

Indian Blue Robin....

Status in Gujarat

The status of the Indian Blue Robin in Gujarat is not clear. Ganpule (2016) mentioned it as a vagrant or rare passage migrant. The species was first mentioned by Khachar (1996) in his article on the birds of Gujarat; he mentioned that he had sighted a female Indian Blue Robin after a thunderstorm in late September (year unknown) at Hingolghadh with Salim Ali himself. He wrote 'it's a storm tossed migrant blown off its normal epic flight', non-stop from the Himalayas to South India. Later, Mashru (2014) compiled five more sightings from 2007-2013, out of which three are from Saurashtra and two are from South Gujarat. There are six more sightings on eBird with photos, all from Saurashtra region (eBird 2020). Hence, it is clear that the Indian Blue Robin has been noted more in the forests of Barda, Girnar-Gir and others (n=10) compared to South Gujarat (n=2).

Out of these 12 sightings of Indian Blue Robin from Gujarat, ten sightings are between the months of October–November and March–April. It supports the species being a passage

migrant, visiting Gujarat during the southward and return leg of its journey. The only two sightings from September and February (one each) are also close to the passage migration period. Hence, I agree with Mashru (2014) that the species is most likely to be a passage migrant to Gujarat.

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Sighting of Pallid Scops Owl *Otus brucei* in Junagadh City

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On 9 November 2018 in the morning at about 11:00 hrs, our neighbour called us and informed that a small, baby owl was injured and present on his terrace. We immediately went to his place and on the way, discussed that it could be a Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*) or a Spotted Owlet (*Athene brama*) because both these species were present in our urban area. We looked for the bird, which our neighbour said had hidden behind a steel cot, From a safe distance we checked if it was injured. We took a photo from our mobile phone and observed two pellets lying near the owl. After a few minutes, we observed that the owl behaved angrily, making a threatening display,

moving its horns (ear tufts) and its face. As we tried to go closer, it flew and perched on the terrace wall. We came back and concluded that the owl was normal and healthy and informed our neighbours that it was not injured and also not a baby! Based on its grey plumage with streaks on the underparts, along with other features, and studying the field guides, we confirmed its identification as a Pallid Scops Owl (*Otus brucei*). Without any disturbance, we observed it from 35-40 feet distance. The owl came back and was seen roosting behind the steel cot.

This was an unexpected sighting because the Pallid Scops Owl is generally found in semi-desert and scrubland area while this sighting was in the middle of the city, in Vishnu Colony-2, Junagadh (21° 31' 27.5" N, 70° 26' 47.8" E). Around 20:30 hrs, the owl drank some water from a bird water feeder kept on the terrace. This water bowl is kept for birds in our area like House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), House Crow (*Corvus splendens*), Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*), Indian Silverbill (*Euodice malabarica*) etc. but we never expected that a Pallid Scops Owl would drink from this bowl. At 21:05 hrs, it flew away towards the east. On the next day, 10 November 2018, we were curious about the pellets; we had seen two pellets the previous day. We went back and saw that the Pallid Scops Owl was roosting behind the cot. We continued watching it and

observed that it was hiding behind the steel cot, probably for the whole day. It became active at around 20:10 hrs, drank some water and again flew away towards the east.

We waited till 23:30 hrs, and then we checked every two hours during the night. On 11 November, after 16:00 hrs, we found that it was again roosting at the same place. We noticed that there were four pellets present around the owl. On this day, the owl was active at 17:40 hrs, drank some water, stretched its wings and flew towards the east at 18:10 hrs. Because the stored pellets partially blocked the digestive system of the owl, new prey could not be swallowed until the pellets are ejected. Regurgitation often signifies that an owl is ready to eat again. We observed this owl here for the last four days. It is known that since November is generally the migration time for Pallid Scops Owl, the short time this owl spent in the city would have helped it in its onward migration. This type of rest in a city area is unusual for this species because it is usually found in stony foothills in semi-desert area and it spends the day in a crevice, tree hole or thick foliage (Grimmett *et al.* 2011).

The Pallid Scops Owl is not a well studied species within the Indian Subcontinent (Ali & Ripley 1981). Its distribution in

Pakistan is that of a scarce resident and local migrant, summering in the hills, with a few winter records from the plains (Roberts 1991). For Gujarat, the Pallid Scops Owl is known to be an uncommon winter visitor, with sightings from Saurashtra and Kachchh, and isolated records from other parts of Gujarat (Ganpule 2016). This sighting from the middle of a city like Junagadh is interesting and suggests that the Pallid Scops Owl could be seen in other urban areas with trees, in our state.

References

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Vocalisation of Greater Painted-snipe *Rostratula benghalensis*

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Introduction

The Greater Painted Snipe (*Rostratula benghalensis*) belongs to the genus *Rostratula*, and it is the only resident snipe in India (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). It is a small, quail-sized bird, found around paddy, marshes, and reeds. This species is polyandrous and sexually dimorphic; the female is brighter in colour than the male. It breeds in the monsoon. The female mates with multiple partners in her territory, and leaves the nest after laying eggs. The male performs the incubation and parental role. During the breeding season, females start getting vocal to challenge rival females. The song of the female is deeper and stronger than the male due to the longer trachea. The female utters a 'ook' sound, like blowing in a bottle (Ali & Ripley 1980); the female uttering the call with fluffed out neck while calling from the ground (Mashru 2017), which can be audible as far as one km away (Kirwan 2020). If accidentally flushed, it makes 'kek...kek' calls in flight. So far, there is very little information available about the vocalisation of this crepuscular species, specifically about male vocalizations. I have observed the male making a hissing call, with wing display, when the chicks are around; probably a call made in threat or self-defence.

Observations

On 9 September 2020, at around 18:45 hrs, while birding at Saldi Talav (21° 34' 30.18" N, 71° 19' 24.7794" E), near Amreli, I heard a 'ook' call, coming from the marsh area. I immediately recognized the call as that given by the Greater Painted Snipe since I had recorded this call in 2011 for the first time and I am also familiar with other species' calls in this area. There were three-four birds based on sounds heard. I tried to approach closer after a few recordings and I flushed one female, which settled in the marsh a few meters away from me. I recorded calls using a Sennheiser ME66 Microphone paired with Zoom H4N digital recorder on a 44 khz 16-bit .wav format. I was able to record 15-minute recordings. Meanwhile, I noticed a very unfamiliar response to the 'ook' call. It was a very low, 'woohoo', coming from two directions where two other individuals were also calling. During the 15-minute observation, a total of 22 bouts of 'ook' (type A) and 16 bouts of 'woohoo' (type B) calls were recorded. It was noted that call-type B overlapped with A type call 11 times.

I generated spectrograms of both calls and also noted the characteristics. The details are given in table.