

## Sighting of Buff-bellied Pipit in GRK: an addition to the avifauna of Gujarat

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The Buff-bellied Pipit (*Anthus rubescens*) is a polytypic species, with three subspecies (Alström & Mild 2003), while some authorities recognise four subspecies (Tyler & Kirwan 2017). The subspecies *japonicus* is also known as the Siberian Buff-bellied Pipit. It breeds in north-eastern Russia and winters in the northern Indian subcontinent; Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) state that *japonicus* is perhaps better considered as a distinct species. There are a few isolated records of the Siberian Buff-bellied Pipit from northern India (Grimmett *et al.* 2011), with recent records from Tal-Chappar and Ranthambhore in Rajasthan (respectively Poonia *et al.* 2014, Sangha 2015).

On 27 January 2017, we visited a large wetland (23° 35' N 69° 29' E) in Greater Rann of Kachchh. This wetland is situated about 15 kms east of the Chhari-Dhand wetland, which is a very well known bird watching area. The third author (JP) took us to this wetland to show the Water Pipits (*Anthus spinoletta*), which were being regularly seen by him in this area. At around 13:00 hrs, we reached the location and immediately saw a group of Water Pipits. We started photographing these birds. While photographing the Water Pipits in the area, we observed that one individual looked different from the Water Pipits seen there. It had darker and greyer upperparts, a more prominent moustachial stripe and heavily streaked underparts, with the breast and malar looking very dark, with prominent and clean dark and distinct spots on the breast and flanks. We took some photos and thought that it could be a Buff-bellied Pipit, but we could not confirm the identification in the field. We tried to hear/record the call but since it was seen briefly and in a group of Water Pipits, we could not discern the call of this individual.

After coming back, we carefully studied the photos and it was apparent that this bird was different from the Water Pipits seen there. In addition to the features described above, we noted that this individual had a long hind claw, dark reddish

legs and also a slimmer bill, which all pointed to this being a Buff-bellied Pipit of the *japonicus* subspecies. These features matched with the description given for the Siberian Buff-bellied Pipit in the reference books



(Alström & Mild 2003, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012, Tyler & Kirwan 2017) and in identification papers about the species (Alström & Mild 1996, Lee 2000, Lee & Birch 2002). Other *Anthus* sp. were also considered before we confirmed the identification. The similar Red-throated Pipit (*Anthus cervinus*) has very heavily streaked underparts (including flanks), with streaking on the rump and hence could be excluded. The Tree Pipit (*Anthus trivialis*) and Olive-backed Pipit (*Anthus hodgsoni*) have a different face pattern and plumage. Since the identification, and separation, of Buff-bellied Pipit from the Water Pipit is difficult, we sent the images to Brian Small, who has experience of *Anthus* sp. He confirmed that this individual was indeed a Buff-bellied Pipit (Brian Small, *in litt.*, email dated 30 January 2017).

After the identification was confirmed, the third author (JP) realised that he had images of more than one individual and that he had been seeing the species from 9 January 2017 onwards in the same area. He searched and found images of one more individual (but probably two), which could be identified as a Buff-bellied Pipit. Thus, the birds were seen in the area from 9 January onwards by the third author (JP) along with his son Nirav Parekh, though he was unaware of its identity and thought that these were more heavily streaked Water Pipits. Hence, the birds were seen here for almost three weeks. It is interesting to note that in one image of the Buff-bellied Pipit taken by the third author (JP), the legs look dark. This could be due to mud on the legs and so the actual leg colour is not seen. But, dark legs are also not unusual, as Alström & Mild (2003) state that leg colour is 'usually pale but sometimes rather dark'. Hence leg colour is variable.

This is the first record of the Buff-bellied Pipit in Gujarat. This species was not included in the checklist of birds of Gujarat (Parasharya *et al.* 2004, Ganpule 2016). Though Sørensen & Tiwari (2009) speculated that the Buff-bellied Pipit could occur in Gujarat as a potential winter visitor or as a vagrant, there were no sightings of this species here till now. Thus, the Buff-bellied Pipit is an addition to the avifauna of Gujarat.

## Buff-bellied Pipit....

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## Recent records of Stork-billed Kingfisher in Gujarat

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The Stork-billed Kingfisher (*Pelargopsis capensis*) is a resident and locally common species found in India; east and south of a line from the Gulf of Khambhat to Dehra Dun (Ali & Ripley 1983). Its occurrence in Gujarat is restricted to the forested area on the eastern fringe of north and south Gujarat (Grimmett *et al.* 2011, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Ali (1954) collected nine specimens of the species from the forested area of the eastern fringe of Gujarat. Though the species is listed in the checklist of the birds of Gujarat (Parasharya *et al.* 2004, Ganpule 2016), there is only one published record (Monga &

Naoroji 1984) of the species after Ali (1954). In this paper, I report sightings of the species from three different locations in Gujarat and draw attention towards a published record from north Gujarat.



### Observations

During my exploration of forests and less-explored areas of Gujarat, I saw and photographed the Stork-billed Kingfisher at three locations in the south-eastern fringe of Gujarat from 2008 to 2010.

My first sighting was from Balam forest area of Banaskantha District (24°16'11.64" N, 72°30'30.87" E) on 21 March 2008. The kingfisher was perched on a tree at the edge of the river, near a small temple. The Balam forest is on the extreme north-eastern fringe of state. The other two records are along the Narmada River in south Gujarat. One bird was photographed on 10 November 2009 at Gora village (21°51'35.85" N, 73°40'59.90" E), near Kevadia colony in Narmada District. The third sighting was on 14 October 2010 at Uchedia village (21°42'45.66" N, 73°7'8.07" E) near Jagadia, Bharuch District. At Uchediya village, a small rivulet, locally known as 'Kavri', merges with the Narmada River.