

Snake (*Pythas mucosa*) attacked the nest, which was abandoned by the birds. Thereafter, they built another nest on the roof of the campsite and successfully laid eggs. The eggs subsequently hatched and the pair was seen feeding the chicks. On 21 July 2019, we noted a Brahminy Starling (*Sturnia pagodarum*) feeding the chicks of the pitta (Photo 4). As per the first author's previous observations, the Brahminy Starling is known to attack the nest of the pitta, often killing the chicks or making them fall out of the nest. So, this interspecific feeding, by the Brahminy Starling, of the India Pitta chicks, is indeed very interesting. Interspecific feeding of chicks of Indian Paradise Flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi*) by Oriental White Eye (*Zosterops palpebrosus*) and by Red-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*) has been documented earlier from Gujarat (Balar 2009, Mori & Malaviya 2016). However, the interspecific feeding of chicks of Indian Pitta by a Brahminy Starling has not been known earlier and this is probably the first such documentation from Gujarat.

The breeding of the Indian Pitta in Gujarat has been studied in detail recently (Solanki *et al.* 2018, Theba *et al.* 2019). However, the observations presented here are different and show that there is still a lot to be learnt about the breeding of the Indian Pitta in the state.

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## Road kill of a Black Bittern *Ixobrychus flavicollis* near Narmada Main Canal, Narmada District

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The Black Bittern (*Ixobrychus flavicollis*) is a blackish or dark brown plumaged bittern, with a brown-and-white striped throat bordered by yellow (Grimmett *et al.* 2011, Heron Conservation 2020). It is usually seen flying away into thick vegetation of reeds such as *Typha latifolia*. The Black Bittern is a 'Least Concern' species as IUCN states that its decline is not believed to be sufficiently rapid to approach the threshold under the population trend criterion and the population size is very large. However, the population trend is declining (BirdLife International 2017). It is one of the largest bitterns with an extremely large range as it is distributed in India, Southeast Asia, Indonesia, Philippines, Australia, and New Guinea to the Solomon Islands (Grimmett *et al.* 2011, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012, Heron Conservation 2020).

In the Indian subcontinent, the Black Bittern is a resident and patchily distributed (Ali 2002). As per Kazmierczak (2000) and Grimmett *et al.* (2011), it is a winter visitor in Sindh in Pakistan and these reference books show isolated records in Gujarat while Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) do not report its occurrence in Gujarat. The species was not recorded in Gujarat by Ali (1954). However, Khacher (1996) and Mukherjee *et al.* (2002) reported all the three species of bitterns breeding around Pariej Tank while Mistry & Parasharya (2016) have reported road kills of Black Bitterns around Pariej Wetland (in Kheda District). The status of Yellow Bittern, Cinnamon Bittern and Black Bittern was studied by Patel *et al.* (2017) in Central Gujarat and in South Gujarat by Patel *et al.* (2018). But Patel *et al.* (2018) did not report the species from Narmada District. We report here the road kill of a Black Bittern near Narmada Main Canal and it is probably the first record of the species from the Narmada District.

On 10 May 2020, while travelling on the road beside the Narmada Main Canal (21° 50' N, 73° 44' E) of Narmada District in South Gujarat, we observed a dead bittern on the

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road. Later, on closer observation, we could identify it as an adult Black Bittern as it had a prominent dark back, striped neck bordered by striking yellow streaks, and a long bill. This being a new species in the area, an extensive search was initiated in the following days in reed beds around the canal. We searched for literature as well as 'eBird' data for the area. We observed White-breasted Waterhen (*Amaurornis phoenicurus*), Little Cormorant (*Microcarbo niger*) and Asian Openbill (*Anastomus oscitans*) around the canal area but could not find the Black Bittern.

Several kinds of research has shown the impacts of roads on biological diversity and roads pose a serious threat to them (Geneletti 2003). In India, many such incidences of roadside mortality of wild animals and birds are regularly reported (Chhangani 2004, Parasharya & Tere 2007, Bhaskaran & Bhoominathan 2010). However, Mistry & Parasharya (2016) have also discussed some feasible mitigation measures, which can be incorporated. Moreover, from the conservation point of view, reed bed habitats should be protected as they are ecologically valuable for many invertebrates and birds as they are used for shelter as well as a source of food (Sears *et al.* 2013). In Gujarat, bitterns are considered as resident breeding birds (Parasharya *et al.* 2004, Ganpule 2016). Hence, at least during the summer, reed bed habitats should not be disturbed as it is the breeding season of bitterns. Further, we request birdwatchers and researchers of Gujarat to report the sightings of Black Bittern from other areas of the state for a better understanding of its status and distribution here.

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