

Specimen of Lesser Fish Eagle from Sasan, Junagadh

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Specimen collections are important for the study of birds. These collections are useful to study morphological details, DNA etc. Various museums have collections which are used by ornithologists / researchers. In India, BNHS and ZSI have good collections while the Natural History Museum, Tring, UK, has one of the biggest bird collections in the world. Museums in USA also have collections of birds from India.

The Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, USA, (henceforth FMNH) has a collection of more than 800 bird specimens from Gujarat. These birds were collected from various regions of Gujarat from 1938 to 1951. The details of these specimens are posted online and can be viewed at http://fm1.fieldmuseum.org/birds/brd_index.php. While browsing online through this catalogue of birds in the FMNH, I came across an entry of a specimen of a Lesser Fish Eagle (*Ichthyophaga humilis plumbea*), Sex: Male, FMNH Number: 228875, from Sasan, Junagadh. Lesser Fish Eagle is classified as 'Near Threatened' (Bird Life International 2012)

This was very intriguing as the Lesser Fish Eagle is not known to occur in Gujarat and no record is shown for Gujarat in the reference books while the Grey-headed Fish Eagle (*Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus*) is known to occur here with isolated records in winter (Grimmett *et al.* 2011, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Hence I decided to check if this entry was correct and whether the specimen was a Lesser Fish Eagle. I wrote an email to the bird curators at the museum for details of this specimen and asked for photos if possible to check if it was correctly identified.

I received a reply from Josh Engel, who along with John Bates of the FMNH, rechecked the specimen and took photos. It is indeed an adult Lesser Fish Eagle, collected from Sasan, Junagadh (now Gir National Park area) on 3 February 1949 by Walter Koelz. The photos show the all brown tail, which is diagnostic for identification.

Lesser Fish Eagle is not included in the Checklist of birds of Gujarat (Parasharya *et al.* 2004) and is also not shown in any other reference books for Gujarat. It is resident in the Himalayas and south-western India, with an isolated record shown from central India (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). Hence it is a vagrant here. This specimen record has been overlooked by all authorities. Further, from the



time this specimen was taken till today, there have been no published / sight records of the Lesser Fish Eagle from Gujarat. Thus, this is an addition to the avifauna of Gujarat.

Acknowledgements:

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