

White-tailed Lapwings (*Vanellus leucurus*) and took some photos. We saw and photographed a male Red-crested Pochard along with three females. I saw it again on 27 January 2019 & on 3 February 2019 with Gaurang Bagda and Anuj Raina. On the same day, 13 January, Hemanya and I saw Sand Martins here. We observed more than 500 Sand Martins along with Barn Swallows (*Hirundo rustica*) and Wire-tailed Swallows (*Hirundo smithii*). The birds were continually catching insects above the wetland. The Red-crested Pochard is uncommon in Saurashtra. This was the first time I had seen it here. The Sand Martin was also seen in such large numbers for the first time.

The above records show that Prashnavada Wetland is an important area for water birds as well as other terrestrial birds. This area is not frequented by many bird watchers and it is not a popular birding destination. Many uncommon and rare

species have been observed in this area in the past one year and more intensive birding may result in a few more surprises. I intend to continue bird watching in this area and look for uncommon / rare birds in this wetland.

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Sightings of Eurasian Scops Owl *Otus scops* from Rajkot and Amreli

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The Eurasian Scops Owl (*Otus scops*) is a polytypic species, which breeds in Europe, in Africa north of the Sahara from Morocco to Tunisia, in the Middle East, Asia Minor and eastwards to Central Asia; it winters in savannahs of west and east Africa (Holt *et al.* 2019). In India, its status is unclear, with Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) stating that it is a rare autumn migrant to NW India while Chandran *et al.* (2016) speculate that the Eurasian Scops Owl, 'if at all it occurs, may be limited as a rare passage migrant to western India, though it is not entirely unlikely in the south'. Kazmierczak (2000) and Grimmett *et al.* (2011) consider it as a winter migrant to southern Pakistan, with isolated records from NW India. For Gujarat, Ganpule (2016) stated that it was believed to be a winter vagrant, with records from Bhavnagar area. Here, we present sightings of Eurasian Scops Owl from Amreli and Rajkot, in Saurashtra, in the years 2017 & 2018.

On 13 November 2018, at around 22:00 hrs, the second and third authors were searching for scops owls (*Otus* sp.) in a wetland near Amreli. They saw an unfamiliar scops owl at the edge of the wetland, where the bird was drinking water. Unfortunately, it got disturbed and flew away. On searching further for the owl in the surrounding area, they subsequently found it perched in a tree. They observed this individual for around 4 hours and were able to take many excellent photos. It was greyish in colour, with some rufous on underparts and

on the facial disk; the underparts were heavily streaked and cross barred; tarsal feathering was absent on the toes, which, along with the rufous in plumage, excluded the Pallid Scops Owl (*Otus brucei*), which is known to be an uncommon but regular winter visitor to Gujarat (Ganpule 2016). They also heard the characteristic *tuuew-tuuew* call uttered by this individual, which excluded the possibility of this being an Oriental Scops Owl (*Otus sunia*). Thus, the identification was confirmed as a Eurasian Scops Owl. However, in subsequent visits to the same area, they were not able to find the owl again. This was the first time the authors had seen this species in Amreli.

On 14 December 2018, at around 16:45 hrs, while bird watching near the premises of Rajkot Zoological Park, near Rajkot, which is also known as Pradyuman Park Zoo, the first author was observing a Sykes's Warbler (*Iduna rama*) moving from one tree to another, when a small owl was seen roosting on a purple baubinia (*Bauhinia purpurea*) at a height of 12-14 feet. It was not disturbed by the noise of people passing through there. It was observed that a Red-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*) was constantly disturbing the owl. The first author was able to take many photos. The bird was overall greyish-brown in colour, with cross barring and some rufous patches on its underparts. The Pallid Scops Owl was easily excluded as tarsal feathering on the toes was absent and also by the presence of rufous patches on the body.

Eurasian Scops Owl...



Hemanya Radadia

on an asphalt road. It seemed like the owl was killed due to a collision with some vehicle. The road was passing through *Acacia* sp. dominated thorn forest, with some farms and scrub. The owl was identified as a Eurasian Scops Owl, as we noted that it was greyish in colour, with notable rufous on the facial disk and underparts; tarsal feathering was absent on the toes, which eliminated the possibility of this being a Pallid Scops Owl. The underparts were irregularly streaked, with cross barring on the lower belly. It had long wings extending beyond the tail. Many photographs were taken. On a closer scrutiny of the photos, it was noted that p1 (the outermost primary) was noticeably longer than p6 (the sixth primary). Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) state that in-hand, p1 (the outermost primary) is longer than p6 in Eurasian Scops Owl; it is equal to p6 for Pallid Scops Owl and p1 is much shorter than p6 in Oriental Scops Owl. Based on this, we confirmed the identification of this individual as a Eurasian Scops Owl as this feature was clearly visible in the photos.



Kaushal Sharma

Although call was not heard, the similar Oriental Scops Owl was excluded based on the features described for the Oriental Scops Owl in Chandran *et al.* (2016), which were not present in this individual. Moreover, looking at the recently published records of Oriental Scops Owl from Saurashtra, it was noted that all the birds observed here were of the rufous morph (Bhaliya & Kotadiya 2016, Chauhan 2017, Gohil 2018) and there are no images of a grey-brown morph of Oriental Scops Owl from Saurashtra. Though, it should be noted that this is only indicative and cannot be used to eliminate the Oriental Scops Owl in this case. However, studying the features seen in this individual and comparing with identification details given in Chandran *et al.* (2016), we were confident that this was a Eurasian Scops Owl. This is a first record of a Eurasian Scops Owl from Rajkot District (Ashok Mashru, *pers comm.*, verbally)

On 22 November 2017, the fourth author was travelling near Bagasara, Amreli, when he found a road-kill of an owl

There are only a few places in Gujarat where Eurasian Scops Owl has been recorded. These include Bhavnagar, Kachchh, Little Rann of Kachchh and Mahuva; the last location is from where the species has been regularly recorded (Bhil 2016, Joshi & Legha 2017). It was seen in Mahuva in November and December 2018 too (Gaurang Bagda, 'eBird'). Now, Rajkot and Amreli can be added to the list of places where this species has been seen in Gujarat. Based on the recent records from Gujarat and also from our observations, it seems that the Eurasian Scops Owl is, in addition to being a passage migrant, also a winter visitor to Gujarat. Most of the sightings from recent years are from the winter months – November to February. While it could be mainly a passage migrant through

the state, some individuals do stay back for an extended period in the winter. But, more observations will help in understanding the status and distribution of the Eurasian Scops Owl in Gujarat.

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Sighting of Plain Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus neglectus* near Nal Sarovar

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collybita) of the *tristis* subspecies, which is also known as Siberian Chiffchaff, and which winters in India; Plain Leaf Warbler can be separated from Siberian Chiffchaff by its smaller size, proportionately shorter tail and larger head. Its call is a hard *tak tak* and a low-pitched *churr*, which is different from the call of a Siberian Chiffchaff (Grimmett *et al.* 2011).

The Plain Leaf Warbler is thought to be a rare winter migrant or a vagrant to Gujarat, and is probably overlooked due to identification difficulties. Sight records from Little Rann of Kachchh and Amreli are known and it is thought to occur in the Greater Rann of Kachchh (Ganpule 2016). However, there are no photographic records from Greater Rann.

On 13 February 2019, we were birding in the areas surrounding Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary. At around 08:00 hrs, on the outskirts of Aniyari, a small village near the sanctuary, we saw a flock of Black-headed Buntings (*Emberiza melanocephala*) and Red-headed Buntings (*Emberiza bruniceps*). We stopped to photograph these birds. After a few minutes, we noticed a

The Plain Leaf Warbler (*Phylloscopus neglectus*) is a winter migrant to western India (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) state that there are a few sight records from India, but no specimens were traced. The Plain Leaf Warbler looks very similar to a Common Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus*

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