

Short Birding Notes



Little Bittern in Pariej Lake

While birding around Pariej Lake in Kheda district, as we travelled parallel to the canal, we observed a Little Bittern (*Ixobrychus minutus*) on 13 October 2017 at around 08:00 hrs, hidden within the reeds. It was identified by its black mantle and crest, whitish wings and pale yellowish stripes on the neck and upper breast. So, on the next day on 14 October 2017, at around 08:35 hrs, we waited at the same spot and soon it emerged from the reeds and this time, was clearly visible. The habitat where it was observed was an area with reeds growing around a canal opening, with very shallow flowing water and mud. Due to traffic, the bird remained shy and after a while, went back into the reeds and was hidden. The Little Bittern is a vagrant to Gujarat, with a recent sighting near Surat (Bendre 2017). This was the first time I had noted it in Pariej.

[A sighting of a juvenile Little Bittern was reported from Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary in September 2017 by Rajni Trivedi; images are posted on the Oriental Bird Images website. The above mentioned records are the third and fourth of the species for Gujarat – Eds]

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White-capped Bunting at Pavagadh, Vadodara district

On 26 January 2016, at around at 16:30 hrs during a trip to Pavagadh hills, Champaner Fort in Vadodara district, I saw a male White-capped Bunting (*Emberiza stewarti*). I saw it only for a few seconds from a long distance and managed to take photos before it swiftly took off and disappeared in the bushes. The identification was confirmed by this individual having all the characteristic features of the species, which can be seen in the photo. The White-capped Bunting is a rare winter visitor in Saurashtra and Kachchh (Ganpule 2016). This is an important record of this species for central Gujarat, as this is probably the first photographic record from this region. There are recent sight records from Nal Sarovar (Trivedi 2016) and Porbandar (Vargiya 2017), but the White-capped Bunting is rare in Gujarat.

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Sightings of Grey-bellied Cuckoo in Saurashtra

Hingolghadh Nature Education Sanctuary: On 19 July 2017, I was birding at Hingolghadh Nature Education Sanctuary in Rajkot district. In the morning at around 11:00 hrs, I saw a small orange bird flying in the scrub forest. It landed on a tree near a water source. I observed it for over five minutes. I was able to identify it as a hepatic morph Grey-bellied Cuckoo (*Cacomantis passerinus*). This species has been recorded from Hingolghadh by Dhaval Vargiya on 12 August 2016 (Vargiya 2016, ebird). It is considered to be a monsoon migrant to the forests of south Gujarat and Gir NP (Bagda *et al.* 2015). These records indicate that it is probably more widespread in Saurashtra.

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Rampara Wildlife Sanctuary: On 17 July 2016, I was birding in Rampara Wildlife Sanctuary, near Wankaner, in Morbi district. At around 18:00 hrs in the evening, we saw and heard the call of a Grey-bellied Cuckoo (*Cacomantis passerinus*) near the forest guesthouse. The bird was calling constantly and as we approached closer, it flew away and started calling from a different location. This was the first time we had noted this species here. It seems that the Grey-bellied Cuckoo is a monsoon migrant to this area as it has not been noted here in the winter months.

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Himalayan Griffon near Jamnagar

A Himalayan Griffon (*Gyps himalayensis*) was found injured near Nevimoda village, Ta: Aliabada, about 15 kms from Jamnagar. As per information given by local villagers, it had collided with a windmill blade. We rescued it and transferred the bird to the Peter Scott Bird Hospital, Jamnagar. With the hard work of dedicated hospital staff, the bird recovered and was released in suitable habitat. Himalayan Griffon is a winter vagrant in Gujarat (Ganpule 2016). Most of its earlier records are from Kachchh area and it is not known to occur in Jamnagar district.

[Gujarat is one of the leading states in wind power generation in India. However, collision of birds with windmill blades is a very less studied topic here in the state. Birders are requested to provide data on birds affected by windmills in Gujarat – Eds]

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Amur Falcon in Navsari

On 12 November 2017, we were participating in a bird count organised as a tribute to Dr. Salim Ali. We had just completed our survey at around 09:30 hrs, and planned to visit one more location to check for Pacific Golden Plovers (*Pluvialis fulva*) near the sea shore area around Machhiwad, Navsari. We saw that one small falcon (*Falco* sp.) came from the sea side and perched on a tree. We took some photos and were surprised to see that it was an Amur Falcon (*Falco amurensis*). It seemed to be a juvenile or a female. The Amur Falcon is an uncommon/rare passage migrant in Gujarat (Ganpule 2016) and there are a few previous records from this region (Joshi 2008, Jat 2010), but, it is rare here.

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Saker Falcon in Little Rann of Kachchh

We went for birding to Wild Ass Sanctuary, Little Rann of Kachchh, on 19 November 2017. We saw one adult Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*). It was afternoon and we were observing it. We also found another falcon nearby which was a juvenile. So we thought it could be a juvenile Peregrine Falcon. Its crop was full and it did not fly away and was perched nearby. We took some photos and since we could not identify it, we sent the images to Nirav Bhatt. It was identified as a juvenile Saker Falcon (*Falco cherrug*). We visited the Wild Ass Sanctuary on 2 December 2017. We found the juvenile Saker Falcon again and this time, we observed that a Peregrine Falcon was mobbing the juvenile Saker Falcon. This species is a rare winter visitor to Gujarat, mainly seen in the Little-, and Greater Rann of Kachchh (Mori & Shah 2017).

[Two Saker Falcons were seen and photographed in the Rann this year. This individual was seen till mid-January by many bird watchers – Eds]

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Indian Cuckoo in Dadra and Nagar Haveli

On 16 October 2017, at around 09:00 hrs, I saw and photographed an Indian Cuckoo (*Cuculus micropterus*) in the forest area of Dadra and Nagar Haveli (UT). The bird showed a rufous-buff wash to the upper breast, while the barring on the underparts was more diffuse but irregular and widely spaced. The eye appeared dark. Based on the above features, it was identified as an immature Indian Cuckoo. It could have been an immature female. There are a few records of Indian Cuckoo from south Gujarat (Shull 1962, Monga & Naoroji 1984, Joshi & Jat 2004); its exact status is not known but it is probably an uncommon or rare monsoon migrant in south Gujarat (Ganpule 2016). The sighting of Indian Cuckoo from this area is probably the first documented sighting for the Union Territory.

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Sightings of Great Bittern in central Gujarat

Vadodara: On 13 December 2017, I was on a morning birding trip at Timbi Lake near Vadodara, which is a home for Yellow Bittern (*Ixobrychus sinensis*), Cinnamon Bittern (*I. cinnamomeus*) & Black Bittern (*Dupetor flavicollis*). I observed that a bittern come out from a grass patch, which was slow in flight compared to other bitterns and its size was comparatively larger. Having seen bitterns before, I quickly realized that this was different. I was lucky to get a few flying photos of this bird. I waited for quite a long time, but it was not seen again. After checking my images and comparing with those on the internet, it was confirmed that this was a Great Bittern (*Botaurus stellaris*).

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Khambhat Taluka: On 5 February 2017, in the evening at around 18:00 hrs, I was bird watching at Tarakpur-Pandad wetland, in Khambhat Taluka, Anand district. I saw and photographed a Great Bittern (*Botaurus stellaris*), which was perched in the open at the edge of the water. It was easily recognized by its cryptic plumage. The Great Bittern is uncommon/rare winter visitor in Gujarat, and this was a surprise sighting for me.

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Grasshopper Warbler near Rajkot

I visited Khirasara vidi, near Rajkot, in the morning on 8 October 2017. In a small bush, I found two Grasshopper Warblers (*Locustella naevia*) foraging. At first, I mistook them for Common Babblers (*Turdoides caudata*), but these birds were much smaller in size. So, I went closer and took some photos of one bird while the other bird went into the bush. I identified it as a Grasshopper Warbler based on its typical plumage and structure. There have been recent sightings of Grasshopper Warbler in Gujarat (Ganpule 2017, Ovalekar *et al.* 2017), but it is uncommon here.

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Grey Hypocolius in Khijadiya Bird Sanctuary, Jamnagar

On 14 January 2018, we visited Khijadiya Bird Sanctuary, near Jamnagar. At around 08:30 hrs, we saw a male Grey Hypocolius (*Hypocolius ampelinus*) perched on a branch of a tree about 30 meters from us. It was seen for about five minutes, and moved about on the branch, before it flew off out of sight. Our guide Sanjay Makwana identified it. We could take good images and confirmed its identity. The Grey Hypocolius has now been noted in many locations outside Fulay, in Kachchh (its regular wintering area), including a sighting from Narara, near Jamnagar (Bhalodia & Mashru 2016). Thus, this is a further record of its occurrence outside Kachchh.

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Crested Hawk Eagle preying on an Oriental Honey-buzzard in Gir NP

On 13 February 2018, I was on route no. 6 (Andhari area) in the Gir National Park. At around 11:30 hrs, I observed a Crested Hawk Eagle (*Nisaetus cirrhatus*) preying on an Oriental Honey-buzzard (*Pernis ptilorhynchus*). The eagle had caught the Honey-buzzard and was perched on the ground with the prey in its talons, just starting to feed on it. The honey-buzzard was probably a female, as indicated by its plumage. The Crested Hawk Eagle is known to prey on large birds like pheasants, junglefowl etc. (Naoraji 2006), and has also been recorded to prey on a Mottled Wood Owl (*Strix ocellata*) in Gir National Park (Joshi 2016). But, this was the first time I had seen it preying on an Oriental Honey-buzzard and this is an addition to its diet.

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Black-capped Kingfisher in Ratanmal Wildlife Sanctuary

On 4 February 2018, I went for bird watching to Ratanmahal Wildlife Sanctuary, near Dahod. Near the Udalmahuda Campsite in the forest, I saw and photographed a Black-capped Kingfisher (*Halcyon pileata*). It was identified by its purplish blue upperparts with black wing coverts, typical black cap, white throat with red bill and pale orange-buff belly and flanks. Black-capped Kingfisher is given as an uncommon to rare resident and local migrant in Gujarat, with isolated records from across the state (Ganpule 2016). However, this was my first sighting of the Black-capped Kingfisher from Ratanmahal and it is an important record for this area.

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Brown-breasted Flycatcher in Jessore Sanctuary

On 31 December 2017, a Brown-breasted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa muttui*) was seen and photographed by me and my friends Raju Saini, Ashutosh Khatri and Jayant Khatri at Jessore Sloth Bear Sanctuary in Banaskantha district of north Gujarat. It was seen by the riverside in an area with large trees. After observing the birds (more than one individual was present) for some time, we could get very close and take good photos. The Brown-breasted Flycatcher is a rare winter migrant to Gujarat (Ganpule 2016). There are previous records from Polo forest and Deesa in north Gujarat, but it is rare here.

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Griffon Vulture near Jamnagar

On 7 January 2018, we were birding near Vijarakhi Dam and Sapda, on the Jamnagar-Junagadh Highway. While returning back, we saw two birds soaring high in the sky near Theba village, about 6 kms from Jamnagar. One of the birds was bigger, so we took some photos and identified it as a Griffon Vulture (*Gyps fulvus*), by its rufous-brown plumage and typical underwing pattern. This species has not been noted in Jamnagar recently and this was the first time we had seen it in our area.

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Graceful Prinia near Surat

On 19 February 2017, a Sunday, I, along with my friends Nilay Desai and Yogesh C. Patel, decided to explore a coastal village named Chhini, near Surat. There is an island-like area about a kilometre away from the village, which is used for cattle grazing. An unpaved road is the only way to approach it. To our surprise, we found a good number of Graceful Prinia (*Prinia gracilis*) here. We observed them closely, saw their habits and habitat, and also confirmed the identification by its call. We took some good images. Graceful Prinia is uncommon/rare in Surat area and this is the first time we observed them here.

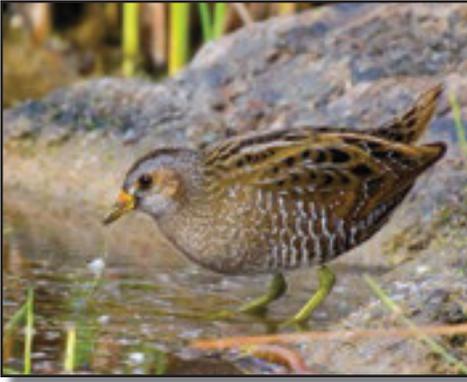
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Egyptian Vulture in Navsari

On 11 November 2017, we visited Navsari outskirts area for checking locations before a planned bird count the next day. When we were returning back, we saw an Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*) perched behind a rock. But, it flew away as soon as we stopped. I could take a photo of it in flight which confirmed its identity. There was only one individual present. As per senior birdwatchers Rajendra Desai and Akshay Desai, it has been noted here after 7-8 years and it is rare in the district.

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Spotted Crake in Rajkot

On 4 February 2018, we visited the Nyari River, Rajkot. There, we saw and photographed a Spotted Crake (*Porzana porzana*) in the reeds in the area. We visited the same place with senior birder Ashok Mashru on 9 February 2018 and saw it again. It seemed like there were 2-3 individuals here and one bird was seen feeding on aquatic plants. The Spotted Crake has been noted in Rajkot before (Mashru & Trivedi 2012), but it is believed to be generally uncommon here. It is possible that it is overlooked due to its skulking nature. These sightings of more than one individual here suggest that it could be a common winter migrant in suitable habitats here in Rajkot area.

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Ultramarine flycatcher in Barda Hills near Porbandar

On a birding trip to Kileshwar Temple, Barda Hills, near Porbandar, on 14 January 2016, I was observing birds at around 13:30 hrs when I spotted a male Ultramarine Flycatcher (*Ficedula superciliaris*). It was easily identified by its typical plumage. It was observed near a rivulet besides the temple. The flycatcher was catching prey and I got an opportunity to watch it and take some photographs. There are scattered and isolated records of Ultramarine Flycatcher from Gujarat (Mashru 2012) and it is considered as an uncommon to rare winter migrant to the state (Ganpule 2016). This sighting adds to our knowledge regarding the distribution of the species in Saurashtra.

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