

Red-necked Stint....

The Red-necked Stint is now a 'Near Threatened' species (BirdLife International 2019). It is a winter visitor to eastern India, with isolated records from Tamil Nadu (Grimmett et al. 2011). It should be noted that Grimmett et al. (2011) show only one isolated record, which is from Karnataka, for the entire western coast of India (from Kerala to Gujarat). Thus, it seems that the Red-necked Stint is very rare on the western coast of India. The species is a winter migrant to E India, Myanmar, S China and Taiwan through Philippines and Indonesia to Solomon Islands, Australia and New Zealand (Van Gils et al. 2019). Thus, its sighting in Gujarat is surprising. It is possible that this bird took a more westerly route on its return migration to its breeding grounds, thus arriving in Gujarat.

The Red-necked Stint is a vagrant to Gujarat and was included in the Gujarat checklist by Parasharya et al. (2004). However, there is no record shown for Gujarat in Grimmett et al. (2011) or in Rasmussen & Anderton (2012). Ganpule (2016) stated that a single bird was ringed under the BNHS-MAPS program at Jakhau, Kachchh, by McClure & Porntip (1972), and included the species in the latest Gujarat checklist. In the list of birds ringed at Jakhau by McClure & Porntip (1972), one Red-necked Stint and 43 Dunlin (*Calidris alpina*) were ringed. However, the commoner Little Stint is absent from this list. But, since this is a ringing record, it can be assumed that the bird was correctly identified. Thus, only one previous record of the species is known for the state.

The present sighting further confirms that the Red-necked Stint occurs in Gujarat and this is the first photographic record from the state. It is well known that the Red-necked Stint is very similar to the Little Stint in non-breeding plumage, and difficult to identify and separate in the field in the winter. Bird watchers should be

aware and carefully check flocks of Little Stints in detail as there is a possibility of Red-necked Stint occurring here – Eds]

Acknowledgements

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Some significant avian records from Prashnavada Wetland, near Sutrapada, Gir-Somnath District

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The Prashnavada Wetland (20°48' N, 70°34' E), near Sutrapada, in Gir-Somnath District, supports a wide variety of avifauna. The area includes a mosaic of habitats, with a main wetland and micro-habitats consisting of coastal area, woodland, scrub, and farms. The wetland dries out in the summer and is filled up by the monsoon rains; it is approximately 8 sq. kms in size and is adjacent to the coast. I carried out a detailed study in this area and recorded all the bird sightings from December 2017 to January 2019 – a period of 14 months. The study was conducted round the year, in the winter season as well as in the summer and monsoon. I noted a total of 149 species, out of which 13 species are of interest. The sightings of these species of interest are presented in the table.



Anup Chavada

Meet Vala



Ravi Patel

Gaurang Bagada



The sightings are described in detail as follows:

Black-headed Munia: On 10 November 2017, I was with Gaurang Bagda. We reached the wetland at 07:30 hrs. That day, the temperature was low and it was quite foggy. We had recorded one Water Rail (*Rallus aquaticus*), four Baillon's Crake (*Porzana pusilla*), two Grey-bellied Cuckoo (*Cacomantis passerinus*) - one hepatic female and a juvenile, and a Zitting Cisticola (*Cisticola juncidis*). We also saw and photographed three Black-headed Munia. The birds were feeding in the grass with Scaly-breasted Munia (*Lonchura punctulata*) and Zitting Cisticola. This was the first time I had seen the Black-headed Munia here.

Details of significant avian sightings from Prashnavada Wetland

No.	Common Name	Scientific Name	Date of sighting(s)	Accompanying observer(s), if any
1	Black-headed Munia	<i>Lonchura malacca</i>	10 November 2017	Gaurang Bagda
2	Cotton Pygmy-goose	<i>Nettapus coromandelianus</i>	1 December 2017	Meet Vala
3	Forest Wagtail	<i>Dendronanthus indicus</i>	2 December 2017 25 December 2018	Meet Vala
4	Red-headed Bunting	<i>Emberiza bruniceps</i>	30 December 2017 13 December 2018	
5	Common Starling	<i>Sturnus vulgaris</i>	16 February 2017 3 February 2018	Saswat Mishra & Dr. Pragnesh Patel
6	Chestnut-tailed Starling	<i>Sturnia malabarica</i>	3 November 2018	
7	Eurasian Cuckoo	<i>Cuculus canorus</i>	3 November 2018	
8	Indian Blackbird	<i>Turdus (merula) simillimus</i>	3 November 2018	
9	Sociable Lapwing	<i>Vanellus gregarius</i>	29 November 2018	
10	Great Bittern	<i>Botaurus stellaris</i>	13 December 2018	Anup Chavda & Shweta Chavda
11	Mallard	<i>Anas platyrhynchos</i>	25 December 2018	Dipak Vadher
12	Red-crested Pochard	<i>Netta rufina</i>	13 January 2019	Hemanya Radadiya
13	Sand Martin	<i>Riparia riparia</i>	13 January 2019	Hemanya Radadiya

Prashnavada Wetland....

Cotton Pygmy-goose: On 1 December 2017, I was in this area with Meet Vala. We reached towards the coastal trail in the evening. We stopped at the side of the road and scanned the area. At that time, we saw and photographed five Cotton Pygmy-goose here. The birds were feeding and preening. We got some good photographs. This is an uncommon species here.

Forest Wagtail: On 2 December 2017, I went again with Meet Vala. In the morning, we reached the wetland and the area of plantation done by Forest Department. This woodland area is very dense and is devoid of human activity. I have seen forest birds like Indian Paradise-flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi*) and Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher (*Culicicapa ceylonensis*) in this area. I saw an unusual bird here and after observing it with binoculars, identified it as a Forest Wagtail based on its distinct plumage. A second sighting of the Forest Wagtail from this area was on 25 December 2018. A total of five birds were feeding on the ground and uttered alarm calls when I approached nearer. The Forest Wagtail is uncommon to rare winter visitor in Gujarat, with sightings from Gir / Girnar area and other scattered records from Saurashtra (Ganpule 2016). I believe these are the only records known from coastal Gir-Somnath District.

Red-headed Bunting: On 30 December 2017, on the road near the wetland, I saw approximately 300 buntings in a group. The majority were Red-headed Buntings and a few were Black-headed Buntings (*Emberiza melanocephala*). I observed that the buntings were feeding in a harvested field and roosting on the electric line. The second sighting of a large group was on 13 December 2018, when more than 400 Red-headed Buntings were seen in this area. Again, the group consisted of a majority of this species. Generally, the Red-headed Buntings are seen in small groups of 6-10 birds in this wetland and seeing such large groups twice in this area was noteworthy.

Common Starling: On 16 February 2018, I was with Saswat Mishra & Pragnesh Patel. We were photographing a Water Rail when a dark bird came and started calling. I saw with my binoculars that it was a Common Starling. A second sighting of this species was on 3 February 2019 with Gaurang Bagda. Three starlings in a group were feeding in dry parts of the wetland and roosting on small trees. The Common Starling is an uncommon winter migrant, with scattered records from the state (Ganpule 2016). The sightings from Prashnavada are important and confirm that it visits coastal areas of Gir-Somnath District.

Chestnut-tailed Starling, Indian Blackbird & Eurasian Cuckoo: On 3 November 2018. I went in the morning towards

the wetland and coastal area. I saw a small group of Chestnut-tailed Starlings in this area. I regularly saw this group from November till February. At around 09:00 hrs on the same day, I saw three Indian Blackbirds and observed that there were two males and one female. I took some photographs. On moving further in the area, at around 10:00 hrs, I saw and photographed a Eurasian Cuckoo here. I initially mistook it for a Shikra (*Accipiter badius*) but on a closer look, it was easily identified as a Eurasian Cuckoo. The sighting of these three species in a single morning was quite surprising as all these three are uncommon here.

Sociable Lapwing: On 29 November 2018, at 16:00 hrs, I saw a group of Red-wattled Lapwings (*Vanellus indicus*) while scanning the wetland. At that time, I observed that one bird looked different. On careful observation, I was surprised to see that it was a Sociable Lapwing. It was easily identified by its prominent supercilium, black bill and legs, and dark crown. On the next day, the bird was still there and was seen feeding with the group of Red-wattled Lapwings. The Sociable Lapwing is a 'Critically Endangered' species (BirdLife International 2019). There are published records from Kodinar (Gajjar & Gajjar 2005) and Amreli District (Joshi & Shah 2016); both these areas are not very far from Prashnavada. However, the sighting of a Sociable Lapwing from this area is significant and is probably the only recent record from Gir-Somnath District.

Great Bittern: On 3 December 2018, at around 11:00 hrs, I was birding with Shweta and Anup Chavda. We were observing a small group of Red-headed Buntings. I saw a Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*) in flight with one brown-coloured, heron-like bird. I saw with my binoculars that it was a Great Bittern. I called Anup to take a photograph of this rarity! We later observed that there were two Great Bitterns in the area and the Purple Heron was trying to chase the bitterns from its territory. One bittern left the place while the other bittern settled in the reeds nearby. It was the first record of the Great Bittern from Prashnavada Wetland. The Great Bittern is a rare winter visitor to Gujarat and this was a significant record of the species from this area.

Mallard: On 25 December 2018, I was birding with Dipak Vadher. We were birding in the coastal area and took photos of a Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*). While returning home, I scanned the wetland with my binoculars and saw that some ducks (*Anas* sp.) were disturbed by a dog. When the flock settled again, we saw a male Mallard in the flock. It was easily identified by its distinct plumage and also photographed. This was the first time I had seen a Mallard here. It is rare in this area.

Red-crested Pochard & Sand Martin: On 13 January 2019, I was bird watching with Hemanya Radadiya. We saw a few

White-tailed Lapwings (*Vanellus leucurus*) and took some photos. We saw and photographed a male Red-crested Pochard along with three females. I saw it again on 27 January 2019 & on 3 February 2019 with Gaurang Bagda and Anuj Raina. On the same day, 13 January, Hemanya and I saw Sand Martins here. We observed more than 500 Sand Martins along with Barn Swallows (*Hirundo rustica*) and Wire-tailed Swallows (*Hirundo smithii*). The birds were continually catching insects above the wetland. The Red-crested Pochard is uncommon in Saurashtra. This was the first time I had seen it here. The Sand Martin was also seen in such large numbers for the first time.

The above records show that Prashnavada Wetland is an important area for water birds as well as other terrestrial birds. This area is not frequented by many bird watchers and it is not a popular birding destination. Many uncommon and rare

species have been observed in this area in the past one year and more intensive birding may result in a few more surprises. I intend to continue bird watching in this area and look for uncommon / rare birds in this wetland.

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Sightings of Eurasian Scops Owl *Otus scops* from Rajkot and Amreli

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The Eurasian Scops Owl (*Otus scops*) is a polytypic species, which breeds in Europe, in Africa north of the Sahara from Morocco to Tunisia, in the Middle East, Asia Minor and eastwards to Central Asia; it winters in savannahs of west and east Africa (Holt *et al.* 2019). In India, its status is unclear, with Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) stating that it is a rare autumn migrant to NW India while Chandran *et al.* (2016) speculate that the Eurasian Scops Owl, 'if at all it occurs, may be limited as a rare passage migrant to western India, though it is not entirely unlikely in the south'. Kazmierczak (2000) and Grimmett *et al.* (2011) consider it as a winter migrant to southern Pakistan, with isolated records from NW India. For Gujarat, Ganpule (2016) stated that it was believed to be a winter vagrant, with records from Bhavnagar area. Here, we present sightings of Eurasian Scops Owl from Amreli and Rajkot, in Saurashtra, in the years 2017 & 2018.

On 13 November 2018, at around 22:00 hrs, the second and third authors were searching for scops owls (*Otus* sp.) in a wetland near Amreli. They saw an unfamiliar scops owl at the edge of the wetland, where the bird was drinking water. Unfortunately, it got disturbed and flew away. On searching further for the owl in the surrounding area, they subsequently found it perched in a tree. They observed this individual for around 4 hours and were able to take many excellent photos. It was greyish in colour, with some rufous on underparts and

on the facial disk; the underparts were heavily streaked and cross barred; tarsal feathering was absent on the toes, which, along with the rufous in plumage, excluded the Pallid Scops Owl (*Otus brucei*), which is known to be an uncommon but regular winter visitor to Gujarat (Ganpule 2016). They also heard the characteristic *tuuew-tuuew* call uttered by this individual, which excluded the possibility of this being an Oriental Scops Owl (*Otus sunia*). Thus, the identification was confirmed as a Eurasian Scops Owl. However, in subsequent visits to the same area, they were not able to find the owl again. This was the first time the authors had seen this species in Amreli.

On 14 December 2018, at around 16:45 hrs, while bird watching near the premises of Rajkot Zoological Park, near Rajkot, which is also known as Pradyuman Park Zoo, the first author was observing a Sykes's Warbler (*Iduna rama*) moving from one tree to another, when a small owl was seen roosting on a purple baubinia (*Bauhinia purpurea*) at a height of 12-14 feet. It was not disturbed by the noise of people passing through there. It was observed that a Red-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*) was constantly disturbing the owl. The first author was able to take many photos. The bird was overall greyish-brown in colour, with cross barring and some rufous patches on its underparts. The Pallid Scops Owl was easily excluded as tarsal feathering on the toes was absent and also by the presence of rufous patches on the body.