

Sighting of Spotted Crake and Water Rail near Surat

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There is a large wetland between Palanpore and Ichchhapore villages (21° 12' N, 72° 43' E), about five kms west of the Surat city, south Gujarat. The wetland is fed by Ukai canal and waste water from the city and so it remains filled throughout the year. On 13 March 2017, it was a holiday due to *Holi-Dhuleti* (festival of colours). We visited the wetland in the morning and at around 10:30 hrs, a bird similar to a Brown Crake (*Amaurornis akool*) was seen. We tried to go closer but immediately, it ran into the thick reeds and grass. Pravin Patel, who was with me, could take a single photograph. After scrutinizing the photograph properly, we could confirm that it was a Spotted Crake (*Porzana porzana*). It is rare in our region and it was a lifer for us, so we were very happy. We waited for half an hour but it did not come out. We decided to visit again the next day. Early morning on 14 March, we went to the same place but it was in vain as we could not see it. In the evening, Pravin Patel visited the location again and at around 17:00 hrs, he noticed some movement in the grass. After a few moments, a Spotted Crake came out in the open and was seen clearly

and photographed. After that, from 15 March to 11 April 2017, we regularly observed the Spotted Crake at the same place between 06:00-07:30 hrs in the morning and 17:00-19:00 hrs in the evening.



During these days, a Water Rail (*Rallus aquaticus*) was observed in the same wetland, around 300 to 400 mts away from the location of the Spotted Crake. The Water Rail was easily identified due to its long red bill and bigger size. We kept observing both the birds. After 26 March 2017, the Water Rail was not seen but the Spotted Crake was regularly seen till 11 April 2017.

Both the birds were active during morning and evening, between the hours stated above. On 28 and 29 March 2017, the temperature of Surat city reached up to 42° C, and during these two days, the Spotted Crake was seen only between 06:00-06:30 hrs in the morning and 18:45-19:15 hrs in the evening. But on 30 and 31 March 2017, the temperature dropped to 37° C and the Spotted Crake was seen between 06:00-08:00 hrs in the morning and 17:30-19:15 hrs in the evening.

The Spotted Crake and Water Rail are rare winter visitors to Gujarat (Ganpule 2016). Recent records of Spotted Crake are from Rajkot, Amreli and Ahmedabad (Mashru & Trivedi 2012) while the Water Rail has been noted near Surat in south Gujarat, in Kachchh, and in some places in Saurashtra (Shah 2004, Jadeja & Shah 2007, Joshi & Karia 2015).

The sightings near Surat, of both these species, over a period of 3-4 weeks are important, and indicate that they may remain in the same area in the winter months.

References

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