

## Sighting of Malabar Whistling Thrush from Ratanmahal Wildlife Sanctuary

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Malabar Whistling Thrush (*Myophonus horsfieldii*) is an endemic bird species of India. It is widely distributed, especially in Western Ghats and in parts of Central India (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). This note comprises of observations of *M. horsfieldii* at the edge of Ratanmahal Wildlife Sanctuary, Gujarat, which lies at the confluence of the Vindhya Range and Malwa Plateau adjoining the state of Madhya Pradesh. It also lies close to the Satpura mountain range which has been regarded as an important pathway for species dispersal between the Himalayas and the Western Ghats in the geological past (Singh *et al.* 2002). It harbors dry deciduous forests dominated by Teak, and some patches of moist deciduous biotopes with very little or no Teak and with abundant bamboo brakes. The habitat is also interspersed with areas of agriculture and semiarid landscapes (Devkar *et al.* 2011). The terrain is undulating, and has good vegetation, leaf litter and presence of big boulders. Two rivers, namely Panam and Orsang, flow adjacent to the sanctuary. Ratanmahal also has prevalence of 'Mahuwa' (*Madhuca indica*) trees (Trivedi & Soni, 2006).

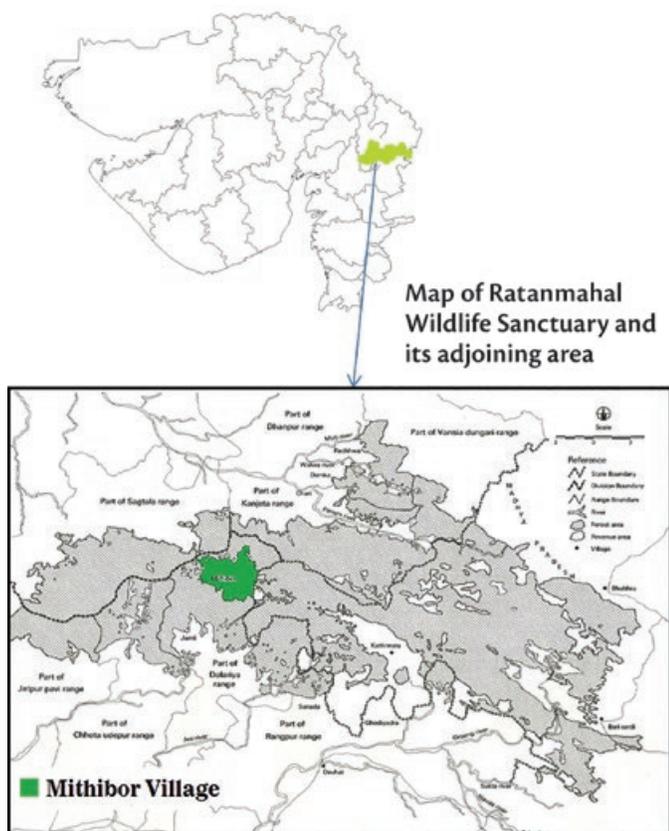
Our first encounter with Malabar Whistling Thrush was completely unexpected. While on a bird watching trip to Ratanmahal Wildlife Sanctuary and its surrounding areas, we happened to visit Mithibor village on 30 May 2015 at 16-00 hours. While moving on the track, suddenly we heard a whistling sound from the surrounding area. At the first instance we thought it might be some local person moving in the area making such whistling calls. To confirm it, we tried to search for it in the surroundings and to our surprise we spotted a black bird with metallic blue shining wings which was giving such whistling calls. We could only take record pictures of the bird, which was later identified by referring the field-guides (Grimmett *et al.* 2011; Kazmierczak, 2000; Ali 2002) and also confirmed by the experts (B.M. Parasharya, Raju Vyas & Uday A. Vora).

On 7 June, 2015 at 09-00 hours we visited the same site again. This time we could spot two birds, frequently jumping from one branch to another in search of small insects, larvae, worms etc to feed upon. They would fly low and fairly fast which made it difficult for us to trace them, but we could keep their track by their calls! They preferred to stay along streams, area expectedly rich in food (insects, crustaceans etc.). Malabar Whistling Thrush is evenly (unspotted) sooty-black or blackish-blue on the head and upper parts except for the shallow 'V' of bright cobalt blue on the forehead extending over the eyes and a patch on lesser coverts; under parts blackish, but tipped metallic blue on the breast, belly & flank (Clement & Hathway, 2010). Sexes are almost alike. Their whistling call has a very human-like tonal quality, which intermittently breaks the silence of the forest. In ancient folktales, the whistling sound of Malabar Whistling Thrush is linked with Lord Krishna's flute playing (Lockwood, 2010).

Apart from reports of Trivedi & Soni (2006) from Purna Wildlife Sanctuary, Dist. Dangs and Vyas (2000) from Gir



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National Park and Sanctuary, Dist. Junagadh, there are no recent reports on the sightings of Malabar Whistling Thrush from any part of Gujarat. It has been recorded in Surat, Dangs (Ali 1955) and Rajpipla (Monga & Naoroji 1983) in the past. Distribution has been depicted from the hills of Gujarat (Mt. Abu and Himmatnagar) to Surat-Dangs by Ali & Ripley (1998), while it is shown from forest areas of Mt. Abu, south to the Dangs by Grimmett *et al* (2011).

Malabar Whistling Thrush is in the Least Concern (LC) criteria in IUCN 2015 checklist of birds. Scientific reports on the presence or absence of the species in fragmented habitats of western India including Gujarat, are certainly valued.

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**A Tip for Longevity :** People say you can't make a living from bird watching. That's perhaps true but, it is also true than man does not live by bread alone. Just look at the people who have no such hobbies and spend all their time solely on earning a living. After 60, when they retire from official chair, they don't know what to do with all the time in their hands and just spend it watching the clock! If they had cultivated a hobby like bird watching, perhaps they would have lived longer to enjoy their pension. - **Dr Salim Ali**