

Some interesting bird sightings from Jessore Sloth Bear Sanctuary: Dist. Banaskantha

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The Jessore Sloth Bear Sanctuary, covering about 180 sq. kms. was declared as a protected area in 1978 to preserve the habitat of the vulnerable Sloth Bear (*Melursus ursinus*). The sanctuary falls in the arid to semi-arid zone of North Gujarat and consists of dry deciduous thorny scrub forest (Anonymous 2017). The forest is part of Aravali ecosystem and acts as a buffer, separating the desert ecosystem (western region) from the forest ecosystem. The rocky terrain and tree-clad landscape arrests the process of desertification and its eastward advancement (Pandit *et al.* 2005). The sanctuary is surrounded by numerous wetlands, which fulfil water requirement of its varied life forms, including endangered birds like vultures (*Gyps* sp.), which regularly nest in its high rocky peaks and crevices. The sanctuary is also a home to some rare and endangered avifauna and holds good number of bird species endemic to India and South Asian region. As per a GEER Foundation report, 212 bird species have been reported from the sanctuary (Trivedi 2005). During our birding trips in the past seven years, we have seen more than 280 bird species and are continuing to collect data from this area. Many of the species have been identified by calls but photos of a few species have not been obtained yet. We hereby report a few of the interesting bird sightings from the region.

Orange-headed Thrush (*Zoothera citrina*) – A first record of the species in Jessore was on 9 July 2017 (Jani 2017). On 27 July 2018, at around 16:00 hrs, the first author was not only able to locate the bird again but was also able to take good photographs, though from a long distance. These photos confirmed the sighting as well as the occurrence of the species from this area. These sightings, for two consecutive years in the same patch of the forest, indicate that it could be a monsoon visitor to this area. But so far, we have not found any evidence of its nesting here.



Drongo Cuckoo (*Surniculus lugubris*) – During many of our monsoon birding visits to the sanctuary, we have heard the call of a Drongo Cuckoo, which is a monsoon visitor to many other parts of the state (Ganpule 2016). On 5 August 2018, at around 11:05 hrs, near 'Muniji' Temple, the first author was able to photograph the bird and confirm its identity by its call and also by its thin, curved beak, white nape patch and white barred under-tail coverts. This is the first photographic record of the species from Jessore and hence confirms its presence during the monsoon season in this area.



Eurasian Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*) – At around 11:00 hrs on 21 October 2018, at Khatta Amba region of the



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sanctuary, the first author was able to photograph a Eurasian Sparrowhawk. The bird was perched on the lower branches of a tree in a patch of forest. Earlier we had captured many flying records of the bird from the Sanctuary premises. The bird was identified by white underparts with chevron-shaped markings, lack of gular stripe, and prominent white supercilium. Though the Eurasian Sparrowhawk is a widespread winter visitor to our state, it is probably overlooked and there are very few published records from Jessore.

Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin (*Cercotrichas galactotes*) – A Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin was seen perching along with an Indian Robin (*Saxicoloides fulicatus*) at around 17:30 hrs on 18 August 2018 in the foothills of Ranitook region, which is a part of the sanctuary. Both the authors, along with birders Akshay Chauhan and Ravi Dave, were present. During our two hour birding trail, we were able to see three individuals, which were quite bold and we were able to get good photographs. The birds were foraging on the lower branches of trees, on the ground, and all its features were noted. No call was heard during our observations. The second author made consecutive



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visits to the same location in an attempt to relocate it and was successful in seeing it again on 15 September 2018 at 17:00 hrs, on 23 September 2018 at 09:40 hrs and on 7 October 2018 at

10:45 hrs. The last sighting was on 7 October 2018, i.e. 51 days from the first sighting date. The Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin bird is a passage migrant in Gujarat and is seen regularly in Kachchh and sometimes in Saurashtra (Ganpule 2016). These records from Jessore suggest that it is a passage migrant in this area too.

In addition to the records mentioned above, we have noted a juvenile Indian Courser (*Cursorius coromandelicus*), which is uncommon in this area and indicates that it could be breeding here. The endangered and endemic White-naped Tit (*Parus nuchalis*) is resident in the sanctuary and is frequently seen in Jessore. Most of the sightings of White-naped Tit are from the foothills of the sanctuary. We have never seen the species at higher regions of the sanctuary, where Great Tit (*Parus major*) is resident and seen in good numbers. Indian Yellow Tit (*Parus xanthogenys aplonotus*) has been recorded from Ranitook and in the north-east area of sanctuary, facing Mt. Abu. The Mottled Wood Owl (*Strix ocellata*) has been heard thrice from Ranitook, during the night and in the early morning hours. More intensive bird watching, in different seasons and covering more areas of the sanctuary, may result in some more interesting sightings from this area and can further increase the avian species recorded from the sanctuary.

References

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Radio-collared Greylag Goose *Anser anser* at Vadla, near Nal Sarovar

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Vadla Wetland is situated about 90 kms from Ahmedabad, on the Viramgam-Surendranagar highway, towards Gangad. It is a shallow wetland north-west of Nal Sarovar and is a part of the same watershed. Due to very less rainfall, the Nal Sarovar Sanctuary is running dry this year. But, Vadla has water this year due to the Narmada Canal, and has turned into a stop-over spot for migratory birds. The water birds and other common birds have found an alternate home in Vadla this year.

On 13 January 2019, a Sunday, I was on my way back from Ahmedabad. I decided to visit this area. I reached Vadla at around 11:00 hrs in the morning. I was greeted by a profusion of birds, both migratory as well as resident. I took a round of the water body, to do a reconnaissance survey of the area, during which I could spot the following birds without the aid of binoculars:

