

Greater Coucal impaling chameleon on a thorn for feeding

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The habitat in the coastal belt from Gandhidham/Kandla to Tuna, Badhreshwar and Mundra is quite good for bird watching as well as for mammal sightings. On 22 April 2018, a Sunday, at around 07:00 hrs, I was going from Gandhidham to Bhadreswar coast in search of Golden Jackals (*Canis aureus*); usually, a pack of jackals is seen after crossing the Chokanda Temple. The area is a thorn forest and connects to the coastal belt, where there is a colony of fishermen.

While on the way, I saw a Greater Coucal (*Centropus sinensis*) very near me in search of some prey as it was seen searching extensively for something; digging in the soil, then jumping on thorny trees and perching and changing locations in search for prey. It then found an Indian Chameleon (*Chamaeleo zeylanicus*) in a tree and in a fraction of a second, caught it in its beak and started hitting it on the branch of tree repeatedly, more than 8 to 10 times, and killed it. The coucal then impaled the chameleon on a big thorn of a tree and started to feed on it.

I took a record photograph where the Greater Coucal is with the kill of the chameleon, with a thorn inside the body of the chameleon, thus impaling it. It was quite surprising to see the

Greater Coucal feed on the chameleon in this way. In India, impaling prey on thorns and then eating it is usually seen in shrikes (*Lanius*

sp.) and they are called 'butcher birds' for this behaviour. The Greater Coucal has a very varied diet and is known to eat small mammals, insects, lizards, snakes, frogs, insects, eggs and young of small birds, fruits and seeds etc. (Payne 2018). Hence, the killing and eating of a chameleon by the Greater Coucal is not unusual. However, the way in which it proceeded to eat it was unusual and the Greater Coucal has not been documented or known to eat prey by impaling it on thorns.



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References

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Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush in Gir

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On 27 May 2018, I visited the Barvala Hanuman Temple near Kothariya, in Khambha Range of Gir National Park, with members of Shetrunji Prakruti Mandal. We (Jignesh Trivedi, Jayesh Shah, Mahendra Makwana, Mahesh Mori and I) reached there early in the morning. At around 08:30 hrs, we saw a rock thrush (*Monticola* sp.) near the water point. It had bluish-grey head and upper breast, rufous-orange underparts, brownish upperparts and very short tail.

The bird came near the water and was seen very well by us. Unfortunately, we were not carrying a camera. So, I took some photos with my mobile phone camera. The features described above could be easily seen in the photos I took. But, the photos were not of very good quality. I shared the photos with other birders here and it was identified as a male Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush (*Monticola saxatilis*).

The Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush is a vagrant or rare passage migrant to Gujarat with records mainly from Kachchh (Ganpule 2016). A recent record from Rampura Grasslands, Dahod, is known (Patel 2017). The species is usually seen during the autumn passage migration in Gujarat and there is only one record in February from Kachchh (Mishra 2015).

There is no previous record of the Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush from Gir National Park and this is an addition to the avifauna of Saurashtra.

[The photos are not of very good quality since they were taken with a mobile phone camera but the distinguishing features can be seen and the identity can be confirmed. This record of the Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush in late May is quite surprising and suggests that this is a late spring migration record. The species breeds in the Western Palearctic and winters in Africa; this could be an individual which was late in returning to its breeding grounds. The Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush is mainly an autumn passage migrant in India and most of its previous records from Gujarat are also from this period. There are very few spring records from the country and hence, this is an important record. – Eds]

References

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