

## Jouanin's Petrel...

which seemed too long for Bulwer's Petrel (*Bulweria bulwerii*). Also, the pale wing bar was not clearly seen here. Hence, it was difficult to be sure but that it was most probably a Jouanin's Petrel. Nils van Duivendijk stated that this was definitely not a Storm-petrel, but a *Bulweria* sp. and was mostly a Jouanin's Petrel, while Jens Eriksen stated that this was a Jouanin's Petrel.

A detailed reply regarding the identification was received from Robert (Bob) Flood, well known author and sea bird expert. He explained that as pointed out by Hadoram Shirihai (world renowned authority on seabirds), due to the angle of view of the photos, some corrections were necessary regarding the measurements, and with corrections, the total length would be around 30-31 cms and wing 22-23 cms. These measurements fall within the range for a young Jouanin's Petrel. The bill dimensions and the proportionately longer rear end, structure and jizz of head profile, and uniform carpal area were all good for a young Jouanin's Petrel. Thus, this was confirmed as a young Jouanin's Petrel by experts.

Regarding the earlier record from Gujarat by Sinclair (1979), the authors are correct in stating that this record is from the Arabian Sea and does not fall within Indian limits and hence needs to be removed from the Gujarat list. Accordingly, the current record from Porbandar is considered to be the first record of the Jouanin's Petrel for the state.

I thank Robert (Bob) Flood, Michael Brooke, Nils van Duivendijk, Jens Eriksen, Praveen J and Dipu K. for all their help.

I specially thank Hadoram Shirihai, who in spite of his very busy schedule, took the time to help in the identification of this bird and I am very grateful for his help and support – Prasad Ganpule]

## Acknowledgements

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## Sightings of Bristled Grassbird in South Gujarat

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The Bristled Grassbird (*Chaetornis striata*) is a large brown warbler of wet grassland, which is classified as 'Vulnerable' and is endemic to the Indian Subcontinent (BirdLife International 2016). Ali & Ripley (2001) noted it as fairly common in Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and lower Bengal; distributed over most of the Indian Subcontinent as a resident, subject to local movements. Dharmakumarsinhji (1955) also described it as a fairly common and a resident bird, found in grasslands and lakesides in most parts of India and Gujarat. However, Grimmett *et al.* (2011) show only two isolated records for Gujarat.

There were no recent sightings in Gujarat, till it rediscovered after more than 100 years, at Naliya, Kachchh, in 2010 (Bhatt 2010). Thereafter, it was seen and photographed on 24 September 2015 near Amreli (Joshi 2015), and there is a recent record from Rampura grassland, Dahod (Patel & Joshi 2017).

This note describes the recent sightings of the Bristled Grassbird, in south Gujarat, at Untiyadra, Sisodra and Adadara (small villages of Ta: Ankleshwar and Ta: Mangrol of Bharuch District), just about 3 km & 10 km south of Kosamba Railway

Station respectively. The major crops of the entire area, including Untiyadra, are Sugarcane (*Saccharum officinarum*) and Rice (*Oryza sativa*). The area is under the Ukai/Kakrapar irrigation command area.

### Details of the Sightings

On 15 July 2015, early in the morning, I visited the area of the pond of my village Untiyadra (21° 30' N, 72° 57' E), in search of the Slaty-breasted Rail (*Gallirallus striata*), which is rare in Gujarat. This place is my favorite and in the past, I have sighted Pied Harrier (*Circus melanoleucos*), Slaty-breasted Rails, Ruddy-breasted Crakes (*Porzana fusca*), Watercocks (*Gallixrex cinerea*), Bitterns (*Ixobrychus* sp.), Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*) etc. here. I waited for more than half an hour for the Rail, but it did not appear. During this time, a noisy and bold bird was constantly calling loudly – a “chwee-chew”, along with a display flight, from a Babool (*Acacia nilotica*) tree nearby. I did not give much attention to the bird, with the impression that it may be a Lark (*Mirafra* sp.), and my main focus was to search for the Rail.

While returning, I took a few photos and recorded a video of this bird from a distance of about 15-20 ft without trying to identify it. The next day, I visited the same place again and successfully saw two Slaty-breasted Rails. Additionally, on that day, the continuously calling bird described above was perched on the same tree and was exhibiting the same behavior. On 22 July 2015, I visited the place again with Yogesh C. Patel and Dr. Pranav Desai for the Rail, and we found the singing bird repeating the same behavior. Pranav Desai took a few photos of this bird.

The following Sunday, I tried to identify this bird on the basis of photographs I had taken. My first impression was that it may possibly be a juvenile Lark. Hence, I checked the photos again, but this bird was slightly bigger than a Lark and also, its bill was thick and black. Thereafter, I checked for Grassbirds, but the map in the field guide shows only one isolated record for South Gujarat (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). Also, Grassbirds are generally skulking, while this bird was very bold. Therefore, without further reference or checking about Grassbirds, I thought this was some common species and forgot about it.

The next year, in 2016, I frequently visited the canal at Sisodra village, about 10 km from Untiyadra, for a survey of Bitterns in our area. On 18 August 2016, I heard the same call of the unidentified bird from the previous year. The call was coming from a grassland near the village. However, I went to search for the Bitterns without stopping to investigate this. Thereafter, I heard the same unidentified bird's call again on 23 August at the same place, and every time, the call reminded me that the bird was yet to be unidentified.

On 28 August, I opened the photographs of this bird from my archives and tried to identify it. The bird seemed to resemble a Bristled Grassbird. However, this species is very rare in Gujarat and not known to occur in south Gujarat. As a result, understanding that further identification would require expert views, I sent the images to Prasad Ganpule and Mukesh Bhatt. Both quickly replied that it was a Bristled Grassbird.

On 3 September, Mukesh Bhatt, Anil Bhardwaj and I visited and spent about half an hour at Sisodra. We could hear the Bristled Grassbird calling continuously but could not see it. Later, I realised that we could not see it as it was calling in flight and the atmosphere that day was cloudy, while we were searching for it in the shrubs and grasses! On the next day, my nephew Moksh Patel, Chinmay Bhatt and I spotted and observed the bird for more than an hour. The bird was continuously giving its characteristic two note call while displaying over the grassland, followed by diving and perching on top of a Neem (*Azadirachta indica*), which was about 20 feet high. I took a few record shots. Anil Bhardwaj, Mukesh Bhatt and I observed the bird in flight and perched on the Neem again on 6 September. On 11 September, two Bristled Grassbirds were seen at the same place. The second bird was 200 mts away from the first bird, with typical territorial flight and call. The bird perched on a Babool every time. The second bird disappeared after two days, while the first was observed up to end of September.

On 15 September, a third bird was sighted at Adadara village of Ankleshwar Taluka. The area was covered with *Desmostachya bipinnata* and was beside an asphalt road. The bird usually perched on *Prosopis juliflora* just 10 ft away from the road. When I visited this place on the morning of 19 September, the ground was flooded up to two feet, due to heavy rain the previous night. Probably its nest/habitat was destroyed due to this flooding and hence, the bird was last seen on this day.

### Habitat

The first bird at Untiyadra was found on top of a small Babool. The tree was on a plain grassy ground of approximately five hectare area, with the grass less than one cm high due to daily grazing, barring 2-3 *Prosopis juliflora* and some scattered *Desmostachya bipinnata*, locally called as 'Darbha'. There are Paddy fields behind this and thereafter there is a 'Sim-talavdi' (a small pond) covered with very dense and tall *Typha angustata*. At Sisodra, the bird was found in a 10 hectare uncultivated farm completely covered with 12-15 inch high *Cyperus rotundus* and some patches of *Pennisetum* sp. grass. There were 15-20 medium sized Neem and shrubs forming two boundaries of the farm, and it is surrounded by fish lakes, farms and barren land on which *Prosopis juliflora* grows. At Adadara, the bird was found on a one hectare small ground, covered with 10 inch

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*Desmostachya bipinnata* and two *Prosopis juliflora*. The ground was surrounded by a road and sugarcane fields.

### Behaviour

The first bird seen at Untiyadra was bold. It was flying in undulating circles for several minutes, emitting its two-note call and then 'parachuting' on top of a Babool, and on a Neem at Sisodra. Its singing continued even when perched atop the tree for a few minutes and then it again started its up-down flight. Probably, it was a territorial and/or display flight. However, at Untiyadra, the Babool is on a plain ground and I have taken photographs of the bird perched on the Babool from a distance of just about 15-20 ft. It did not fly away and continued singing continuously even when I approached near to it. All three birds were flying in undulating circles for several minutes, emitting the two-note call, and then parachute diving on top of the shrub/tree. This typical behavior was observed at all times during the day i.e. in the morning, noon and evening. The birds were bold and did not even get disturbed due to human activity.

### Discussion

Earlier this species has been found in Kachchh, Saurashtra and near Dahod, in central Gujarat, in the recent years, and now it has been recorded in south Gujarat. The Bristled Grassbird was seen continuously for three years in Amreli district (Viral Joshi, *pers. comm.*, verbally.) and now for two years in Bharuch district at three different places; hence confirming that it is still widespread in Gujarat. Maybe, it is more common than believed.

The sightings in Kachchh and Saurashtra with nesting material and in Bharuch district in display flight in the monsoon season indicates that the species could be breeding in the state. However, its status as a migrant or a resident is still unclear, because all the sightings were only in the monsoon season. Maybe, it is a resident bird and has remained unrecorded in

other seasons due to its skulking nature. In a study conducted in Nepal, Bristled Grassbirds virtually disappeared from their habitats by the end of October, with no response to call playback from December-March and were not seen in the winter months (Baral *et al.* 2014).

However, for Gujarat, further confirmation is required to ascertain its status as a resident or migrant. These sightings in South Gujarat indicate a wider distribution of this 'Vulnerable' species in our state.

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