

Second update to the Gujarat checklist: March 2020

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This paper is the second update to the Gujarat checklist; the checklist was published in 2016 (Ganpule 2016) and the first update in December 2017 (Ganpule 2017), which took the total number of species documented within the boundaries of the state of Gujarat, along with the adjoining Union Territories of Diu & Daman, and Dadra & Nagar Haveli, to 582. This paper reviews important records, lists the additions to the checklist, discusses taxonomy followed and changes to the taxonomy, and explores the question of adding special categories to the Gujarat checklist.

In the last two years, there have been many additions to the checklist and other interesting records were noted, which are given and discussed in detail here. Interesting records and new additions to the state checklist, since the publication of the first update of the checklist in December 2017 up to 31 March 2020, are discussed in this paper. Two or three of the sightings listed here have not been formally published in birding journals/magazines. However, these sightings have been posted on the social media, Whatsapp groups, websites like 'Oriental Bird Images', 'Birds of Gujarat' and other birding websites. Personal discussions with bird watchers helped in getting additional details for a few of the records discussed and listed in this paper.

The records of the following species have been reviewed:

Thick-billed Green Pigeon (*Treron curvirostra*): An injured Thick-billed Green Pigeon was recovered near Mangrol, in Junagadh District, in November 2017 by Mital Moradiya (Moradiya 2018). It had a neck injury and survived for only two weeks. This species is resident in E Himalayas, NE India, Bangladesh and Odisha (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). Though correctly identified, this record from Gujarat is way out of range for this species and it was most likely an escapee. This species has been widely noted in the pet bird trade. Thus, the Thick-billed Green Pigeon is not included in the Gujarat checklist as there are no records of this species from western India and its occurrence here as a wild vagrant is quite unlikely.

Red-breasted Parakeet (*Psittacula alexandri*): There have been two recent records of Red-breasted Parakeet from Gujarat; it was first seen and photographed near Surat (Parikh & Patel 2017) and the second record was from Vadodara (Patel *et al.* 2019). In both cases, it was explained by the authors that these individuals were likely to be escapees from the pet trade. It is well known that feral populations of Red-breasted Parakeets are seen in large cities like Mumbai and Chennai, well away from its natural range. However, these sightings

from Gujarat are of single individuals and at present, there is no confirmation of a feral population establishing itself. Hence, this species is not included in the Gujarat checklist.

Himalayan / Oriental Cuckoo (*Cuculus saturatus / optatus*): A hepatic cuckoo seen in October 2019 near Mahuva, Bhavnagar, by Batuk Bhil and others, was identified as a probable Himalayan / Oriental Cuckoo (Bhil *et al.* 2020). There is very less data on identification and separation of hepatic Himalayan / Oriental Cuckoo from hepatic Lesser Cuckoo (*C. poliocephalus*) and Eurasian Cuckoo (*C. canorus*) and the criteria for identification are not well understood. In such a case, though expert opinions indicated that the cuckoo seen near Mahuva was a Himalayan / Oriental Cuckoo, it was felt that until there is clarity regarding the identification of Himalayan / Oriental Cuckoo out of its normal range, the species should not be added to the Gujarat checklist. A detailed paper on the identification of Oriental Cuckoo and Eurasian Cuckoo has been recently published in *Dutch Birding*, which will be helpful in the identification of these species (Lehikoinen & Väisänen 2020). In view of this publication, it was decided to wait and re-assess the Mahuva record with more expert help in the future. There are other potential sightings of Himalayan / Oriental Cuckoo from Gujarat (birds of hepatic form in adult plumage, showing barred rump but identified as Eurasian Cuckoo) and it is recommended that all such sightings be collected and analysed in detail. This species is likely to be added in the Gujarat checklist in the future subject to expert opinions but is, at present, not added to the Gujarat checklist.

White-faced Whistling Duck (*Dendrocygna viduata*): Two records of White-faced Whistling Duck have been reported from Gujarat so far – one from Jamnagar in February 2017 and one from Navsari in October 2019 (Rajendra Desai, *see elsewhere in this issue*). Upon investigation, it was found that a private collection near Jamnagar has more than 50 pairs in its collection. Both records were considered to be probable escapees from this collection. In the India Checklist v3.1 this species was added to Appendix 2 – treating the records as 'of unknown origin' (Praveen *et al.* 2019A). This species is not added to the Gujarat checklist as these records are likely to be of escapees from this private collection.

Woodchat Shrike / Masked Shrike (*Lanius senator / Lanius nubicus*): A juvenile shrike was seen in Velavadar NP in October 2017, which was identified as either a Woodchat Shrike or a Masked Shrike, with expert opinion divided (Pankaj

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Maheria *et al.*, see elsewhere in this issue). Unfortunately, the identification could not be confirmed since the photos / video were considered inconclusive. It should be noted that both these species are vagrants to India, with only once record of each species from the country. While the Masked Shrike has been noted in Gujarat earlier, the Woodchat Shrike has not been documented here so far. This interesting sighting is at present treated as a Woodchat Shrike/Masked Shrike and the Woodchat Shrike is not added to the Gujarat checklist.

Since the publication of the Gujarat checklist and the first update, the following species have been added:

Species added

583. Bronzed Drongo (*Dicrurus aeneus*): This species was treated as hypothetical in the Gujarat checklist (Ganpule 2016). This treatment evoked responses from senior birders from South Gujarat and also from other bird watchers here in the state. Sight records were received from Dang forest area and also from Shoolpaneshwar WLS. The species is included in a few trip reports from Vansada NP area, which are available online. The Bronzed Drongo is resident in the Western Ghats, and is seen north of Mumbai, up to the Gujarat border. Senior birder Adesh Shivkar had reported it from Vansada NP and Mukesh Bhatt also mentioned a sight record from this area. Based on discussions with senior birders of the state, it was decided to include this species in the checklist based on sight records by experienced bird watchers. There are no photographic records of the species from Gujarat till date and birders are urged to look for and photograph this species in our state to further confirm its occurrence here.

584. Namaqua Dove (*Oena capensis*): A female Namaqua Dove was seen and photographed in December 2017 in Khijadiya Bird Sanctuary, Jamnagar, and was the first record for India (Trivedi & Trivedi 2018, Patel & Raol 2018). There was speculation that this could have been an escapee but detailed analysis was presented in the editor's note, which explained the logic in treating this record as that of a wild vagrant rather than an escapee. Further, as explained in the editor's note, this species has a tendency for colonizing new areas. A detailed article on the range expansion of the Namaqua Dove was recently published in *Dutch Birding*, which listed records from South Asia (including the Gujarat record) as a part of this range expansion (Ławicki 2020). This was accepted to the Gujarat checklist and is also accepted into the India checklist (Praveen *et al.* 2019A).

585. Black-legged Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*): An adult Black-legged Kittiwake was seen and photographed in December 2017 in Mandvi area, Kachchh, and is the first record

for Gujarat (Mehta 2018). Earlier records from India were mostly of juvenile / immature birds and this was the first time that an adult was seen here.

586. Rook (*Corvus frugilegus*): A Rook was seen and photographed at Velan-Kaj Wetland, in Gir-Somnath District (Dave & Raina 2018). This was the first record of a Rook from Gujarat. This is also the southernmost record of the species for India.

587. Chestnut Munia (*Lonchura atricapilla*): A Chestnut Munia was first seen and photographed in a flock of Tricoloured Munia (*L. malacca*) around Tarapur, in Anand District (Bhatt *et al.* 2019). A few individuals with belly colour intermediate between white and chestnut were also seen, and were presumed to be hybrids. The editorial comments given in the note state that till date, there are no records of Chestnut Munia in flocks of Tricoloured Munia and more studies are needed to establish the origins of the birds seen in Gujarat, with conclusions and decisions drawn till then treated as tentative. Till further studies are conducted, the photographic record from Anand District is considered to be the first record for Gujarat. This record can be reassessed in the future based on the findings of DNA studies.

588. Variable Sunbird (*Cinnyris venustus*): A first sighting of Variable Sunbird from Jamnagar area was discussed in Ganpule (2017), and the species was not accepted into the Gujarat checklist as it was treated to be 'of unknown origin'. Subsequently, a second sighting of Variable Sunbird was reported from Gir National Park (Devmurari 2018). This individual was different from the earlier one reported from Jamnagar. The editor's note in Devmurari (2018) explained in detail the various aspects of this sighting. This species was added to the Gujarat checklist based on the two sight records, of different individuals, from Gujarat. This inclusion is somewhat contentious, but, based on the two well documented sight records from Gujarat, this seems to be the best course of action till further data is available. The Variable Sunbird is added in Appendix 2 of the India checklist, treating these records as 'of unknown origin' (Praveen *et al.* 2019A).

589. Swinhoe's Minivet (*Pericrocotus cantonensis*): Two Swinhoe's Minivets were seen and photographed in Gandhinagar in February 2018 (Theba *et al.* 2018). The identification is discussed in detail in this paper and all the diagnostic features were noted for these two individuals, which separated these birds from the similar Ashy Minivet (*P. divaricatus*) with the help of good photographs taken. This is the first record of Swinhoe's Minivet for Gujarat.

590. Common Redstart (*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*): A Common Redstart of the subspecies *samamisticus*, also known as Ehrenberg's Redstart, was seen and photographed in Thol Bird Sanctuary (Bhatt 2018). Though the Common Redstart of the nominate subspecies had been noted in India before, this was a first record of Ehrenberg's Redstart for India. The Common Redstart is an addition to the state checklist. The nominate subspecies of Common Redstart has not been noted in Gujarat yet and only Ehrenberg's Redstart has been documented. This is the first record of Common Redstart for Gujarat.

591. Eastern Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla tshutschensis*): A first sighting of a probable Eastern Yellow Wagtail, of the *taivana* subspecies, was reported from Kachchh by Varu (2016). At that time, the occurrence of Eastern Yellow Wagtail in India was uncertain and all records of the species were under review. Later, a detailed paper by Vishwanathan *et al.* (2017) confirmed its occurrence in India; they treated the record by Varu (2016) as a 'potential' Eastern Yellow Wagtail. Another sighting near Rajkot by Radadiya (2018) was identified as a 'putative' Eastern Yellow Wagtail (Radadiya 2018). A recent sighting from Rajkot, again by Hemanya Radadiya, in December 2019, was also identified as a probable Eastern Yellow Wagtail (Hemanya Radadiya, *pers comm.*). The photo from Kachchh by Varu (2016) shows all features of a *taivana* but the slight curving of the yellow supercilium on the ear coverts was thought to be a little odd; there was only one photo available for study. For the individual reported by Radadiya (2018), expert opinion (by Per Alström) indicated it to be a first winter Eastern Yellow Wagtail moulting into summer plumage. The editor's note in Radadiya (2018) explained that this species was added to the Gujarat checklist pending further molecular studies, treating the sightings from Kachchh and Rajkot to be of *taivana* subspecies of Eastern Yellow Wagtail. The sighting by Varu (2016) fits best to a *taivana* and is the main reason for its acceptance in the Gujarat checklist. The other sightings by Radadiya can be considered to be of Eastern Yellow Wagtails but can be confirmed beyond any doubt only by DNA studies. It is recommended that such wagtails in Gujarat be trapped and studied so that the exact status of various taxa in the state can be determined.

592. Black Noddy (*Anous minutus*): A Black Noddy was seen and photographed in Porbandar in August 2018 (Jadeja 2018). The photos showed well all the features of the species and the identification was confirmed by experts. The Black Noddy is an addition to the state checklist.

593. Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*): A Golden Eagle was reported near Palanpur in December 2018 (Prajapati *et al.* 2018). The bird was well photographed and seen in the same area for almost two months, with many birders visiting the site to see it. This was the first record of a Golden Eagle from Gujarat and is the southernmost record of the species for the country.

594. Yellow-browed Warbler (*Phylloscopus inornatus*): The identification of Yellow-browed Warbler is challenging as it can be confused with other *Phylloscopus* sp. warblers, especially Hume's Leaf Warbler (*P. humei*). For Gujarat, there have been claims of Yellow-browed Warbler from Gir NP and from other forest areas of the state. The call of Yellow-browed Warbler is diagnostic and helps in separating it from Hume's Leaf Warbler. Photos of suspected *P. inornatus* from Gujarat were collected and sent to Nils Van Duivendijk, who opined that bare part colouration varies in both species and it is not a reliable feature for identification but instead, a good Yellow-browed Warbler should show a more obvious second wing-bar over the median coverts, more green upperparts, at least some green on the crown, more contrastingly patterned wing as a whole and most importantly, it has a different call (Nils Van Duivendijk, *in litt*, email dated 23 September 2016). A well documented sighting from Shoolpaneshwar WLS by Anand Patel, which was confirmed later by experts, shows a warbler which matches well with a Yellow-browed Warbler, showing a prominent median covert wing bar, greenish mantle, a supercilium with yellow at the end and contrasting wings (Patel 2015). The photo is also uploaded on the OBI website. Though the call was not noted, the photo shows features which match well with a Yellow-browed Warbler and hence, this species is added to the Gujarat checklist. Birders should look out for the Yellow-browed Warbler in the forest areas of Gujarat.

595. Yellow-breasted Bunting (*Emberiza aureola*): A Yellow-breasted Bunting was documented, with photographs, from Pariej, near Kheda (Mengar 2019). This was the first record of this species from Gujarat. The Yellow-breasted Bunting is now listed as 'Critically Endangered' and the species has declined all over its range (BirdLife International 2020). This record, from the western part of the Indian Subcontinent, after more than 115 years, is an important record for India.

596. Lammergeier (*Gypaetus barbatus*): A juvenile/immature Lammergeier, also known as Bearded Vulture, was photographed in Girnar WLS in January 2019 (Vadher 2019). This was the first confirmed record of Lammergeier for Gujarat. An earlier sighting, from Kachchh, was treated as unconfirmed

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due to lack of photographs or other corroborative evidence (Thakkar 2005, Ganpule 2016). This sighting confirmed the occurrence of Lammergeier in Gujarat.

597. Great Snipe (*Gallinago media*): An unusual snipe was seen in Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary in February 2019, which was identified as a female Great Snipe (Kini *et al.* 2019). The identification was widely discussed and some experts expressed concerns that this could be a Pin-tailed Snipe/Swinhoe's Snipe (*G. stenura*/*G. megala*). As explained in the editor's note in Kini *et al.* (2019), the identification was confirmed by experts who had studied the Great Snipe in Scandinavian countries; they conclusively opined that it was a female Great Snipe. Hence, this species was accepted into the Gujarat checklist. This is the first record of a Great Snipe for Gujarat.

598. Spot-bellied Eagle Owl (*Bubo nipalensis*): A Spot-bellied Eagle Owl was photographed in Shoolpaneshwar WLS in June 2019 (Kanthariya 2019). This individual was seen in the same area for more than 2 months and was photographed by many birders. This was the first record of the Spot-bellied Eagle Owl for the state.

599. Lesser Short-toed Lark (*Alaudala rufescens*): A detailed paper on Sand Lark (*A. raytal*) and its separation from Lesser / Asian Short-toed Lark (*A. cheleensis*) was recently published in *Indian BIRDS* (Ganpule 2019A). A sighting from Kachchh, by Jugal Tiwari, is discussed in detail in this paper and it was treated to be a 'putative' Lesser / Asian Short-toed Lark. This sighting was widely discussed here in Gujarat and a critical re-assessment of the photos confirmed that its features matched more with a Lesser Short-toed Lark than a Sand Lark. For this bird, based on inputs received from senior birders in the state, it was recommended that this sighting be accepted as a Lesser / Asian Short-toed Lark based on the photographs available, and it be included in the Gujarat checklist. It is included in the checklist as a Lesser Short-toed Lark. Here, *A. rufescens* includes *cheleensis* as a subspecies of Lesser Short-toed Lark, with explanation as follows:

The taxonomy in this group is complex and unresolved, with many authorities treating *cheleensis* as a separate species, the Asian Short-toed Lark. Further study is required for this complex and it is likely that there will be a taxonomic revision for this group in the future – it has been suggested that the *A. rufescens* – *A. raytal* complex should be separated into at least four, or even five, separate species (Ghorbani *et al.* 2020). However, until such a revision is formally done, the various forms likely to occur here in Gujarat, like *persica*, *heinei*, *cheleensis* or even *pseudobaetica*, are retained under one species – the Lesser Short-toed Lark. The exact subspecies occurring

in Gujarat is not known but occurrence of *persica*, *heinei* or *cheleensis* is speculated. The Kachchh sighting is treated as a Lesser Short-toed Lark without going into detailed subspecific identification since separation without trapping and DNA analysis is often impossible.

Birders should look out for this species in the state and more documented sightings will help in further confirming its occurrence here. This species has been listed in trip reports of a few foreign birders visiting Gujarat; all such sightings are from Kachchh. However, photographs are not available for study. Details for a few other sightings could not be traced. Hence, it is likely that this species could be occurring but without corroborative evidence, it is not possible to consider these sightings. It is recommended that all Sand Larks be looked at closely, especially in the winter, as the Lesser Short-toed Lark is very similar and good photos are required for identification.

600. Red Phalarope (*Phalaropus fulicarius*): A Red Phalarope was seen and photographed in Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary in October 2019 (Alvani *et al.* 2020). The identification was confirmed by the many photos taken and it was an addition to the Gujarat checklist.

601. Lemon-rumped Warbler (*Phylloscopus chloronotus*): A *Phylloscopus* warbler, initially identified as a Western Crowned Warbler (*P. occipitalis*), was reported from Ahmedabad in February 2011 and the sighting was published, with photograph, in the Gujarati language birding newsletter 'Vihang' (Trivedi 2012). A re-assessment of the photographs concluded that this individual was a Lemon-rumped Warbler and the identification was confirmed by experts (Rajnikant Trivedi & Devvratsinh Mori, *in print*, information given by Devvratsinh Mori, *pers. comm.*). The Lemon-rumped Warbler was not listed for Gujarat earlier and this is an addition to the avifauna of the state.

602. Large Hawk Cuckoo (*Hierococcyx sparverioides*): A hawk cuckoo seen in Kachchh in November 2019 by S. N. Varu and others caused a lot of debate; some of the features of this individual did not match with the Common Hawk Cuckoo (*H. varius*) and it was speculated that it could be a Large Hawk Cuckoo. Expert opinion was divided, with few experts opining that it was a Large Hawk Cuckoo while others suggesting it as a Common Hawk Cuckoo.

There are well documented records of Large Hawk Cuckoo from Girnar, near Junagadh, where adult birds were photographed twice by Dr. Gaurang Bagda and others (Gaurang Bagda *et al.*, *see elsewhere in this issue*). These birds show well all the features of Large Hawk Cuckoo and a

reassessment of the photographs by experts confirmed the identification. Interestingly, the Large Hawk Cuckoo was recently noted in Maharashtra and a record from Mumbai is also given in Dhaigude *et al.* (2019). So, its occurrence here is not surprising. The Large Hawk Cuckoo is thus added to the Gujarat checklist based on the photographic records from Girnar. The other record from Kachchh mentioned here could also be of this species but is, at present, treated as unconfirmed and needs further checking.

603. Indian Swiftlet (*Aerodramus unicornis*): An Indian Swiftlet was photographed near Kevdi, Mandvi Taluka, Surat (Pankaj Maheria *et al.* see elsewhere in this issue). The photo shows all the diagnostic features of the Indian Swiftlet and was uploaded on the OBI website. The Indian Swiftlet has been noted north of Mumbai, in Tansa WLS, near to the Gujarat border. The location of Kevdi is not very far from Tansa WLS and this species could be occurring in the forests of southern Gujarat but is probably overlooked. The Indian Swiftlet is an addition to the avifauna of Gujarat.

604. Orange-breasted Green Pigeon (*Treron bicinctus*): A group of four green pigeons were seen and photographed near Gir National Park in January 2014. These were initially identified as Yellow-footed Green Pigeons (*T. phoenicopterus*). A subsequent re-examination of the photographs confirmed that these were Orange-breasted Green Pigeons (Ravi Dave, see elsewhere in this issue). This species was not listed in the Gujarat checklist and is an addition to the avifauna of the state.

605. European Honey Buzzard (*Pernis apivorus*): A juvenile honey buzzard was recovered off coastal Porbandar. Since it was injured, it was treated for a few days and recovered from its injuries. This bird showed all the features of a European Honey Buzzard like five fingered primaries, dark carpal patch, small bill and legs. Morphometric data was collected. Expert opinions confirmed it as a European Honey Buzzard. This was the first confirmed record of European Honey Buzzard for Gujarat and India (Vargiya *et al.*, *Birding ASIA* 33).

Details for certain vagrant species included in the checklist, which were photographed recently in Gujarat, are given as follows:

Little Crane (*Porzana parva*): This species was included in the checklist based on a sight record from Little Rann of Kachchh (Mallard & Showler 2010). However, there was no photographic or specimen evidence of its occurrence here in Gujarat. In December 2017, a Little Crane was seen and photographed near Ranjitsagar Dam, Jamnagar (Trivedi 2018), which was the first photo of this species from India. Since then, the Little Crane has been recorded in many locations

like Khijadiya in Jamnagar, Anand and Kheda Districts, Nal Sarovar, Porbandar and also in central Gujarat (photos on OBI website). Thus, there remains no doubt that the Little Crane occurs here fairly regularly in suitable habitats and its addition in the Gujarat checklist is further strengthened by these photo documentations.

White-tailed Eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*): The White-tailed Eagle was included in the Gujarat checklist based on a record from Kachchh (Himmatsinhji 1970). There was no specimen record or photo of this species from Gujarat. A juvenile / immature White-tailed Eagle was seen in Velavadar in January 2018 and this individual was in the same area for almost 3-4 weeks (Bhatt 2018). It was seen by many birders and photographed, thus confirming its occurrence here.

Fulvous Whistling Duck (*Dendrocygna bicolor*): In the Gujarat checklist (Ganpule 2016), the Fulvous Whistling Duck was included based on historical records from Kachchh. In April 2019, a pair of Fulvous Whistling Ducks was seen and photographed near Vadodara (Naria *et al.* 2019). This sighting is important and established that this species does still occur in Gujarat and is a vagrant here.

Baikal Teal (*Anas formosa*): A male Baikal Teal was seen in February 2018 in Bhavnagar, which was the first photographic record for Gujarat (Mishra 2018). It was seen in the same area for almost one month. It was included in the Gujarat checklist based on two previous records. This sighting from Bhavnagar was an important record of this species for Gujarat.

Red-necked Stint (*Calidris ruficollis*): The Red-necked Stint was included in the Gujarat checklist based on a ringing record from Kachchh. A Red-necked Stint in breeding plumage was seen and photographed near Mahuva in May 2019 (Bhil 2019). This sighting further confirmed the occurrence of the species for Gujarat and was the first photographic record for the state.

Rosy Pipit (*Anthus roseatus*): Specimens of Rosy Pipit were collected from Bhavnagar in April 1951 (Dharmakumarsinhji 1951) and this was the basis of its inclusion in the Gujarat checklist. A Rosy Pipit was photographed in Kachchh in October 2019 by Jaysukh Parekh 'Suman' (Parekh 2020) and the identification was confirmed based on the photos and video taken. This was the second record and first photographic record of the species for Gujarat.

Pale Rock Sparrow (*Carpospiza brachydactyla*): A large flock of Pale Rock Sparrows was seen and photographed in Kachchh in January 2012 by Jugal Tiwari, when it was the first record for Gujarat and India (Tiwari 2012). A small flock, of about 10-12 individuals, was seen in Little Rann of Kachchh in October 2019 and another sighting was noted

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in Rajkot in January 2019 (Ganpule & Karia 2020). These sightings, in October and January, suggest that this species could be occurring here and is probably overlooked due to identification difficulties.

Large-billed Leaf Warbler (*Phylloscopus magnirostris*): A Large-billed Leaf Warbler was seen and photographed near Mahuva in October 2019 by Mahendra Bhil (Bhil 2020). This was only the second sighting of this species for Gujarat. An earlier sighting from Little Rann of Kachchh in November 2009 was the reason for the inclusion of this species in the checklist (Ganpule 2016). The present sighting further confirms its occurrence here.

Black-throated Thrush (*Turdus atrogularis*): The Black-throated Thrush was included in the Gujarat checklist based on historical records from Kachchh. In December 2019, a male Black-throated Thrush was seen and photographed in Chhari-Dhand, Kachchh (Kapdi & Kulkarni 2020). This was a record of the species in Gujarat after more than 100 years and is an important record for the state.

Taxonomic notes

BCSG follows taxonomy as per Grimmett *et al.* (2011). Since the publication of this reference, changes have been proposed / incorporated for many species. The India checklist (Praveen *et al.* 2016) initially followed Howard & Moore 4th Edition (Dickinson & Remsen 2013; Dickinson & Christidis 2014). In the subsequent taxonomic update to the India checklist (Praveen *et al.* 2018), the authors took a pragmatic approach, wherein for the species lumps/splits for which there is consensus amongst the three major taxonomies – BirdLife International/HBW (currently HBW-BirdLife version 9.1) (BirdLife International 2017), IOC (Gill & Donsker 2017), and eBird/Clements (Clements *et al.* 2017), – changes in species limits were approved provided the above three taxonomies were in consensus.

BCSG has now decided to follow the taxonomy as per the India Checklist v3.0 (Praveen *et al.* 2019B), but with a few changes. The new checklist, with updated taxonomy, is going to be published by BCSG in the near future (Dr. Bakul Trivedi, *pers. comm.*). The taxonomic changes from the India Checklist v3.0 which are being adopted for the Gujarat checklist will be explained in detail in the upcoming checklist.

The additions in the Gujarat checklist when compared to the species documented in the earlier checklists (Ganpule 2016, 2017), due to changes in taxonomy, are given as follows:

(1) Taimyr Gull (*Larus taimyrensis*): In a recent article on large white-headed gulls (Ganpule 2019B), the Taimyr Gull

was treated as a distinct species; the Gujarat checklist treated it as a subspecies of Heuglin's Gull (*L. heuglini*). The occurrence of *taimyrensis* – type gulls in Gujarat is beyond any doubt and such gulls have been well documented here. However, the taxonomy is complex and occurrence of Vega Gull (*L. vegae*) – type of gulls in the state has also been speculated. Till such a time the taxonomy becomes stable, it was suggested that the Taimyr Gull be treated as a distinct species. This treatment is different from the India checklist v3.0 and the earlier Gujarat checklist taxonomy. This was widely discussed with senior birders here and the same was accepted for the Gujarat checklist.

(2) Mongolian Gull (*Larus vegae mongolicus*): Gulls similar to Mongolian Gulls have been documented 3-4 times in Gujarat and it is thought to be a vagrant here (Ganpule 2019B). The identification of such birds can be confirmed beyond any doubt only by DNA studies but based on the photos available, it can be seen that these individuals matched to Mongolian Gulls, which was confirmed by gull experts. The Mongolian Gull was treated as a subspecies of Caspian Gull (*L. cachinnans*) in the Gujarat checklist. The taxonomy for this gull is followed as per Malling Olsen (2018) and is different from the India Checklist v3.0. It was decided to treat the Mongolian Gull as a subspecies of Vega Gull as this seems to be the preferred treatment as of now.

(3) Sykes's Short-toed Lark (*Calandrella dukhunensis*): Also known as the Eastern Short-toed Lark or Mongolian Short-toed Lark, this species was split from Greater Short-toed Lark (*C. brachydactyla*). The Sykes's Short-toed Lark occurs in Gujarat and there are specimen records as well as recent sightings documented with photos – see Ganpule (2018). In the Gujarat checklist, the Sykes's Short-toed Lark was not treated as a separate species and this is an addition due to the recent taxonomic changes.

The Variable Wheatear (*Oenanthe picata*) complex: Shirihi & Svensson (2018) split the Variable Wheatear into Blyth's Wheatear (*O. picata*), Gould's Wheatear (*O. capistrata*) and Strickland's Wheatear (*O. opistholeuca*); this treatment was suggested as the best solution for this complex till further DNA studies are carried out in the areas where these forms breed and more data is available. In the Gujarat checklist, the Variable Wheatear was treated as single species but it should be noted that *picata*, *capistrata* and *opistholeuca* occur here as winter migrants. After discussions with senior birders here, it was decided that this split should be accepted – the checklist will now have, in addition to Blyth's Wheatear, two more species from this complex:

(4) Gould's Wheatear (*O. capistrata*): This is seen in Kachchh, Saurashtra and surrounding areas. The exact distribution in Gujarat is not well known but birders should look for this in suitable habitats to know its distribution range here. It occurs here regularly, in arid areas, and should be documented, preferably with photos, to know its distribution here.

(5) Strickland's Wheatear (*O. opistholeuca*): This is somewhat uncommon / rare and there are not too many records of it in Gujarat. The Strickland's Wheatear has been documented in Kachchh, Saurashtra and N Gujarat, but nowhere is it common. More sightings will help in knowing its status and distribution in the state.

It should be noted that other authorities have not accepted this split and treat these as morphs. While it is radical to accept this split, only future studies in its breeding areas will clarify the taxonomy. Till such studies are done, we accept this split into three species. This can be reassessed in the future after results of DNA studies are published.

Though BCSG has decided to adopt the taxonomy as per the India Checklist v3.0, there has been a recent taxonomic revision for the India Checklist; the new India checklist v4.0 follows taxonomy and nomenclature as per eBird/Clements and IOC (Praveen *et al.* 2020). Changes in species limits (either splits or lumps) will be adopted only if both the taxonomies (eBird/Clements and IOC) accept the splits/lumps consistently for all the subspecies of the parent taxon occurring in South Asia. Independent review of emerging taxonomic literature will also be considered if warranted. This approach has resulted in some changes from the India Checklist v3.0. However, at this stage, BCSG has decided to follow the taxonomy mainly as per the India Checklist v3.0. Whether to adopt this change for the Gujarat checklist, and follow the revised India Checklist with its updated taxonomy, can be decided in the future. There is also another major initiative in the works; the IOU has formed a working group on avian checklists, which will produce and maintain an open access global checklist of the birds of the world. It is intended to serve as a benchmark for all avian taxa. This resource, when available, will be a landmark in avian checklists. This development will also be closely watched and can be used as a reference in the future.

The issue of having special categories in the Gujarat Checklist

One of the much discussed aspects of the Gujarat checklist is the lack of categories to keep birds of unknown origin, escapees from captivity or human assisted / ship assisted birds in a separate list, which does not form a part of the

main checklist. Many state or country lists classify species as per such categories. For example, the British Ornithologists' Union Records Committee (BOURC) has species categories A, B, C & D wherein each species is assigned to a category, depending on the criteria for its admission to the British List; only those species in categories A, B & C form the main British List. The India Checklist, from 2019 onwards, has Appendix 1 and Appendix 2, wherein Appendix 1 lists the species that have occurred in the country by virtue of human assistance and Appendix 2 lists species for which the origins are unknown. The species listed in Appendix 1 & 2 are kept outside the main India checklist.

The Gujarat checklist, at present, does not have special categories. A species is either added to the main checklist or rejected. For example, White-faced Whistling Duck has not been added to the Gujarat checklist while Variable Sunbird was included in the list, with reasons and explanations given as to why this decision was taken. Similarly, the Thick-billed Green Pigeon was not accepted to the list. Though decisions taken for all accepted or rejected species are logically explained, some species can be put in special categories in the list so that checklist users know about such species and their records in the state. Categories can be added to the Gujarat checklist in the future, which will be helpful for a few species for which there is inadequate information, which are suspected to have arrived by human assistance or are of unknown origin. This is something which is being seriously considered and could be done in the next update or when the entire checklist is again reviewed taxonomically in the future. The decision on whether to add categories to the checklist will be taken keeping in mind all the pros and cons of such a move.

The decisions for inclusion or exclusion of a species in the checklist are often controversial, with dissenting views expressed by experts. Many such examples are there where there is no unanimity. But, this is to be expected since it is often impossible to be sure whether a record is of a genuine vagrant or is ship assisted / human assisted or of an escapee and any decision taken in such cases is always open to questions. Though the decisions for inclusion or exclusion of a species for the Gujarat checklist have been logically explained for each species, these decisions may not be acceptable to all. But, they were taken based on informal discussions with senior birders and majority opinion was considered. Hence, while the India Checklist v3.0 has been taken as a base for taxonomy and nomenclature, records / sightings for a few species have been assessed critically at the state level and taxonomy has been looked at independently, by referring to literature published

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in various national and international journals and global checklists. This has ensured that there is no inflexibility (which is seen when following only one source or reference) for the checklist.

Discussion

The number of species documented in Gujarat, along with the Union Territories of Daman & Diu and Dadra & Nagar Haveli, with updated taxonomy (mainly following India Checklist v3.0 but with few changes) is now **609**. In the earlier Gujarat checklist (Ganpule 2016), the Black-eared Kite (*Milvus migrans lineatus*) was assigned a separate number, while in the forthcoming new and updated checklist, it is listed under Black Kite (*M. migrans*). With the addition of 5 species due to changes in taxonomy and deletion of one species from the earlier list, the total number of species for the state comes to 609 [605 (as per details here) – 1 (removal of Black-eared Kite) + 5 (species added due to taxonomic changes and listed here) = 609], which is the same as per the new and updated checklist for the birds of Gujarat. Thus, this update brings the list of species documented in the state, till 31 March 2020, in line with the new, to be published, Gujarat checklist. Some of the splits accepted in the Gujarat checklist can be considered as bold and forward looking but it is always possible that these may be endorsed by future research or these can be reviewed in the future.

Since the taxonomy will now be updated and followed mainly as per the India checklist v3.0, but with few changes, it is hoped that this will bring the Gujarat checklist in agreement with the latest taxonomic developments. As with any state/regional checklist, the taxonomy needs to be updated periodically to keep the checklist in line with the latest taxonomic changes. It can be seen that since the publication of the first update to the Gujarat checklist in December 2017, there have been many additions as well as interesting records documented in the state and taxonomy for a few species has been revised.

The bird watching community in Gujarat is growing and birders are out in the field in all seasons, helping add new records and documenting important sightings with photographs. But, there is still very less data on pelagic birds. Gujarat, with its long coastline, can become one of the hot spots for pelagic birding and this can also be developed as an income generating activity for fishermen. Towards this, NGO's and the Forest Dept. can take active interest and develop a network which can be beneficial for both, the birders as well as fishermen, and this can generate data on pelagic species occurring off the Gujarat coast, which could add new species to the state checklist. The Gujarat coastline is not a well birded

area and more pelagic trips are needed to get an idea regarding the species occurring here.

As stated in the first update, checklists are dynamic and need to be reviewed periodically. It can be seen that there is potential for adding the Himalayan / Oriental Cuckoo to the state checklist after the record is properly reviewed by experts. In the next few years, it is hoped that the birding community in the state will keep on growing, which will help in getting more birders with cameras out in the field. This will result in getting more data and interesting records from the state. The next update will again aim to cover all such new and interesting records.

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Sighting of Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus* in Little Rann of Kachchh

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In the Indian Subcontinent, the Little Bittern (*Ixobrychus minutus*) is known to be a resident but breeding only in Sindh, NWFP, Gilgit, Kashmir and Baluchistan; it is widely recorded as a passage / winter migrant elsewhere in India and Pakistan (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). In India, there are isolated sightings from the northern states like Rajasthan, Delhi, Punjab, Uttaranchal, and Uttar Pradesh; the records from the south-western states are from Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Kerala (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). While none of the field guides show records of the species from Gujarat, there many published records in the past few years (Bhatt 2003; Trivedi 2015; Bendre 2017; Sudhir 2017; Magiawala 2018). There is also a record of

probable breeding of Little Bittern at Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary (Trivedi & Parasharya 2019). Recently, there was a sighting in Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary in October 2019, where an adult male was seen over three weeks and widely reported (photos on 'eBird' and OBI website).

On 16 November 2019 I was on a birding tour with Swayam Thakkar, Shreyas Bharadwaj, Desigan AGV and Santosh Mulik at the Little Rann of Kachchh. Inside the Rann (23° 15' N, 71° 35' E), about 16 kms from Kharaghoda, on the vast open mudflat, I saw a bird but could not identify it given the oddity of its structure when seen from afar and the location. Upon a closer inspection, we identified it as a juvenile Little Bittern based on the following features: a small-sized bittern with medium-length bill, black on forehead, crown, and nape prominent; dark brown stripes on ventral side of the neck, dark upperparts (including tertials) with pale whitish edges, pale wing coverts and heavily streaked dark underparts.

In juvenile plumage, both Little Bittern and Yellow Bittern (*Ixobrychus sinensis*) can be quite similar and identification is challenging. The contrast between the dark back and pale wing panel as well as the prominently dark nape and crown are said to be important for identification; further, the heavily streaked brownish underparts, shorter bill and the field observation of