

## Short Birding Notes



### Slaty-breasted Rail *Gallirallus striatus* near Dhari, Amreli District

On Saturday, 21 November 2018, I went for birding at Khodiyar Temple, near Khodiyar Dam, Dhari, Amreli District. Near the temple, there is a stream, which runs off the river. There are lot of reeds and grasses, with muddy areas in between. At around 10:00 hrs, I saw a rail (*Rallus* sp.) coming out of the reeds and searching for food in the area. I took some photos. With the help of the field guide and photos, I confirmed this as a Slaty-breasted Rail (*Gallirallus striatus*) based on the stout red bill, faintly whitish barred upperparts and pale chestnut crown and nape. It seemed to be an immature individual. On the next day, I went again, but could not find the bird. I heard its call from a nearby area but could not see it. The Slaty-breasted Rail is rare in Saurashtra, though sightings from Barda (near Porbandar) and Nal Sarovar are documented; it is a regular monsoon migrant to southern Gujarat (Ganpule 2016). This is a sighting from the early winter and a very good record for our area.

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### Steppe Grey Shrike *Lanius meridionalis pallidirostris* in Bhavnagar

On 16 December 2018, in the morning at 07:30 hrs, my friend Vivek Upadhyay and I were passing through the cable bridge near Bhavnagar. We saw one shrike (*Lanius* sp.) perched on an electric wire. We stopped to watch it but it flew away in the nearby bushes. To confirm its identification, we searched for it, found it and I took a few photographs. After coming home and sharing the photos on social media, it was identified as a Steppe Grey Shrike (*Lanius meridionalis pallidirostris*) by the pale bill, pale black mask in front of eye (not extending on forehead), long primary projection, pinkish wash to underparts, white scapulars etc. The Steppe Grey Shrike is an uncommon to rare winter visitor to Gujarat, and has been mainly recorded from Kachchh (Ganpule 2016). This is probably the first record of the Steppe Grey Shrike from Bhavnagar area.

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### Little Crake *Porzana parva* near Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary

On 13 March 2019, in the evening, I was bird watching on the outskirts of Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary. In an area with reeds and water, I saw and photographed an adult male Little Crake (*Porzana parva*). It was identified by the red base to bill and the longer primary projection. Its plumage was typical of adult male. This individual was seen here for 2-3 weeks, in the same area. The Little Crake is a vagrant to Gujarat, with recent records from Jamnagar and Anand/Kheda Districts (photos on the website Oriental Bird Images). This was the first time it has been recorded near Nal Sarovar.

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### Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush *Monticola saxatilis* in Kuchchh

I saw and photographed a Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush (*Monticola saxatilis*) near Kunathiya Bustard Sanctuary at Naliya, Kachchh, on 20 January 2019. It seemed to be either a female or a first-winter bird. The habitat is open grassland with some small bushes. I saw the bird perched on a *Prosopis juliflora* and since it was quite confiding, I spent some time with this individual and observed its behaviour. Only one bird was seen. The Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush was foraging on the ground, between small rocks and in the dry grass. I saw it go near a *Ziziphus nummularia* tree and collect a fruit from the ground and eat it. The Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush is a rare passage migrant or vagrant in Gujarat, with recent sightings from Saurashtra, Kachchh and Central Gujarat. This sighting is from the winter and suggests that a few individuals could straggle to Kachchh in the winter.

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#### **Brown Hawk Owl *Ninox scutulata* feeding on a bat**

On 2 April 2019, we visited the outskirts of Rajpipla, in Narmada District. It was around midnight when we heard a very faint call, a *whoo-wuk*, a couple of times, and after searching, the call became very clear, but the bird was not visible. After trying to locate the bird, it suddenly flew away, disappeared for a few seconds, came back and perched on a branch of a tree. It was readily identified as a Brown Hawk Owl (*Ninox scutulata*). After taking a few photographs, we were surprised to see that the owl had made a fresh bat kill. After waiting for about 5 to 10 minutes, the owl started to feed on the bat. We could not identify the species of the bat it had caught. The owl tore off small pieces and would take a bite or two, look around, and repeat it. The Brown Hawk Owl feeds mainly on insects, but also takes frogs, lizards, small birds and mammals, including bats (Olsen *et al.* 2019). There are very few photographs of it feeding on a bat.

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#### **White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* at Rajkot**

We visited Randarda Lake on the morning of 20 April 2019 for participating in a cleaning program by Wild Saurashtra Group. We saw an unusual and different type of tern amongst a flock of Whiskered Terns (*Chlidonias hybrida*) and River Terns (*Sterna aurantia*) coming to feed on *ganthiya* (a fried snack) offered by local people. We identified it as a White-winged Tern (*Chlidonias leucopterus*) in full breeding plumage. We saw a total of three White-winged Terns here. Afterwards, Ashok Mashru also saw a single White-winged Tern at Nyari-I Dam on 24 April 2019, and again on the morning of 29 April 2019. Earlier, Raju Karia had seen a White-winged Tern at Nyari-I Dam on 16 April 2014 (Karia 2015). This shows that there is a possibility of it visiting more wetlands in Rajkot area but is overlooked due to similarity with Whiskered Tern in the winter and is noted in early summer due to its conspicuous plumage.

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#### **Black-capped Kingfisher *Halcyon pileata* near Anand**

On 10 November 2015, I was travelling between Tarapur and Pariej, near Anand. I saw and photographed a Black-capped Kingfisher (*Halcyon pileata*) perched on the side of the road. On a closer approach, the bird flew away and perched on the banks of a small river nearby. I was able to take good photographs, which confirmed the identification. The Black-capped Kingfisher is uncommon or rare, but widely distributed in Gujarat, with sightings from coastal as well as inland areas in almost the entire state (Rank & Parasharya 2004, Ganpule 2016). Very few records from Anand District are known.

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#### **Further observations on breeding of Coppersmith Barbet *Megalaima haemacephala***

I had described, in detail, the breeding of Coppersmith Barbet (*Megalaima haemacephala*) earlier in Rajkot (Mashru 2018). I would like to add an observation and a change for this year i.e. 2019, compared to the earlier years breeding observations (2014-2018). I had stated in 'nesting hole' in Mashru (2018) that 'it never uses the same hole in the next season'. In the month of October 2018, the birds started digging a nest hole at two different places but stopped after a few days. In the first week of March, I saw the adult go in the nest hole made in 2018. Then, around 10 March 2019, looking at the behaviour of the pair, I presumed that incubation had started. On 30 March 2019, I saw the bird go in to feed the chicks for the first time. Further, the same nest hole was used for the second brood, which was also successful. So, the Coppersmith Barbet used the same nest hole made in the previous year. The exact reasons for using the nest hole from the previous season remain unclear.

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### Grey Hypocolius *Hypocolius ampelinus* in Khijadiya Bird Sanctuary

On 2 February 2019, we went to Khijadiya Bird Sanctuary, near Jamnagar. When we were moving on a road in part II of the sanctuary, a bird flew in and perched on a branch of a *Salvadora* sp. tree, which caught our attention. After watching through binoculars and taking photos, we identified it as a female Grey Hypocolius (*Hypocolius ampelinus*). There were many *Salvadora* trees on this road, and so we were hopeful of seeing more birds as the Grey Hypocolius likes to feed on the fruits of this tree. On moving further along the road, we found and photographed two males. The Grey Hypocolius is a regular winter visitor to Banni area of Kachchh but is rare in Jamnagar with previous records from Narara (Jadeja 2015) and Khijadiya (Buch 2018, Kunal Joshi, *pers. comm.*). Hence, the present sighting suggests that this species might be a rare but regular winter visitor to suitable habitats in Jamnagar District.

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### Unusual feeding behaviour of Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*

I visited Chhari-Dhand, in Greater Rann of Kachchh, on 7 December 2018, for watching raptors in the area. I saw and stopped to photograph a Long-legged Buzzard (*Buteo rufinus*) which was perched on the ground. The bird was preening its feathers and I started to photograph it. The bird preened some of its back feathers and pulled out small white feathers from its back. I was amazed to see that the Long-legged Buzzard then ate these feathers. It also picked up some small white feathers which had fallen on the ground and ate them. On sharing this observation with experts, Hans Peeters suggested that this bird was eating its moulting down, which would perhaps help in formation of a pellet of indigestible prey remains, which would soon be ejected. This was something new for me and I had never seen any bird of prey eating its own down feathers. I thank Hans Peeters for explaining this behaviour of the Long-legged Buzzard.

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### Sulphur-bellied Warbler *Phylloscopus griseolus* in Kachchh

On 9 December 2018, we went to explore a hilly and rocky area on the Bhuj - Mundra Road, near Bharapar Village. After some time, we saw a warbler (*Phylloscopus* sp.) which was continuously flying from one rock to another, moving and foraging. We thought that it was something new, and so we waited there to get some photographs. We managed to get a few photographs from a distance. We identified it as a Sulphur-bellied Warbler (*Phylloscopus griseolus*). We waited for some time, but then it disappeared. We shared the photographs with experts, and the identification was confirmed by them. The Sulphur-bellied Warbler is a rare winter migrant to Kachchh, with recent records from Phot Mahadev and Bhuj in Kachchh (Tiwari 2016). Thus, this sighting adds to the records of this species from Kachchh.

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### White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* near Navsari

On 19 September 2018, we went to Sultanpur Wetland near Navsari. After watching flamingos (*Phoenicopterus* sp.), we came on to the main road and suddenly, we saw a group of 20 to 25 terns (*Sterna* and *Chlidonias* sp.) flying around the wetland. I observed, from the moving car, a tern with black underwing coverts and black belly, which looked different from the remaining terns. So, we immediately photographed it. For identification, we contacted Anil Bhatt and it was identified as White-winged Tern (*Chlidonias leucopterus*). It seemed to be moulting out of breeding plumage. Anil Bhatt further told us that though the White-winged Tern is a widespread winter migrant to Gujarat, this might be the first photographic record of a White-winged Tern from southern Gujarat.

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### Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina* near Bilimora, Navsari District

A Red-crested Pochard (*Netta rufina*) was seen and photographed for many days in January 2019 at Devsar, near Bilimora, in Navsari District. It was seen in a large wetland in the area. According to senior bird watchers here, it was the first record of the species after ten years as it was last seen here in January 2008. There was one pair seen in this area. The Red-crested Pochard is known to occur in wetlands of Central and North Gujarat while it is rare in Saurashtra and South Gujarat. Thus, this sighting from Navsari District after ten years is quite surprising and it seems that it visits wetlands in this district only rarely.

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### White-browed Bulbul *Pycnonotus luteolus* near Rajkot

A White-browed Bulbul (*Pycnonotus luteolus*) was seen and photographed near Sindhavadar, in Ta: Wankaner, Dist: Rajkot, on 26 January 2019. The bird was seen perched in the bushes and we managed to take a few photographs. The area is a scrub surrounded by farms. We were surprised to see the White-browed Bulbul here as it is quite rare in Saurashtra. Though a recent record from Rajkot is known (Bhatt & Trivedi 2016), this location is more than 50 kms from the place where it was seen earlier and there are no other recent records from the region.

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### Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus* near Amalsad, Navsari District

I visited Amalsad outskirts, in Navsari District, on 5 December 2019, with Viren Desai. We had gone there to see and photograph a Great Bittern (*Botaurus stellaris*) which was found by Praveen Patel and Anil Bhatt. We reached there at around 07:00 hrs and saw the Great Bittern at around at 08.15 hrs. We searched the area for other waders / water birds. At around 10:00 hrs, I saw a bird fly from one patch of reeds towards another and land some distance away in the water. Before it went inside the reeds, we managed to get a record shot from long distance and we immediately identified it as a Water Rail (*Rallus aquaticus*) by its long, down-curved red bill, streaked olive-brown upperparts etc. The Water Rail is uncommon / rare in Navsari District.

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**Errata: Flamingo Gujarat 17 (1)** - Page 6: In editorial comments, reference of Praveen et al. (2014) is quoted, which is not included in the list of references. The details of the reference are: Praveen J, Jayapal, R, & Pittie, A., 2014. Notes on Indian rarities - 2: Waterfowl, diving waterbirds, and gulls and terns. *Indian BIRDS* 9 (5&6): 113–136