

Rubber bands in regurgitated pellets of Cattle Egret, Pond Heron and Intermediate Egret

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(*Chironomidae*) which develops in marshy area are long (1 to 1.5 cm) and blood-red in colour, which is similar to rubber bands.

In the recent past, I have checked some more roosting and breeding sites of egrets in the interior rural areas of Kheda district, away from the drainage canal. Surprisingly, I could not find any rubber bands or condoms. This supports the hypothesis that the source of the rubber was drainage canal and the material was the waste from urban areas.

Cattle Egret consumes a large variety of invertebrates as well as vertebrates, including reptiles and mammals (Jenni, 1973, Sodhi 1992) but it is not known to consume rubber bands or any other non-living material. Amongst other birds, White Stork (*Ciconia ciconia*) was recently reported consuming rubber bands. Foraging and ingestion of rubber bands by White Storks in a garbage dump area was considered to be dangerous for the life of the Storks, with seven deaths reported due to stomach occlusion between 2000 to 2004 (Pierre-Yves *et al.* 2011). In our area, the Cattle Egrets forage mainly in the drainage canal, sewage tanks as well as in carcass dumps. A study should be carried out at Vaso or any appropriate urban area to see if there are any deaths in these birds due to ingestion of rubber bands and other rubber items.

I recollect my studying some fifteen years ago in a primary school close to our village pond – known as *Vadutalav* at Vaso, Kheda District. There were several *Eucalyptus* in the school campus and two huge Banyan (*Ficus benghalensis*) at the edge of the pond, which were regular roosting sites of Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*), Intermediate Egret (*Mesophoyx intermedia*) and Pond Heron (*Ardeola grayii*). Numerically, the Cattle Egrets were most dominant.

My friends and I used to skip the classes and wander around, particularly looking for discarded rubber bands to play with. By experience, we knew that rubber bands were likely to be found on the ground just below the trees on which these birds used to roost. We used to get rubber bands -intact or broken, more frequently of red colour than others. These rubber bands were often entangled in the regurgitated pellets. The other rubber items found in the pellets were baby milk-feeding nipples and condoms. Amongst the condoms, pink coloured were most frequent. But at that time our interest was only in the rubber bands and we never knew the significance of this observation.

Recovery of rubber bands from the pellets of egrets is still a common phenomenon at Vaso. Recently we have taken photographs of these pellets containing rubber bands, both red and tri-coloured. At Vaso, the egrets regularly feed in the drainage canal bringing sewage from towns in the upstream, in which sewage of our town also gets mixed. It is quite likely that the rubber being very soft and pliable might have been picked up as a food source by egrets. It is not very clear why the frequency of red coloured bands and pink condoms was high compared with other colours. It is possible that the red coloured thread-like rubber bands look like earthworms and other related species of aquatic environment, which are natural food source of these birds. Even the larvae of Chironomid Fly



[These observations show that if rubber and plastic waste is not disposed off properly, it may be harmful to birds. There have been many reports of rubber bands being consumed by birds, and causing death (Jackson 1954, Hocken 1960, Gómez-Tejedor *et al.* 1994). Ingestion of plastic and rubber debris in the oceans is particularly a serious problem in Seabirds and it has been extensively studied and widely documented. Rubber band ingestion in birds has also been documented in India (Venkatratnam 2013). However ingestion of rubber nipples

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and condoms has not been reported earlier and could present a serious and bigger health hazard to the birds. A proper method of disposal of rubber and plastic items needs to be implemented at the earliest – Eds]

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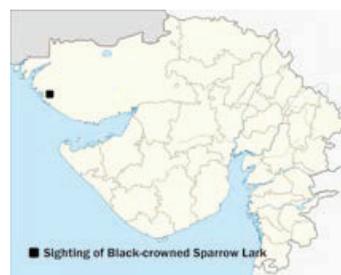
Sighting of Black-crowned Sparrow Lark in Kachchh

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has noted it twice in Kachchh, from Kuawar Bet (in 1960) and more recently (in 2003) in Naliya. Outside of Kachchh, Raol (2005) has sighted it at Vadsar, near Ahmedabad. Pandya & Vachhrajani (2010) report it from Mahi River estuary and give it as resident,



but do not list the more common Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark for the area. Parasharya et al (2004) give it as a resident species in Gujarat. Jugalkishor Tiwari informed, there is only one record when the bird was ringed in GRK at Kunwer Beyt, in 1992 by BNHS Bird-migration Team whose part he was (verbal comm.).

It is possible that it is overlooked. Readers are requested to send their sightings of Black-crowned Sparrow Lark from Gujarat so that its status here can be better known - Eds]

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On 26 December 2014, I visited Naliya grassland with Dr. Bharat Jethva, Dhavit Andhariya, Virag Vyas, Dhruvi Ghedia, Pooja Vyas and Alpa Jethva. There we saw a flock of about 15 larks foraging in the grass. We initially ignored them, considering them as Ashy-crowned Sparrow Larks (*Eremopterix griseus*), but when we rechecked, we were surprised to see that they were Black-crowned Sparrow Larks (*Eremopterix nigriceps*).

We checked the oriental bird images website for sight records from Gujarat, but most of the sightings were from Rajasthan, mainly from Jaisalmer and Tal Chhpar area. There is only one photo record of Black-crowned Sparrow Lark from little Rann of Kachchh, by Otto Pfister, in November 2002 on this website. Thus it was a very unusual and uncommon sighting of this species in Kachchh.

[There are isolated records of Black-crowned Sparrow Lark from Gujarat given in Grimmett et al. (2011), while Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) show its occurrence in the entire state. Various recently published records from Gujarat are as follows; Varu (2006)