

Probable poaching of Crested Serpent Eagle *Spilornis cheela* in Shoolpaneshwar Wildlife Sanctuary

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Dhyey Shah

On 18 October 2020, I, along with my father Ketan Shah, visited the Shoolpaneshwar Wildlife Sanctuary, near Rajpipla. We were on a birding trip to the Sagai range of the sanctuary. We went from Sagai to Ninai Waterfall. In between, there is a

trail known as the Dr. Shailendra Sinha trail. On reaching Ninai, we decided to return back to the Sagai campsite and explore the trail. Right outside the entrance of the trail and on the tar road, there was an adult Crested Serpent Eagle (*Spilornis cheela*) lying dead on the road. While going to Ninai, this dead bird was not present on the road and so, in the interval of about 15-20 minutes, this bird had appeared there. We initially thought it was a road kill but noted the following: ants were crawling all over the body, its eyes were taken out, its talons were cut and the legs were disoriented.

Based on these observations, we concluded that it was not a fresh road kill but rather, someone might have killed the bird and then put it on the road to trick people into believing that it was a road kill. In this area, we noted some kids with *gulel* (slingshot), which can be used to throw stones at birds and animals. On seeing us, the kids ran away. We tried to lodge a complaint about this incident but there was no authorised person available. On speaking with locals, they denied that any hunting was taking place in this area. However, it is possible that the locals do hunt wild birds and animals. This incident highlights the need to be vigilant regarding poaching in this area. □

Indian Blue Robin *Larvivora brunnea* revisits Barda Hills, Porbandar

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Dhaval Vargiya

With reference to my previous sighting of Indian Blue Robin (*Larvivora brunnea*) (previously known as Indian Blue Chat *Erithacus brunneus*) in November 2016 from Barda Hills (Vargiya & Legha 2017), it is interesting to record that one

male was sighted again at Kileshwar Temple of Barda Hills on 29 October 2017 by my wife Divya and I. It was observed from 15 ft distance under the shade of a large banyan tree (known as Ravan Vruksh locally), perched on a huge stone and looking for insects. The bird was observed for five minutes and then flew away. It is pertinent to note that during both sightings, the birds were observed close to a puddle during the afternoon, hopping and pecking on the ground, turning leaves and looking for insects.

The bright chestnut underparts contrasting with blue upperparts, short tail with white vent were unmistakable and its identification as a male of Indian Blue Robin was confirmed beyond doubt. As seen in the photo, the chestnut on primaries and 'not well developed' - distinct white supercilium suggests, the bird is not an adult but perhaps an immature or a first-winter male.

Indian Blue Robin....

Status in Gujarat

The status of the Indian Blue Robin in Gujarat is not clear. Ganpule (2016) mentioned it as a vagrant or rare passage migrant. The species was first mentioned by Khachar (1996) in his article on the birds of Gujarat; he mentioned that he had sighted a female Indian Blue Robin after a thunderstorm in late September (year unknown) at Hingolghadh with Salim Ali himself. He wrote 'it's a storm tossed migrant blown off its normal epic flight', non-stop from the Himalayas to South India. Later, Mashru (2014) compiled five more sightings from 2007-2013, out of which three are from Saurashtra and two are from South Gujarat. There are six more sightings on eBird with photos, all from Saurashtra region (eBird 2020). Hence, it is clear that the Indian Blue Robin has been noted more in the forests of Barda, Girnar-Gir and others (n=10) compared to South Gujarat (n=2).

Out of these 12 sightings of Indian Blue Robin from Gujarat, ten sightings are between the months of October–November and March–April. It supports the species being a passage

migrant, visiting Gujarat during the southward and return leg of its journey. The only two sightings from September and February (one each) are also close to the passage migration period. Hence, I agree with Mashru (2014) that the species is most likely to be a passage migrant to Gujarat.

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Sighting of Pallid Scops Owl *Otus brucei* in Junagadh City

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Ravi Patel

On 9 November 2018 in the morning at about 11:00 hrs, our neighbour called us and informed that a small, baby owl was injured and present on his terrace. We immediately went to his place and on the way, discussed that it could be a Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*) or a Spotted Owlet (*Athene brama*) because both these species were present in our urban area. We looked for the bird, which our neighbour said had hidden behind a steel cot, From a safe distance we checked if it was injured. We took a photo from our mobile phone and observed two pellets lying near the owl. After a few minutes, we observed that the owl behaved angrily, making a threatening display,

moving its horns (ear tufts) and its face. As we tried to go closer, it flew and perched on the terrace wall. We came back and concluded that the owl was normal and healthy and informed our neighbours that it was not injured and also not a baby! Based on its grey plumage with streaks on the underparts, along with other features, and studying the field guides, we confirmed its identification as a Pallid Scops Owl (*Otus brucei*). Without any disturbance, we observed it from 35-40 feet distance. The owl came back and was seen roosting behind the steel cot.

This was an unexpected sighting because the Pallid Scops Owl is generally found in semi-desert and scrubland area while this sighting was in the middle of the city, in Vishnu Colony-2, Junagadh (21° 31' 27.5" N, 70° 26' 47.8" E). Around 20:30 hrs, the owl drank some water from a bird water feeder kept on the terrace. This water bowl is kept for birds in our area like House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), House Crow (*Corvus splendens*), Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*), Indian Silverbill (*Euodice malabarica*) etc. but we never expected that a Pallid Scops Owl would drink from this bowl. At 21:05 hrs, it flew away towards the east. On the next day, 10 November 2018, we were curious about the pellets; we had seen two pellets the previous day. We went back and saw that the Pallid Scops Owl was roosting behind the cot. We continued watching it and