

Sighting of Loten's Sunbird in Dadra and Nagar Haveli

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On 26 August 2017, I visited Madhuban Dam forest (20° 12' 43.9" N, 73° 03' 28.5" E) near Silvassa, in Dadra and Nagar Haveli (Union Territory), south Gujarat, which is very near the state border. At around 16:00 hrs, I saw a sunbird in the area which looked different from a Purple Sunbird (*Cinnyris asiaticus*). It was a male, with lower belly looking yellowish and with metallic blue-green head, upperparts, and upper breast. I could take a few photos and the following features were noted: a long, sharply down-curved beak, which looked much longer than seen in Purple Sunbird. Also the tail was longer than the tail of a Purple Sunbird. When observed closely, a maroon band was visible on the breast.

The features described here led me to identify this as a male Loten's Sunbird (*Cinnyris lotenia*). However, since I was not very sure of the identification, I posted the image on the Facebook group 'Ask ID's of Indian Birds'. Many bird watchers commented that this was a Loten's Sunbird. So the identification was also confirmed by others. It was the first time that I had noted it here and this is the first photographic record of Loten's Sunbird from Gujarat. On 17 October 2017, while bird watching in the Madhuban Dam forest at around 08:50 hrs, I again saw and photographed a male Loten's Sunbird. A third sighting of a pair (adult male and female) was made in the same area on 20 October 2017, and images were posted on the OBPix group. These three sightings in the space of two months remove any doubt regarding the occurrence of the species in Gujarat and this is an addition to the avifauna of the state.

[As described by the observer, the long and sharply down-curved bill, longer tail and maroon band on the breast are all diagnostic of a male Loten's Sunbird and there remains no doubt regarding the identification. Loten's Sunbird is very similar to the Purple Sunbird and careful observation is needed to separate the two.

*Loten's Sunbird is endemic to India and resident in south India, Sri Lanka and in the Western Ghats; its range is shown till around Mumbai, Maharashtra in the north and there are no records given for Gujarat (Grimmett et al. 2011). Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) give its range from northern Maharashtra, south to southern India and Sri Lanka. For Gujarat, Ali (1955) did not record the species here. Khacher (1996) stated that 'it is in the Dangs that a look out needs to be kept for the two Western Ghats sunbirds: Crimson-backed Sunbird (*Leptocoma minima*) and Loten's Sunbird', but did not give any specific record or sighting. Khacher (2000) again stated that both the above species should be looked out for in Gujarat and they could be more widespread than believed, but gave no records. Parasharya et al. (2004) included the Loten's Sunbird in the Gujarat checklist, giving it as a resident. However, Ganpule (2016) did not include it in the latest checklist of the birds of Gujarat in absence of properly documented sightings, stating that it could be 'probable in south Gujarat forests'. It is important to note that there are no photos of the species from Gujarat on the popular birding websites Oriental Bird Images, Indianaturewatch or Internet Bird Collection. Further, confusion with Purple Sunbird is very probable and observers should be careful in the identification of this species, and all sightings should be well documented with photographs or field notes. It is also important that birdwatchers should be aware of this species.*

As stated in the editor's note in Mishra (2017), sightings from Dadra and Nagar Haveli are included in the state checklist. Thus, these sightings are the first confirmed sightings of Loten's Sunbird from Gujarat and it is an addition to the avifauna of the state – Eds]

References

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