Sighting of Blue-throated Blue Flycatcher at Porbandar: a second record for Gujarat

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The Blue-throated Blue Flycatcher (*Cyornis rubeculoides*) is a summer visitor to the Himalayas and is resident in NE India; wintering in Eastern Himalayas and south to Bangladesh, SW India and Sri Lanka (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). The species is believed to be a vagrant to Gujarat, with only one previous record from Morbi, near Rajkot, in 2008 (Ganpule 2009).

A female Blue-throated Blue Flycatcher was seen and photographed on 5 December 2015, in the Porbandar city area (21° 38' 10" N 69° 38' 07" E), by the second author. He observed the bird for two consecutive days between 14:00 to 16:00 hrs, and it was active and catching insects. After the recent sighting of Brown-breasted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa muttui*) (*pers. observ.*) here, the sighting of Blue-throated Blue Flycatcher from Porbandar is really exciting, and it is only the second record for Gujarat.

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Acknowledgements:

We are thankful to Umar Khan and Nelson George for identifying the bird on 'Ask ID' of 'Indian Birds' FB Group.

References:

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Sighting of a probable Long-tailed Skua in Amreli district

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On 23 August 2016, we were on a birding trip near Savarkundla, Amreli district. Our aim was to search for passage migrants. We saw a gull-like bird flying overhead in sky. It was brownish-black in colour, with white on primaries. It had longer and pointed wings. Its central tail feathers were pointed and extended slightly beyond the tail. The second author managed to take one record photo. We identified it as a juvenile skua (alternative name for skua is jaeger, with Arctic Skua also known as Parasitic Jaeger). We thought that it was either an Arctic Skua (*Stercorarius parasiticus*) or a Long-tailed Skua (*Stercorarius longicaudus*). However, with only a single poor quality photograph, we could not confirm the identification. This location is almost 80 kms from the coast and it was surprising to find the skua here.

[*Even though the photograph is not very clear, it can be seen that the bird in question is a juvenile skua, based on its structure, the long wings and other characteristics. It looked similar to a Long-tailed Skua, due to the longer tail (looking longer than width of arm), narrower arms and the 'hand' looking longer than the arm (Olsen & Larsson 1997).*

Bhanubhai Acharya

Since juvenile skuas are very difficult to identify, we decided to send the image to experts. Klaus Malling Olsen and Rob van Bemmelen, who have experience of Stercorarius sp., opined that this individual was a juvenile Long-tailed Skua based on the long and slender (slim) wings, the long tail and shape of projecting central tail feathers (which look blunt), and a small white primary patch. Rob van Bemmelen stated that since there is only one image, and that too not very clear, Arctic Skua could not be entirely ruled out, but this individual could be considered as a probable Long-tailed Skua based on the above features (in litt., email dated 25 August 2016). Klaus Malling Olsen unequivocally stated that this individual was a juvenile Long-tailed Skua (in litt., email dated 29 August 2016).

Based on the detailed replies received from the experts and also on speaking with the observers regarding the jizz and flight of this bird, this individual was most probably a Long-tailed Skua. There is no previous record of Long-tailed Skua from Gujarat. But there are records from the western coast of India (Karuthedathu 2014, Moorthy 2015), and it is a vagrant in India.

However, since this individual could not be conclusively identified as a Long-tailed Skua, it is not included in the checklist of birds of Gujarat at present. We decided to treat this record with caution as the photograph is not clear enough. Identification of sea birds is quite difficult, and observers are requested to take as many images as possible for correct identification. We thank Klaus Malling Olsen, Rob van Bemmelen, Praveen J and Dipu K for helping with the identification of this bird – Eds]

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Observation of bait-fishing using insects by Striated Heron

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On 22 July 2016, I saw a Striated Heron (*Butorides striata*) at a road side pond near Nana Liliya village (21°50' N 71°39'E), Amreli District. It was picking up insects and dropping them in the water carefully so as to attract fish present in the water. In my 40 minutes of observations, it succeeded in catching three fish by using insects as bait. I also observed that when the insects moved away in the water due to the wind, it picked up the insect and put it at the original place (within striking distance). In case of failure, it was repeating its efforts by picking up new insects. When no insects were found nearby, it went a few feet away to find them. It changed its location four times, probably to increase the chance of success. Another curious thing I noticed was that when the insect which was used as a bait died in the water, the heron would sometimes eat it. Though I was a little far from the place where the heron was bait fishing, I could see that it was mainly catching Carpenter Ants (*Camponotus* spp.) and other insects like Beetles (*Coleoptera* spp.) for the bait. I was able to record a video of this event. The video can be seen at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r3-xLKUlc_A. This was the first time I had seen bait-fishing by a bird and it was fascinating to observe.

[*Bait-fishing has been recorded in 17 bird species of which 11 are herons (Réglade et al. 2015). Striated Heron has been recorded bait-fishing and may use either animal or vegetal bait, even if animal bait seems to be more effective (Higuchi 1986). There is one published record of bait-fishing by Striated Heron from India, but the kind of bait used was not known (Bhat 1990). Recent observations of bait-fishing by Indian Pond Heron (Ardeola grayii) were reported from Bengaluru and MP, wherein bread and an artificial item (polystyrene) were used as bait (Réglade et al. 2015). This report of Striated Heron using insects as bait qualifies as active bait-fishing behaviour as defined by Ruxton & Hansell (2011) and the observation of the heron eating insects which were used as bait is interesting – Eds*]

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