

Sighting of the Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug* at Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary

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where the wintering ranges of both the races probably overlap (Naoroji 2006).

Historical distribution in Gujarat: Dharmakumarsinhji (1955) wrote quite elaborately about the identification of Saker Falcon, and gave details from his field notes regarding the distribution of the Saker Falcon in Saurashtra. His observations during the mid-1950s were that it was a fairly common winter visitor to the desert tracts of northern Saurashtra, Kachchh & northwestern Gujarat. He made a specific mention of his sightings during that period in Wankaner (near Rajkot) as well as in Bhal grasslands of Bhavnagar and observed that these falcons usually arrived a bit late, towards the end of November or early December, and remained only for a short period during the colder months. These important and interesting observations by him correspond well with the recent sightings in Gujarat.

Sighting at Nal Sarovar: On 3 December 2018, a Monday, I received a call late in the evening around 18:00 hrs from the second author. He informed me of his sighting of a possible juvenile Laggar Falcon (*Falco jugger*) in a farmland at Aniyari Village, about 8 kms from Nal Sarovar. The record image which he sent was not very clear due to the fading evening light and the bird was perched quite high and was far. However, the face and breast markings of the falcon were visible in the image. One usually cannot make a firm conclusion on the identity with record images, especially when differentiating between a Laggar Falcon and Saker Falcon, as both tend to appear quite similar at first glance. After looking at the image thoroughly, I was convinced that this was a Saker Falcon and as more images came in, could convincingly conclude it as one. I requested the second author to keep a close watch on the bird till sunset and zero in on its roosting location, which would give a fair opportunity to photograph the bird the next morning.

After getting a confirmation about the roosting spot, I planned a visit to the location the next day, on 4 December 2018, with the second author and his son Ramzaan. We reached the site early and saw the bird perched at the same spot, where it was seen the previous evening. We made a slow and cautious approach, to get to a good photograph and managed to take some decent photos. The bird perched there till around 09:55 hrs, before taking off. In the following days and thereafter, I made several field visits in the mornings and evenings, till 18 December 2018, to further observe and take notes regarding the behavior of this individual. I also shared my sightings with a couple of senior birders to keep them abreast about this

The Saker Falcon (*Falco cherrug*) is a rare and uncommon winter migrant, mostly to north-western part of the Indian Subcontinent (Naoroji 2006). The Saker Falcon is one of the four species of *Hierofalcons*. It is listed as an 'Endangered' species, as there has been a rapid decline in its numbers over the past many years (BirdLife International 2019). This decline is mainly attributed to habitat loss in its distribution range along with rampant trapping of birds on its wintering grounds for falconry; it is a highly sought after and prized bird. Two races of the Saker Falcon are thought to occur in India, *F. c. cherrug* and *F. c. milvipes*. The distribution of *cherrug* is across central Europe to southwestern Russia, N Kazakhstan to Asia Minor and Iran; it winters in SW Asia. The distribution of *milvipes*, though a bit uncertain, is known to be from C Tien Shan and Altai Mountains to S Transbaikalia, Mongolia and N & C China, and recently in Jammu and Kashmir, N India and these birds winter in the subcontinent in Pakistan, Nepal & probably in semi-arid northwestern India (Ali & Ripley 1978, Orta *et al.* 2019). It is thought that northwestern India is

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important sighting. This individual was later identified as a second-year sub-adult female, by senior ornithologist Yoav Perlman from Israel, through the kind help of my friend and field researcher Giovanni Leonardi from Italy. This individual was last seen and photographed on the 14 March 2019 by the second author, and was believed to have returned back to its breeding grounds. It stayed in this area for more than three months, which is a rather long period for this species to stay at one location.

Over the past 10 years, there have been occasional and irregular sightings of this falcon, which have mainly been from the Little Rann of Kachchh and from the Greater Rann of Kachchh (Mori & Shah 2017). There have been other sightings of Saker Falcon in the winter season of 2018-2019 in Gujarat, which included sightings from the Little-, and Greater Rann of Kachchh. This sighting is a first record of this species from Nal Sarovar in the past many years. Also, it is important to note is that the Saker Falcon, which is a winter visitor mainly to the deserts now, was seen wintering throughout the season in a farmland area, close to a bustling village and in an area frequented by humans regularly. It should be noted that there were large numbers of *Calandrella* sp. larks, mostly Greater Short-toed Larks (*Calandrella brachydactyla*), in the surrounding area and their number was estimated to be in thousands (*pers. observation*). It is possible that due to the easy availability of prey, this falcon came and stayed here for the duration of the winter. This sighting of a Saker Falcon from

Nal Sarovar is important and suggests that this species is seen outside of its preferred habitat of deserts if there is availability of prey. Similar locations should be scouted for the presence of Saker Falcon, especially in Saurashtra.

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A first confirmed breeding record of Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher *Ceyx erithaca* in Gujarat

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Introduction

The Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher (*Ceyx erithaca*), is also known as the Indian Three-toed Kingfisher. Since the last few years, the Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher has been recorded from multiple sites in Gujarat (Jat 2015, Rathod 2017). It was assumed that the species could be a breeding migrant to the forests of south Gujarat as it was recorded attempting to dig a tunnel near Ahwa, in Dang Forest (Mistri *et al.* 2017) and an individual was recorded in Vansada National Park in October 2018 (Mishra 2018). However, there is no confirmed breeding or nesting record reported from Gujarat. We report here a nest of an Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher from Vansada National Park.

Observations

On 30 June 2019, a pair of Oriental Dwarf Kingfishers was seen in Vansada National Park during a field survey. The pair was