

Sighting of Rosy Minivet in Vansda National Park: an addition to the avifauna of Gujarat

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I often visit Vansda National Park (henceforth VNP) (20° 45' N, 73° 33' E), in Dang district in South Gujarat, for bird watching. On 15 January 2017, I reached VNP at around 14:30 hrs. I started photographing birds in the area. I observed that a Minivet (*Pericrocotus* sp.) was perched on a branch of a tree. I took two-three photos before the bird flew away. I saw that it had a pinkish wash on the breast and belly, greyish head and a whitish throat.

After coming home, I checked the images on my computer and noted that this individual was different from the Orange

Minivet (*Pericrocotus flammeus*), which is usually seen in the area. With the help of the reference book (Grimmett *et al.* 2011), I identified this as a male Rosy Minivet (*Pericrocotus roseus*). Since the species is not known to occur in Gujarat, I uploaded the image on various birding websites and on the social media, where the identity was confirmed as a Rosy Minivet by senior birdwatchers.

This is the first photographic record of the Rosy Minivet in Gujarat and the sighting was very exciting for me.

[The Rosy Minivet had been reported from VNP earlier in November 2008 by Adesh Shivkar (Praveen 2009). However, the bird could not be photographed. Since it was not documented properly at that time, the species was not included in the checklist of birds of Gujarat (Ganpule 2016). Hence, this is the first confirmed record of the Rosy Minivet from Gujarat and it is an addition to the avifauna of Gujarat – Eds]

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Sighting of Stoliczka's Bushchat near Vadodara

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The Stoliczka's Bushchat or White-browed Bushchat (*Saxicola macrorhynchus*) has gained interest of Indian birdwatchers and

ornithologists, especially in Gujarat and Rajasthan, over the last couple of decades. Being endemic to the Indian Subcontinent, historical data shows its presence only in Pakistan and India (Ripley 1982; Grimmett *et al.* 1998). It is considered as extinct in Pakistan (Roberts 1992), with sightings now only from India, and it is a 'Vulnerable' species (BirdLife International 2016).

The habitat of Stoliczka's Bushchat is semi-arid, desert, semi-desert, scrubland and areas with scattered bushes (Grimmett *et al.* 1998; BirdLife International 2016). We report its presence near a wetland i.e. Timbi irrigation tank (22° 19' N, 73° 17' E), located on the outskirts of Vadodara, in central Gujarat.

On 7 March 2016, at around 11:45 hrs, an unusual bird was photographed near Timbi irrigation tank. The bird was observed on a dry stem of a plant in the shallow and drying waters of the tank. It was having a prominent white supercilium, longer black beak and feet and tail - a characteristic of the Chat family, white underparts and streaked upperparts. The white supercilium and underparts,

along with the longer beak, indicated a possibility that it was a Stoliczka's Bushchat. The habitat where the bird was observed, though near a wetland, is quite similar to a scrub. Literature survey and discussion helped in its identification as a Stoliczka's Bushchat. The photograph was also circulated amongst experienced birdwatchers, where the identity was re-confirmed.

This species has been observed for the first time at Timbi irrigation tank, which is regularly inundated with water from the Narmada canal since last ten years and the canal system is well developed in the area. A dry, seasonal wetland is now almost perennial and is surrounded by *Prosopis juliflora* dominated scrub with scattered *Cassia* sp. and *Calotropis procera* on wetland fringe, which is the habitat favored by Stoliczka's Bushchat. There are records of Stoliczka's Bushchat near wetlands; Rahmani (1993) has reported its occurrence at Sultanpur jheel in Haryana and there are several records of its occurrence around Chhari-Dhandh Conservation Reserve in Kachchh.

We wonder if the species has adapted to the wetland conditions / extended its range to central Gujarat recently or was present earlier and had been overlooked due to the presence of a similar looking species like Common Stonechat (*Saxicola torquata*) in the area.

Since its record in the Velavadar Blackbuck National Park in 1992-1993 (Rahmani 1997) and near Naliya by Raghuvirsinh Jadeja, RFO of Naliya grassland, around the year 2000 (IBCN 2015), interest in Stoliczka's Bushchat has increased and several sightings from different areas have been reported (Himmatsinhji 2004; Varu 2007, 2009, 2010; Ganpule 2014, 2015; Mori 2016; Tiwari 2016). A total of 17 individuals were recorded during a survey in Kachchh in February and March, at six different locations near Naliya (Soni *et al.*, 2016). As per published records, the species has been mainly reported from Banni grassland, Chhari- Dhandh Conservation Reserve and Naliya grassland area in Kachchh, Little Rann of Kachchh, Velavadar Blackbuck National Park and once near Positra, in the Marine National Park i.e. in Kachchh and Saurashtra peninsula of Gujarat. Here, we recorded its presence for the first time in Central Gujarat. However, it is pertinent to note that there is a record of Stoliczka's Bushchat from Akola, in Maharashtra (Deshmukh 2007). Hence, it is possible that a few individuals wander up to Maharashtra. Systematic, intensive, in depth and meticulous surveys for the species are required in the entire state (including behavior, routine activity studies).

The first author (HP) visited Timbi again on 28 October 2016 and the Stoliczka's Bushchat was seen again. It was seen in the same area till the end of February 2017. Strong site fidelity has

been observed in Stoliczka's Bushchat (Rahmani 1997). We wonder if this same spot will be used every year by the bird. We will continue to monitor this area.

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