

Sightings of rufous morph Oriental Scops Owl

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Amreli District

We visited a forest area near Bhad village (21° 12' N, 71° 14' E), Ta: Khambha, Dist. Amreli, on 10 January 2016 with our birder friends Bhavesh Baladhiya, Himanshu Vegad, Chhaganbhai Shiyal, Bharat Vegad and Ramesh Makwana. There, we saw and photographed a small, rufous coloured owl roosting in a Banyan tree (*Ficus benghalensis*). We did not hear its call. After carefully observing the bird and taking photographs, we concluded that it was a rufous morph Oriental Scops Owl (*Otus sunia*). There are very few previous records of this species in Gujarat.



Rakesh Bhaliya

Gandhinagar District

We regularly go for birdwatching to 'Aranyaa Udyan', in the eastern part of Indroda Nature Park, Gandhinagar (23° 12' N, 72° 39' E). It is a well wooded area with large trees. On 1 February 2016, at around 08-30 hrs, we saw a small, rufous coloured owl roosting in a 'Chandan' tree (Sandalwood, *Santalum album*). Near this place, there is a small water point with many big trees and Bamboo thickets. We took some photos and identified the owl as a rufous morph Oriental Scops Owl (*Otus sunia*). The bird stayed at the same place for the whole day and was undisturbed by other small birds which came near to it. At around 19-30 hrs, it started preening and then flew away. We went to the same place on the next day but could not locate it. After nightfall, we used call playback to check if the Owl was still there. It responded once and called from a Mango tree (*Mangifera indica*).

The Oriental Scops Owl has been noted by us earlier in Gandhinagar. On 12 October 2014, a small grey-brown coloured owl was seen in 'Punit Van' area for a few minutes. However it was disturbed by other birds and hence we could not confirm its identity. However on 16 October 2015, a small grey coloured owl was seen and photographed in the same area. This time we could take photos and it was confirmed as an Oriental Scops Owl. It was a grey morph bird.

As per our knowledge, Oriental Scops Owl is uncommon in Gujarat.



Irshad Theba

Oriental Scops Owl...

[There are very few previous records of this species in Gujarat. Dharmakumarsinhji (1955) collected two specimens near Bhavnagar and suspected them to be of the subspecies *rufipennis*. There are two subspecies of the Oriental Scops Owl in the Peninsula: the nominate *sunia* and *rufipennis*. *Rufipennis* occurs in 'N Maharashtra through Western Ghats and S E Ghats' and *sunia* in a large area extending from Nepal to Assam, E Bangladesh and through NE Peninsula in Madhya Pradesh and Orissa (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). For Gujarat, the authors give its distribution for south Gujarat and Gir area in Saurashtra, showing it as a resident in our area, with *rufipennis* shown as occurring here. There are three colour morphs in this species; rufous, brown and grey. Regarding identification of the above birds, there is no doubt that these are Oriental Scops Owls. The two birds are clearly of rufous morph.

Oriental Scops Owl was seen and photographed by Mukesh Bhatt in Dang forest (Bhatt 2012) and it is known to occur in the region all round the year (Mukesh Bhatt, pers. comm., verbally). It is presumably resident in the Dang forest area as

many birdwatchers have photographed it in the area in different seasons since then. However these records from Gandhinagar (Central Gujarat) and from Amreli District in Saurashtra are noteworthy.

We thank Abhinand C and Praveen J for their help – Eds]

References:

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Great Bittern at Porbandar

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Kartik Pomal

On 18 Januray 2015, I visited Gosabara wetland, Porbandar with Manojbhai Tank and Jaymeet Solanki. There we photographed a Great Bittern (*Botaurus stellaris*). There are very few records of this bird from Gujarat. Hence this sighting is worth reporting.

[There have been recent records of Great Bittern from Gujarat; Bagda (2014) from Junagadh and Trivedi (2015) from Nal sarovar. Also there are records of Great bittern in November and December 2014 from Gosabara (Rughani 2014). Birdwatchers are requested to send their sightings of Great Bittern from Gujarat so that its status and distribution can be understood – Eds]

References:

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