

Sighting of Lesser Cuckoo near Mahuva, Bhavnagar District

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On 6 October 2017, while birding near Nikol village (21° 08' 64.09" N, 71° 85' 66.59" E), Ta: Mahuva, Dist: Bhavnagar, I saw a cuckoo (*Cuculus* sp.) perched deep inside a Neem tree. After careful observation, I noted that it was smaller in size, had slate-grey (speckled and faintly barred with brown) upperparts, contrastingly blackish tail and uppertail-coverts, white tips and spots at sides of tail, dark greyish head and neck. The throat and upper breast were blackish with some barring, while lower breast and rest of underparts were white and boldly barred black. It had a yellow eye-ring, and orange yellow legs. I took

a few record shots. Based on my observations and photographs, I identified it as a Lesser Cuckoo (*Cuculus poliocephalus*).

This place is located about 500 mts from coast. I saw this individual here for two days.

After that, I could not find it again. Whenever I observed it, it was perched deep inside a Neem or a Mango tree. Sometimes it came on the ground to catch insects and caterpillars. It did not call during the time I observed it.

[The Lesser Cuckoo breeds in the Himalayas and winters in Sri Lanka; it is a passage migrant in the Peninsula (Grimmett et al. 2011). Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) show it as breeding in the Himalayas and wintering in Sri Lanka and give it as a passage migrant in the Western, and Eastern Ghats; it is shown as a passage migrant in south Gujarat. For Gujarat, there is a previous record from Dang forest (Shull 1962). There are other unconfirmed sightings from south Gujarat and Dang forest but it has not been photographed recently in the state.

In general, cuckoos are notoriously difficult to identify and many times, they can be separated only by call. The Lesser Cuckoo is much smaller in size, has whiter boldly barred underparts, and is darker above. In juvenile plumage, it can be similar to other cuckoo sp. but is smaller in size and has bolder underpart barring. All these features were noted by the observer for this individual. But since identification is difficult, we sent the images to Clive Mann for opinion. He replied (in litt., email dated 8 October 2017) that it was a juvenile or an immature Lesser Cuckoo.

This is an important record for the state. It is possible that the Lesser Cuckoo could be a rare passage migrant or a vagrant here and is overlooked due to identification difficulties. Birders are requested to keep a watch for this species in the state – Eds]

References

- Grimmett, R., Inskipp, C., & Inskipp, T. 2011. *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*. 2nd ed. Christopher Helm & Oxford University Press. London.
- Rasmussen, P. C., & Anderton, J. C., 2012. *Birds of South Asia: the Ripley guide*. 2 Vols. 2nd ed. Smithsonian Institution and Lynx Edicions. Washington, D.C. and Barcelona.
- Shull, E. M., 1962. Supplementary notes on 'The birds of Gujarat' from birds collected in the Surat Dangs. *J Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* 59 (2): 658-660 □

