

Sighting of Little Crake near Jamnagar: a first photographic record for India

Ashvin Trivedi: Jalani Jar, Bajariya Fali, near Pancheshwar Tower, Jamnagar. snapchaserashvintrivedi@yahoo.com



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On 10 December 2017, I visited Ranjitsagar Dam (22° 23' 06" N, 70° 06' 09" E), located about 10 kms from Jamnagar, for birding. At the outflow of the dam, downstream from the main dam wall, there is a small pond and a bridge. The habitat is a marshy, water flooded area with some reeds, lotus plants and underwater vegetation. This area is an ideal habitat for water birds and harbours a good population of crakes (*Porzana* sp.), bitterns (*Ixobrychus* sp.), White-breasted Waterhen (*Amaurornis phoenicurus*), Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) etc. There, I saw a crake (*Porzana* sp.), which I thought was probably a Baillon's Crake (*Porzana pusilla*), but because it was late in the evening, I could not take any photo due to the low light.

In the evening on 17 December 2017, I visited the same place again with my wife Jyoti, hoping to encounter the crake again. I was fortunate as it was seen foraging out in the open, on the lotus leaves, searching for food. It was seen well and I managed to take some good photos. I immediately shared these photos with Prasad Ganpule, as I thought that this bird was larger, and also somewhat different, from a Baillon's Crake. He quickly confirmed that this was a Little Crake (*Porzana parva*) based on a diagnostic red base to bill, larger size and longer primary projection. He further informed that this was the first photographic record of this species from Gujarat and also India. Hence, I was very much excited to find this rarity near Jamnagar. On 23 December 2017, I visited this area with him at around 16:30 hrs in the evening and we saw the Little Crake very well as the bird was feeding out in the open. We took photos and re-confirmed the identification.

I visited this area many more times and saw the crake on numerous occasions. A large number of bird watchers visited this location to see this rarity here. It was seen in the same area at least till mid-February 2018. It was seen regularly early in

the morning and in the late evening. It was not disturbed by the traffic and noise made by vehicles travelling on the bridge and used to feed in the open during this time. Based on the plumage features, it seemed that the Little Crake seen here was an immature bird.



[The Baillon's Crake and the Little Crake are two small crakes which are very similar and usually provide only brief and fleeting views. Hence, identification is quite difficult. In Gujarat, and also elsewhere in India, the default small crake seen here between these two is usually the Baillon's Crake, as it is a widespread winter migrant. The identification of these two crakes in juvenile and adult plumages is covered in the recent field guides (Grimmett et al. 2011, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012) and also given in detail in Bradshaw (1993) and Christie et al. (1996), who state that the Little Crake is best separated from the Baillon's Crake by structural differences; a larger size, and longer wing projection. The primary projection in Little Crake is longer, with five well spaced primary tips visible. Another feature which is consistent and can be used practically for separating the two is that the Little Crake has a red base to bill, which is lacking in Baillon's Crake. Other features like less extensive barring on the underparts in Little Crake, and bill colour (dark olive-greenish in Baillon's Crake) etc. are also useful in identification of these species. But, it is truly difficult to identify it conclusively (in all plumages) unless seen well and the distinguishing features noted or photographed.

The Little Crake breeds in the western and central Palearctic and winters in central Africa and the Middle East (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). For India, Grimmett et al. (2011) give it as a winter migrant to the northern areas of Jammu & Kashmir (Indus Valley) and show only three isolated records from the Peninsula; from Mumbai (Maharashtra), Karnataka and Uttar Pradesh. Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) state that the records from Mumbai and Karnataka are specimen records and the species is a winterer and passage migrant in the Upper Indus Valley, further noting that other than these two specimen records, other regional reports require verification as confusion with Baillon's Crake is likely. Surprisingly, there are numerous reports of Little Crake from various locations in India (Pittie 2018) but, since it is quite similar to Baillon's Crake, it is possible that these reports could be of misidentified birds. It is important to note that before it was photographed here in Jamnagar, there were no photos of the Little Crake from India on the popular birding websites like Oriental Bird Images, India nature watch and Internet Bird Collection, or even on the social media. Hence, this is the first photographic record of the Little Crake from India.

Little Crane...

For Gujarat, there have been claims of Little Crane sightings previously. Sightings have been reported from Nal Sarovar, in south Gujarat (Mukesh Bhatt, pers. comm.) and from Saladi, Amreli (Viral Joshi, pers. comm.). However, there is no photographic proof and it can be said that it was not adequately documented before. Ganpule (2016) included it in the checklist of birds of Gujarat based on a sight report from the Little Rann of Kachchh, where it was noted alongside Baillon's Crane and presumed to have been correctly identified. Here again, there is no photographic evidence. Though it is probable that some of the earlier reports could have been correct, it is a fact that even though there are a large number of bird photographers now in India, the Little Crane remained elusive so far and also, the identification of the species is quite difficult unless the diagnostic features are seen well. Hence, this photographic record of one individual seen in Jamnagar is very important and is the first properly documented and confirmed sighting of the Little Crane from Gujarat, proving that its inclusion in the Gujarat checklist is justified. It is also pertinent to note that it was seen for more than two months in the same area, indicating that it is a winter visitor here and not a passage migrant.

Now that many bird watchers have seen this species here and noted the habitat in which it was seen in Jamnagar, they are urged to search for the Little Crane in other areas in Gujarat and report any sightings – Eds]

Sighting of Namaqua Dove near Jamnagar: a first record for India

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On 17 December 2017, a Sunday, we visited Khijadiya Bird Sanctuary (22° 31' 18" N, 70° 08' 40" E), near Jamnagar, early in the morning. After a few hours of fruitful birding during which we saw more than 50 species like Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*), many Ducks (*Anas* sp.), Orphean Warbler (*Sylvia hortensis*), etc. we were returning back. At around 09:30 hrs, we saw a dove foraging on ground in the short grass along the road. It looked different from the other common doves (*Streptopelia* sp.) that are seen here. So, we stopped for a while. We saw that this dove had a long and pointed tail with some barring on the rump, black spots on the wing coverts, thin greyish bill, blackish primaries and darkish lores. We observed that it was much smaller than other species of doves and similar in size to a White-eared Bulbul (*Pycnonotus leucotis*), which came and perched beside it. When we approached closer, it flew away. Its flight was quick and it flew close to the ground and then perched on a tree. We took some photos and tried to identify this dove but failed to do so.

On coming back, we saw the photos on our computer but could not identify it. Though superficially similar to the doves seen here, we were sure that this was not one of the species

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seen here as none has such a long and pointed tail. We then sent the images to senior bird watchers Jaipalsinh Jadeja, S. N. Varu and Prasad Ganpule. It was identified as a female Namaqua Dove (*Oena capensis*). We were happy because it was a lifer for us and this species has not been noted in India before and this was the first record of the Namaqua Dove from India.



Akshay Trivedi

[On the same day in the morning, we were in Khijadiya Bird Sanctuary. We were observing a Paddyfield Pipit (*Anthus*