

## Sighting of Rook from Velan-Kaj Wetland, Gir Somnath District: an addition to the avifauna of Gujarat

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On 8 December 2017, the first author [RB] visited Velan-Kaj Wetland (20°43' 9.3"N, 70°48' 48.6"E), in Gir Somnath district, during the morning hours. He observed a large Crow (*Corvus* sp.), which seemed unusual, with bare base of bill and glossy plumage. The bird was not shy and was perched on a cement pole near a dumping site close to Sodav Mataji temple. The plumage and body features looked different from an Indian Jungle Crow (*Corvus macrorhynchos culminatus*). It was identified as a Rook (*Corvus frugilegus*) by its large size, conical pointed bill with bare base and glossy plumage. It looked like an adult bird.

On 17 December 2017, we again visited the area in search of the bird. It was easily located near the same place, perching on another cement pole nearby. On closer examination and with the help of the many photographs which we could take, it was identified as an adult Rook without any doubt. The bird allowed close approach. The dumping site had House Crows (*Corvus splendens*) foraging but we did not observe any Indian Jungle Crows there.

The Rook was a full grown adult, with peaked crown, plumage with violet gloss and ragged, shaggy thighs. The bill was conical in shape with bare nostrils, and naked paler base having creamish-white skin, which was extending till the eyes. When perched, the wings tips reached till the tail tip. During flight, we were able to note the rounded tail, splayed and fingered wing-tip, and longer wings. No call was made by the bird during both observations.

Subsequently, we contacted Prasad Ganpule, who confirmed its identification as an adult Rook. In the field guides (Kazmierczak 2000, Grimmett *et al.* 2011, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), there is no record of Rook from whole of India except Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh and Punjab.

There are no photos of the species on the Oriental Bird Images website from Rajasthan or Gujarat. It is also not mentioned in the checklist of birds of Gujarat (Ganpule 2016) or in the first update to the Gujarat checklist (Ganpule 2017). Thus, this is the first record of Rook from Gujarat and it is an addition to the avifauna of the state.

[We sent the images of the Rook to Arend Wassink, author of *Birds of Kazakhstan*, who confirmed that it was an adult Rook with unusually strong violet gloss to the wing coverts and scapulars. The nominate subspecies *C. f. frugilegus* is resident in Europe and Central Asia; northern populations migrate south to Mediterranean Basin and Middle East, east across Iran to Afghanistan, NW China and NW Indian Subcontinent (Madge 2018). In the southern part of its range, the blue gloss is tinged violet, as was seen here. Rook is generally uncommon in the Indian Subcontinent, and occurs in Ladakh in India (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). A flock was recently noted in the plains near Jammu, in Jammu & Kashmir (Sharma & Sharma 2017); as stated by the authors here, isolated records from Himachal Pradesh and Punjab are known, but there are no records from other parts of the country. Hence, this is an important record of the Rook from Gujarat and it is the southernmost known sighting so far for India. As stated by the authors, it is an addition to the avifauna of Gujarat.

We are grateful to Arend Wassink for all his help – Eds]

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