

Sightings of Great Bittern *Botaurus stellaris* near Amalsad, South Gujarat

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On 2 December 2019, the first and second authors, PCP and ANB, went to a wetland at Kotha Village, near Amalsad (South Gujarat), which is around 500 acres in size. This wetland is inundated with water during the monsoon season and dries in the summer. The winter months are peak season for birding. Various water birds and raptors are seen here during this season. On that day, early in the morning, we were walking on a small trail in the wetland and we were actively observing birds with binoculars. At that time, PCP saw a flying heron-like bird but its flight was different and it was flying towards us. So, we immediately sat down and observed this different looking bird in flight. It passed just 50 feet from us, flew onwards, and landed in the grass of the wetland, around 200 mts away from us. During that time, we took around 10 photographs and observed all the photos carefully, confirming that this was a Great Bittern (*Botaurus stellaris*). After this observation, we

walked towards the other side of the wetland from where two more Great Bitterns flew away. So, within an hour, we observed three Great Bitterns in this area. We thought that this was probably the first record of Great Bittern for South Gujarat as we had never seen it here and not heard about its occurrence in our region. We informed about this surprising sighting of Great Bittern to local bird-watcher and our friend DP and told him to keep a watch for this species in this area. DP visited this area several times and observed the Great Bittern in this wetland. Sightings of Great Bittern are detailed in Table 1:

After 13 December 2019, there were no sightings of the Great Bittern from this area even though we visited the wetland frequently. It seemed that the birds were here only for a few days.

In the map for Great Bittern in Grimmett *et al.* (2011), an asterisk is given for Gujarat, which denotes 'isolated record(s) – exact location uncertain'. The Great Bittern was stated to be a rare winter migrant to Gujarat, with sightings from Saurashtra, North and Central Gujarat (Ganpule 2016). Recent records of the species from Khambhat (Vora 2018) and Vadodara (Shah 2018) in Central Gujarat are known. However, there were no documented records of Great Bittern from South Gujarat and no photos from this area were posted on popular birding websites or on social media before these sightings. Thus, these sightings confirm that the Great Bittern

Table 1: Sightings of Great Bittern near Amalsad

Sr. No.	Date	Time	No. of birds	Observer(s)
1	2 December 2019	08:30 to 09:30 hrs	3	Pravin Patel & Anil Bhatt
2	3 December 2019	09:05 hrs	1	Dipak Patel
3	4 December 2019	09:00 hrs	Not seen	Dipak Patel
4	5 December 2019	08:30 to 10:00 hrs	2	Dipak Patel, Viren Bachu Desai & Dr. Anand Patel
5	6 December 2019	08:30 hrs	2	Dipak Patel and Dr. Pragnesh Patel
6	7 December 2019	08:30 hrs 10:00-11:00 hrs 18:45 hrs	1 2 1	Dipak Patel Pravin Patel, Mukesh Bhatt Dipak Patel
7	8 December 2019	17:00 hrs	1	Dipak Patel
9	9 December 2019	07:30 hrs 09:00 to 10:30 hrs	1 1	Dipak Patel Pravin Patel, Anil Bhatt, Dr. Nilay Desai, Dr. Dhanesh Vaidya, Mukesh Bhatt
10	11 December 2019	08:00-09:00 hrs	1	Dipak Patel
11	12 December 2019	07:00 hrs	1 (busy feeding)	Dipak Patel
12	13 December 2019	09:00 hrs	1 (last record)	Dipak Patel

Great Bittern....

does visit this region and it could be a rare winter migrant here.

References

Ganpule, P., 2016. The birds of Gujarat: Status and distribution. *Flamingo* 8 (3)–12 (4): 2–40

Grimmett, R., Inskipp, C., & Inskipp, T., 2011. *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*. 2nd ed. Oxford University Press & Christopher Helm. London.

Shah, D., 2018. Sightings of Great Bittern in central Gujarat: Vadodara. *Flamingo* 16 (1): 22

Vora, U., 2018. Sightings of Great Bittern in central Gujarat: Khambhat Taluka. *Flamingo* 16 (1): 22 □

Does the Grey Nightjar *Caprimulgus jotaka* occur in Gujarat?

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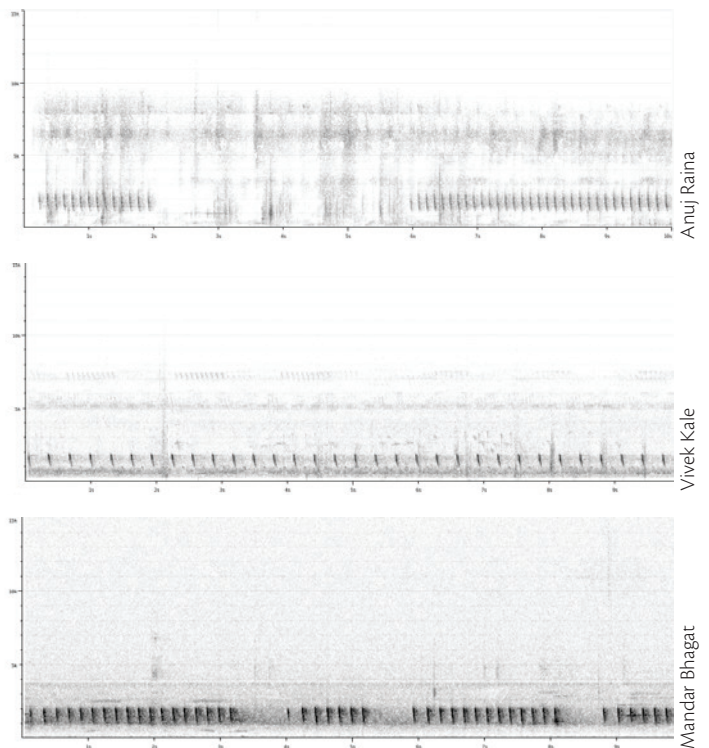
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On 17 June 2018, we visited Kumkotar (20° 53' N, 73° 12' E), near Vansada National Park in South Gujarat. We were mainly doing amphibian surveys in the area as seasonal rains had increased the flora and fauna diversity. At around 04:30 hrs, very early in the morning, we heard a call of a nightjar (*Caprimulgus* sp.). We recorded the call and tried to locate the bird. We saw a nightjar flying away but could not get photos as it was dark and the nightjar was seen briefly and that too only in flight. This call did not match with any amphibian species found in this location and we were sure that this was a call of a nightjar. Two calls were heard from the opposite direction during the survey. The site is near Koskhadi River, a tributary of Ambika River, which connects the secluded forest of Kumkotar (Surat district) with Vansada National Park (Navsari District). The forest land of Kumkotar has similar forest type as Vansada national NP i.e. tropical moist deciduous forests.

We were somewhat confused by this call. Being familiar with the call of the Indian Jungle Nightjar (*Caprimulgus indicus*), we could make out that the call of this bird was faster than the call of the Indian Jungle Nightjar. The first author has birded extensively in the Himalayas and heard the call of the Grey Nightjar (*Caprimulgus jotaka*) and was reminded of that call in pitch and frequency. We generated a sonogram from our recorded call and compared it with the call of a Grey Nightjar from the Himalayas and an Indian Jungle Nightjar from Gujarat. Three sonograms are given here – sonogram of call recorded by us, sonogram of call of Indian Jungle Nightjar (Xeno Canto XC131945 by Vivek Kale) and Grey Nightjar (Xeno Canto XC320019 by Mandar Bhagat).

It can be seen that the call recorded by us matches with the call of the Grey Nightjar more than the call of an Indian Jungle



Nightjar. For call of the Indian Jungle Nightjar, there are around 3 to 4 notes/second. The call of the Grey Nightjar is faster, with 6 to 7 notes/second. The relative pitch also differs slightly, with the Grey Nightjar call being of slightly higher pitch. These differences are slight, but the call recorded by us points to the identification of this individual as a Grey Nightjar rather than an Indian Jungle Nightjar.

[The recording by one of the authors (Anuj Raina) has been uploaded on the website Xeno Canto as the call of a Grey Nightjar and can be accessed online at <https://www.xeno-canto.org/439948>. The Indian Jungle Nightjar and the Grey Nightjar are now treated as