:30 hrs. There were approximately 10000 Greylag Geese (*Anser anser*). We recorded a total of 132 bird species in and around Vadhavana (Vargiya 2018), out of which three species are important and mentioned here.

I saw and photographed one adult male Rock Bush Quail (*Perdica argoondah*) next to an agricultural patch where the land was dry and few grassy patches were present in the



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scrubland. This species is a common resident bird of arid and scrub forest of Saurashtra and Kachchh but is rarer in North, Central and South Gujarat. It is often seen in pairs or flocks of several individuals in grasslands of Saurashtra (Ganpule 2016). Since it is somewhat uncommon to rare in Central Gujarat,

this sighting is important. Prior to this, there were only two checklists mentioning this species in Vadodara and none with a photo (eBird 2020). Surprisingly, Salim Ali collected a specimen from Dabka village on 22 November 1945, situated on the banks of Mahi River, about 73 kms away from Vadhavana (Dutta 2000).

Next to an irrigation pipeline where water goes to agricultural fields, there was a Watercock (*Gallicrex cinerea*), which quickly disappeared in the reeds. The Watercock is an uncommon to



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rare monsoon migrant in Gujarat, with sightings from few locations of Saurashtra, Nalsarovar and predominantly from South Gujarat; it is rare in Kachchh. There are many historical records, from almost all parts of the state, and a few winter records too, but its status in winter is not clear and more data is needed (Ganpule 2016). The species was first recorded from Harni Village, Vadodara (47 km from Vadhavana) in 1890 (Littledale 1890). Lester (1897) mentioned a pair shot by the Rao of Kachchh and eggs were also collected by Lester's *shikaris* from Kachchh. A maximum of 27 birds were seen by Dr. Indra Gadhavi in 2007 at Velavadar National Park, Bhavnagar (Mashru 2017). Mashru (2017) did not mention any other sighting from Vadodara District. Prior to this sighting, two adult males were recorded in July 2017 by Chavda *et al.* (2017) and later, an adult male was recorded by Shah (2019), both at Timbi Lake of Vadodara District. This individual could be a female or a male in non-breeding plumage. There are very few winter records of this species and hence, this sighting is interesting. Mashru (2017) gives winter records of Watercock from Gir, Khijadiya (near Jamnagar), Porbandar and Amreli. This is another winter record from Vadodara.

Opposite to a watch tower where birders generally stop to spot ducks and geese, there was one Great Bittern (*Botaurus stellaris*), very well camouflaged in the reeds. The bird remained

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idle until a Eurasian Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*) flew over. The bittern did not fly but, very slowly, moved inside the reeds while keeping the beak and eyes up, watching the flight of the harrier. The Great Bittern is a rare winter visitor to Gujarat, with some sightings from Nalsarovar, Junagadh, Mokarsagar Wetlands of Porbandar and many historical records from North and Central Gujarat (Ganpule 2016). Ali (1954) did not come across any bittern in his surveys but, he mentioned an old *shikar* record of Butler. Butler (1876) collected specimens from Deesa region of North Gujarat.

### Conclusion

All these sightings were on the west side of the wetland, which is also on the left side of the dam catchment area, where the water is very shallow and reeds are abundant. The Rock Bush Quail and Great Bittern are recorded for the first time in Vadhavana Wetland and we also recorded Brown Crake (*Zapornia akool*), which is a second record for the Vadhavana Wetland (Dhey Shah, *verbally*, 27 November 2018). Hence, all

three sightings are important photographic records from Vadhavana Wetland.

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