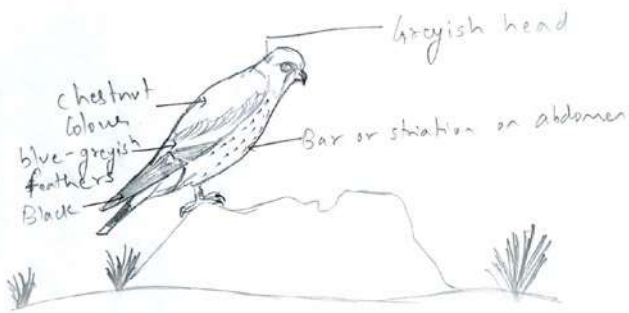


## Sighting of Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni* in North Gujarat

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The Lesser Kestrel (*Falco naumanni*) is mainly a passage migrant and winter visitor to the Indian Subcontinent (BirdLife International 2001, Naorji 2006, Grimmett *et al.* 2011). Though widespread, its status in the region is uncertain owing to very few confirmed specimens and being generally overlooked or mistaken for the Common Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*), with most sightings lacking details and confusion with Common Kestrel being always possible (Naorji 2006, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Bhatt & Ganpule (2013) compiled sightings of Lesser Kestrel from Gujarat and stated that it is a rare but regular autumn passage migrant here. There have been a few more sightings from Little Rann of Kachchh and Velavadar National Park since 2013, and photos are posted on the 'Oriental Bird Images' website.

The adult male Lesser Kestrel has blue-grey head, uniform chestnut upperparts, blue-grey secondaries and greater upperwing-coverts. In this plumage, it is easier to identify and separate from the Common Kestrel. However, the female and juvenile of Lesser Kestrel are very similar to Common Kestrel but can be separated by its paler, less streaked cheeks, no dark line behind eye, pale (yellowish) claws, wing-tips reaching or almost reach tip of tail when perched (Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001, Naorji 2006, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012, BirdLife International 2016). We report here the occurrence of the Lesser Kestrel in North Gujarat.

On 19 October 2018, while birding at Aravalli Ranges of Banaskantha district in North Gujarat, we observed a small falcon perched on a rock. Later, on closer observation through binoculars we initially identified it as a Common Kestrel. However, on taking photographs and on closer scrutiny, we could clearly identify it as an adult male Lesser Kestrel since it had a prominent grey head lacking moustachial stripe, plain rufous upperparts, grey greater-coverts, creamy underparts with few spots and wing-tips almost reaching tail tip. The photograph was not very clear, so we sketched the bird in the

field. This being a new species to the area, an extensive search was initiated in the following days and the literature as well as 'eBird' data for the area was surveyed. An adult male was again seen perched on a wire in Sabarkantha district on 25 October 2018.

Being a rare passage migrant, the Lesser Kestrel has not been seen earlier or may have been overlooked due to identification difficulties with Common Kestrel in parts of North Gujarat. Bhatt & Ganpule (2013) have shown its presence in Little Rann of Kachchh, Naliya and Velavadar National Park, Bhavnagar, and Ganpule (2016) cited the sightings by Bhatt & Ganpule (2013), and stated that isolated records from elsewhere in the state are known. The occurrence of Lesser Kestrel in North Gujarat has not been reported earlier. Our sightings from North Gujarat are thus new for the region. We request birdwatchers of North Gujarat to report their sightings of Lesser Kestrel for a better understanding of the status and distribution of the species in Gujarat.

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