

Sighting of Spotted Sandgrouse in Kachchh

Bharat Kapdi: Epicenter Homestay, Lodai, Kachchh.

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In north-western India, it is seen in Jaisalmer district. P. M. Laad, a senior retired forest officer, had seen it in January 2002 at Ramgarh, near Jaisalmer (*pers. comm.*). It is still seen at Ramgarh, and photos of the species from this location are posted on the popular website 'Oriental Bird Images'.

According to Ali (1945), the Spotted Sandgrouse is a winter visitor to Kachchh and is particularly abundant in some years. It breeds in Sindh and Baluchistan in Pakistan (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). Ali (1945) stated that there is a high possibility that a small number of Spotted Sandgrouse could breed in Kachchh, as the place is not too far from Sindh. However, there is no record of its breeding in Kachchh.

This present sighting comes after a span of 19 years, and hence is an important record for Kachchh. It shows that the Spotted Sandgrouse is still an erratic winter migrant to the Kachchh region.

The Spotted Sandgrouse (*Pterocles senegallus*), is a winter migrant to north-west India and Pakistan (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). A flock of fifty birds was seen near Lodai village, in eastern Banni, Kachchh, on 15 November 2016. After this, the sandgrouse were seen again at least five more times in November and till the end of January 2017. There were more than 250 birds seen in small flocks a few times. The birds constantly call in flight, giving a 'waku-waku' call, and hence are locally known as 'waku waku'.

The Spotted Sandgrouse were very shy, keeping a distance from us. The flock was feeding on the exposed tubers of *Cyperus* sp. When a vehicle approached, the birds walked to the brown patches of dried sedges, and got completely camouflaged. It is extremely difficult to locate the birds when the flock settles to roost in the golden yellow to brownish, open flat land, where *Cyperus* sp. (locally called as 'Dhamor') is seen. The birds were very well camouflaged in the habitat.

The previous record of this species from Gujarat was of 90 birds, seen by S. N. Varu on 7 December 1997 in Vekaria Dhandh area, Banni (Varu 2000). In earlier years, he had recorded a big flock of more than 100 birds at Bhirandiara, Banni on 10 February 1980 and Kaswati Dam (23°37'62.24" N 69°90'08.43" E) near Lodai on 20 February 1983 and 15 January 1984, when the birds were arriving for drinking water (Varu 2000).



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References

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- Varu, S. N., 2000. 'Kachchhma Kachchhi Batavada' (Spotted Sandgrouse *Pterocles senegallus*) ni avalokan nondh. *Vihang* 2000 (*Sharad*): 9 [In Gujarati]. □



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