

Short Birding Notes



Probable nesting of Cream-coloured Courser at Nalsarovar

On 28 June 2018, at around 14:00 hrs, I was at Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary. I saw and photographed a juvenile Cream-colored Courser (*Cursorius cursor*), near an Indian Courser (*Cursorius coromandelicus*) group. The adult Indian Courser was mobbing this juvenile bird, which flew away a short distance. Adult Cream-coloured Coursers were not seen. The juvenile Cream-coloured Courser was identified by its pale sandy upperparts with faint barring, prominent white supercilium, grey patch on crown and buffy underparts. Though Ali & Ripley (1983) state that there is circumstantial evidence of the species breeding in Kachchh, there are no recent reports of it nesting in Gujarat. The Cream-coloured Courser is considered to be mainly a winter migrant to Kachchh, with isolated records elsewhere (Ganpule 2016). Thus, the sighting of a recently fledged juvenile in Nalsarovar in late June is indicative of its nesting here.

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Black Bittern in Rajkot

On 8 August 2018, I was bird watching in the outskirts of Rajkot, in an area with reeds. I was trying to get a good photo of Cinnamon Bittern (*Ixobrychus cinnamomeus*), which is known to occur in the area. It was late in the evening when I saw and photographed a Black Bittern (*Dupetor flavicollis*) flying over the reeds. I saw it fly away and was unable to see where it landed. It could be easily identified based on its size and plumage; the yellow neck stripe and black underparts were seen. According to senior birder Ashok Mashru, the Black Bittern has not been noted in Rajkot before and this was the first photographic record from this area.

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Chestnut-tailed Starling near Rajkot

On 9 June 2018, early in the morning, Niravbhai Mehta, Bhavya Joshi and I visited Lalpari Lake, Rajkot. We saw and photographed a Chestnut-tailed starling (*Sturnia malabarica*) near the lake. It was perched on a *Prosopis juliflora*. We were surprised to see it here as it is not known to occur in Rajkot. Though there have been recent sightings from Hingolghadh, near Rajkot, this was the first time we had seen it here. According to senior birder Ashok Mashru, this species is quite rare in Rajkot area.

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Nesting of Black-headed Munia near Rajkot

On 22 July 2018, while birding at Baghi village, near Rajkot, we saw a pair of Black-headed Munia (*Lonchura malacca*) with nesting material in its beak in an area with dense reeds. After observing closely, we found the nest. We also searched nearby areas for more nests but did not find any. We took some photos and video. After a couple of days, we visited the place twice but not find the nest or the birds. It seemed that the birds had left the area. This nesting of Black-headed Munia was seen almost after 16 years in Rajkot area; successful breeding of the species was observed here by Ashok Mashru in 2001 (Mashru 2002). On enquiring, Ashok Mashru informed us that he had seen a single bird in 2015 and recently in February 2018 in Rajkot area but had not observed its breeding after 2001 & 2002. It is possible that the Black-headed Munia might be nesting in Rajkot area in small numbers regularly but has not been noted by birders since the nest is usually in very dense reeds.

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Grasshopper Warbler in Mehsana District

It was a pleasant afternoon on 5 November 2017 and we (Vaneet Daniel, C. B. Modhwadia and I) were on way to Bavlu village, District: Mehsana. We were watching some common birds when I saw some movement in the bushes of a farm, hardly 10-12 feet away from me. I stopped and tried to figure out which bird was moving in the bushes. The bird was very shy but I managed to get two photographs and did not see it again. I could not identify the bird at first sight. Later, with the help of experts, it was identified as a Grasshopper Warbler (*Locustella naevia*), which is an uncommon/rare winter visitor to Gujarat (Ganpule 2016). It was indeed a thrilling sighting for me. This was probably the first photographic record from north Gujarat.

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Eurasian Hobby at Pavagadh

On 3 June 2018, we saw three Eurasian Hobby (*Falco subbuteo*) at Pavagadh, near Vadodara. The birds were observed feeding on insects (mostly dragonflies) in mid-air from 09:45 to 13:30 hrs continuously without resting. We observed that the birds were in moult from juvenile to adult plumage, as fresh adult-type mantle feathers were observed along with worn juvenile feathers on the wings. There were two other sightings from Gujarat during this period; by Vikrant Vyas from Timbi Lake, near Vadodara, on 3 June 2018, by Vikrant Vyas and his friends at Wadhvana wetland near Dabhoi, Dist. Vadodara on 8 June 2018, and by Krunal Trivedi from Rajkot on 25 May 2018 (*pers. comm.*). These sightings are indicative of late spring migration and further observations would help to understand its distribution and migration in Gujarat during the spring migration season.

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Unusual nest of Tickell's Blue Flycatcher at Hingolghadh

On 27 July 2018, Raju Karia, Hiren Suba and I visited Hingolghadh Sanctuary in Rajkot District. While watching an Indian Pitta (*Pitta brachyura*), I saw a Tickell's Blue Flycatcher (*Cyornis tickelliae*) pair constantly perching on a wall and going into the side of a fiber/plastic toilet unit with food in its bill. On watching from far, we found a dump of leaves, twigs and plant material on a short notch in the fiber wall of the toilet, behind an aluminum bar. On observing closer, we saw three chicks, which were calling for food and the parent birds were feeding them. We took photographs of this unusual nest. The species usually makes a nest in crevices in rocky walls, in tree trunks, between boulders and among roots of upturned trees (Clement & Christie 2018). This nest suggests that the Tickell's Blue Flycatcher can adapt and make a nest in a manmade structure if it is suitable.

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Sighting of Orange-headed Thrush in Velavadar National Park

I visited Velavadar National Park, in Bhavanagar District, for a routine birding trip on 14 June 2018. I reached early, at 07:15 hrs. I immediately started bird watching in a patch full of grass near the main entrance gate. I saw an Orange-headed Thrush (*Zosterops citrina*) moving on the ground and photographed it with my mobile phone. It was quite fearless and allowed close approach. This was my first sighting of the species from Velavadar. I observed this bird for more than 15 minutes without any disturbance. It was not seen again later in the day. Though the Orange-headed Thrush is resident in south Gujarat and has been noted elsewhere in the state (Ganpule 2016), this is an important record for Velavadar National Park.

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Chestnut-tailed Starling at Hingolgadh Sanctuary

On 13 December 2017, I saw and photographed 6 Chestnut-tailed Starlings (*Sturnia malabarica*) at Hingolgadh Nature Education Sanctuary, Dist: Rajkot. I have been birding at this place since many years but I had never recorded this species here earlier. On 12 February 2017, 8 birds were seen near Bhichari village, Dist: Rajkot and on 4 January 2018, 3 birds were seen near Bhutnath Temple, Halenda (about 25 kms from Rajkot). The Chestnut-tailed Starling is resident in Gir forest and adjoining well wooded areas. These records of the species around Rajkot are suggestive of a wider distribution in Saurashtra.

I am thankful to Valkubhai Khacher for showing me this bird at Hingolgadh.

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Watercock near Vadodara

On 4 July 2018, I went to Timbi Lake, near Vadodara. I was passing through a marshy area and suddenly, I saw an unusual bird. I stopped my vehicle and went to see it. It was a male Watercock (*Gallicrex cinerea*). Due to the very less distance between us, it flew away. The very next day, I visited the same place again hoping to spot it. Surprisingly, it was foraging out in the open and I could get very good photographs. The Watercock is uncommon in Vadodara area and this sighting from Timbi Lake in the monsoon is not unexpected but shows that the species does occur in this area.

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Red Spurfowl in Dadra & Nagar Haveli

On 19 August 2016, a female Red Spurfowl (*Galloperdix spadicea*) was seen along with 2 chicks in Madhuban Dam forest area, Dadra & Nagar Haveli. It was probably nesting in the nearby bushes. Every monsoon, a family (adult pair with chicks) is noted in this same location. The Red Spurfowl is resident in south Gujarat and seen in the forest areas of the region. So, its occurrence in Dadra & Nagar Haveli is not unexpected. But, it is resident in this area and successfully breeding here.

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Crested Bunting near Bhavnagar

On 29 July 2018, my friend and I went for the birding to Malnath Hills, near Bhavnagar, in the evening at about 16:00 hrs. I saw a bird, slightly smaller than a Red-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*) suddenly flew from one branch to another. I called my friend and we observed that, it was bathing in a small stream and then perched on a wooden fence near the stream. I took some photographs and identified it as a Crested Bunting (*Melophus lathamii*). It seemed to be a juvenile or immature bird, with dark plumage and streaking on mantle and underparts. The Crested Bunting is uncommon / rare in Bhavnagar District.

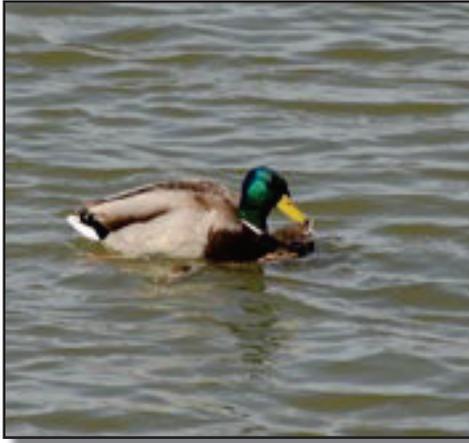
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Indian Pitta in Rajkot

On 26 May 2018, I visited Randarda Nursery, in the outskirts of Rajkot, along with my wife Parul and friends Akshay and Krunal Trivedi for birding. While roaming in the area near the nursery, Akshay and I heard the distinct call of an Indian Pitta (*Pitta brachyura*). Its call is a distinct two-note whistle and very well known to us. I whistled back and the bird responded. After a few minutes, the Indian Pitta came out and we could see it well and take photographs. We spent almost two hours observing it. While the Indian Pitta is regularly seen in Hingolgadh Nature Education Sanctuary near Jasdan, in Rajkot District, this was the first time we had seen the species in Rajkot city.

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Mating of Mallard in the winter in Jamnagar

Reading the note on courtship behaviour and mating of Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) near Rajkot by Kunal Trivedi and Akshay Trivedi (Trivedi & Trivedi 2018) reminded me of my earlier and similar observations at Lakhota Lake, Jamnagar, in 2012. I was at the lake at around 13:00 hrs on 18 January 2012 for photography of a Mallard pair. At around 13:45 hrs, the pair did courtship display and I was able to take some photos. Again, in the afternoon on 25 January 2012, I saw courtship display and mating. Subsequently, I visited Lakhota Lake everyday but saw the courtship and mating a third time only on 9 February 2012. It was quite surprising that each time, I observed this behaviour in the afternoon at around 13:45 hrs. The post-mating behaviour was like other duck species. So, the courtship display and mating of Mallards in the winter was noted in Jamnagar too earlier.

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Bronze-winged Jacana in Rajkot

On 20 January 2018, I went to Randarada Lake, Rajkot, with Prakash Jani and Devang Kotecha, for birding. Due to adequate rain last year, the lake was full of water, with birds scattered around the lake. At one edge of the lake, when we were watching a group of 7 Pheasant-tailed Jacana (*Hydrophasianus chirurgus*), we were surprised to find 2 Bronze-winged Jacana (*Metopidius indicus*) alongside this group. We took photos and confirmed the identification. On enquiring with Rajkot birdwatchers, Ashok Mashru said that he had sighted the species once at Randarda in 2002. Rajdeep Zala had observed this species at a river near Christ College in 2003. Recently, Rajubhai Karia has photographed a Bronze-winged Jacana, first on 5 May 2015 at Randarda, and it stayed there for about 10 days. So this species is not a frequent or regular visitor to Rajkot area.

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Red-tailed Shrike of karelini morph in Kachchh

On 24 August 2018, I was bird watching in the Khari River, near Bhuj, along with my son Nirav. The area is rocky, with small plants and some trees. At around 11:30 hrs, I saw a Red-tailed Shrike (*Lanius phoenicuroides*), of the *karelini* morph, perched on a dry shrub. It was identified as a *karelini* morph individual by its grey upperparts, white supercilium, prominent black eye mask, white underparts and red tail. The white wing patch was seen when it flew. Thus, the identification could be confirmed beyond any doubt. The bird perched on a heap of dry stems and was very active and hunting for prey. It was seen in the same area till about 17:00 hrs. I visited the same spot on the next day but could not find this bird. I also observed two other individuals of Red-tailed Shrikes in the next one week and the plumage of all the three birds was quite different. However, the other birds were of normal morph and this was the only bird of *karelini* morph seen here. The *karelini* morph Red-tailed Shrike has been noted only once before from Saurashtra (Ganpule 2017), and this is the first sighting of this morph from Kachchh.

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