

The Indian Blackbird is an uncommon resident/local winter migrant in Gujarat (Ganpule 2016) with most of the sightings in well wooded areas. It is seen in south Gujarat, and it is known to occur in Gir National Park in Saurashtra. This is the first time I have seen this species near Mahuva and it is an important record for this area.

References

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Sighting of Black-bellied Tern near Bharuch

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structural differences (Black-bellied Tern is smaller than River Tern) and orange bill are the main differences from River Tern.

For Gujarat, Dharmakumarsinhji (1955) gave it as 'not as common as River Tern but as many as half a dozen pairs are sometimes found on larger lakes and rivers' and gave its distribution as whole of India including Saurashtra and in the winter, a local migrant all over the country; also breeding here, and stated the breeding period to be from January/February to April. Ali (1955) noted it in Kaira (now Anand and Kheda) and Baroda districts but stated that its status was uncertain and it was probably resident and breeding on the sandbanks of some rivers here. Khacher (1996) noted that he had seen the Black-bellied Tern breeding at Jasdan, near Rajkot, and stated that the large reservoirs constructed in the state had become nesting areas for the species.

I visited Bharuch, south Gujarat, on 24 February 2018, for watching birds. On the banks of the Narmada River, I noticed a group of five Black-bellied Terns (*Sterna acuticauda*). In this group of five birds, I noticed that three birds were immature or non-breeding plumaged birds and two were adults in breeding plumage. The adults were identified by orange bill, black cap not reaching till the forehead and black upper breast, belly and vent. The immature/non-breeding birds were having white underparts, orange bill with black tip, and diffuse black crown and dark eye mask. I took photos and confirmed the identification.

The Black-bellied Tern is given as formerly resident in Gujarat with no recent records (but may still survive) (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). There are no recent photo records of the species from Gujarat and thus, this is an important sighting from Bharuch. This photographic record from Bharuch confirms that the Black-bellied Tern is still seen along the Narmada River.

[The Black-bellied Tern is now classified as 'Endangered' since the species is almost extinct in large parts of its range and is thought to be in very rapid decline overall, owing to a multitude of threatening processes that affect riverine species in southern Asia (BirdLife International 2017). Its decline has been noted earlier (Sykes 2010), and there are only a few locations in India now where it is reliably seen and still breeds. Regarding its identification, the Black-bellied Tern can be confused with both the River Tern (*Sterna aurantia*) and Whiskered Tern (*Chlidonias hybrida*). It can be separated from Whiskered Tern by its long orange bill and deeply forked tail, while



In the recent reference texts, Grimmett *et al.* (2011) give it as formerly resident with no recent records while Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) give it as a resident along the Narmada River. Ganpule (2016) gives it as probably rare and a migrant, possibly overlooked in non-breeding plumage. There are a few records from the state in the bibliography by Pittie (2018), but there are no photos of the species on popular birding/bird photography websites or on the social media. It is certainly not seen regularly in Saurashtra now, which is quite different from what is stated in Dharmakumarsinhji (1955). Thus, there is no doubt that it has either become rare or is overlooked. As

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per senior birdwatchers from south Gujarat, it is still known to occur along the Narmada River, but is uncommon / rare in the state. Thus, in Gujarat, the Narmada River is now the only place where it is still seen. It seems that the Black-bellied Tern is now indeed uncommon or rare (or even absent) in Saurashtra and Kachchh, but detailed surveys are needed to confirm this. It is possible that it is overlooked but now, with many bird watchers actively taking photographs and travelling widely all over the state, it is strange that this species has not been seen or photographed recently.

Since the Black-bellied Tern is now treated as 'Endangered', an urgent survey and a population assessment is required to be done in the state to know its current status and distribution in Gujarat. This sighting of five individuals is encouraging and suggests that a few individuals may still be resident in the state. Birdwatchers should actively look for this species in suitable habitats like large rivers and lakes, sandbanks, etc. and report sightings – Eds]

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Significant bird sightings near Porbandar

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Gosabara Wetland, also known as Mokarsagar Wetland, is situated near Porbandar. It is a well known place for bird watching, attracting large number of birds in the winter. In the course of birding here during the last two-three years, following are the important sightings noted by me:

Amur Falcon (*Falco amurensis*): On 3 January 2017, Rajesh Shah and I visited the wetland. At around 09:00 hrs, we saw and photographed an Amur Falcon. It was easily identified as this species by its orange-red cere and eye ring. It was perched on the branch of a tree and gave us very good views. The Amur Falcon is given as an autumn and spring passage migrant in Gujarat (Ganpule 2016). However, this sighting in January is in mid-winter and too late for autumn passage. This could be an individual which was late in its migration to its wintering grounds in southern Africa. For this district, there are only two previous records of Amur Falcon; from Porbandar and near Madhavpur (Ganpule 2011). Hence, this is an important record for this area.

White Stork (*Ciconia ciconia*): On 3 February 2017, I visited Gosabara for bird watching. There, in a flock of Painted Storks (*Mycteria leucocephala*) and Woolly-necked Storks (*Ciconia episcopus*), I saw and photographed a White Stork. It was easily

identified by me since I had seen in previously in Jamnagar with wildlife photographer Amish Patel. I was happy to get this species near my home. Though the White Stork is a widely distributed winter migrant to Gujarat (Grimmett *et al.* 2011), it is not very common here in Porbandar.



Pin-tailed Snipe (*Gallinago stenura*): On 7 May 2017, a Sunday, I visited the area with my son Konark in the morning. As soon as we started bird watching, we saw a snipe (*Gallinago* sp.) which was foraging on the ground in the open. We were sure that it was not a Common Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*) as its size, plumage and length of bill looked different. We took some photos and shared the photos with Prasad Ganpule. He confirmed that it was a Pin-tailed Snipe by its plumage and underwing pattern. The Pin-tailed Snipe has been noted here in Gosabara before, but it is an uncommon/rare winter migrant to Gujarat (Ganpule 2016). This sighting in the month of May is surprising, as it is rather late for the species to remain here in the summer.