

The Birds of Gujarat: Status and Distribution

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Introduction:

Gujarat (20° 01' to 24° 44' N, 68° 03' to 74° 24' E), situated in western India, has diverse habitats and a varied birdlife. The main regions of Gujarat are Kachchh, Saurashtra and mainland Gujarat (which includes South Gujarat, North Gujarat and the area in between, which can be referred to as Central Gujarat). These regions have varied habitats, with the moist, deciduous forests of South Gujarat to the deserts of Kachchh. Hence there is great diversity in the bird life seen here. The varied habitats, along with a culture of non-violence towards wildlife, have made Gujarat a premier destination for bird watching in India.

Gujarat has always been lucky to have ornithologists and dedicated bird watchers. Major surveys and specimen collections were done here before independence. A checklist of birds of Gujarat was published by Bird Conservation Society, Gujarat (henceforth BCSG) in 2004, which lists a total of 526 species (Parasharya *et al.* 2004). In the last 15 years, due to the advent of digital cameras and well illustrated field guides, there has been an explosion in bird watching activity in the state. Reports of birds on social media websites like Facebook, and other networking sites and internet groups, trip reports etc. have added to our knowledge of birds of Gujarat.

Building on the checklist made earlier by BCSG, an attempt is made here to update the same and provide basic details about the status and distribution of birds occurring here. Recent well documented records and historical records (from books, journals, periodicals etc.) were collected and a comprehensive list is presented here. All the recent field guides are quite inadequate regarding the distribution of many species of birds in Gujarat. The distribution given here is only indicative and further data is required to get the detailed distribution of certain species. A total of 574

species are listed here, with a further 25 species given as hypothetical / unverified or incorrectly listed.

With reference to the list given below:

Serial number is given first, common name is given next and the scientific name follows. The status and distribution is given thereafter. References are given for uncommon / rare / vagrant birds. Birds with a (**) before the serial number means that it has not been recorded in Gujarat but could be occurring here or that it has been recorded but needs further confirmation or was incorrectly listed earlier. The 'Plate' numbers are as per 'Birds of the Indian Subcontinent' by Grimmett *et al.* (2011) and vagrant birds are included in the respective families. The regions are described wherever possible and 'Gujarat' in the text means the area from South Gujarat to North Gujarat, including Central Gujarat (unless specific regions are mentioned). Sub-species are mentioned only for select species.

With reference to pelagic birds:

Our knowledge of pelagic birds is very less. Extensive surveys are needed to know about the occurrence of these birds in the Arabian Sea. There are many pelagic species which are noted in the Arabian Sea, off the Gujarat Coast, which are present in the RNBWS database but have not been included here. More data is needed to make any assessment for these birds.

Taxonomy:

Various organizations in India follow different taxonomies. Due to this, there are many differences in the checklists, as some proposed splits may not be accepted by some authorities. However, since BCSG follows Grimmett *et al.* (2011), the same is followed here to avoid confusion. Thus common names and taxonomy given in Grimmett *et al.* (2011) is followed here.

Abbreviations and Details:

BNHS:	Bombay Natural History Society
eBird:	Website http://ebird.org/content/ebird/
Facebook:	Social networking website
Flamingo:	Newsletter of Bird Conservation Society, Gujarat (In English)
FMNH:	Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, USA
GEER:	Gujarat Ecological Education and Research Foundation, Gandhinagar

GRK:	Greater Rann of Kachchh
IBC:	Website http://ibc.lynxeds.com
INW:	Website www.indianaturewatch.net
JBNHS:	Journal of Bombay Natural History Society
LRK:	Little Rann of Kachchh
MNP:	Marine National Park, Gulf of Kachchh
NLBW:	Newsletter for Birdwatchers
NMNH:	National Museum of Natural History, Smithsonian, USA

NP: National Park
OBI: Website <http://orientalbirdimages.org>
Pavo: Ornithology Journal, Maharaj Sayajirao University, Baroda (Now closed).
RNBWS: Royal Naval Birdwatching Society

Sea Swallow: Journal of Royal Naval Birdwatching Society
Vihang: Newsletter of Gujarat Birds (In Gujarati) (Now closed)
WFVZ: Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology, California, USA
WSGB: Wader Study Group Bulletin

Bird species with annotations:

Francolins, Quails, Bush Quails, Partridges, Spurrows and Junglefowls (Plate 2-5, 7)

1. Black Francolin: *Francolinus francolinus*

Common resident. Mainly in Kachchh. More easily seen in the monsoon. Status in Saurashtra and Gujarat uncertain. Seen in grasslands near Naliya and GRK very easily. No published records / photos from Saurashtra / Gujarat.

2. Painted Francolin: *Francolinus pictus*

Common resident. In Saurashtra and Gujarat. Absent in Kachchh. Common in 'vidi' areas and grasslands in Saurashtra. More easily seen in the monsoon when frequently seen calling from prominent perches.

3. Grey Francolin: *Francolinus pondicerianus*

Common resident. In all parts of the state. Very common in grasslands, scrub forest and stony areas.

4. Common Quail: *Coturnix coturnix*

Common winter visitor. In Saurashtra and Kachchh. Seen regularly in grasslands near Naliya in Kachchh and in other grasslands in Saurashtra. Common in LRK. Also in Velavadar NP. In Gujarat, but not common.

5. Rain Quail: *Coturnix coromandelica*

Common monsoon / breeding migrant. In all parts of the state. Common in grasslands of Saurashtra and Kachchh. Call heard very commonly in monsoon. Seen in good numbers in grasslands near Naliya, Rajkot and other grasslands near Jamnagar, Porbandar, Surendranagar etc. Also in Velavadar NP and other areas in Gujarat.

6. King Quail: *Coturnix chinensis*

Vagrant. Could be occurring as a monsoon vagrant but status not known. Sighting near Morbi (Ganpule 2005). Also listed for Thol BS near Ahmedabad (Iyer 2005).

7. Jungle Bush Quail: *Perdica asiatica*

Common resident. In Gujarat and Saurashtra. More common in Gujarat, rarer in Saurashtra. Seen regularly in Gir NP and other jungle areas nearby. Rare in other areas in Saurashtra. Status in Kachchh uncertain.

8. Rock Bush Quail: *Perdica argoondah*

Common resident. In arid and scrub forest of Saurashtra and Kachchh. Rarer in Gujarat. Seen in vidis and grasslands in Saurashtra quite regularly.

9. Red Spurrow: *Galloperdix spadicea*

Uncommon resident. In the forested belt from North Gujarat to South Gujarat. Many historical records (Ali 1954).

10. Red Junglefowl: *Gallus gallus*

Vagrant. Or rare resident? Sighting from Rajpipla (Monga & Naoroji 1983). Probably a vagrant in the forest belt in South Gujarat. Not present elsewhere in Saurashtra or Kachchh.

11. Grey Junglefowl: *Gallus sonneratii*

Uncommon / rare resident. Sightings from Rajpipla and South Gujarat (Monga & Naoroji 1983, Trivedi & Soni 2006). Specimens from Navasri Dist. (NMNH). Reported to be present in the forested belt in North Gujarat. Not present elsewhere in Saurashtra or Kachchh.

Peafowls (Plate 8)

12. Indian Peafowl: *Pavo cristatus*

Common resident. In Gujarat, Kachchh and Saurashtra. Seen commonly in all areas of the state. Good numbers in Gir NP.