

Nal sarovar Diary...

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27-09-2015

Though Rains played truant and were inadequate this year, the canals enroute to Nalsarovar had good water and seemed to have supported a good standing crop of paddy all along the Sanand-Nalsarovar stretch. We found several paddy fields flooded with water attracting some early migrant wader species especially Ruff and Reeves (more than 50) and Black-tailed Godwits (just a couple) to feed upon. Open-bill Storks (more than 30) were spotted quite often this time and near Goraj village on the banks of the canal were a flock of more than 50 Little Cormorants enjoying the morning sun. Significantly a good population of Asian Openbills was active in this stretch indicating a good availability of food along the canal banks! After a few sightings of half a dozen White-breasted Waterhens, one Sarus Crane, about a dozen Glossy Ibis and a solitary Long-tailed Shrike, we reached Nalsarovar at around 8 am and found it to be very quiet in contrast to our June visit...the heronries at the entry gate were no longer active...The Purple Swamphen too were fewer-just a couple were spotted

near the entrance this time. The breeding season seemed to have ended....

Once inside we found the water level in Nal varying from two to four feet in depth, much cleaner and less turbid than June. Indeed at places we could see the lake bottom clearly. Presence of certain species like wagtails, Purple Swamphens, kingfishers, Purple Herons was restricted to the *beyts* [islands] of Gha bajariyo and other emergent aquatic vegetation while the Grey Herons, terns (mainly Whiskered) and Garganey preferred open waters. Overall the density of birds was sparse on the Nal proper at this time of the year. No major duck species except Garganey was spotted. Little Cormorants were present in sizeable numbers though scattered across the water body. Glossy Ibis were found close to the islands like Nani and Moti Chorathali. Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters were seen in small numbers while among the kingfishers only one individual of the Small Blue Kingfisher was spotted. Yellow Wagtails in good numbers were feasting on the abundant dragonflies, water skaters and other insect life. The lake was exploding with dragonflies of all hues!!





11-11-2015

On our second trip on 11th October, the waders had moved into the Nal and colonised the two islands of Siyal *beyt* and Gadhevad *beyt* that we visited. Most common waders such as Ruff, Common Sandpiper, Wood Sandpiper, Little Stints, Kentish Plover, Marsh Sandpiper were busy foraging in good numbers. However, the highlight of the day was Collared Pratincoles (more than 300 on a single *beyt* - Gadhevad), Lesser Golden Plovers (about 10) and a lone Rosy Pelican (most probably). We also saw flock of Garganey and other unidentified ducks in flight. The return journey too was quite eventful with frequent sightings of Asian Openbills (more than 50), on almost every second tree... one Marsh Harrier and a couple of honey buzzards as well as a pair of Sarus Cranes. Eurasian Rollers, White-eared Bulbuls, Long-tailed Shrikes (5), Little Egrets (> 50) gave us company till we reached Sanand...

Vadla (a satellite wetland about 10 km from Nal): Anuj Raina and Jitendra Dave who visited Vadla in the late afternoon were witness to an astounding aerial display of courting Black winged kites! The courting pair displayed amazing aerial feats

enough to embarrass a self-respecting air force squadron first by interlocking their talons in mid air, then going into a downward spiral and the female then flipping upside down during descent. The locked talons were then disengaged before



Golden Plover

reaching ground zero. Variants of this aerial display continued for almost 45 minutes before the courting pair landed finally exhausted on a tree. Furthermore, there was another surprise in store that afternoon when they found Demoiselle Cranes in thousands flying in towards Vadla wetland. With their characteristic loud trumpeting call, almost five thousand of these beautiful visitors descended on the neighbouring farmlands to forage. A gregarious group of Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters and Barn Swallows too were seen all the way on electric lines and finally, when it was time to call it a day they were rewarded with flocks of Northern Shovelers, Northern Pintails and Garganey all coming to roost for the night at Vadla. □