

Flamingo

Newsletter of the Bird Conservation Society, Gujarat



Habitat Concerns....

Many of our natural lakes and ponds in rural landscape are shallow and seasonal with fluctuating water-spread. However, people (including their leaders and policy-makers) usually desire permanent water bodies with perpetual and long-lasting water owing to the apparent livelihood, recreational and aesthetic needs. There is a prevailing ignorance about the fact that perennial water bodies are not beneficial ecologically. Prolonged high water levels can cause decline in emergent vegetation required by ducks and other water birds for food and shelter. Wetland literature also says that persistent, high level of waters in a wetland encourages aggressive growth of submerged vegetation, which eventually becomes so dense that free movement of water as well as birds is obstructed. Repeated inadvertent and sometimes deliberate addition of seepage from irrigation infrastructure can change the character of a wetland in ecologically undesirable manner. Narmada water is the potential example. It has cast doubt upon preservation of natural character of many important wetlands including a recently declared Ramsar Site, Nalsarovar, located in Ahmedabad-Surendranagar Districts of Gujarat. It is locally believed that its hydrophytic vegetation characteristics have been changing.

- Ketan Tatu, *PhD*



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Bird Conservation Society, Gujarat (BCSG) was founded in 2000 with the objective of conservation of birds of the State through field research, documentation, training, awareness activities, networking with like-minded NGOs; and lobbying for protection of birds and their habitats. It is the only statewide network of bird-watchers, ornithologists and conservationists of Gujarat striving to achieve the above goal.

BCSG brings out a quarterly newsletter – 'Flamingo'. Articles, notes on bird-life of Gujarat, interesting bird sightings, knowledge about important bird areas, information / appeal regarding conservation issues, reports on society's events and activities are published in 'Flamingo'. For publication of articles/notes in the Flamingo, both the common English and scientific names must be given when a bird species is mentioned for the first time and later references, common English name only. Common English and scientific names should follow Richard Grimmett, Carol Inskipp and Tim Inskipp (2011), Birds of Indian Subcontinent, Second edition. Oxford University Press, New Delhi. If the nomenclature is adopted from other source, full reference should be given.

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Editorial....

Dear Readers,

Resurgence of Flamingo - a printed newsletter on ornithology of Gujarat in the age of internet and social media is of tremendous significance. Gujarat being adorned with a spectrum of diverse habitats, meticulous documentation of its avian life is a worthy task, especially to aid its conservation. Two glaring phenomena have been currently observed about bird-life in general - its improved documentation with outrageous amplification in documenting gadgets and available facilities on one hand, and its worsening status with gross degradation of natural habitats under tremendous anthropogenic pressures, on the other.

Not undermining the importance of the internet-based birding sites and information available elsewhere, we cannot deny the value and power of a physically available in-the-hand document in generating greater awareness amongst masses, inspiring more birders and bird-photographers for data-keeping and showcasing the facts to the custodians and the policy-makers. With the advent of this newsletter, we hope to inspire and involve increasing number of individuals in generating the all important database on the bird-life of Gujarat, so as to facilitate the birders, researchers, field-workers, and forest officers to work in mutual co-operation for bird conservation in the State.

As you will notice while going through this issue, plenty of interesting bird sightings are taking place in the state. Some information puts question mark on the existing literature; like distribution of number of species in popular field-guides on birds of India, available to us. The observations on Watercock in Bharuch District are encouraging and add to prevailing knowledge on the distribution and occurrence of the species. We are also producing a compiled list of articles on Gujarat Birds, published during the last 5 years, as was customarily carried out before as well. I thank Hiren Soni for this exhaustive work accomplished satisfactorily.

Though 'Flamingo' is a Newsletter of BCSG, we have decided to keep a subscription to increase its reach among non-members, even as to strengthen its financial condition. We seek your support in every possible way.

In the end, I would like to express gratitude to my friend Girish Adesara, who has been taking lots of initiative in collecting funds and enrolling subscribers, so also the donors who are helping us fulfill our dream of a quality publication.

Bakul Trivedi, M.S.

I have a large flowering climber on the south - east corner of my house. By mid January, each year, its leaves start appearing tired and the green gloss begins to fade. However, here and there, all along the stems in the axis of each leaf there appear buds that rapidly swell and spread out into sprays of densely packed, small orange-red flowers. By mid February the leaves fall and the entire climber is ablaze. Drawn to the flowers are a large number of birds - since the flowers are small, the birds are all small: Sunbirds, White - eyes, Common loras and Warblers (both resident and migratory) are the chief habitues. Occasionally, Red-vented Bulbuls sample the proffered food: nectar served up in the multitudes of small flowers but their beaks appear to be too thick to efficiently probe the receptacles. These are essentially bee flowers and both species of our common bee's *Apis dorsata* and *A. florea* literally swarm onto the inflorescence. Their comings and goings invariably draw Green Bee-eaters. So, I can spend time in the warm winter sun enjoying bird watching as exciting as would be possible any place else away from home.

There had been a large *Erythrina* tree just across in the neighbours plot and this tree would also burst into bloom at around the same time as the climber and it provided a spectacular backdrop - the larger flowers drawing an assortment of larger birds: Bulbuls, Babblers, Magpie Robins, Drongos (Black, Grey and the occasional White-bellied), Mynas and Parakeets. Unfortunately, when the property was bought by new owners and they built their house, their first act was to fell the lovely tree. I have planted a sapling from that tree's seed along with an Indian Silk Cotton on my side of the fence. Hopefully, I will have more rewarding bird watching in my very home as with advancing age I will find extended forays less agreeable; in any case, the country side is getting less and less attractive.

At the back of my house stands a tall Umbar (*Ficus glomerata*). That too provides me delightful bird watching particularly when its branches are laden with figs. Coppermiths, Bulbuls, Mynas, Koels all throng. Small birds too are drawn to sample the partially eaten figs and capture the multitudes of small insects that visit them. This tree bears fruit several times a year which makes it extremely important for essentially frugivorous birds like Green Pigeons. I have yet to have a hornbill visit my humble home, but the pigeons drop in year round and are a delight to have around if for nothing else than their musical whistling calls. Unfortunately this fine tree is rather messy since its fecundity rains down huge quantities of fermenting fruit on the ground below. I can appreciate why house proud housewives abhor having one anywhere near their homes. The masses of figs dropping can be advantageously swept up and used for preparing highly enriched compost for household

plants - the inconvenience should be amply compensated by this valuable end product and by of course, the joy of having so many birds around throughout the day. Being a large tree, its full potentials (and total avoidance of the mess it creates) can be had by planting it outside as a roadside shade tree.

Given the fact of shrinkage in garden spaces, we could do well to go in for using the many large climbers for covering bare walls, screens between properties and pergolas. Apart from the beauty and the attracted birds, the foliage cuts out heat, glare and dust. In India we are indeed fortunate in having a plethora of large, freely flowering forest lianas, some so large that one can even cover an entire house! Further advantage is that once having taken root, these magnificent forest plants need no watering. Unfortunately the majority of our climbers are very seasonal in bearing flowers but we do have the *Thunbergias* that bloom almost throughout the year - the blooms are very attractive and borne characteristically on pendant racemes that are decoratively festooned if the climber is trained across overhead trellises and along beams. Sunbirds are the main beneficiaries since they have learnt to pierce the base of the showy flower trumpets to get at the nectar. Bumble Bees appear to be the main pollinators as they enter the flower and in the process, get their furry backs powdered in yellow pollen.

Apart from the *Ficus glomerata* we have many species of fruit and flower bearing trees that can be used along the road front or between houses and in the center of courtyards. The chief argument against trees is that they often grow too large for the space and of course there is the universal Indian fear of roots of trees destroying buildings! Size can be kept within bounds since all trees can be kept within limits by judicious pruning. In fact such treatment produces denser foliage and heavier flowering. As for the roots, they certainly are not going to grow upwards, they go down to water and given space and located judiciously they pose no threat to buildings.

Closely trimmed hedges and shrubbery not only provide privacy, they offer shelter to nesting birds. If the plant is thorny, it invariably attracts Bulbuls, Babblers, loras, White-eyes and doves. The larger leafed varieties draw to them Tailorbirds and Ashy Wren Warblers who stitch leaves together to form receptacles for their nests. Even potted plants on patios and in balconies are patronised.

With greater number of families compelled to live in cramped areas, often with no garden space, the question of having birds around would seem irrelevant for many who have had to forgo homes with gardens, this is quite traumatic. It has become imperative to evolve garden and landscaping practices so that plants and with them birds, are brought into urban homes. Believe me, there can be nothing more relaxing than a flat

balcony or a tenement patio with luxuriant foliage. Such bits of artificial wildernesses are extremely relaxing and magnets to birds.

Well tended roadside trees convert a most crowded urban neighborhood into a sylvan retreat. I am attempting to evolve an avian sanctuary in my small place at Gandhinagar. Something that my neighbours can see. Restricted spaces,

dwindling water supplies and advancing age all make it compulsive to make a very strong statement that even in the most cramped of surroundings the freshness of plants and the cheer of birds need not be given up.

(We shall regularly be publishing selected writeups of Shri Lavkumar Khachar - Ed.) □



Photo : Bhushan Pandya

Notes on Watercock in Dist. Bharuch (South Gujarat)

Jugal H. Patel : At Untiyadra, Ta. Ankleshwar, Dist. Bharuch-394125. jugalkishorhpatel@gmail.com

Introduction: Watercock (*Gallicrex cinerea*), locally known as 'Kora', is a widespread resident and a summer migrant in India. Usually skulking, there are a few records of Watercock from Gujarat. In this article, I present my observations on Watercock from Bharuch district of Gujarat.

Status and Distribution in Gujarat: In the distribution map of the species for Gujarat, Kazmierczak (2000) has shown only one isolated record; Grimmett *et al* (2011) give three isolated records and it is shown as a winter migrant to Gir area. Grewal *et al* (2002) have shown its range from coastal areas of Jamnagar to Valsad, and its status as an uncommon and scarce local migrant (The distribution map is designed looking at the possibility of its presence, with less than 50% likelihood of its encounter and not actual records.). Ali & Ripley (1980) have described its distribution range from Himalayas to Sri Lanka and from West Pakistan (Sindh and Punjab) to Assam but have not specifically mentioned its status in Gujarat. Raol (1998) has mentioned it as 'uncommon to scarce' but is not sure whether it is migratory or resident in Gujarat. Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) show it as a summer visitor to an isolated area in Saurashtra, noting that it is a 'scarce but widespread'. Thus, various authorities have noted it as vagrant, scarce, uncommon or with isolated/individual records in Gujarat. Further, all have described it as crepuscular and shy, secretive during daytime.

Observations: My observations are a little different from the observations given in the above mentioned references. I have observed it for at least three to four days a week in the last four

monsoon seasons. As per my observations, Watercock is a regular and common summer visitor in the command area of Ukai Dam in Surat & Bharuch Districts of South Gujarat. One can see it frequently late in the morning and early in the evening i.e. during day time also after 08-00 hrs and 16-00 hrs. It is not secretive and shy as generally believed, at least in comparison to other Rails & Crakes (*Rallidae*).



I have continuously watched and monitored this bird in the years '12, '13, '14 & '15 in Ankleshwar & Hansot Talukas of Bharuch District. From all my notes, I give here my major sightings for the year 2012 in Table 1. Though I did monitor the species in the subsequent years, had not maintained observation notes during this period. I give only my reflections on its presence and populations for the last three years in the year-wise comments.

2012 - All the sightings from 10 June '12 to 1 July '12, except on 15 June '12, were made in 6 sq. km area beside my village Untiyadra (21° 30' N 72° 57' E). After 15 June, it became very difficult to visit these points due to peak rainy season and hence I had to continue with my search in another area on motorbike, exploring the road side fields.

Table : Watercock sightings in '12

Date	Time	No. birds	Location	Remarks
10.06.12	17.30	1	Untiyadra	First record of the season
15.06.12	19.00	1	Hajat	
24.06.12	16.30	3	Untiyadra	
26.06.12	7.00 to 9.00	4	Untiyadra	
	16.00 to 18.00	5	Untiyadra	
28.06.12	7.00 to 9.30	14	Untiyadra	
30.06.12	7.00 to 9.00	11	Untiyadra	
01.07.12	8.00 to 11.00	16	Untiyadra	
04.07.12	7.00 to 8.30	23	Untiyadra to Piludra Road -9 km	
07.07.12	7.00 to 8.00	14	Untiyadra-Piludra-Telva Road- 14 km	Observed mating at one place and at another place, a fight between two males for territory
08.07.12	7.00 to 11.00	21	Untiyadra-Karmali-Pardi Road- km?	Observed a female being chased by two males.
09.07.12	6.00 to 8.00	12	Pandvai to Parvat -5 Km	
12.07.12	8.00 to 9.00	4	Untiyadra	
14.07.12	15.00 to 20.00	4	Kalam	
18.07.12		9	Untiyadra	Two males fighting beside a female
16.09.12	17.00	1	Motvan	Last sighting of the season

Photo : Anil Bharadwaj



Photo : Anil Bharadwaj



95% of Watercocks observed were males in breeding plumage. Females were rarely seen and so very less in number in my counts. Perhaps, this may be due to its dull and camouflaged appearance and less tendency to come out in the open for feeding. Most of my observations were made in and around the fields along the sides of roads and tracks. Time constraints as well as rains, seldom allowed me to explore distant and interior parts, away from the pathways. Certainly, it was quite possible that the Watercock population was much higher than what was estimated in my notes. If the Watercock population in the distant farmlands (including camouflaged females) in the entire region is to be taken into consideration, then as per my estimate, there should be 50+ Watercocks around my

village Untiyadra alone, during 2012. They started to disappear by the end of August, and the last bird was spotted on 16 September 2012.

I had spotted Watercocks in Untiyadra, Ravidra-Karmali, Piludra, Telva, Adol, Hajat, Sisodra, Adadra, Pardi, Motvan and Umarwada villages of Ankleshwar Taluka and Parvat, Pandvai, Kudadra, Kalam, Ghodadra, Kathodra, Bolav, Ankalava, Sunevkalla villages of Hansot Taluka.

2013 – The canals of Ukai remained closed for five months in this year due to maintenance work and damage in the main canal. Hence, major fraction of rice-crop and reeds, mainly *Typha angustata* were destroyed. This badly affected the population of Watercock in the early stage of monsoon. I took



Watercock in Dist. Bharuch....

stock of the entire area which I sampled in '12 and found that, though its number increased as soon as monsoon started to peak-up, overall population of the bird was less compared to the previous year.

2014 – In this year, population increased as compared to 2013. In comparison to the study area of 2012, which was restricted to surroundings of my village Untiyadara, this year I scanned a much larger area. It was spotted in 25 villages, from the outskirts of Ankleshwar to coastal villages (Katpor, Ankalva) on the Arabian Sea (Ta. Hansot). As per my assumption, their number should be around 200 in the whole region. However, its population is continuously on decline since last two years. In and around my village Untiyadra, farmers have given up harvesting summer rice (*Oryza sativa*). This has affected its population adversely. Its population around my village, which was more than 50 in 2012, has declined to 10-15 now.

2015 – This year too seems to be disappointing. Though I have already spotted 15 birds including 5 females only at one place along Hansot-Kosamba road in the early June. The place is surrounded by paddy fields, a village pond (Sisodra), inundated wasteland covered with dense *Typha angustata*, and patches of grassland with nutsedge (*Cyperus esculentus*), hence ideal for Rallidae. In mid July, its population has not shown any rise. It will all depend on the rains for the habitat to anticipate more influx of the individuals.

Habitat: All the villages of Hansot and western villages of Ankleshwar Taluka are a part of the land covered under the irrigation infrastructure of Ukai Dam and its canals. The villages of both Talukas have, besides the main village pond/tank, natural and man-made streams and small tanks in the fields (locally called as 'Talavadi'). The roads also have in-built drainages on both sides. All these ponds, streams, and at some places even the drainages remain full of water throughout the year on account of constant water supply from the dam. Average annual rainfall of the area is 40 inches. Main crops of the area are sugarcane (*Saccharum officinarum*) and rice (*Oryza sativa*). These crops are water intensive, and scarcity of water supply is never felt due to the irrigation facilities provided by Ukai Dam. On account of easy availability of water, farmers tend to irrigate their crops excessively. As a result, huge volume of run-off waters gets accumulated in the adjoining uncultivated or barren lands or flows through streams, lakes and drainages. Because of this water supply, a wide variety of plants and herbs like; Lesser Indian Reed Mace (*Typha angustata*), Yellow Nutsedge (*Cyperus esculentus*), *Echinochloa colonum*, *Echinochloa crus-galli*, Marsh Glory (*Ipomoea aquatica*) and other local grasses, shrubs and creepers, keep on growing

throughout the year in these areas, creating a good habitat for Watercock, with abundant food supply in the nearby paddy fields. This is the reason why high population of Watercock is found in this region.

Same geographical, agricultural and marshy conditions exist in many parts of other Districts of South Gujarat. For my job, I commute daily by train between Kosamba and Surat. Many times during this daily transit, I have spotted Watercocks beside the railway track near Kim, Kudsad, Kosad and Sayan of Olpad Taluka. The population of Watercocks would turn out to be much higher than is believed, if detailed surveys are conducted by bird watchers in the entire sugarcane belt, especially of Surat and Navsari districts.

Habits/Behaviour: Observations during the past four years:

Unlike other *Rallidae*, Watercocks come out late in the morning and return to their shelters early in the evening. They were visible at all times of the day, except at noon.

Males were generally spotted in cropped paddy-fields and green grasslands in the summer, while females were seen in uncultivated land, having little grass and isolated shrubs.

They are not normally seen far from their established territories. Hence, there is hardly any chance of individuals being repeated in the counts cited in the above table.

They are not very shy as commonly believed. They were frequently spotted in open land during daytime also. Several times, they were found in the fields beside the road. On 8 July 2012, I spotted four males on the boundary of a rice field, just 40 ft away from the spot where some labourers were busy implanting rice.

Fights between males were seen frequently after the first week of July. They jump like domestic cocks during the fight. The defeated male used to surrender and run away with its head bowed and wings spread.

Males call continuously during the day, rolling their head up and down, and puffing out their necks and raising their feathers; Female were never seen calling.

Food: It was observed that, Watercocks eat rice-grains fallen on the ground at the time of sowing; seeds and shoots of Yellow Nutsedge (*Cyperus esculentus*) and *Echinochloa colonum* and also flying termite (*Alate termite*).

Breeding: Watercocks usually arrive in the first week of May and are already in breeding plumage. Many times, males and females are seen together, but courtship display was never observed. Once a male was seen aggressively chasing the female before mating. They stay here till mid- September;

Photo : Bakul Trivedi



Photo : Jugal Patel

Watercock habitat

Photo : Jugal Patel



Photo : Jugal Patel

hence it is very much possible that they are nesting here. However, I have neither seen nor attempted to search for the nests as an ethical birdwatcher.

Threats: Summer harvesting of rice is in continuous decline since last two years due to crop failure as well as unrewarding market rates. Farmers have started clearing unfertile and unused land for selling. They have also started to wipe out the reed beds along roadsides and also in the fields by fire and using machinery, considering them a nuisance. For the purpose of supply to paper mills, farming of Eucalyptus (*E. hybrid*) in uncultivated and less fertile land has increased in the past two years. Water level in the dam and irregularity in schedule of water supply through canal, also affect the concerned area adversely, as happened in 2013. These are major threats to their habitat.

Conclusion: On the basis of continuous observations for the last four years, my opinion is that Watercock is a regular and common summer visitor in the irrigated areas of Bharuch and Surat districts. They arrive in the middle of May and stay till about the first week of September, every year. I request birdwatchers of South Gujarat to search for Watercocks in

areas of suitable habitat to ascertain its correct distribution and abundance. This should in long run help us study in detail, the threats faced by this and other allied bird species, and subsequently design our conservation strategies.

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The bird is powered by its own life and by its motivation. - A. P. J. Abdul Kalam

Grey-bellied Cuckoo in Gir and its Distribution in Gujarat

Gaurang Bagda¹, Viral Joshi² & Prasad Ganpule³ :

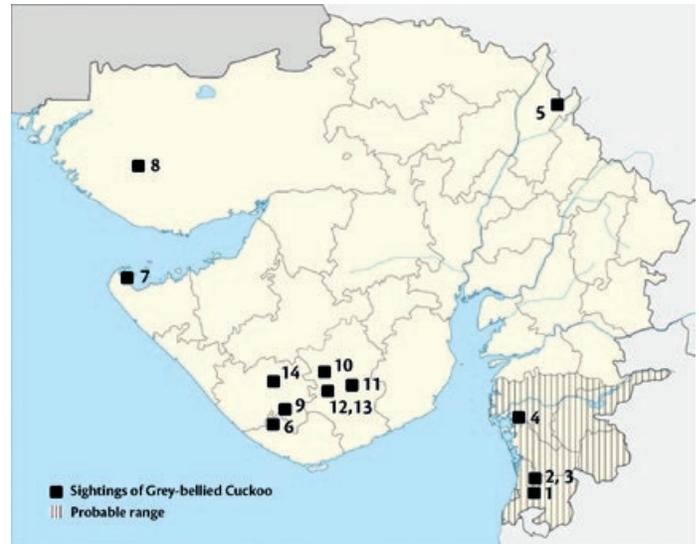
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Introduction: Grey-bellied Cuckoo (*Cacomantis passerinus*) is resident to India from the Himalayas to north India, east to Nepal, Sikkim, Bhutan and possibly Assam, and south through peninsular India to Nilgiris and Wynad (Kerala) and it winters south to Sri Lanka and Maldives Islands (Payne 1997). Ripley (1982) refers it to be resident with subject to local migration and/or summer visitor in some areas, in its distribution in North India. Kazmierczak (2000) shows it as resident in extreme south and east Gujarat while Grimmett *et al* (2011) show it as monsoon migrant in south and east Gujarat. Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) show it as a breeding visitor for south Gujarat. It is known to occur in Gujarat, mainly with records in summer from south Gujarat.

Observations: The first author [GB] observed and photographed an adult male Grey-bellied Cuckoo in Gir National Park area on 14 June 2014. It was identified by the overall grey plumage, cuckoo-like structure, tail with white markings etc. Another sighting on 20 June 2014 at Hasnapur Dam in Girnar WLS confirmed its presence in the area. The



dates of the sightings were indicative of the bird being a monsoon migrant (breeding migrant?) to Gir/Girnar area. The second author [VJ] has observed it around Amreli and Gir forest a number of times, the details of which are:

1. Two individuals on 15 June 2012 and another individual on 16 September 2012, near Savarkundla (21° 19' N 71° 16' E).
2. One individual on 29 Sept. 2012 near Satadhar, Gir forest (21° 17' N 70° 44' E).
3. One individual on 30 May 2015 at Sasan Gir area, near Kankai (21° 08' N 70° 47' E).

While on a short visit to Hanumangala, near Khambha, Amreli District (21° 03' N 71° 08' E) on 14 June 2015, we [PG and VJ], along with Bhanubhai Adhyaru, Ashok Mashru, Manoj Finava and Gunvant Trivedi, saw and photographed one adult male and a hepatic female. We also heard its call, as it was calling frequently.

Distribution: The status of Grey-bellied Cuckoo in Gujarat is intriguing. Ali (1952) did not find it in Gujarat. Monga & Naoroji (1983) also did not note it from Rajpipla forest during their study. However Dharmakumarsinhji (1955) gives it as "occurring in the wooded areas of Gujarat", and notes that Butler recorded it at Mt. Abu. Butler (1875) noted it as 'not uncommon' around Mt Abu but also writes that, "it occurs nowhere else throughout the whole region". Ripley (1982) has mentioned of Eastern Gujarat in its distribution. Parasharya *et al* (2004) include it in the 'Checklist of Birds of Gujarat' and describe it as 'Resident and Breeding'. Recently there have

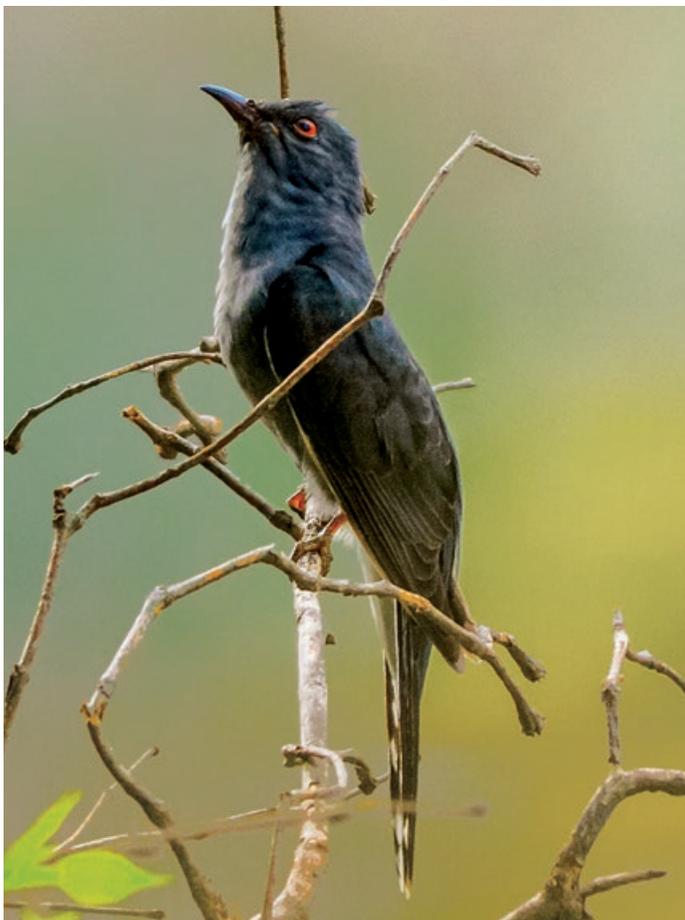


Photo : Prasad Ganpule



Photo: Prasad Ganpule

been sightings from Valsad area (Joshi 2004, 2005, 2007 – Map Ref. 1, 2, 3), Surat area (Trivedi 2005, Map Ref. 4) and from Polo forest in Sabarkantha (Naik 2013 – Map Ref. 5). Trivedi (2005) gives it as ‘common’ around Surat in May, June and July. A sighting from Poshitra, near Dwarka on 12 January, 2014 was reported by the third author (PG) along with Ashwin Trivedi and K. V. Zala (Map Ref. 7). Hepatic female has also been recorded in Kachchh at Fulay village near Moti Virani, Ta. Naliya on 13th Dec. 2011 (Veervaibhav Mishra, *pers. comm*) (Map Ref. 8). All the sightings, including the sightings from Gir / Girnar area (Map Ref. 6, 14) and from around Amreli and Gir area (Map Ref. 9-13) are given in the map on the adjoining page.

Though it is premature to discuss the status and distribution of Grey-bellied Cuckoo based on these few records, it is obvious that the Grey-bellied Cuckoo is a local, as well as a breeding migrant to well forested areas in South Gujarat. The approximate area of occurrence is shown in the map. It is also a monsoon migrant to Gir forest area, with a few individuals occurring there in this season. It could be a local winter migrant (vagrant?) to other areas in the State, as the winter sighting from Poshitra, near Dwarka shows.

Though we have tried to find out as many published sightings/photos from websites as possible, we might have missed some sightings.

Conclusion: Grey-bellied Cuckoo is a monsoon migrant to south Gujarat and to Gir/Girnar forest. Isolated records from elsewhere in the state show that it could be a local

winter migrant. More data / sightings would be helpful in understanding its distribution. Birdwatchers here are urged to report their sightings of Grey-bellied Cuckoo from Gujarat.

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Faith is the bird that feels the light when the dawn is still dark. - Rabindranath Tagore

Sighting of Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush in Kachchh

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Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush (*Monticola saxatilis*), also known as Common Rock-thrush or Rock-thrush, belongs to the Turdidae family, and breeds in NW Africa, southern and central Europe, and east across central Asia to inner Mongolia and central China (Collar & Bonan 2013). This species is strongly migratory, with all populations wintering in Africa, south of the Sahara.



Photo : Veervaibhav Mishra

On 4 February 2015, I was going to Banni grassland area, Kachchh, with a birder couple Mr. Ganesh Shankaran and Mrs. Vidya Murugan from the USA. Here, we came across a bird at around 3.50 pm., which on the first sight looked like a male Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush. We took pictures and confirmed that it was indeed a Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush. It was further identified as a first winter to second summer male (Jugal Tiwari, *pers. communication*).

There are very few records of the Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush from India. It has been recorded in Ladakh a few times as an autumn passage migrant (Pfister 2001) and S. Sen photographed an individual near Hunder Dunes, Nubra Valley, Ladakh on 16 September 2011 (images on <http://orientalbirdimages.org>). It has been recorded from Naliya, Kachchh (in October of 1998, 2000 and 2002) as an autumn passage migrant (Jadeja & Shah 2007). This sighting provides further evidence of the likelihood of Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush being a passage migrant in Gujarat.

[This sighting in February is interesting, as this bird could be on spring passage migration, during which it is much rarer (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005), evidently with no previous records during spring migration from India – Ed.]



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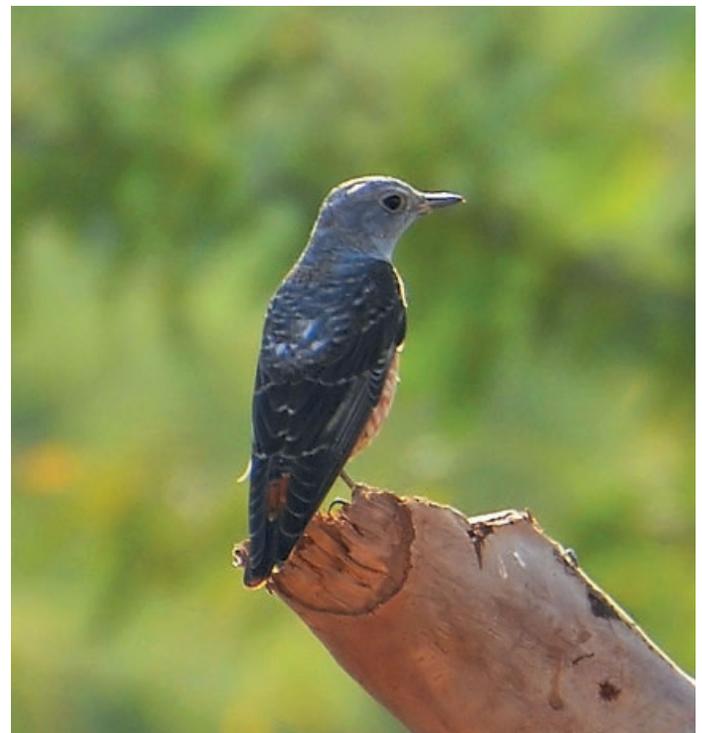


Photo : Veervaibhav Mishra

Status of Himalayan Griffon in Gujarat

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We saw a flock of vultures near a carcass between Kothara-Vanku, Tal. Abdasa, Dist. Kachchh, on 19 December 2008. On closer observation, we found Himalayan Griffon (*Gyps himalayensis*) (3 adults and 5 juveniles) along with 2 White-rumped Vultures (*Gyps bengalensis*). First author also took photographs.

Dr. Salim Ali did not come across this species in Kachchh during his surveys (Ali 1945, 1954). Kazmierczak (2000) and Grimmett *et al.* (2011) show only an isolated record for Gujarat. It is included in the checklist of birds of Gujarat (Parasharya *et al.* 2004), and Naoroji (2006) gives it as a winter vagrant to Gujarat, with a sight record of a single individual near Ahmedabad. Iyer Mohan (2005) also noted it at Dabhla, near Ahmedabad.



Photo : Prasad Ganpule

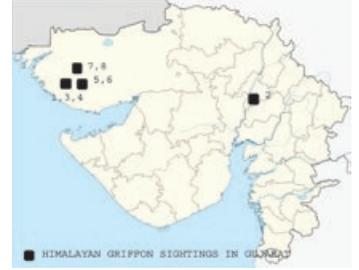
There have been scattered records of Himalayan Griffon in Gujarat in the past few years.

Though we have tried to collect as many sightings as possible from the photographs posted on various websites on the internet, we might have missed a few sightings.

Looking at the records mentioned in the table below, it seems that the Himalayan Griffon is a winter vagrant to Gujarat, with

a few individuals occurring in the winter, mainly in Kachchh. Further records will help in understanding its status here; either as a winter vagrant or as a rare winter migrant.

Birdwatchers are requested to share their sightings of Himalayan Griffon from Gujarat.



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Himalayan Griffon sightings in Gujarat

No	Date	Place	Observer	Reference
1	April 2002	Parjau grassland, Tal. Abdasa, Kachchh	Kavi Tej	<i>Pers. comm.</i>
2	19 December 2004	Dabhla, Ahmedabad	Kartik Shastri	<i>Flamingo</i> 3 (3) : 12
3	19 December 2008	Tal. Abdasa, Kachchh	S. N. Varu, M. B. Khatri	
4	26 January 2009	Naliya, Kachchh	Jugal Tiwari	Photo on INW
5	22 January 2014	Kachchh	Jaysukh Parekh	Photo on OBI
6	January 2015	Naliya grassland, Kachchh	Veervaibhav Mishra	Photo on OB Pix
7	February 2015	Greater Rann of Kachchh	Pravinsinh Vihol	Photo on INW
8	February 2015	Phot Mahadev Area, Kachchh	Veervaibhav Mishra	<i>Pers. Comm.</i>

Nal sarovar Diary...

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14-06-2015

We started around 6.30 am from Ahmedabad towards Nal sarovar in partly cloudy weather to find out the bird activity in and around Nal sarovar at this time of the year. Normally one would expect Nal sarovar to be dry, parched and impatiently awaiting the first rains, so we were curious to see what the Nal has to offer in terms of birding...

Every time we go to Nal sarovar, we see more and more plotted residential schemes coming up on both sides of the road right up to within 4 kms of the entry to the sanctuary. It is a matter of speculation if this development around the lake will have any adverse effect on the rainy run-off waters which normally feed the lake. A customary sighting of a pair of Sarus Cranes enroute happened as the birds crossed the road flying above. We did look for shrike species viz. Southern Grey Shrike, Bay-backed Shrike, Long-tailed Shrike, as I had gone looking for them in the last week of November '14 also but had only seen the long-tailed species. This time too we saw only a couple of Long-tailed Shrike individuals on the Nal approach road. Could it be that rapid spread of irrigation along the Nal bordering areas is contributing to the decline in the local shrike populations? We did come across a carcass of a Jungle cat killed by a speeding vehicle and took some pictures.

The journey being uneventful in terms of bird sightings on the way, we reached Nal around 7.45 am and soon found ourselves in the middle of a large noisy nesting colony of Little Cormorants, at the entrance to the Ramsar site. Almost exclusively, the cormorants were nesting on Pipal (*Ficus virens*). A closer look revealed that Cattle Egrets and Little Egrets too were nesting at the same spot but preferring Neem (*Azadirachta indica*) instead of Ficus spp. There were 150 to 200 nests of which almost 50% belonged to Little Cormorants and Indian Cormorants, while the rest were

of the two egret species. Just opposite to the nesting of cormorants we found a Chestnut-shouldered Petronia calling melodiously and soon discovered that it too was nesting inside a lamp-post. Going further down the road towards the main office block and interpretation centre, we spotted Black-tailed Godwits (more than 25), Woolly-necked Storks (4), and three Greater Flamingos foraging in a shallow patch of water to the right of the road.



Photo : Bakul Trivedi

Quite clearly, the Nal was playing host to a large number of breeding bird species both waterfowl and terrestrial at this time of the year, also indicating a reasonable availability of food for both and presence of sufficient water in the wetland!! Our guess was confirmed very shortly as we turned the corner and were greeted with an almost full to the brim Sarovar- an unexpected sight in this season!! Our good friend and local birding expert Kasam Sama, whom we picked up near the entrance spelled out a few interesting facts, "Nal was being fed by Narmada waters from broken/leaking check dams from upstream Bhaskarpura reservoir which is linked to Narmada branch canal." Run-off from irrigation through this system too contributes to unwanted addition of water round the year in the lake. This partly explained the unusual volume of water in this month. It also raised questions about how the mixing of freshwater from Narmada and the extant brackish water were affecting the depth and growth of aquatic vegetation of this recently declared Ramsar site and whether this will have any adverse effect on the habitat in the long run. Whether the custodians i.e the Forest Department functionaries are aware and have allowed this or they have little control over it, is to be seen. Kasam of course was quick to point out as we got into the boat for an interior view, that the composition of vegetation was changing; for instance 'gha-bajaryu' (*Typha*) was reducing

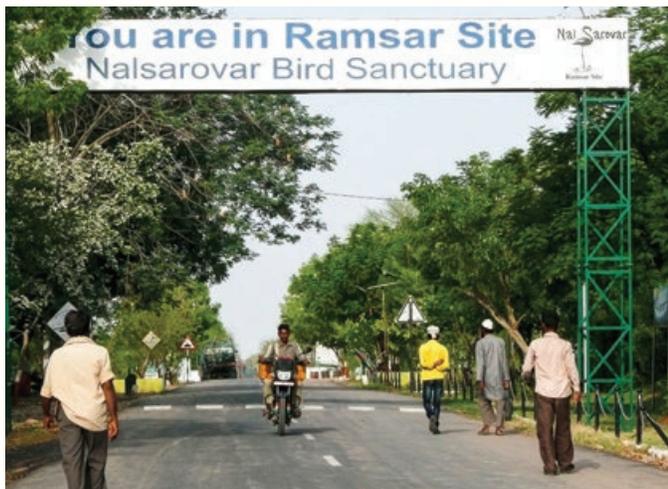


Photo : Bakul Trivedi

in density and 'gondro' (*Scirpus*) too was decreasing while bamboo like sedges and grasses were increasing. This in turn is also affecting the aquatic fauna, like fishes, and subsequently the bird population dependent on them. Clearly we were being informed about a change in the local food pyramid and its constituents. We also witnessed heavy eutrophication in the lake caused by the decaying of submerged vegetation. Water was stinking and its transparency was reduced. We wondered whether the Forest Department was involved in regulation of this organic matter decay to maintain the character of the wetland or not? This needs to be confirmed with them...

However as we travelled further into the Nal by boat the wetland began displaying its true hidden beauty and charm that has brought it the Ramsar status! First we spotted the Yellow Bittern in beautiful breeding plumage but ever so well camouflaged by the reeds and sedges of the Nal!!! Over a time we counted and took pictures of at least 20 of this resident species. Scores of purple moorhens, Little cormorants and a few Little Terns, Whiskered Terns, Pied Kingfishers were the other species recorded. Another major highlight of this visit was the presence of Whit-winged Black Tern, that too a couple of birds in breeding plumage. Interestingly we did not spot a single duck species though we saw a couple of whistling teals in flight. This was a bit intriguing.

'Vadla' was specially recommended by Bakulbhai as he has always found some interesting sightings in this small satellite wetland located some 10 km west to Nal sarovar. This time



Photo : Bakul Trivedi

we made a rapid visit and were amply rewarded by the presence of almost a thousand Lesser Flamingos, a Black-necked Stork as well as large number of purple moorhens (interestingly, we counted more than twenty purple moorhens foraging in a field but could not make out what were they foraging on?). A solitary Black-necked Stork was our first sighting of this bird in the area. And what better way to end the trip than watching the marching display of the Lesser Flamingos...!

Nal has always something more to offer you, whenever you go, whichever season you may choose. One finds himself grown richer in his birding experience after every visit. This is what makes Nal so special and justifies its Ramsar status. □



Photo : Bakul Trivedi

COMPILATION OF Popular PUBLICATIONS ON Gujarat BIRDS (2010-2014)

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Errors and omissions are solely regretted in citing references or citations in the present compilation, if any.

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Sightings of Grasshopper Warbler in Amreli, Gujarat

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Grasshopper Warbler (*Locustella naevia*) is a small streaked warbler of the genus *Locustella*. It breeds across central and western Palearctic and winters in S Asia and N Africa (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). It is a winter migrant in India, wintering mainly in the Western Ghats and C India (Grimmett *et al.* 2011, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), with isolated records from other parts of India.

For Gujarat, a few isolated records are given in Grimmett *et al.* (2011); it is shown as a passage migrant also (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Ali (1955) collected specimen from Golana, Cambay (Ta. Khambhat, Dist. Anand at present) and also noted it around Baroda (Vadodara), with the remark that it was not common or abundant, but was likely to occur in suitable habitat. Due to the generally skulking nature of this warbler, it is very rarely seen and it has not been reported recently from Gujarat. Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) give its status as 'scarce or overlooked'.

On 15 December 2010, I was searching for a Spotted Crake (*Porzana porzana*) which is seen in an area near my village, Saladi, Dist. Amreli (21° 34' N, 71° 20' E). This marshy area at the edge of the village pond is covered with reeds, and interspersed with Gando Baval (*Prosopis juliflora*). Usually water is present in the area till March. While waiting for Spotted Crake, my attention was drawn towards a small, streaked warbler moving near the base of a Gando Baval shrub. Its call was a "chat-chat-chat" repeated a few times. I got good views of the bird and was able to see the streaked upperparts and crown and buffy underparts, with faint streaking. The streaking was prominent on the flanks. I identified the warbler as a Grasshopper Warbler, ruling out the similar looking Lanceolated Warbler (*L. lanceolata*) and Rusty-rumped Warbler (*L. certhiola*), based on the call and other features seen on the bird. The calls of Lanceolated and Rusty-rumped warblers are quite different

from the calls heard here. Though differences in plumage are not very apparent; plumage of this individual was matching with the description given in the reference texts (Grimmett *et al.* 2011, Pearson & Kirwan 2015) for



Grasshopper Warbler, and was different from Lanceolated and Rusty-rumped Warblers. Its "chat-chat-chat" call is typical of a Grasshopper Warbler and thus it could be identified conclusively.

Thereafter I kept on visiting the area during following winters and observed the warbler many more times. I have been keeping detailed records of my sightings over the last four winters.

Sightings of Grasshopper Warbler at Saladi, Gujarat

Year	First record	Last record	No. birds	Dates of record
2010-2011	15 Dec. 2010	13 Jan. 2011	2	17, 18, 31 Dec. 2010 4 Jan. 2011
2011-2012	9 Dec. 2011	4 Jan. 2012	1	----
2013-2014	6 Dec. 2013	6 Dec. 2013	1	-----
2014-2015	12 Nov. 2014	30 Dec. 2014	5	Twice or thrice a week in the given period

As can be seen from the table, Grasshopper Warbler is a regular winter migrant to this area. Though I could not go to the area frequently, it was apparent that the birds remained in the area for at least two to three months during winter (from November up to January).

Since the area in which the birds were seen is not very large, I was able to observe the birds well. In the winter of 2014-2015 the number of birds noted was more. Again, the same year

I could visit the area regularly till December end. The bird is crepuscular and was more easily seen early (around 06-30 hrs) in the morning and late (after 17-30 hrs) in the evening. Many birdwatchers visited this place and took



Photo : Manoj Finava



Photo : Prasad Ganpule

Grasshopper Warbler....

photographs of the species. It is possible that more than five birds were wintering regularly in this area during the period of 4 years, as I could hear its calls from different locations while remaining seated at one place. The count of five was based on birds observed by me personally.

Here, the Grasshopper Warblers had two types of plumages:

Yellow throat and breast with no streaking at all. The upperparts streaked, with prominent streaking on the mantle and head. (Img. 1)

Buffy throat and underparts, faint streaking on the breast, and more prominent streaking on the flanks. (Img. 2)

Photographs of both types of birds are given in Image 1 [photo by Manoj Finava] and Image 2 [photo by Prasad Ganpule].

Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) state that, "it may have bright yellow wash below" and that, "the adult may show distinct streaking across the lower throat/upper breast and on the rear flanks". The subspecies wintering in India is *L. n. straminea*, and at Saladi the birds showed both types of plumages described above. This is also illustrated in Kazmierczak (2000), where both types of individuals – with whitish as well as yellowish underparts – are shown.

The above sightings show that the Grasshopper Warbler is a regular winter migrant to the area. It is possible that it may have been overlooked due to its secretive habits and skulking behaviour. It could be wintering in areas with suitable habitat in other parts of Gujarat. A detailed survey would be helpful in understanding its distribution in Gujarat.

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[Ali (1960) reported its occurrence in Kachchh. The species was also recorded from Hingolghadh Nature Education Sanctuary in central Saurashtra (Naik *et al.* 1990). - Eds.

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Bird watching, in its essence, is the fine art of becoming invisible: of merging into the surroundings in such a manner that the breath which Nature has held back upon your entry into Her parlour, is joyfully exhaled, and normal respiration restored; in such a way that the frozen statues of animate wildlife, interrupted by your brashness, are coaxed into resuming their activities; in such a way that your aural and visual senses are drenched with the buoyancy of life; in such a way that you get outside yourself and become a part of the pageant around you. This does require the cultivation of a patience that slows down your pace to that of the elemental cycles dominating the flow of life in an immaculate world run entirely without human help. It requires the marshalling and re-aligning of vision, and a new focus of hearing so that you absorb every single sound and identify its source, and gradually its nuances, its cadenzas. It demands the preoccupation with stillness.

What are the rewards of this exercise? I can think of at least two that will last you a lifetime. One, you would have begun to notice things about your surroundings that you never knew existed, bringing you immediate, immeasurable joy. Two, you would have wound down your restless inner dynamo to such an extent that you would discover a quietude, a stiffness within you: a fount for a fresh view of your surroundings, a new approach to life, based on re-energised sensitivities. But first you must do this.

- Aasheesh Pittie

Photo: Saurabh Dave

Sightings of Water Rail at two places in Saurashtra

Viral Joshi : At & Post Saladi, Ta. Liliya, Dist. Amreli-365535. virjoshi892@yahoo.com

Our local pond in the village Saldi, Dist. Amreli, Gujarat (21° 34' N, 71° 20' E) becomes a heaven for Rails, Crakes and other reed birds, as some part of it turns into a wet, marshy ground, full of tall reeds during winters (October to February). We made observations of Water Rail in this patch during two consecutive winters (2012-13 and 2013-14). We used to visit the site every day from 6:00 hrs to 10:00 hrs and 16:00 hrs to 18:00 hrs. Total number of days we made visits to monitor this bird were above 100. We also carried out observations with the help of a camera trap, which was placed in a small open patch in the centre of the reeds for a couple of weeks at some point of time during the study-period. This gave us good insight into the behaviour of these elusive and shy bird. Secretive nature of this bird and the character of its habitat made spotting of Water Rail, difficult. But its presence could be detected, as we were familiar with its calls. Normally this bird calls during sunrise and sunset and is silent at other times unless disturbed

by a predator. Water Rail utters a call like “tip tip tip”. Its alarm call is a high pitched scream. Totally 4 individuals were seen during this period of observation.



Sightings:

First winter: First seen 12-12-2012 to last seen 27-1-2013.

Second winter: First seen 31-12-2013 to last seen 10-2-2014.

(Detailed note on the relevant subject submitted for publication)

Punit Karia : C/o. Mijbani caterers, 27, 'Nirant', Jalaram Colony, National Highway, Porbander-360575. mijbani@yahoo.com

My son Konark and I started our early morning birding trip on 25 April, 2015 to Mokar-sagar wetland. This wetland is about 20 km from Porbander, on the Veraval coastal highway. As it was midsummer, we were sceptical about good sightings. But no sooner we reached the place; we sighted a wonderful bird within a short time. It looked like some *Rallidae* and it was on the edge of the wetland, engaged in feeding. We were not sure about its identification as we didn't carry any reference book on that day, but we realised that it was something different from the birds we usually see in this area and so we took photos. We confirmed the identification as Water Rail (*Rallus aquaticus*) from the oriental bird images website and field guide (Grimmett *et al* 2011).



Photo : Punit Karia

There are a few previous records of Water Rail from Gujarat. It was seen in Kheda District (Mukherjee *et al* 2002), near Surat (Shah 2004) and Jamnagar (Patel 2012, photo on INW). It is shown to be a winter visitor to N India (Grimmett *et al* 2011), but its status in Gujarat is unclear.

It would be interesting to see if there are Water Rail sightings from Saurashtra in the future. -Eds

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Sighting of Eye-browed Thrush in Girnar Wildlife Sanctuary, Gujarat

Gaurang Bagda : 22/44, Morari Nagar, Near Alpha School-2, Opp. Avanti Apartment, Laxminagar, Junagadh-362001. gaurangbagda@gmail.com

On 21 February 2013, I observed and photographed an Eye-browed Thrush in Girnar Wildlife Sanctuary (21° 30' N 70° 30' E). The identification was confirmed by the white supercilium, grayish head, peach-orange flanks and white belly.

Eye-browed Thrush *Turdus obscurus* is a migratory Thrush breeding in C & E Siberia E to Kamchatka, S to N Mongolia and Amurland and is a non-breeding migrant to NE Indian Subcontinent, E to Taiwan, S to Greater Sundas and Philippines (Collar 2005)



Photo : Vicky Chauhan

It is a vagrant to Gujarat. It has been reported earlier by Raol (1971) from Porbander and by Anwar Turk (Anonymous, 2010) from Kachchh.

This is a significant sighting for the area as it is a vagrant to Gujarat.

[Recently, another sighting (with photograph) of an adult was reported from Gandhinagar, in February 2014 by Vicky Chauhan (*pers. comm.*). - Ed.]

References:

Anonymous, 2010. Some interesting bird sightings. *Flamingo* 8(1&2): 24.

Collar, N. 2005. Eyebrowed Thrush (*Turdus obscurus*). In: del Hoyo, J., Elliott, A., Sargatal, J., Christie, D.A. & de Juana, E. (eds.) *Handbook of the Birds of the World Alive*. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona. (Accessed on 21 July 2014).

Raol, L. M. 1971. A puzzling bird: a new record? *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* 11(5): 2–3. □



GLOBAL INVASIVE SPECIES DATABASE (GISD)

The Aim of GISD is to increase awareness about invasive alien species and to facilitate effective prevention and management activities. The database of GISD is continually being populated with species information which are threat to native biodiversity. GISD is managed by the Invasive Species Specialist Group (ISSG) of the SSC- Species Survival Commission of the IUCN.

IUCN declares three birds among world's 100 worst invasive species, found in Indian Subcontinent: Red-vented bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*), Common myna (*Acridotheres tristis*) and Common starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*).

Common myna (*Acridotheres tristis*) is a pest in South Africa, North America, the Middle East, Australia, New Zealand and many Pacific islands. The species poses a serious threat to the ecosystems of Australia where it was named "The Most Important Pest/ Problem"

Common Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*), for its role in the decline of local native species and the damages to agriculture, has been included in the IUCN List of the world's 100 worst invasive species. Common starlings can eat and damage fruits in orchards such as grapes, peaches, olives, currants and tomatoes, or dig up newly sown grain and sprouting crops. They may also eat animal feed and distribute seeds through their droppings. In eastern Australia, weeds like bridal creeper, blackberry and boneseed are thought to have been spread by common starlings. Agricultural damage In the US is estimated as costing about US\$800 million annually.

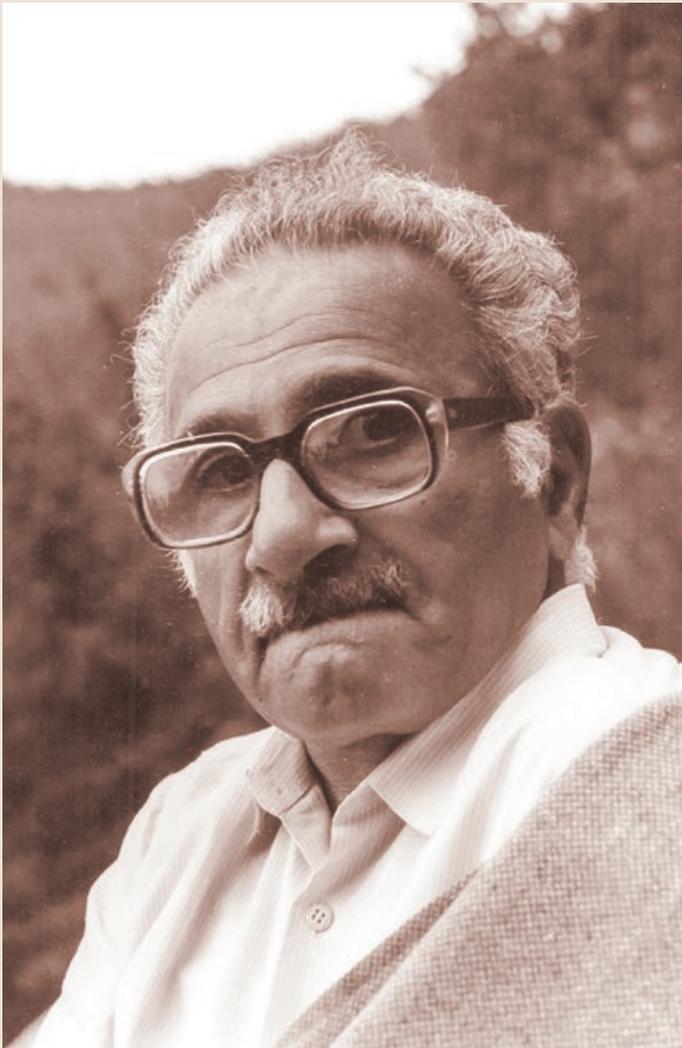
Red-vented bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*) is a noisy, gregarious bird, aggressive, and chases off other bird species. It may also help to spread the seeds of other invasive species. It is an agricultural pest, destroying fruits, flowers, beans, tomatoes and peas. It has been introduced to many Pacific Islands, where it has caused serious problems by eating fruits and vegetable crops, as well as nectar, seeds and buds.

“I knew ‘Him’ too....”

A series of tributes to Sh. Lavkumar Khachar

Listening to the sounds of a flowing stream, chirping of birds, the whistling wind; walking and walking and more walking and enjoying the Himalayas while doing so; camping in tents amidst nature in its pristine conditions; crossing rivers, climbing mountains, sitting in silence out in the open under the canopy of stars; meeting local families and learning from them - conservation of the environment at a grassroots level; respect for nature - even landslides; making puddings with the help of flowing streams.....this is what ‘Mama’ or Rajkumar Lavkumar Khachar of Jasdan meant to me!

‘Sir’ to hundreds of Rajkumar College boys, he was an icon for ornithologists and environmentalists. He nurtured many a young hearts to care for trees, birds, forests and of course nature in general! Senior politicians consulted him on conservation and natural resource balancing, industrialists engaged him to be helped with an antidote for the unavoidable effluents, schools sought his help for nature-based activities for their students, which he aptly obliged through his nature camps in Manali and other places in Gujarat. ‘Simple



living- high thinking’ is what comprised the life of this man.

Five decades later, and still just my *Mama* – he came to help me in my married home! The much sought after landscape designer helped me plan the gardens of ‘Deo Bagh’ - today Gwalior’s number one hotel. “This peaceful setting, your hundred year plus heritage trees will work their magic! So let’s just add to the charm and weave the garden around what you already have”, he said to me and set off to plan the ‘Nau Bagh’ within this very ancient ‘Char Bagh’, where important Mughals were known to have camped. He worked tirelessly, silently, steadily to get it going- using local trees, plants and a sturdy variety of lawn, which we are so thankful for. “Shrubbery must be kept for the birds to nest- you can’t have everything squeaky clean like Switzerland”, is what I often heard him say. “Keep the dry leaves off the walkways but retain them in the soil beds - they make excellent manure in due course of time”, he would point out. Deo Bagh today boasts of 30 species of birds in the heart of the chaotic city!

For ‘Flameback’, my younger sister Ambika Raje Ghorpade’s resort at Mudigere in Karnataka, he toured the Western Ghats with his student and confidante Girish Adesara to acquaint themselves on the local flora and fauna and carefully selected the plantations for the boutique resort. Several other cousins and friends will remember him for a creeper here and a shrub there.

With my father, H R Patankar, a former Chief Secretary to the Government of Gujarat, known to have spearheaded Gujarat’s industrialization, he spent many evenings discussing the pros and cons of several coming up industries, power plants, dams etc. These were enlightening discussions and a huge learning process for our tender minds and we are forever grateful to him for this opportunity.

His note left for me, with my mother in law, late Lady Jadhav while I was away on Thursday, 22nd July, 2010

“Uma,

It is always great to see younger people wanting to plan for the future even as they strive to preserve the past. The task you have taken on is daunting to the extreme and though the mists are clearing, you have a distance to travel. Restricting my observations to the landscaping, I have provided the very basics.....

Affy,

Mama”

Uma Devi Jadhav

Jadhav Kothi, Opp. Janak Tal, Bahodapur,
Agra-Mumbai Highway, Gwalior- 474012



News on Wings

VOTE FOR ROBIN

Britain a country without any official national bird witnessed a nationwide poll for finding the bird to be recognized as national bird. Maximum number of vote came to European Robin

(*Erithacus rubecula*), a territorial woodland bird commonly found in Britain. The ballot 'National bird vote' organized by birder David Lindo, came with participation of 2,24,000 voters, which in fact made the site crash twice during online poll. The Robin got significant margin of 34% votes, followed by Barn Owl and Blackbird with 12% and 11% votes respectively.

Source: <http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/jun/10/robin-wins-vote-uk-national-bird-britain>



Sketch : Jagdish Thakor

BIRD PHOTO ID

'Merlin bird photo ID' a website created by Cornell University and Visipedia research project using artificial intelligence techniques can help bird watchers identify birds captured in photos. The user need to upload photo on website, enter details about the location photograph was taken and date details; the site provides tools like draw line and points to be placed over the bird features like eyes, beak, tail etc. The website will suggest the names with other images stored in database. Currently the website is meant for birds found in North American continent.

Source: <http://merlin.allaboutbirds.org/photo-id/>



Merlin Bird ID
From the Cornell Lab of Ornithology

OWLS AND WIND FARMS

Scientist from University of Cambridge and American experts has been able to design efficient wind turbines derived from Owl's feather. They have created coating for turbine blades that can control the flow of air quietly. Owls feathers are nature marvel, the efficient design of wings create less sound during flight for prey.

Examining the owl's wing three prominent features was revealed: a downy covering, flexible comb of bristles on the leading edge and a porous fringe on the trailing edge.

Professor Peake said: "No other bird has this sort of intricate wing structure. Much of the noise caused by a wing, whether it's attached to a bird, plane or fan - originates at the trailing edge where the air passing over the wing surface is turbulent. The structure of an owl's wing serves to reduce noise by smoothing the passage of air as it passes over the wing - scattering the sound so their prey can't hear them coming."

Interesting results came when tested live, whereby, the noise was reduced to 10 decibels and turbines moved more faster than previous design giving more electric outcome.

Source: <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/sciencetech/article-3133987/Owls-silent-swoop-key-quieter-wind-farms-Analysis-feathers-engineers-design-surfaces-control-flow-air.html>



Source : Internet

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Erratum: Flamingo XIII (1-2): page 14. Photo appearing under Tickell's Leaf Warbler (*Phylloscopus affinis*) is of Hume's Leaf Warbler (*Phylloscopus humei*) and should be considered under that species.



'Lakes of Saurashtra' is a last page diagram in the book 'Birds of Saurashtra', one of the ornithological classics and is authored by Late R. S. Dharmakumarsinhji of Bhavnagar State. Curiously year of publication is nowhere mentioned in the book. In the forward Major General H. Williams mentions, "There are far too few ornithologists in India. Of some who can claim high distinction in this field of activity Raol Shri Dharmakumarsinhji finds an assured place. I believe, this is the first authoritative record of birds of Saurashtra."



“

When someone asks me “Do you believe in God?” my stock answer is, “Does it really matter whether I do or do not?” And, what of Life after Death? This again is something rather facile to be concerned about; my contemplation of the biological training is that Life is the manifestation made possible when and as long as there is protoplasmic organisation and when this organisation disintegrates, the manifestation fades away like a flame when the combustible material is burnt up. To conclude then, it is not the After Life that I am concerned about, it is whatever is left of the present.... the discomforts, the pains, and, above all the remaining moments of bliss which I can extract. And, what of God? My energy will merge into His Cosmic Presence of wide near empty spaces and whirling universes of myriad stars blazing in all their magnificence, themselves as insignificant as indeed I am during the brief period of my Life which should be more important for me and not the presumed afterlife.

- Lavkumar Khachar

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