

also known to feed on eggs and chicks of Cape Cormorant (*P. capensis*) in Namibia (Elliott *et al.* 2016). Hence this is not unexpected.

Purple Swamphen is primarily vegetarian, but it is known to be omnivorous. Animal food forms only a small part of its diet, but it is known to feed on eggs and nestlings of birds (Taylor 2016).

These observations add to our knowledge about the diet of these waterbirds.

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Sightings of Stoliczka's Bushchat in Kachchh

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other grass spp. and *Capparis* and *Ziziphus* shrubs. The species is probably highly adaptive, considering its presence in the dissimilar habitats present in Banni and Naliya areas, and other distinct habitats in Rajasthan. The habitat in Rajasthan is dominated by *Cenchrus ciliaris* grass and scanty bushes of *Capparis* and *Ziziphus*. Some individuals observed in the Naliya and Banni region, inhabit agricultural land, and adjacent areas.



Introduction

The White-browed Bushchat or Stoliczka's Bushchat (*Saxicola macrorhynchus*) is endemic to the north-west Indian subcontinent. Its historical distribution included Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Gujarat in India; adjacent parts of Punjab and Sind in Pakistan (probably now extinct) and Afghanistan (now extinct) (Ali & Ripley 1983). It inhabits dry, semi-deserts and desert plains with low herbs and scattered shrubs. The species is threatened by habitat loss and degradation and is classified as 'Vulnerable' (BirdLife International 2016).

Habitat, Distribution and Ecology

The Stoliczka's Bushchat is mainly distributed in the Banni and Naliya grasslands of Kachchh district (Himmatsinhji 2004, Varu 2007, 2009, 2010, Soni 2015). The Banni grassland is located in Kachchh district, south of the Greater Rann of Kachchh while Naliya grassland is situated in Abdasa Taluka of Kachchh. In Banni, it inhabits dry flatland having *Suaeda fruticosa* along with *Cressa cretica* and *Tamarix* shrubs. In Naliya grasslands, it inhabits grassland having *Aristida*, *Cenchrus*, *Dicanthium*,

Sightings and Behaviour

The Stoliczka's Bushchat is a strictly insectivorous bird (Ali & Ripley 1983). The bird is highly parochial and has high site fidelity, and shows preference to certain favoured bushes or shrubs in their territory (Rahmani 1997). This is mainly due to food niche. The birds observed in both Banni and Naliya habitat are either seen singly or in pairs.

A peculiar behaviour unique to the Stoliczka's Bushchat is the 'Puff and Roll'. In it, the bird puffs up its chest, sways sideways, runs a little distance and again repeats the same. The bird appears to be larger than normal, and the white belly is prominently visible. The head is held slightly back, and the tail

and wing tips touch the ground occasionally. This behaviour has been observed in both Naliya and Banni areas, where it is performed on the open ground amidst vegetation. The

reasons for this behaviour are not known but there are several hypotheses; it could be a threat display, a courtship ritual or a tactic to flush its prey.

Sightings by Jugal Tiwari, Vaibhav Mishra and me in Banni and Naliya areas of Kachchh are given below in Table.

Place	Month	Year	No. of Sightings
Banni	December	2006	1
Banni	March	2007	2
Banni	January	2009	1
Banni	December	2009	3
Banni and Naliya	November-February	2010-2011	13
Banni and Naliya	January-March	2012	7
Banni	November	2012	1
Banni and Naliya	November-January	2013-2014	3
Banni	September	2015	2 (Juvenile)
Banni and Naliya	December-March	2015-2016	7



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We have been observing the Stoliczka's Bushchat from December 2006. The latest sightings are from March 2016. In Banni, it was noted near Kiro hill, near watch-tower no. 2 on the way to Chahlo village, in Baghdadia Thath area, and near Servo Dhandh. In Naliya, it was noted in Bhanada and Kunathiya Don (grassland), near Lala watch-tower and on the edge of agricultural fields. All of the sightings have been between September and March. There have been no sightings in the other months, suggesting either short-range or long-range migration for breeding.

The most notable sightings are those of two separate, first-year juveniles, on 4 September 2015 and 17 September 2015 in Banni. Both the juveniles showed darker brown wings with clear barring, similar to adults, whitish belly, indistinctly brown-mottled throat and breast. The juvenile seen on 4 September also showed a prominently yellow gape, and dark mottling on the head and flanks. It should be noted that nothing is known about the breeding of Stoliczka's Bushchat and an active nest has never been found anywhere yet. Our observations indicate

that it is a winter migrant to Kachchh; from September to March and it is not known to breed in Kachchh, but the sighting of these two fresh juveniles is intriguing.

These sightings show that the Stoliczka's Bushchat is a regular winter migrant to Kachchh.

[Though Stoliczka's Bushchat is a regular winter migrant to Banni and Naliya in Kachchh, there are very few sightings from outside these areas in Gujarat. It has been noted in Velavadar National Park (Rahmani 1997), in Little Rann of Kachchh (photos on the website 'indianaturewatch') and near Positra, Dwarka (Ganpule 2015) in the recent past – Eds]

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