

Sightings of Large Hawk Cuckoo *Hierococcyx sparveroides* near Girnar: an addition to the avifauna of Gujarat

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The first and second authors [GB & AV] visited Laldhori area of Bhavanath, Girnar, near Junagadh, on 10 March 2018. We saw a hawk cuckoo (*Hierococcyx* sp.) in the deep shade of a large tree. It was moving in the area and we followed it and got good photographs. It looked similar to a Common Hawk Cuckoo (*Hierococcyx varius*). After some time, when we saw the photographs of that bird again, we felt that it was somewhat different from a Common Hawk Cuckoo. It was larger sized, had a black chin, was darker and browner on the upperparts and had a slaty-grey head contrasting with brownish-grey mantle. The tail had broader and fewer tail bands than in a Common Hawk Cuckoo and the thin whitish bands on the tail, normally seen in a Common Hawk Cuckoo, were lacking. We identified it as a Large Hawk Cuckoo (*Hierococcyx sparveroides*). All three of us saw another hawk cuckoo in the same area on

3 January 2019. We photographed it and initially identified it as a Common Hawk Cuckoo. But, Prasad Ganpule saw the photographs in our eBird checklist (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S51286618>) and informed us that the bird looked similar to a Large Hawk Cuckoo. After rechecking the photographs, we found that the following features matched with a Large Hawk Cuckoo: we remembered that it was large sized, had dark-brown barring on underparts, a distinct black chin was visible and there was chestnut streaking on throat and breast. We identified it as an adult Large Hawk Cuckoo. The similar Common Hawk Cuckoo has pinkish-rufous on breast, with greyer upperparts and grey-and-rufous bars on belly (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

The Large Hawk Cuckoo breeds in the Himalayas; it winters along the base of the Himalayas and in the Eastern and Western Ghats (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Grimmett *et al.* (2011) give isolated records of the Large Hawk Cuckoo from the Western Ghats in the winter. There are recent winter records of this species from Maharashtra, and a record from Mumbai is also known (Dhaigude *et al.* 2020). Hence, it could occur as a vagrant in Gujarat too and these sightings confirm its occurrence here. Both these sightings can be considered to be in the winter season and would suggest that the Large Hawk Cuckoo may be migrating to suitable habitats outside its known range in the non-breeding season. The challenge is in the identification of the Large Hawk Cuckoo in the field since it is quite similar to the Common Hawk Cuckoo. The identification can be confirmed only with good photographs, which show well all the features. In juvenile plumage, it is extremely similar to the Common Hawk Cuckoo and it might be difficult to identify it conclusively even if seen well. In this respect, a juvenile/immature hawk cuckoo seen in Kachchh in November 2019 by S. N. Varu and others was identified as a probable Large Hawk Cuckoo. However, the upperparts were not visible and the tail pattern could not be ascertained; there were differing opinions from experts and so the identification could not be confirmed.

The Large Hawk Cuckoo is not listed in the recent checklist of the birds of Gujarat (Ganpule 2016, 2017). These sightings from Girnar are thus important and the Large Hawk Cuckoo is an addition to the avifauna of the state. It is suggested that all hawk cuckoos should be properly photographed and

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scrutinized, especially in the winter, as there is a possibility that a few birds could turn out to be Large Hawk Cuckoos. Birders should be aware of the occurrence of this species in Gujarat, especially in forests and well wooded areas in the winter, and familiarize themselves with the features of both hawk cuckoos – the Common Hawk Cuckoo and the Large Hawk Cuckoo, for correct identification.

Acknowledgements

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Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator* or Masked Shrike *Lanius nubicus*? Sighting of an unusual shrike in Velavadar National Park

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We visited Blackbuck National Park, Velavadar, near Bhavanagar, on 23 October 2017. It is the largest roosting ground for harriers (*Circus* sp.) and it is quite well known for their spectacular evening roosting numbers. We observed harriers in large numbers and many other species of birds. While birding in the area, we observed one juvenile shrike (*Lanius* sp.) perched on a tree cage. We initially identified it as an Isabelline Shrike (*Lanius isabellinus*) and the photos were uploaded on the OBI website.

Later, we got an email from Prasad Ganpule regarding the identification of this shrike. He suspected that the images

which were uploaded on the OBI website were either of a juvenile Woodchat Shrike (*Lanius senator*) or a juvenile Masked Shrike (*Lanius nubicus*). We sent high resolution images and a video of the same bird for identification. It was later identified as either a juvenile Woodchat Shrike or a juvenile Masked Shrike by experts but the identification could not be concluded. This sighting also shows that the identification of juvenile shrikes is often very difficult and some birds cannot be conclusively identified even when photos and video is available.



Pankaj Maheria

[A brief description of the individual is as follows: a juvenile shrike, aged by the dark scaling to upperparts. It had creamish underparts,