

**Vocalisation:** At 11:00 hrs on 29 September 2015, in the Banni Grassland near Chhari-Dhand, a single bird was heard calling; the call was a territorial 'churr', similar to the calls described by Cleere (2010). But generally, European Nightjars are silent during migration. Ali (1954) noted that the birds were silent except for an occasional quick repeated 'chuck-chuck-chuck' call.

The European Nightjar is a regular passage migrant through north-west India. The subspecies that passes through the region is *unwini*, and the passage of *sarudnyi/plumipes* subspecies is also probable. Birders in north-western India should keep a watch for the movements of European Nightjars during the autumn passage migration season from August till October. Though it has not been noted outside Kachchh, it is very probable that it could occur in suitable habitat in Saurashtra too. We need to conduct surveys in other areas of the state for this species in the autumn migration season.

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## Ruff in almost full breeding plumage in Jamnagar

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Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax* or *Calidris pugnax*), is a common winter migrant to Gujarat (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). It is commonly seen in Jamnagar in the salt pans and the coastal areas of the city.

On 16 June 2017, I was watching and photographing birds in a marshy wetland near the Gandhinagar area of Jamnagar. There, I saw that three Ruffs flew in and started feeding. I was surprised to see that two of the birds were males in almost full breeding plumage. I took a few pictures of the two birds. The third individual was in non-breeding plumage and so could not be sexed. It can be seen from the photos that the birds were not in their full breeding plumage, as the head tufts were missing. However, the extensive white coloured 'ruff', black breast and the black scapulars were clearly seen in one bird while the other bird had a fully developed black 'ruff' and blackish upper parts.

The presence of these birds in mid-June in Jamnagar is unusual and rare but it has been reported earlier. An individual with a blackish, extensive 'ruff' was photographed in Jamnagar earlier (Patel 2009), and according to senior birdwatchers here, individuals have been reported in similar, near full breeding plumage in Jamnagar area a few times before. A sighting of a Ruff in active moult, starting to acquire breeding plumage, seen by Rajdeepsinh Jadeja in Bedi area, Jamnagar, on 10 May 2017 (*pers. comm.*), confirms that some birds start to acquire breeding plumage in their wintering areas.



## Ruff...

The most probable reason for the sighting of these birds in near full breeding plumage could be the early return of males from their breeding areas. The mating strategy in Ruff is extremely complex and there are three types of males; independent, satellite and 'female-type' males, which are called 'faeders' (Jukema & Piersma 2006). The satellite males lack the



Bhargav Raval



Bhargav Raval

head tufts and facial wattles, but have ruff, which is usually white or pale yellowish, lacking solid black in the ruff or head tufts (Farrell *et al.* 2015). But here, one individual had a solid blackish ruff, which was unlike a satellite male.

It seems unlikely that these were birds which stayed back (over-summering birds), as such individuals usually do not attain breeding plumage. It is well known that many waders stay back during the summer in Gujarat and are seen in the lakes and coastal areas of the state. A few waders (including Ruffs) are seen all round the year in Jamnagar also. In a study on Ruffs in Kenya, only females stayed back and over-summered (Pearson 1981), and in shorebirds in Pulicat Lake (Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu), Ruffs were not recorded in

June and July, but were seen from August till May (Kannan & Pandiyan 2012). Mostly, Ruffs start to arrive in Jamnagar in the month of July (*pers. obsv.*). Males, who play no part in nesting and chick care, leave the breeding grounds earlier, in late June or early July, followed by the females in mid-July, and juveniles from late July to August (Van Gils *et al.* 2017). In Ukraine, the earliest observations of autumn migration of Ruff were on 18 June (Strus 2014). Hence, some individuals are very early autumn migrants.

An observation of Ruffs in breeding plumage was made in Suru Valley, Ladakh, on 18 July 1977, when a flock included a number of males in full breeding plumage (Prins & Namgail 2017). Thus, it is most probable that these individuals seen in Jamnagar were early autumn migrants, in almost full breeding plumage, and not birds which over-summered / stayed back.

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