

Blue-throated Blue Flycatcher...

On 14 January 2018, the second author, along with Dr Ankit Dey and Dr Terrance Makwan, were invited for treatment of birds injured during the kite flying festival day 2018 (i.e. 14 January) at Porbandar Bird Sanctuary. The first author, through Rapid Action Project of Wildlife Trust of India and International Fund for Animal Welfare, was involved in this project. The second author saw a flycatcher during the lunch break and could take some photographs. Later, he showed the photos to the first author and both visited the site and found the bird. It was identified as female Blue-throated Blue Flycatcher. It is interesting to note that a female of Blue-throated Blue Flycatcher was also seen on 5 December 2015 at Porbandar, on the same tree and at almost same time of the day (Vargiya & Jethva 2016). This sighting makes it a third sighting from Gujarat and the second from the same place in Porbandar.

Sightings of species which are vagrant to a particular region are very important to ornithology and such records add to our understating of species distribution and behaviour. When a vagrant species returns to the same tree in its wintering area, it usually means that the habitat is suitable and must be conserved. It is possible that this was the same individual which was seen here in 2015 and we speculate wintering site fidelity in the Blue-throated Blue Flycatcher. But, we

understand that to prove this, the individual must be ringed and re-trapped to be sure.

Wintering site fidelity is known in birds. For example, a ringed Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*) returned to the same garden in Mumbai for five years in succession (Wooley Smith 1947). There are many other instances of wintering site fidelity in different species and many studies have been carried out regarding this. We will continue to monitor this area to see if the flycatcher is seen here again.

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Observations on nesting of Indian Pitta *Pitta brachyura* at Hingolghadh Nature Education Sanctuary, near Rajkot

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We happened to be at Hingolghadh Nature Education Sanctuary, Dist: Rajkot, many times during July-August 2018. The sanctuary is spread over about 654 ha. and was notified in August 1980. It is situated in Ta: Vinchhiya of Rajkot. It is an open thorny scrub forest, with patches of grasslands, interspersed with some large trees, and is dominated by *gorad* (*Acacia senegal*). The sanctuary is surrounded by agricultural farms and waste lands. Some parts of the sanctuary are hilly and undulating. The area provides a good habitat for resident and migratory birds. We took this opportunity to observe the nesting activity of Indian Pitta (*Pitta brachyura*), which is known to breed here in the monsoon season. The birds usually arrive in the month of May, and are silent when they arrive. As the rainy season approaches, they become vocal and start their breeding activities. This year, we observed a total of 14 nests in the sanctuary area. Out of these 14 nests, we monitored four nests closely and noted various details, which are as follows:

Nest 1:

Location: Near a stream, in a *gorad*. The nest was built by repairing an old nest made the previous year, in 2017. The nest was at a height of approximately 14 feet.

3 July 2018: Incubation started.

17 July 2018: Three chicks were seen.

25 July 2018: Four chicks were seen putting their heads outside the nest. Both parent birds were feeding them, mainly with earthworms, millipedes and other insects. We noted that they came 11 times to feed the chicks in 34 minutes of observation.

28 July 2018: Same feeding activity as noted on 25 July 2018.

29 July 2018: All four chicks were outside the nest and seen wandering nearby.

1 August 2018: Same activity as noted on 29 July 2018. At roosting time, both the parent birds were calling the chicks,

presumably for roosting at a safe place.

Result: Chicks fledged successfully.

Nest 2:

Location: In a *gorad* in the compound. The nest was at a height of 13 feet.

23 July 2018: Nest building was going on. Nesting material consisted of dried leaves of bamboo, some twigs and plastic threads and other plastic items.

28 July 2018: Incubation started.

31 July 2018: Incubation was going on.

An important observation was that before making this nest, the same pair had started building nests at three different locations one after the other, but each time, left the nest incomplete due to unknown reasons.

Nest 3:

Location: In an *ingoriyo* (*Balanites aegyptiaca*) in the compound. The nest was at a height of 13 feet.

6 July 2018: A single bird was moving in the area and seemed to select the nesting site.

13 July 2018: Nest building was going on.

18 July 2018: Incubation started.

21 July 2018: Incubation was going on (by both the parent birds).

23 July 2018: Left the nest and started building another nest, about 4-5 feet behind the previous nest.

28 July 2018: Incubation started in the new nest.

31 July 2018: Incubation was going on.

An important observation here was that the birds changed the nest even after the eggs were laid. They built another nest nearby and started nesting there.

Nest 4:

Location: Near a stream in an *aambali* (*Tamarindus indica*). The nest was at a height of 11 feet.

2 July 2018: Nest building started.

7 July 2018: Incubation started.

20 July 2018: Both the parent birds were seen carrying food to the nest but chicks were not visible.

26 July 2018: Same observations as noted on 20 July 2018.

28 July 2018. Four chicks were seen protruding their heads outside the nest and both the parent birds were seen feeding them.

2 August 2018: All four chicks were outside the nest and parent birds were feeding them.



Bhavesh Trivedi

Result: Chicks fledged successfully

Discussion

The Indian Pitta is mainly a monsoon (breeding) migrant to Gujarat and is widely distributed in the state (Ganpule 2016). The species is quite common in Gir National Park and in many other forest areas of the state in the monsoon season. It is also well known that the India Pitta nests in Hingolghadh. Many photographers from all over Saurashtra come to Hingolghadh to see and photograph these birds. Thus, its nesting here is not new. A good population of Indian Pitta nests here as it can be seen that 14 nests were located within a short distance of each other. It is quite astounding that so many nests were located in a small area, quite near to each other. We noted that the nests were usually quite large and oblong or round in shape. The nesting material observed here was twigs, leaves, grass, etc. with plastic threads and other plastic items also being used in some nests. Majority of the nests were located near streams or water sources. The nesting season of July-August observed here is similar to what is described in the reference texts (Erritzoe 2018). We observed two other nests where the birds were successful in raising young but we did not monitor these nests closely. Thus, we saw and observed that the chicks were fledged successfully in four nests. We were unable to complete our observations for the two other nests we were studying since we had to leave the area for some urgent work.

Indian Pitta....

In a recent study on the nesting of Indian Pitta in Jambhughoda Wildlife Sanctuary, central Gujarat (Solanki *et al.* 2018), breeding biology of the species was studied till the chicks were predated by a common palm civet (*Paradoxurus hermaphrodites*); nesting site, feeding behaviour, etc. was described in detail. The height of the nest in Jambhughoda was 3 mts, or about 10 feet. In Hingolghadh, the height of the nests ranged from 10 to 14 feet. The species preferred to build its nests in forks of tree trunks, and the same was observed here in Hingolghadh. Here, two nesting attempts that we observed closely were successful with the parent birds managing to fledge four chicks each in these two nests. The brood size of four observed here, is also similar to what is known for the species – a clutch of 4-6 eggs is normal. The food given to the hatchlings, mainly earthworms, millipedes and insects, was similar to what was observed in central Gujarat. An interesting observation here was that the birds caught insects attracted by tube-lights at night and fed the chicks. This feeding in the night was unusual. The fledging period here, for two nests, was around 14 days, which is also similar to what has been observed earlier. The nesting in two other nests that we were watching closely was ongoing but as stated earlier, we could not complete our observations of these nests and so, we could not find out if nesting was successful here too.

An interesting observation was at nest no. 3, where the parent birds left the nest while incubation was going on and made another nest, laid eggs, and were seen incubating in the new nest. The eggs from the abandoned nest were observed and noted to be white in colour, with red-brown blotches or different-shaped markings on one side (towards the broader end) and were spherical in shape. This behaviour of nest abandonment and making a new nest is atypical and the reasons for abandonment of the earlier nest were not known. This type of behaviour has not been reported for the species in the previous study and requires further study. It was observed that in nest no. 1, the pair repaired an older nest, from the previous season, and used it for nesting this year after making suitable changes. This reusing of an old nest is also intriguing and it is not known whether this is common for the species or is rarely observed.

The successful nesting of the Indian Pitta at Hingolghadh is encouraging and it seems that the species is thriving here. The total of 14 nests seen in July-August 2018 makes this as one of the important areas for the breeding of the Indian Pitta in Saurashtra. Some of the observations reported here like reusing of old nest, nest abandonment and making a new nest etc. have not been described for the species and more studies will help in understanding the breeding biology of the Indian Pitta here.

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