

FLAMINGO Gujarat

Bulletin of Gujarat Birds



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Editorial

Dear Friends,

Please accept greetings from BCSG. The last quarter saw even worse phase of the pandemic. I am sure you must have had overcome personal adversities confronted during this period.

'FLAMINGO Gujarat' is now in its 17th year overall and 7th year in its new version. This is the 6th issue published online.

The new format of the bulletin was introduced in 2015, after the gap of five years during which it remained unpublished. The new version was received very well. With colourful pictures we could serve the avian news and stories from the state vividly and more meaningfully.

Transition to online version was to save from exorbitant expenses, to increase its outreach and last but not the least, to give a practical message on nature conservation.

From the very first issue, after we took the decision to revive the Society's newsletter in 2015, we have been working on giving the magazine a scientific outlook that it bears presently. The technical side of the subject matter and the scientific writings are very efficiently managed by Mr. Prasad Ganpule. BCSG is committed to run this online Bird Bulletin as long as possible, with its financial and other executive liabilities duly fulfilled.

Our pursuance to get ISSN status is on. We are launching flamingogujarat.com under ISSN prerequisite criteria. The website will act as base repository for all current and past issues along with the ease option to download pdf files article wise. The website shares the same domain space as www.bcsgeo.in, hence preventing extra web space charges, and making the access between two domains user-friendly. The option for submitting articles has been included which will direct users for online submission without any hitch. We hope to secure ISSN before the next issue.

BCSG is proud to be the only bulletin of its kind exclusively demarcated for a state. I am sure your cooperation to our valuable publication will be as warm and crisp as before. Together we can do wonders! Please be safe and healthy.

Warm wishes and regards!

- Bakul Trivedi

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Notes on the Macqueen's Bustard *Chlamydotis macqueenii* in Gujarat

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Introduction

The Macqueen's Bustard *Chlamydotis macqueenii*, is also known as the Asian Houbara Bustard, Houbara Bustard or the Eastern Houbara Bustard. The species is omnivorous, eating fruits, seeds, shoots, leaves and flowers, and animal prey including locusts, grasshoppers, mole-crickets, and beetles (Cramp 1980). The Macqueen's Bustard is a desert- and steppe- dwelling bird, distributed throughout Central Asia and whose range stretches from Mongolia to the Arabian Peninsula (del Hoyo *et al.* 1996). It is a small to mid-sized bustard, categorized as 'Vulnerable' (Birdlife International 2021). It is an iconic inhabitant of steppe and semi-desert in Central Asia and the Middle East. A highly terrestrial bird, capable of going long periods without taking flight, it is, nonetheless, a true long-distance migrant, with some individuals travelling more than 7,500 km over the course of a single year (Combreau *et al.* 2011, Islam *et al.* 2014).

The Macqueen's Bustard population extends from northeast Asia (Mongolia and China) across Central Asia, the Middle East and the Arabian Peninsula to reach the Sinai Desert. After breeding in the spring in Central Asia, some Macqueen's Bustard groups migrate southward to spend the winter in warmer regions (the Arabian Peninsula, Pakistan, and NW India). In early spring, they return to their breeding habitats in China, Kazakhstan, Mongolia and other provinces. Some Macqueen's Bustards breed and are resident in the southern part of their range, particularly in Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Oman, Yemen and parts of Iran, parts of Pakistan and Turkmenistan (source of information: International Fund for Houbara Conservation, Abu Dhabi).

For the Indian Subcontinent, the Macqueen's Bustard is mainly a winter visitor to Pakistan and Northwest India; it breeds in south-eastern Pakistan, in Baluchistan (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). It is an uncommon winter migrant to Gujarat, with scattered sightings from Little Rann of Kachchh and Greater Rann of Kachchh, where it winters in small numbers. Recently, there have been isolated photographic records from Jamnagar and Dwarka Districts (Jamnagar City outskirts and Positra near Dwarka) and there are a few unconfirmed reports from other areas of the state (Ganpule 2014, 2016).

Here, we present the current status and distribution of the Macqueen's Bustard in Gujarat, based on eBird sightings and photographic records collected from bird watchers and report sightings of ringed birds recently photographed from Gujarat.



Devvratsinh Mori

Taxonomy

The Macqueen's Bustard, found in Asia, was described by John Edward Gray in 1832 as *Otis macqueenii*. Earlier, it was treated as a subspecies of the Houbara Bustard *Chlamydotis undulata*, but is now treated as a separate species following clear cut differences in plumage, courtship behaviour, vocalizations, and mitochondrial DNA between the two (Sangster *et al.* 2004).

The earlier taxonomy of the Houbara Bustard was as follows:

Chlamydotis undulata undulata – the nominate subspecies found in northern Africa, from Mauritania to western Egypt.

Chlamydotis undulata fuertaventurae - Fuerteventura, Lanzarote and Graciosa, in the Canary Islands.

Chlamydotis undulata macqueenii - Eastern Egypt (Sinai), Arabia and Central Asia, from northwest Kazakhstan east to Mongolia, wintering from the Persian Gulf to northwest India and in central China.

Macqueen's Bustard has now been recommended to be treated as a full species, while the 'Houbara' group is treated as the African Houbara Bustard *Chlamydotis undulata* (comprising *C. u. undulata* and *C. u. fuertaventurae*). The dividing line between the two *Chlamydotis* species is the Sinai Peninsula (Rahmani 2012). The application of recently published quantitative criteria for species delimitation, as outlined in Tobias *et al.* (2010), also suggests that the 'Houbara' group is better split as two species — the African Houbara Bustard (including the nominate and ssp. *fuertaventurae*) and Macqueen's Bustard (monotypic). This new taxonomy has

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been adopted by the BirdLife Taxonomic Working Group and is followed in the recent HBW - Birdlife Illustrated Checklist of the Birds of the World (del Hoyo & Collar 2014).

Historical status in Gujarat

There are historical records of Macqueen's Bustard from Gujarat. It was said to be distributed in Saurashtra, Kachchh and other parts of Gujarat, and given as a winter migrant to the state. Butler (1879) gave it as 'cold weather visitant, common in Sindh and Kachchh, rare in Kathiawar (=now Saurashtra) and Gujarat'. Ali (1945) gave it as a winter visitor, fairly common in Kachchh, but local, and abundant in some years, less in others. Ali (1954) collected a specimen from Khavda, Kachchh, and noted that it was fairly abundant in some years; in three drives in December 1943, the Maharao of Kachchh shot 16 and 17 Macqueen's Bustards in the sand dunes near Mandvi! It is further stated that it is rare elsewhere in Gujarat, only occasionally met with in semi-desert northern parts, for e.g. about Deesa in northern Gujarat. Dharmakumarsinhji (1955) gave it as an uncommon but regular winter visitor to Saurashtra, in the northern part from Jamnagar to Dhrangadhra, with specimens being shot in Wankaner and Jasdan; stragglers to eastern Saurashtra were

recorded, with few records from Bhavnagar and Talaja. Khachar (1996) stated that the Macqueen's Bustard is not 'rare' but rather a regular winter visitor to the semi-desert margins of the Ranns and the sand dunes of the Saurashtra and Kachchh coasts. Thus, the Macqueen's Bustard was fairly common historically in Kachchh.

Sightings

Based on the eBird data collected till now, published sightings and from personal records from bird watchers, the Macqueen's Bustard is still mainly a winter visitor to Kachchh, with scattered and isolated records from other parts of the state. It has been recorded in Kachchh from Greater Rann of Kachchh, Banni Grassland, Little Rann of Kachchh, Naliya and there are other isolated records from Pingleshwar Beach and other parts of Kachchh. The records from outside Kachchh are from near Dwarka (Positra and Mithapur), Jamnagar, Rajkot, Bhavnagar, Amreli, Porbandar, northern parts of Gujarat on the fringes of Little Rann of Kachchh in Banaskantha and Patan Districts (Vora *et al.* 2008). The maximum numbers of sightings are from the arid regions of the Greater Rann of Kachchh (GRK) and the Little Rann of Kachchh (LRK), with few records from other parts of Gujarat. There are more than 477 checklists (Graph 1)



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with sightings of Macqueen's Bustard on eBird (eBird Basic Dataset 2021), but only a handful of records are from outside Kachchh. The records from other parts of Gujarat (other than

Kachchh) are given here in Table 1. All sightings are given in Map 1, which shows the current distribution of Macqueen's Bustard in Gujarat.

Graph 1

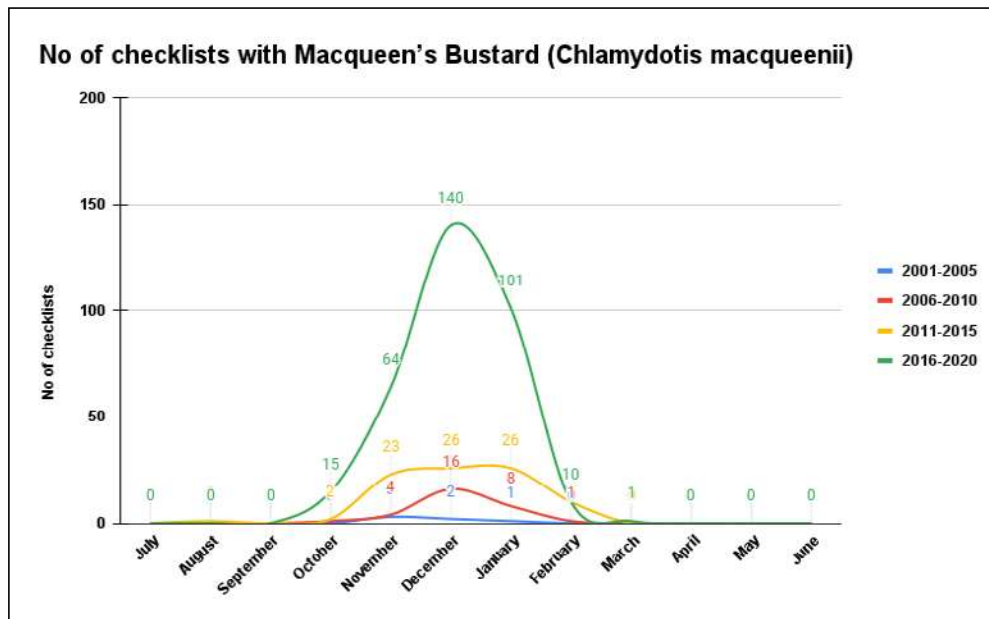
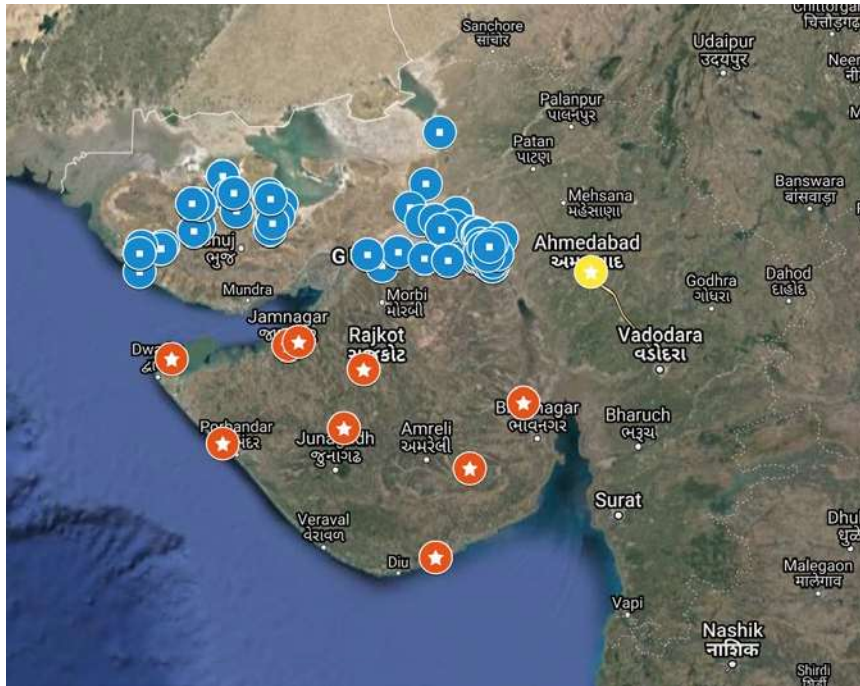


Table 1: Records of Macqueen's Bustard from Gujarat (other than Kachchh)

Sr No.	Date	Locality	District	Reference
1	1994 to 2003	Velavadar National Park (around Kanatalav), & between Velavadar and Sanesh	Bhavnagar	V. J. Rana, <i>pers. comm.</i>
2	Winter of 1999	Near Porbandar	Porbandar	Rughani 1999
3	14 December 2003	Suigam	Banaskantha	Jadhav & Parasharya 2003
4	January 2004	Mithapur	Jamnagar (Now Dwarka)	Trivedi 2004
5	18 November 2008	Positra	Jamnagar (Now Dwarka)	Parasharya & Gajjar 2009
6	14 December 2009	Wetland near Jamnagar	Jamnagar	eBird
7	15 December 2009	Wetland near Jamnagar	Jamnagar	eBird
8	23 February 2014	Velavadar National Park	Bhavnagar	eBird
9	27-October-2015	Jafrabad Salt Pan	Amreli	Batuk Bhil, <i>pers. comm</i>
10	11 January 2016	Jafrabad Salt Pan	Amreli	Author's sighting
11	15 February 2016	Jafrabad Salt pan	Amreli	Author's sighting
12	November 2017	Nagershree	Amreli	Photo available, source: social media
13	31 October 2017	Gariyadhar	Bhavnagar	Batuk Bhil, <i>pers. comm.</i>
14	16 October 2018	Sabarmati (Rescue)	Ahmedabad	Arvind Parmar & Arif Theba, <i>pers. comm</i>
15	3 January 2019	Fofal Dam	Rajkot	eBird
16	23 January 2019	Khijadiya Bird Sanctuary	Jamnagar	eBird
17	11 October 2020	Khambhala <i>vidi</i>	Rajkot	Rindani <i>et al.</i> 2021

Map 1: Distribution of Macqueen's Bustard in Gujarat



Blue: GRK, LRK and the fringes of both the ranns, Red: Saurashtra, Yellow: Central Gujarat

A state-wide survey was conducted by Bird Conservation Society, Gujarat (BCSG), from September 2006 to March 2007, under the leadership of Dr. Indra Gadhvi, to estimate the population of Macqueen's Bustard in Gujarat and to find out the habitat preferences of the species here. In the draft report prepared, a total of 121 individuals were reported, with indirect evidence (foot prints) of another 28 birds, for a total of 149 individuals. The maximum numbers of birds were reported from the fringes of GRK, falling in Banaskantha District. It was found that more than 80% of the birds were seen in LRK and GRK (including fringe areas). The report listed records from outside LRK and GRK, with sightings from Porbandar, Mandvi and the observation of a dead bird (probably hunted) recovered from Lakhtar *vidi*, in Surendranagar District. Thus, records from outside Kachchh were scarce during the survey too.

Migration and Movement

Bird ringing is a scientific research method based on the individual marking of birds. Any record of a ringed bird, either through recapture and subsequent release, or on the occasion of its final recovery as a dead bird, will tell us much about its life. This technique is one of the most effective methods to study the biology, ecology, behaviour, movement, breeding productivity and population demography of birds. We report here a ringed Macqueen's Bustard seen and photographed by

the first author [DM] in the Little Rann of Kachchh. There were two ringed Macqueen's Bustards sighted from two different places in the Little Rann of Kachchh. The sanctuary provides an important feeding, breeding and roosting habitat for a large number of birds due to its strategic location on the bird migration route and its connection with the dynamic Gulf of Kachchh.

On 29 December 2020, around at 09:30 hrs, the first author visited the southern part of the Little Rann of Kachchh. He observed a Macqueen's Bustard with one aluminium ring on both legs. The left tarsus had a green coloured ring and the right one had a metallic aluminium ring. He took many photographs of the bustard till the bird started running and went far away. The photographs were sent to BNHS (Bombay Natural History Society) and IFHC. The following ringing details were received from IFHC, which are given in Table 2 and the locations are given in the maps given here.

Table 2: Ringing and re-sighting details of Macqueen's Bustard photographed in the Little Rann of Kachchh

Left leg ring number:	EV5
Sex:	Male
Ring colour	Green (metallic)
Ringing date:	21 September 2020
Ringed by:	Earnest Shams, IFHC, in Pakistan
Ringing place:	Cholistan Desert or Rohi, Southern part of Punjab, Pakistan

Coordinates of the release site	28.56791° N, 71.33489° E
Finding date:	29 December 2020
Finding time:	09:45 hrs
Country:	India
Finding place:	Little Rann of Kachchh (southern part), Gujarat
Distance:	598 km
Finding coordinates:	23° 19' 34.6" N, 71° 34' 50.8 "E

Map 2: Ringing location and re-sighting location of ringed Macqueen's Bustard



Maps: Re-sighting location is Little Rann of Kachchh; distance from release to re-sighting is 598 km.

Another ringed Macqueen's Bustard has been reported from Gujarat; an injured bird was rescued near Par Village, Santalpur Taluka, Patan District, on the fringes of Little Rann of Kachchh,

on 18 January 2021. It had a metal ring on the leg with the inscription "M20K- IFHC. SKHBC.KZ, T.UAE +9 7137347555 T. KZK +7 7012280898". The photographs of the injured bird were uploaded on eBird by Prabhu Thakker. The exact details of where this bird was ringed or released are not available. But, it is a bird ringed by IFHC.

Discussion

As can be seen from the records presented here, the Macqueen's Bustard is now a winter visitor mainly to Kachchh, with scattered records from other parts of Gujarat. It regularly winters in small numbers in Little- and Greater Rann of Kachchh. There are regular reports from Naliya area too. But, other than these areas, there are only a few records of this species from other parts of the state. It is certainly quite uncommon or rare in Saurashtra now. It is seen in good numbers in the fringes of Little- and Greater Rann of Kachchh in suitable habitat in Patan and Banaskantha Districts.

The recent records from Jamnagar, Rajkot and other places in Saurashtra are probably of stragglers. Even in the Little Rann of Kachchh, the number of wintering birds is not high. Though groups of six to eight birds are sometimes seen in the vast expanses of the rann, the total number of birds wintering in the area is less.

The record of the Macqueen's Bustard from central Gujarat is unusual. The individual rescued from Ahmedabad was badly injured and was brought for veterinary care. It was found injured in the Sabarmati area of Ahmedabad; there was another bird which flew away. It is possible that during migration, this individual might have become disoriented and could have collided with some man-made structures, thus getting injured. Certainly, this record is outside the current known habitat of the species in Gujarat.

The re-sighting of two ringed birds provides information about the migration route of the bustards. The bird for which ringing information was obtained shows that it was a short distance migrant, visiting Gujarat from Pakistan. The birds from Central Asia are strongly migratory, leaving their breeding grounds in August-September on trans-Himalayan migration, and arriving in wintering grounds in Persian Gulf to NW India. Satellite tracking studies have shown that birds from Central Asian and Chinese populations have wintered in India. It is quite likely that birds seen in Gujarat would comprise individuals from southern breeding (from Pakistan/Iran) and Central Asian/Chinese breeding populations. Further studies can help in determining the origins of the birds seen here.

The number of birds wintering in Gujarat is currently not

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known. An assessment of the population wintering here will help in understanding more about this species in the state and it will be useful to compare the current data with the survey carried out by BCSG in 2006-2007; the report gave suggestions for management of habitat and recommended studying the ecology of wintering birds and a comparison of habitats (then and now) will be useful. Surveys in parts of Kachchh, which are adjoining the Pakistan border (from India Bridge near Khavda till Vighakot near Pakistan border, which is a large part of Greater Rann of Kachchh) are required as we have almost no information for that area. The habitat there is suitable for the Macqueen's Bustard and there might be small populations wintering there. Similarly, the coastal areas of Saurashtra, where it was once seen regularly, need to be surveyed to check for the presence of the Macqueen's Bustard.

Conclusion

The Macqueen's Bustard is a regular winter migrant to Gujarat, mainly to the dry desert and semi-arid areas of Kachchh; it is rare in Saurashtra. It is seen in small numbers in the state and nowhere is it common. Further surveys are required to know more about the number of birds currently wintering here. More studies are required to understand the wintering ecology of the species in Gujarat. This threatened species is an important visitor to Gujarat. The habitats in our state, if preserved properly with minimal disturbance to the wintering birds, can host more individuals and Gujarat can become a stronghold for wintering Macqueen's Bustards.

Acknowledgments

We are grateful to Dadabapu Bhavansinhji Mori (Ex-member of State Board for Wildlife & Ex. Honorary Wildlife Warden of Surendranagar District) and Shri S. J. Pandit (Additional Secretary to Government, Forest and Environment Department, Gandhinagar) for their constant support and motivation, without which this study would not have been possible. We sincerely thank Prasad Ganpule and Ashok Mashru for constructive improvements in the draft

manuscript. Heartfelt thanks to V. J. Rana (Chief Conservator of Forest Wildlife Crime, Gandhinagar), S. S. Asoda (Deputy Conservator of Forest), P. Dave (Assistant Conservator of Forest), Bhupendra Makwana (Range Forest Officer, Morbi), Bharat Chhasiya (Range Forest Officer, Dhrangadhra), Pratap Zinzuvadiya (Forest Guard at LRK), Ranjit Zinzuvadiya (Forest Guard at LRK), Akshay Zinzuvadiya, Sadik Malek, Bhuro (guides at LRK) and all staff members of the Wild Ass Sanctuary and Forest Department of Gujarat, for their indispensable support. We express gratitude to Madhumita Panigrahi (senior scientist – B at Bombay Natural History Society) and Earnest Shams (Houbara Foundation International, Pakistan) for their help. Thanks to Suyash Sawant for helping with the graph. We are grateful to Yagnesh Bhatt, Sunil Kini, Bimal Patel, Batuk Bhil, Kartik Upadhyay, Irshad Theba, Hiteshwarsinh Mori, Surajsinh Parmar, Shaktisinh Solanki, Kuldipsinh Parmar, Bhotu Mori, Kulipsinh Mori and Jaydipsinh Mori for accompanying us in the field and for data collection.

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Breeding of Indian Eagle Owl *Bubo bengalensis* near Bhavnagar

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Prashant Andharia: Airport Road, Bhavnagar.

Vivek Upadhyay: Ring Road, Bhavnagar.



Kandarp Andharia

The Indian Eagle Owl (*Bubo bengalensis*) is an uncommon but widespread resident in Gujarat (Ganpule 2016). It is seen in rocky areas, semi-deserts and in the open grasslands or *vidis* of Saurashtra.

We often go to the Malnath Hill area for birding, where we regularly observed one pair of Indian Eagle Owl on the rocky areas of Malnath Hill. We started searching for its nest on the rocky escarpments where we saw this pair but could not locate its nesting. But, we always had doubts that this species

could be breeding here and so we regularly observed this area and were always on the lookout for breeding evidences.

On 4 September 2019, we saw a beautiful chick with one adult, and photographed it, thus confirming that the Indian Eagle Owl breeds at this site. We then noticed that there were two chicks and followed up regularly and observed that they were growing up day by day. We last observed them on 20 October 2019 and after that, we could not see these juveniles. It is possible that they flew away but we still observed the adult pair at the same site.

We also located one nest at Sosiya, near Bhavnagar, and observed one juvenile there. There was another breeding pair observed at Sihor, near Bhavnagar. Hence, there are at least three sites near Bhavnagar where the Indian Eagle Owl breeds regularly. We did not do any detailed study of the nesting so as not to disturb the birds. But, it is encouraging that this species is breeding regularly in these areas.

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Sighting of Sooty Gull *Ichthyiaetus hemprichii* near Porbandar: an addition to the avifauna of Gujarat

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On 1 May 2021, while exploring the sea shore on Porbandar-Veraval Highway (around 10 kms away from Porbandar and before Rangbai Temple), a group of terns (*Sterna* sp.) and gulls (*Larus* sp.) were seen roosting on the sea shore. In this group, we saw a dark bird roosting with the terns and gulls. After getting closer and taking some photographs, we were sure that the bird was a Sooty Gull (*Ichthyiaetus hemprichii*) since it had brown-grey upperparts and long two-toned bill which had a reddish tip; the underparts were whitish, with a greyish-brown fore-neck and upper breast. A whitish eye-lid was visible above the eye. As the bird is vagrant to India, we confirmed the identification with Prasad Ganpule, who said it was indeed a Sooty Gull. When we found the bird the first time, it was around 07:00 hrs and the tide was low. On 3 May 2021, at around the same time as before and at low tide, the Sooty Gull

was seen again and photographed. The bird was roosting along with other gulls and terns. We observed that the Sooty Gull was not disturbed by the local fishermen and when they came too close to the bird, it would move to a comfortable distance from the fishermen but it did not leave the roosting site. We visited the area from 1 May to 4 May in the morning and evening but found the bird only two times in the morning when the tide was low.

The Sooty Gull is resident from Baluchistan to the Sindh Coast, Pakistan, breeding sporadically in this area (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012); there are a few records from India. Praveen *et al.* (2014) listed records of this species till 2014; after this, there is a recent record from the western coast of India from Karnataka (Doraisamy 2015). For Gujarat, Ganpule (2019) in his paper on the gulls of Gujarat noted that the status of this species in the state is interesting; the Sooty Gull has been recorded from the Arabian Sea but there have been no records from the coastal areas of the state even though it is present in Pakistan, very near to the Gujarat coast and stated that it could occur in the coastal areas of the state. The Sooty Gull was not included in the recent checklist of the birds of Gujarat (Ganpule 2020). This is the first confirmed record of the Sooty Gull from Gujarat and it is an addition to the avifauna of the state.

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Sighting of Christmas Island Frigatebird *Fregata andrewsi* and Lesser Frigatebird *Fregata ariel* near Mahuva, Bhavnagar

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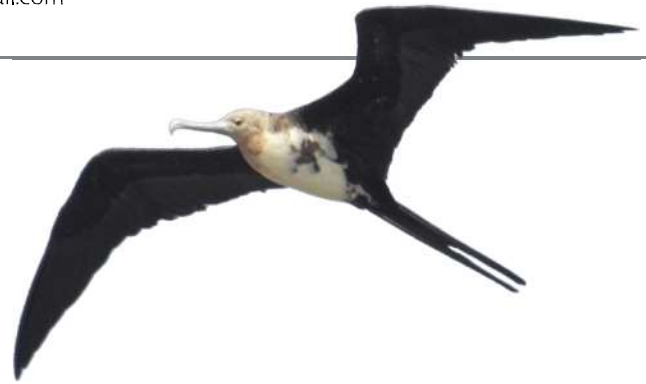
Mahendra Bhil

On 20 May 2021, at around 14:30 hrs, Vijay, my younger son, saw a large bird flying from the sea from the north-east direction. He called me and said that this bird was something he had never seen before and looked very different. I went and had a look and saw that it was headed parallel to the sea coast, about 400 feet away and was flying about 20 feet above the water. This bird was new for me also and I had never seen it before. It was flying steadily and passed near to my home.

A brief description of this bird (Bird 1) is as follows: a large black-and-white bird, with long tail, white underparts with black patch on side of breast, long pale bill, black wings, pale brownish patch on throat and whitish head. The location where this bird was seen is 21° 5' 12.92" N, 71° 51' 25.56" E. I identified it as a frigatebird (*Fregata* sp.).

After about an hour, at around 15:45 hrs, I was in the field near Nikol Bandhara Wetland, and on its edges I was looking at birds in the area. My attention was drawn towards a Red-wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*) attacking a blackish bird. I took a closer look and realised that this too was a frigatebird, but it looked different from the bird I had seen earlier near my home. I took some photographs and followed the bird on my motorcycle. I soon saw that this frigatebird was joined by another frigatebird, the one I had seen earlier, and both birds were soaring above the wetland. I immediately called the second author, and he soon joined me and we both saw the birds for almost 20 minutes.

A brief description of this bird (Bird 2) is as follows: a large black bird, with black underparts and wings, a white patch on



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belly extending on the underside of wings, reddish gular pouch, medium long bill and longish tail. The location where this bird was seen is 21° 4' 36.47" N, 71° 50' 20.28" E.

The second author took very good photographs and also some videos of the birds. Both birds were flying apart but soon came quite close to each other. At that time, we observed that there was a distinct difference in size of both the birds, with the earlier bird (with white belly) looking much larger. Both the birds then went towards the west, out to the sea and were lost from our view.

We soon saw the photographs on the computer but could not identify the birds. We shared the photos with other senior birders. The bird seen earlier (Bird 1), with the pale belly, was identified as a Christmas Island Frigatebird (*Fregata andrewsi*) while the other bird (Bird 2) was identified as a Lesser Frigatebird (*Fregata ariel*). This is the first record of a Christmas Island Frigatebird for Gujarat and the second record of Lesser Frigatebird for the state.



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[The authors took good photographs of both the birds. Identification of frigatebirds is tricky, especially in juvenile and immature plumages. James (2004) discussed the identification of all three regionally occurring frigatebirds in detail. For Bird 1, the distinct black breast-tabs, along with the long bill, white underparts with white lower belly, white axillaries lacking distinct axillary spurs, rusty

Frigatebird....

throat, and large size are all features consistent with juvenile or second year Christmas Island Frigatebird; the black breast-tabs are absent in Lesser Frigatebird and Great Frigatebird (*Fregata minor*) at a similar age. Identification of Bird 2 is fairly straightforward; it is an adult Lesser Frigatebird showing black underparts with small white belly patch connected to white axillary spur, smaller bill and smaller size in direct comparison to the Christmas Island Frigatebird.

We sent the photos to Dipu Karuthedathu, who has extensively studied frigatebirds, for confirming the identification. He replied that Bird 1 was a second-year female Christmas Island Frigatebird while Bird 2 was an adult Lesser Frigatebird. The Christmas Island Frigatebird is 'Critically Endangered' and Karuthedathu et al. 2015 listed five records of this species from India during the 2014 south-west monsoon season. Thus, there have been reports of this species from India earlier.

It should be noted that the cyclonic storm 'Tauktae' had hit the Gujarat coast, making landfall near Una, and moved through the state on 17 May 2021 and 18 May 2021. The strong winds, which exceeded more than 100 kms / hr at landfall, resulted in many reports of windblown pelagic birds from the western coast of India. These frigatebirds must also have been blown towards land by the strong winds of the cyclone. After cyclone 'Amphan' hit the coast of West Bengal, many seabirds were blown inland, and there were reports of frigatebirds and shearwaters (*Puffinus* sp.) from inland

areas. Thus, the occurrence of the Lesser Frigatebird and Christmas Island Frigatebird near Mahuva can be attributed to the cyclonic storm which had hit the state two days earlier.

For Gujarat, there is a previous record of a Lesser Frigatebird; an injured bird was recovered on the banks of the Tapi River in South Gujarat, which was reported in 'Chatak', the newsletter of WWF (Ganpule 2016). This is the second record of Lesser Frigatebird for the state. The Christmas Island Frigatebird has not been included in the checklist of the birds of Gujarat (Ganpule 2020) and it is an addition to the avifauna of Gujarat.

We are very grateful to Dipu Karuthedathu for helping with the identification – Eds]

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Yellow-eyed Pigeons *Columba eversmanni* on the periphery of the Little Rann of Kachchh in December 2005

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David Cooper

During a three week birding trip to northwest India in December 2005, we arrived at 04.30 hrs at Ahmedabad by overnight train from Udaipur. We were met at the station by a representative of Desert Coursers and driven to Camp Zainabad for breakfast. With no time to lose, we were soon allocated a jeep and a driver and we set off to the more arid

areas of the periphery of the Little Rann of Kachchh and were soon watching our prime target species for the day - a party of 6 Macqueen's Bustards (*Chlamydotis macqueenii*) – a 'dream species' for British birders since it is a very rare vagrant to Britain, last recorded in 1962. Of course, there were many other highlights including several groups of Wild Ass as well as Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse (*Pterocles exustus*), both Pallid Harriers (*Circus macrourus*) and Montagu's Harriers (*Circus pygargus*) and Variable Wheatears (*Oenanthe picata*). Even better was to follow after dark as we went spotlighting, seeing five Sykes's Nightjars (*Caprimulgus mahrattensis*) – a species that we had not anticipated!

The following day, 28 December 2005, we targeted the more irrigated periphery of the Little Rann in the hope of finally seeing a species that had eluded us thus far – Sirkeer Malkoha (*Taccocua leschenaultii*). This proved no easy task but by

walking the margins of many farm fields, our persistence finally paid off when a single individual rose from some scrub to briefly alight atop a thorny *Acacia*. We made the long trek back to the jeep and with the heat of the day now upon us, our driver suggested we visit a small wetland created by a dam at the edge of the Little Rann where he had regularly seen birds arrive to drink. This seemed like a good idea, so we decided to give it a try...

In fact, there was a fine assortment of wetland species present including a nice selection of waders, gulls and terns, and sure enough, we had seen a succession of birds that included around 25 Red Collared Doves (*Streptopelia tranquebarica*) and 25 Eurasian Collared Doves (*Streptopelia chinensis*) arrive to drink from the stony margins of small grassy islands in the wetland. Whilst scanning one such island, we noticed a group of 3 small grey pigeons (*Columba* sp.) walking around and sunning themselves. Whilst superficially resembling Common Pigeons (*Columba livia*) they appeared smaller, of neater proportions, showed poorly-marked black wingbars, purplish neck-sides and reminded us of Stock Doves (*Columba oenas*) that we are very familiar with in the UK. Knowing that Yellow-eyed Pigeons (*Columba eversmanni*) had been recorded in India, we were quickly viewing them through our telescope and bingo, we could see the rather obvious yellow orbital skin – they really were Yellow-eyed Pigeons – another species that we definitely had not anticipated seeing!

With a quick glance at the species' mapped range in our 'Pocket Guide to the Birds of the Indian Subcontinent' by

Grimmett *et al.* (1999), we knew of the likely importance of the record. Being of the pre-digital camera era, we set about creeping to the closest point from which to attempt to photograph them – we need not have worried as they seemed unconcerned by our approach. In the end, we enjoyed photographing and watching them mainly resting, sunbathing and preening for an hour, when for no apparent reason, they suddenly flew off strongly towards the west. We had my father's telescope camera adapter for just such an occasion and whilst photography was very much a game of chance in those days - as there was no instant reviewing of results - we were pleasantly surprised that on having the slides processed after returning home to the UK, the results supported our identification.

On our return to Camp Zainabad that evening we told the owner of our unexpected sighting of the trip and with a check of the literature he had at hand he thought it represented the first record for Gujarat.

[Yellow-eyed Pigeons were reported from Little Rann of Kachchh in October 2006 when 8 birds were seen by Dr. Schute, a birder from Germany (Malik 2009). This record, from December 2005, with supporting photographic evidence, is the first record of the species for Gujarat – Eds].

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Rare colonial nesting of Black Ibis *Pseudibis papillosa* at Amla, near Vadodara

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Introduction

The Black Ibis (*Pseudibis papillosa*), also known as Indian Black Ibis or Red-naped Ibis, is a resident species of Indian Subcontinent (Ali & Ripley 1987, Grimmett *et al.* 2001, Parasharya *et al.* 2004, Ganpule 2020). It is common in Gujarat state, where its population is considered to be good compared to other states (Mundkur & Taylor 1993). It is a schedule IV species protected under Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 and a 'Least Concern' species according to the IUCN Redlist (Nanda 2006, BirdLife International 2021). It inhabits various habitats, such as wetlands, marshlands, agricultural fields, etc. and unlike other species of ibises, it is not much dependent on water (Ali & Ripley 1987, Chavda 1997, Soni 2008).

Black Ibis usually nest individually, high in tree, from March to November in India (Chavda 1997, Soni 2008, Soni *et al.* 2010, Kumar 2017, Kumar 2019). It is recorded to use old unused nests of birds of prey and crows (Hancock *et al.* 1992). It nests on the trees like Banyan (*Ficus benghalensis*), Peepul (*F. religiosa*), Neem (*Azadirachta indica*), Tamarind (*Tamarindus indica*), palmyra palm (*Borassus flabellifer*), Sheeshum (*Dalbergia* sp.), Nilgiri (*Eucalyptus* sp.) and Khejri (*Prosopis cineraria*) (Baker 1935, Nair & Vyas 2003, Dookia 2004, Soni *et al.* 2010, Sangha 2013, Kumar 2019). However, the species is also reported nesting on electricity transmission and communication pylons (Dodia & Parasharya 1986, Sangha 2013, Mohamed *et al.* 2014). Except for a few records of its nesting, very little detailed scientific work has been done to understand the breeding

Black Ibis....



Anika Tere



Anika Tere



Anika Tere

ecology of Black Ibis (Ali & Ripley 1983, Hancock *et al.* 1992, Chavda 1997, Soni 2008, Soni *et al.* 2010, Sangha 2013, Kumar 2019).

Study area

Amla village (22° 10' 32.63" N; 73° 04' 27.20" E) is located in Padra Tehsil of Vadodara district in Gujarat state, India. It is about 15 km southwest of Vadodara, 8 km south of Padra and 6 km southeast of Ranu. It has a semi-arid climate, with three distinct seasons *viz.* summer, monsoon and winter. The village has a large pond (1237 m perimeter) at the edge of a road connecting Ranu village to Amla and a small pond (427 m

perimeter) located near human habitation. Surrounding the ponds are agricultural fields.

Methodology

Amla village was visited on 25 April 2021 and 4 May 2021. The trees were identified and given numbers for the convenience of recording observations. The birds and their nests were observed by using binoculars (10X50) between 09:00 hrs and 11:00 hrs by standing 25-50 m away from the trees. The total numbers of nests were counted while standing below the tree. Information such as location of nests, height of nest, activities of birds, presence and numbers of chicks etc. was taken on

data sheets. Photographs were taken by using DSLR Canon 1100D camera with 50-500mm lens and Sony HX400 camera. GPS locations were taken from Sony HX400 camera.

Interactions with the local people were done to get more information about the presence and nesting activities of ibises in the study area.



Vadodara district



Gujarat state



Padra Tehsil

The height of trees and nests was estimated by visual observation and comparison with man-made objects such as home and electricity transmission poles adjacent to the tree. The diameter at breast (DBH) was measured by using a measuring tape. Distances of nesting trees from human habitation, water body and roads as well as the minimum and maximum distance between two adjacent nests were estimated by visual observations.

Observations

Black Ibises were found nesting on three Banyan trees near the small village pond. The large village pond was totally dry and process of digging/deepening this pond was going on. All the Banyan trees were within human habitation, about 25 m from each other and were roughly arranged on the corner of an imaginary triangle. The trees were given numbers according to

Date	No. of Banyan trees	TH (m)	UNH (m)	DBH (inch)	Activity			EN	Total Nests
					IN	WC	NB		
25-4-2021	1	18	17	65.60	06	-	-	01	07
	2	16-18	16-18	49.68	-	02	01	02	05
	3	18	18	36.30	01	-	-	-	1
	Total Nests					07	02	01	03
4-5-2021	1	18	17	65.60	07	00	01	01	09
	2	16-18	16-18	49.68	01	02	-	02	05
	3	18	18	36.30	01	-	-	-	1
	Total Nests					09	02	01	03

TH- tree height, UNH- upper most height of nest, DBH-diameter of tree at breast height, IN-Incubating, WC- With Chicks, NB- Nest Building, EN-Empty Nests

Black Ibis....

the descending order of the nests they contained (Photo 2). Tree 1 and tree 3 were used by the villagers to keep their livestock cattle. The distance of nearest home to tree 1, 2 and 3 were approximately 6 m, 4 m and 24 m respectively (Photo 1 and 2). Tree 2 and 3 were at the edge of a small interior road beside the small pond.

A total of 13 nests were observed on 25 April 2021 (Table 1). The nests were large platforms of sticks, with few leaves. The Banyan tree-1 was about 18 m in height (Photo 1). Total 7 nests were observed on tree 1. All nests were occupied by one adult bird incubating except for one empty nest. Three nests were at the top of the tree. The lowest height of the nest was about 16 m. Banyan tree-2 was about 16-18 m in height. A total of five nests were found on Tree 2 at a height between 16 m and 18 m. There were two chicks in one nest while two chicks with a parent were found in another nest. The chicks were covered with white down and some had black plumage. The third nest, which was located in middle of two nests, was empty at the time of observation. All these nests were at the height of 16 m (Photo 3). Two nests were on the top of the tree, of which one was empty and in another, nesting material was being added by an adult. Banyan tree-3 was also about 18 m in height and contained only one nest at the top of the tree with an adult incubating in it.

Two more nests were seen on Banyan tree 1 and a total of 15 nests were observed when the site was revisited on 4 May 2021. The two empty nests of tree 2 were still unoccupied. One of the empty nests was small in size. The minimum and maximum distance between two adjacent nests was about less than 1 m and 3.5 m respectively.

Discussion

The Black Ibis is known to nest individually on trees or electric and transmission poles. However, they have been recorded nesting in colony of few pairs in the past. A small colony of two pairs nesting on palmyra palms was recorded in ICRISAT campus, Patancheru, Medak district, Andhra Pradesh (Sangha 2013). Baker (1935) recorded 3-5 pairs nesting in the same tree. Hancock *et al.* (1992) recorded colonial nesting of Black Ibis in Nepal Terai with two pairs nesting on the same tree. However, the numbers of nesting pairs recorded in past was less compared to the current study.

For Gujarat, colonial nesting of Black Ibis has been reported earlier; Thakker (2010) reported 21 nests on four Banyan trees at Sanathal Tank, near Ahmedabad, wherein the Black Ibis were using nests built by Painted Storks (*Mycteria leucocephala*). A total of 12 active nests were observed and 12

pairs were recorded nesting colonially at a single site in this study. Total nine nests were observed on a single tree, which might be the highest number of nests recorded in a single tree. Black Ibis make nests and lay eggs within 5-9 days and incubate the eggs for 30-32 days (Kumar 2019). The presence of chicks in two nests at this site suggests that these two pairs of ibises might have started nesting in the beginning of March 2021. Interactions with local people revealed that they nest at this site regularly.

Black Ibis are recorded nesting along with other species such as crows, vultures and Black Kites (*Milvus migrans*) (Ali & Ripley 1983, Soni *et al.* 2010). Nesting of the ibis in a colony with other species was reported by Naik (1989) and Mundkur (1991). Chavda (1997) has observed this ibis nesting on one of the palm species with White-backed Vulture (*Gyps bengalensis*) in Gir Forest, Gujarat. Black Ibis is known to use old deserted nest of crows and birds of prey. Few Jungle Crows (*Corvus macrorhynchos culminatus*) were observed at the nest sites. However, no other species was observed nesting with Black Ibis at the same site during the observations.

A large number of species, including many species of order *Ciconiiformes*, nest colonially (Parasharya & Naik 1990, Hencock *et al.* 1992, Tere 2004, Tere 2009, Gopi & Pandav 2011, Minias 2014, Mohapatra *et al.* 2018, Koju *et al.* 2019). However, colonial nesting of Black Ibis is uncommon. Factors such as food abundance, protection from predators, and scarcity of nesting sites etc. are thought to cause birds to nest colonially (Urfi 2003, Roshnath & Sinu 2017, Brzeziński *et al.* 2018). Nesting within human habitation might be advantageous for the Black Ibis. However, continuous monitoring of the site and a detailed study is required to understand the factors supporting colonial breeding of Black Ibis.

Acknowledgments

I am grateful to Prof. K. C. Soni and Dr. Manoj Kumar for providing literature on Black Ibis. I thank the people of Amla village, who are staying near the nest site, for their help in getting morphometric data of nesting trees and also for providing information of nesting in the past. I am thankful to Sagar Tere for his help in the field in gathering the research data.

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Some important bird records from Porbandar area

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Porbandar, located on the sea coast of Saurashtra, is a well known bird watching destination. The habitats are good and there is a great variety of bird life to be seen around Porbandar. We have been regularly birding in and around Porbandar for the last few years. We present here noteworthy and important records from Porbandar area.

Grey Hypocolius (*Hypocolius ampelinus*): On the morning of 16 January 2021, we were exploring the sea shore on Porbandar-Veraval Highway (around 10 kms away from Porbandar and before Rangbai Temple). At around 08:00 hrs, we saw a flock of Grey Hypocolius amongst some Red-vented Bulbuls (*Pycnonotus cafer*) and Jungle Babblers (*Turdoides striata*). This flock of hypocolius had 8-10 birds and the majority of them were males. The birds were foraging by hopping within the branches of *Salvadora persica*. The sea shore was approximately 75 meters away from the place where we saw the flock of hypocolius. We visited the place frequently and found at least 3-4 birds every time. They were seen from mid-January till end of February, for a period of almost one and a half months.



Konark Karia

The Grey Hypocolius is a winter migrant to Gujarat, and is seen mainly in Chhari-Dhand in Kachchh and surrounding areas. Bhalodia & Mashru (2016) compiled records of this species outside of its known wintering area in Kachchh. They showed records of the Grey Hypocolius from Saurashtra; from Rajkot and Jamnagar. But, there is no record of the Grey Hypocolius from Porbandar. This is probably the first confirmed record of this species from Porbandar area.

Great Crested Tern (*Thalasseus bergii*): On 17 January 2021, we were exploring the sea shore on Porbandar-Veraval Highway (around 10 kms away from Porbandar and before Rangbai Temple). At around 14:00 hrs, we saw a flock of approximately 150 terns roosting near the shore. There were Caspian Terns (*Hydroprogne caspia*), Sandwich Terns (*Thalasseus sandvicensis*), Lesser Crested Terns (*Thalasseus bengalensis*), Common Terns (*Sterna hirundo*) and Gull-billed Terns (*Gelochelidon nilotica*) in the flock. After getting closer to the flock, we observed a large tern amongst them and we were sure that it was a Great Crested Tern because of its larger size, stockier build and its yellow to lime-green bill. As this tern is a rare winter visitor to Gujarat, we asked Prasad Ganpule for confirmation of the identification. He confirmed that it was a Great Crested Tern. After that, we visited the place frequently but did not see any Great Crested Terns till April end. On 28 April 2021, at around 07:00 hrs, we saw a flock 7-8 Great Crested Terns roosting along with other above mentioned terns and gulls.



Konark Karia

The Great Crested Tern is given as an uncommon to rare winter visitor to Gujarat, with sightings from coastal areas of Saurashtra and Kachchh (Ganpule 2016). However, there are only a few photographic records of this species in the past few years. Hence, the sightings of this tern in January 2021 and April 2021 are important records for the state.

Sanderling (*Calidris alba*): From first week of January till the end of April, we have observed Sanderlings in great numbers at the sea shore on Porbandar-Veraval Highway. Every time we visited the area, we saw approximately 400-500 Sanderlings in a large flock. At the time of high tide, we have observed them roosting in a single large flock near the shore and at time of low tides, we have seen them get divided in small flocks to forage on the shore. We have also observed them feeding on



Punit Karia

invertebrate prey buried in the sand in the upper intertidal zone.

Sanderlings are common winter visitors to our state but such large flocks have been infrequently observed here.

Amur Falcon (*Falco amurensis*): On 21 November 2020, we visited Mokarsagar Wetland (also known as Gosabara Wetland) and at around 08:00 hrs, we saw an Amur Falcon perched on a tree. The bird stayed on the tree for 8-10 minutes and then it flew away because of disturbance from locals. The Amur Falcon was previously recorded in Mokarsagar Wetland in January 2017 by Punit Karia and Rajesh Shah (Karia 2018). This sighting is another record of this species from Mokarsagar area.



The Black-winged Kite is known to prey on juveniles of other birds and has been reported to prey on crakes and other smaller water birds. This was an interesting documentation of a Black-winged Kite preying on a jacana sp.

Sightings of Yellow Bittern (*Ixobrychus sinensis*) throughout the winter in Mokarsagar Wetland:

From December 2020 to April 2021, we had frequent sightings of Yellow Bittern in Mokarsagar Wetland, Porbandar. The table given here includes all the sightings of Yellow Bittern from this period. The Yellow Bittern is given as an uncommon monsoon/breeding migrant to Gujarat (Ganpule 2016). Its status in the winter is not well known as there are only few sightings of this species in the non-breeding season. From these records, it can be said that the Yellow Bittern is seen in the winter months in Mokarsagar Wetland. These winter sightings are important and give an idea regarding the presence of Yellow Bittern in the non-breeding season here. It is quite likely that the Yellow Bittern is a year round resident in this area.

Black-winged Kite (*Elanus caeruleus*) with a juvenile jacana kill:

On 26 December 2020, we visited Mokarsagar Wetland and at around 11:00 hrs, we saw and photographed a Black-winged Kite with some prey on an electric pole. In the field, we misidentified the kill as a Baillon's Crake (*Porzana pusilla*) but after sending the photos to Prasad Ganpule, he told us that the kill was probably a juvenile Pheasant-tailed Jacana (*Hydrophasianus chirurgus*), based on the black crown and the prominent supercilium which was visible; but, he informed that the identification was tentative and it would be better to err on the side of caution and keep the prey as a jacana species. It took the kite approximately 25 minutes to completely eat the bird.



Sightings of Yellow Bittern from December 2020 till April 2021 in Mokarsagar Wetland

No.	Date and time	No. of individuals	Remarks
1	5 December 2020, 07:00 hrs	1	Adult perched
2	8 December 2020, 08:00 hrs	1	Juvenile? perched
3	15 December 2020, 09:00 hrs	1	Adult photographed, actively foraging
4	26 December 2020, 09:00 hrs	1	Adult perched
5	12 January 2021, 07:00 hrs	1	Adult photographed
6	30 January 2021, 12:00 hrs	1	Adult photographed
7	18 February 2021, 11:00 hrs	1	Adult photographed
8	3 April 2021, 09:00 hrs	1	Adult photographed

Breeding of Saunders's Tern (*Sternula saundersi*): On 29 April 2021, while exploring the sea shore on Porbandar-Veraval Highway, we saw 6-8 individuals of Saunders's Tern breeding in a colony. The birds were in breeding plumage, incubating the eggs which they had laid. They could be identified with certainty since they were in breeding plumage; the plumage of Saunder's Tern is very similar to Little Tern (*Sternula albifrons*) and in breeding plumage, the head pattern is diagnostic. We took some photographs of the adults and saw and photographed one egg of one of the pairs without disturbing the birds; the photo was taken when the bird had left the nest and we quickly went away after taking the photos. Constant threats to the birds were the feral dogs which were roaming around, probably in search of eggs. We also observed the birds attacking a local who was passing by their breeding grounds, which shows their defensive behavior towards their nests. We were unable to confirm if the chicks fledged.



Konark Karia

The Saunder's Tern is an uncommon breeding migrant to the coastal areas of Jamnagar and Kachchh (Ganpule 2016). This is the first time we had noted its breeding here. Its status around Porbandar is not well known and more sightings will help in knowing whether it breeds in this area regularly.

White-winged Tern (*Chlidonias leucopterus*): On 25 April 2021, we visited Mokarsagar Wetland and at around 07:00 hrs, we saw a White-winged Tern foraging along with Whiskered Terns (*Chlidonias hybrida*) and River Terns (*Sterna aurantia*).

The bird was not diving for fish but it was flying over the water surface to catch insects. The bird was almost in full breeding plumage and had black underparts and black underwing coverts, which confirmed the identification. We took some photographs. The White-winged Tern is a winter visitor, remaining here till May, when it attains full breeding plumage; there are many photos of this species in full breeding plumage from Gujarat on the website 'oriental bird images' (<http://orientalbirdimages.org>). There is a previous record of this species from Porbandar (Mori *et al.* 2016) and this is one more record of the White-winged Tern from Porbandar.



Konark Karia

Sightings of Steppe Buzzard (*Buteo b. vulpinus*): A table containing all the sightings of Steppe Buzzard from Mokarsagar Wetland is given here. The birds seen were probably of different morphs, with one individual of fox-red morph; there were two individuals which wintered in this area. These two individuals were seen over period of almost two months in this wetland and were photographed by us.

The Steppe Buzzard is an uncommon winter migrant to Gujarat, with sightings from almost all parts of the state. These sightings indicate that the Steppe Buzzard winters in this area.

No.	Date and time	No. of individuals	Remarks
1	10 January 2021, 11:00 hrs	2	One bird was perched and the other one was soaring in the sky
2	13 January 2021, 08:00 hrs	1	Perched
3	18 January 2021, 11:00 hrs	1	Perched
4	25 January 2021, 12:00 hrs	1	Perched
5	6 March 2021, 11:00 hrs	1	The bird was chasing some pigeons and bulbuls and later, it was mobbed by a Black Drongo (<i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>)



Konark Karia

Sighting of a probable White-cheeked Tern (*Sterna repressa*):
On 28 April 2021, at around 07:00 hrs, while photographing Great Crested Terns, we took some photographs of a flock of Common Terns. In this flock of Common Terns, there was one tern which looked smaller, with darker upperparts and a finer bill (in direct comparison with the Common Terns present) and the covert bar was not looking much darker than the upperparts; this led us to believe that it could be a White-cheeked Tern as the head pattern was also slightly different.



Konark Karia

We sent the photos to Prasad Ganpule, who opined that looking at the darker upperparts concolorous with the lesser covert bar, this could be a White-cheeked Tern but without photographs of underwings and rump, it would not be possible to identify this individual with certainty. We saw another similar tern with a greyish rump on 1 May 2021 but could not confirm the identification. But, it is likely that the

White-cheeked Tern could occur here but is overlooked amongst the Common Terns and other tern species. There is very less information regarding the White-cheeked Tern from Gujarat and it is thought to be an uncommon winter visitor (Ganpule 2016). However, there have been no recent photographic records of this species from Gujarat on popular birding websites or on the social media. Birdwatchers are requested to be on the lookout for this species in the coastal areas of the state.

Breeding of Collared Pratincole (*Glareola pratincola*) at Mokarsagar Wetland: This year, we have been regularly seeing Collared Pratincoles in Mokarsagar Wetland and from the first week of March, they were seen breeding in colonies of approximately eight birds in one colony. We saw three colonies at different areas in the wetland. In mid-April, we observed four juvenile birds in one of the colonies. The adults in the colonies were mostly active during the evenings and we have observed them resting on the ground in the afternoons. We also observed that the adults were not staying too close to the chicks, probably so that the predators cannot notice the young ones. The major threats to the birds were the feral dogs of that area.



Punit Karia

Porbandar....

The first time we recorded breeding of Collared Pratincoles was in May 2015. That year, we observed one sub-adult bird with its parents. After that, we observed them breeding in a colony in April 2017; we saw approximately five birds in a colony and in the last week of April, we saw and photographed a freshly fledged bird with an adult.

The records given here are interesting and provide more information about these species in Gujarat. Porbandar and its surrounding areas should be explored more so that we get more information about the status and distribution of some lesser known birds here. The records of Grey Hypocolius and Great Crested Tern, along with the breeding records of Saunder's Tern and Collared Pratincoles are important. We will continue exploring these areas and report more such records in the future.

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An unusual colour aberrant Western Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava* in Jamnagar

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Hiren Khambhayta

On 2 April 2021, I, along with three friends, Ashish Pankhaniya, Chirag Shah & Varun Shah, visited Rangmati Dam, near Jamnagar, Gujarat, for routine birding and saw an unusual coloured Western Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*), with white a head. A brief description of the bird is given here: this individual had an all white head, bill had dark upper mandible and pink-orange lower mandible, the neck and underparts were yellow, the upperparts were olive-greenish, the wings had a whitish patch near the alula and the legs were entirely pink-orange.

This individual was looking distinctly different from other wagtails in the area; there were more than 100 Western Yellow Wagtails there. As this bird did not give much time on that day and flew away in just 10 minutes, we thought that it could

be a Western Yellow Wagtail of the subspecies *leucocephala*, which is a white-headed subspecies. But, the same bird was seen again on the next day by other birders and photographers who went there searching for this bird. On later days, the bird gave enough time to document it properly and we could get good photographs and found that it had pinkish-orange legs and beak, contrary to black legs of other Western Yellow Wagtails present in the area. So, I thought that it could be a colour aberrant Western Yellow Wagtail. The bird was last seen on 6 April 2021, and remained in this area for five days. I observed, in the field, that its vision and eyes were not affected as it was easily catching insects and also showing antagonistic behaviour towards swallows (*Hirundo* sp.) present in the area.

The subspecies *leucocephala*, also known as the 'White-headed' Yellow Wagtail, is known in our region (in India) by spring records from N Punjab and from specimens collected in spring from Garo Hills, Meghalaya (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). The breeding male of this subspecies has an unmarked white chin, crown and face, often grading into grey on nape, olive-yellow upperparts with two wing bars, and yellow underparts. I carried out a literature search but could not find any records of this subspecies from Gujarat. However, since this individual was colour aberrant, the subspecies identification could not be confirmed.

[We sent the photographs to Hein Van Grouw for his opinion. He replied in detail as follows:

Whether it is subspecies leucocephala I do not know, but the white head, and pale bill and feet are the result of a colour aberration.

Even the lightest coloured individuals of *leucocephala* still have a greyish head as the feathers still contain melanin pigment. This bird has bright white feathers without any melanin left. Two sorts of aberrations can cause feathers without any melanin next to normal pigmented feathers; Leucism and Progressive Greying.

Progressive Greying will affect plumage all over the individual, and most forms do not affect the skin colour much. An example of such a bird you can find on this website: <https://www.shanghaibirding.com/wagtail-shanghai/>

This bird from Shanghai is not a *leucocephala*. The yellow feathers on the bird's back are feathers without melanin but, obviously still with the yellow carotenoid pigment (the melanin together with the carotenoid gives the green colour). However, Leucism often affects the 'extremities' of the body and it affects both the melanin pigmentation of the feathers and the skin. As the melanin pigments are missing in the head area both the plumage and the bill are (almost) without it. Also, the feet, what are extremities have no melanin pigment due to the mutation and even the feathers just above the heel (above the bare part of the feet) are without melanin. Normally these feathers are dark coloured (melanin), but in this individual they are bright white. I would not be surprised if this bird also had a few white feathers in the outer wing area (the 'hand'). The 'alula area' also seems to have some white feathers, indicating that it is indeed an aberration.

Due to the mutation it looks like a White-headed (*leucocephala*) Yellow Wagtail. It may be that subspecies, but then also, affected by Leucism. However, as it seems that the neck of this bird is also very bright yellow, suggesting that the melanin is also lacking in the neck area and therefore the remaining yellow carotenoid pigments show brighter, it is more likely that this is an aberrant individual of the subspecies what is most likely to occur in Gujarat.

The mutation here is likely Leucism but could also be probably Progressive Greying'.

Looking at the detailed reply received from Hein Van Grouw, it was confirmed that this individual was colour aberrant and the likely mutation was Leucism or Progressive Greying. However, due to the mutation, it could not be confirmed whether this bird was of the subspecies *leucocephala*. However, this is an interesting record of a colour aberrant Western Yellow Wagtail from Gujarat and it is surprising that if this individual was not of the subspecies *leucocephala*, then the aberration caused it to look very similar to individuals of this subspecies.

We are extremely grateful to Hein Van Grouw for explaining the identification of this bird in detail – Eds].

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Sighting of Oriental Pied Hornbill *Anthracoceros albirostris* in Surat

Vidhi Patel: Surat.



upperparts and I identified it as a female Oriental Pied Hornbill (*Anthracoceros albirostris*) based on the bill with extensive black on upper mandible and black cutting edges. It soon took an elegant flight through the street, from which I confirmed its plumage and black-tipped casque. After 20 minutes, it was dusk and it vanished in the back streets. The next morning, at around 07:30 hrs, it was last sighted in the same region, feeding on *Asopalav* (*Polyalthia longifolia*) fruits. I took some photographs of this bird and confirmed the identification.

The Oriental Pied Hornbill belongs to the *Bucerotidae* family. According to IUCN Red list of Threatened species, it is a least concerned species. It can be identified by its black tail with white tips on all except the central tail feathers. It has a black-tipped casque, black cutting edges to bill, and black of neck extending to centre of breast (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). It is quite similar to the Malabar Pied Hornbill (*Anthracoceros coronatus*), which has a forward pointing casque, all white outer retrices and elongated black central tail feathers.

On 21 March 2020, at around 19:00 hrs, in Adajan area of Surat (21° 11' 47" N, 72° 47' 16" E), I chanced upon an odd-looking, large, blackish bird in the canopy of a rain tree, being chased by a group of crows (*Corvus* sp.). It was a hornbill with black

Vidhi Patel

Oriental Pied Hornbill....

The Oriental Pied Hornbill is resident in the Himalayan foothills, Northeast India and eastern India, and in some parts of east-central India (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). Its habitat is riverine forests, tropical and subtropical moist lowland forests as well as rural areas with trees; it is seen around cultivation and it more tolerant to habitat disturbance than other hornbill species. Encountering such a species, within Surat city, was quite surprising. However, Adajan area has large fruiting trees like Almond (*Terminalia catappa*), Baobab, Bael (*Aegle marmelos*), Asopalav, Tamarind, Sapodilla (*Manilkara zapota*), Java plum (*Syzygium cumini*), Mango (*Mangifera indica*) and a variety of *Ficus* species. The Oriental Pied Hornbill is an omnivore and its diet consists mainly of fruits, supplemented by birds and animals (e.g., small birds, eggs, lizards, snakes, bats, squirrels, arthropods, snails, crabs etc.).

The nearest sighting of Oriental Pied Hornbill from this area is from Panna National Park in Madhya Pradesh (as per eBird map), which is more than 800 kms from Surat. If the bird was a vagrant, then the possibility of its occurrence in the Dangs or nearby forests of Western Ghats should also be considered. However, no sightings have been reported from these areas so far. It remains a mystery as to how this individual reached Surat.

[The Oriental Pied Hornbill is not included in the checklist of the birds of Gujarat (Ganpule 2020). This sighting is intriguing, as it is quite far from the known range of the species. The Oriental Pied Hornbill is present in some zoos of Gujarat; Vyas (2002) reported its successful breeding in Sayaji Baug Zoo and three birds were procured from a private dealer for this.

A wider discussion with senior birdwatchers here was initiated and the majority opinion suggested that this record may be treated as of a bird of 'unknown origin' as it is possible that this individual could be an escapee and not a genuine wild vagrant and it should not be accepted into the Gujarat checklist until there is further evidence, especially some proof that the species is expanding its range or has been seen in areas where it was not noted before. Hence, the Oriental Pied Hornbill is not accepted into the Gujarat checklist at present – Eds]

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisors Mukesh Bhatt, Pratik Parmar and Krunal Trivedi for invaluable guidance. I would also like to thank WECT and Nature Club Surat for giving me endless support.

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Purple Swamphen *Porphyrio porphyrio* preying of chick of Brown Crake *Zapornia akool*

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Sunil Moteria

On 9 May 2021, a Sunday, we were on our routine birding in the downstream area of Nyari-II Dam, in a reedy vegetation patch, with co-birders Sandeep Nandani and Chetan Hansalia.

We saw some feeding activities of Purple Swamphen (*Porphyrio porphyrio*). A Brown Crake (*Zapornia akool*) was chasing and trying to drive away the swamphens; there were five swamphens in the area, probably an adult pair with three immatures. On detailed observation, we found that a swamphen was preying a chick of Brown Crake and one adult bird was protecting the preying swamphen from the Brown Crakes. Finally, the adult bird got the crake chick in its beak and we observed that the birds fought amongst themselves and brutally tore off pieces of the crake chick for their share. They all got some pieces and we could see that one adult fed a young bird.

It was surprising to see the Purple Swamphen prey on the chick of a Brown Crake. The Purple Swamphen is mainly

herbivorous and feeds on shoots and tubers of reeds and other grasses / rushes but it is known to be opportunistic and has been observed consuming a wide range of taxa including birds, amphibians, reptiles, fish, eggs, insects, arthropods, and molluscs (Callaghan *et al.* 2020). The Purple Swamphen has been observed attempting to prey on Black Swan (*Cygnus atratus*) eggs and preying on a cygnet in an urban lake in Melbourne, Australia (Balasubramaniam & Guay 2008). But, the Purple Swamphen is predominantly herbivorous and various studies have shown that animal matter in gizzards is minimal (<1%) (Callaghan *et al.* 2020). In Gujarat, the Purple Swamphen has been recorded killing and feeding on a chick of Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*) (Patel 2016).

It can be seen that though animal matter is not the preferred food for the Purple Swamphen, it is an opportunistic feeder

and will catch and kill chicks of other birds. Further studies on the diet of this bird can throw more light on the feeding habits of the Purple Swamphen in Gujarat.

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Rescue of Persian Shearwater *Puffinus persicus* from Porbandar, Gujarat

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Chirag Tank

The status of the Persian Shearwater (*Puffinus persicus*) in Gujarat is not known and it is believed to be a vagrant. It is possible that it occurs off the Gujarat coast, as it was seen on pelagic trips off the Gujarat coast in September 2016 and November 2017 (Munshi & Naik 2016, 2017). However, the species can be found off Pakistan's Makran Coast, which is close to the Kachchh coastline (Ganpule 2016). The Persian Shearwater has light to dark brown upperparts with less contrast between the face and the throat, dark brown axillaries, but pale primary and secondary coverts and white underparts (Grimmett *et al.* 2014).

On 4 April 2021, a shearwater was rescued from Porbandar Jetty by the first author and Paresch Pitroda of Green Wildlife Conservation Society, Porbandar. The bird was identified as a Persian Shearwater based on above mentioned identification features by experienced birders and the dark brown axillaries

confirmed the identification. The bird was stressed and lethargic and could not survive even for one day under veterinary care. This individual was not oiled or did not appear to have any external injuries but it was not eating at all, unlike rescued Masked Boobies (*Sula dactylatra*), which are fed and mostly survive to be released back in the wild.

This is the second record of a rescued shearwater from Porbandar; a probable Tropical Shearwater (*Puffinus bailloni*) was rescued from Porbandar on 3 July 2015 which also died (Jhala 2016). This is the first confirmed record of a Persian Shearwater on land; all previous records were in the sea, off the Gujarat coast.

We appreciate the identification help received from Prasad Ganpule, Kunan Naik, and Dipu Karuthedathu.

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Re-sightings of satellite tagged Greylag Geese *Anser anser* from Mongolia in Gujarat

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We report here re-sighting records of three satellite tagged Greylag Geese (*Anser anser*) from Mongolia. These birds were re-sighted in Gujarat and we give additional details of one sighting from Maharashtra.

Gujarat: On 10 February 2021, two Greylag Geese with satellite tags around their neck were photographed at Nava Talav, a wetland near Patdi in Surendranagar district, on the periphery of the Little Rann of Kachchh, Gujarat (23° 12' 34.4" N, 71° 44' 26.0" E) by the second author [DM]. He visited the site again on 14 February 2021 and saw both tagged birds there. Both the tagged geese also had a ring on the right leg but the numbers on the rings were not legible. The border around the solar panel of the geo-tag was white in one bird and brown in the other bird. The second author had earlier seen a geo-tagged bird at Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary in December 2020 but he could not take photographs.

Later, we got information from a young bird watcher, Dhyey Shah, about re-sighting of a similarly tagged Greylag Goose on 16 November 2019 at Wadhvana Lake, near Vadodara, in Gujarat (22° 17' 29" N, 73° 47' 19" E). He sent the first author an image of the goose showing a geo-tag around the neck, having a grey coloured border around the solar panel.

Report from Maharashtra: On 22 January 2021, while watching birds at Sirpur Wetland near Paraswada Lake, Gondia District, Maharashtra (21° 32' 52.1" N, 80° 17' 09.2" E) the third author and Mukund Dhurve sighted a Greylag Goose with a satellite tag which was golden-yellow. This particular goose had a ring on the right leg but the number was not legible in the photograph.

The first author shared the re-sighting information with various ornithologists across the Central Asian Flyway countries. Dr. Nyambayar Batbayarat, from the Wildlife Science and Conservation Centre of Mongolia, replied with the tagging information and informed the first author about the research they are carrying out in Mongolia.

Dr. Nyambayar informed that all these geese were marked at Airag Lake (also called Ayrag Nuur) in July 2019 in Hovd Province in western Mongolia (48° 54' N, 93° 24' E) by his team. They had marked almost 70 Greylag Geese during 2017–2019 in Mongolia and fitted these birds with Global Positioning System/Global System for Mobile Communications (GPS/GSM) loggers to identify breeding and wintering areas,

migration routes and stopover sites. He added that, 'these neck collar GPS trackers do not have any visible code for some reasons. Therefore, it is hard to tell the exact origin of each of these birds right away. Also, many of these transmitters stopped working. But, I was lucky to find out about the origin of these two particular birds' (one from Gujarat and one in Gonia).

Airag Lake is a Ramsar site and also a proposed National Park. It is a shallow, freshwater lake in the Mongolian Great Lakes Basin. He informed that many of these geese went to India and some went to East China.

The marking and re-sighting details, with key findings, are listed in the table given here. The 'Indian Bird Migration Atlas' published by the Bombay Natural History Society (Balachandran *et al.* 2018) has information about 25 ring recoveries of Greylag Geese ringed at Bharatpur, Rajasthan. The northernmost recovery was from Khar-Us Lake (49° N, 92° E) in western Mongolia. Other important long distance ring recoveries were from eastern Batken (39° 52' N, 69° 39' E) in Kyrgyzstan and four from Kazakhstan.

BNHS had also conducted studies using neck collars and fitted eight Greylag Geese with neck collars at Pong Dam in Himachal Pradesh (31° 58' N, 76° 03' E) during December 2012 and February 2013. One of these neck-collared bird was re-sighted at Wadhavana Lake in Gujarat (22° 10' N, 73° 29' E), *i.e.*, about 1000 km southwest of the marking site. Following two geese collared in other countries were re-sighted in India: one marked in Qinghai Province in China (35° 50' N, 96° 22' E) was re-sighted in Kokilamukh Lake in Assam (26° 49' N, 94° 10' E) and another marked in Darkhad Valley in Kazakhstan (51° 10' N, 99° 30' E) was re-sighted in Kaziranga National Park, Assam (25° 34' N, 93° 10, E).

Considering the previous re-sighting records about the migration of Greylag Geese (Balachandran *et al.* 2018), we now have additional information about the birds visiting Gujarat and Maharashtra. For Gujarat, there is one previous sighting of a geo-tagged Greylag Goose, which was photographed at Vadla, Nalsarovar; this individual had been tagged in Lake Dorgon, in province of Khovd, Mongolia (Sarangi 2019). Previously, there was no information about birds visiting Maharashtra. Also, with present findings mentioned in this paper, we now know that birds wintering in Gujarat mainly involve individuals from populations breeding in Mongolia.

Table: Marking and re-sighting details of Greylag Geese

	Marking details – all	Re-sighting details Gujarat – 2 geese	Re-sighting details Maharashtra – 1 Goose
Date of marking	July 2019	10 February 2021	22 January 2021
Metal ring	-	On right leg	On right leg
Code on ring	-	Not legible	Not legible
Location	Airag Lake, Hovd Province, Mongolia	Nava Talav, Surendranagar, Gujarat, India	Sirpur Wetland, Gondia district, Maharashtra, India
Location latitude	48.901727° N	23° 12' 34.4" N	21° 32' 52.1" N
Location longitude	93.401346° E	71° 44' 26.0" E	80° 17' 09.2" E
Ringer/Observer	Nyambayar Batbayar	Devvratsinh Mori	Sandeep Gabhane and Mukund Dhurve
Distance from ringing site	-	3442 km	3251 km
Time from ringing to re-sighting	-	19 months	19 months

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Dr. Nyambayar Batbayarat, Wildlife Science and Conservation Center of Mongolia, for providing the tagging information. We are thankful to Mukund Dhurve for accompanying SG. Thanks to young bird watcher Dhyey Shah from Vadodara, for sharing his resighting information with us.

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Injured Common Pochard *Aythya ferina* and Rock Pigeon *Columba livia* surviving in the wild

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I present here two instances of injured birds which were surviving in the wild. In both these cases, the injuries looked quite serious but the birds survived. The first instance was of a Common Pochard (*Aythya ferina*) and the second observation was of a Common Pigeon (*Columba livia*)

Common Pochard: Due to very less rain this year (2018), the waterholes were almost empty and at some places, very little water was available. In November-end 2018, Hamirsar Lake, in the heart of Bhuj, Kachchh, had very little water. My son Nirav and I go regularly there in the winter for photographing birds. At the edge of the lake, the water was looking very dirty and dark green, mixed with mud. Garbage, glass bottles and other useless objects were thrown here. There were 60-70 Common Pochards, 4 pairs of Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*), 50-60 Indian Spot-billed Ducks (*Anas poecilorhyncha*), 3 Great White Pelicans (*Pelecanus onocrotalus*), a mixed flock of waders (*Calidris* sp.) and other common birds. Here, I observed a



Jaysukh Parekh

Common Pochard which had a puncture in the front of its upper breast and some part of its digestive tract (possibly the esophagus) was hanging outside its neck. I assumed that as the water was very shallow, the pochard might have been injured when diving for food. Its chest may have been damaged by

Injured....

some sharp objects present in the water and possibly, its digestive tract or a part of the esophagus (or maybe some other part?) may have come out. Since I was not aware of bird anatomy, I could not identify the body part conclusively. Due to the natural healing process, the wound may have healed but the body part was hanging on its chest. This was visible only when duck flapped its wings and was not seen while it was swimming. Seeing the pochard carrying out its normal activities with this wound was quite surprising. The bird looked normal and was moving around without any difficulties. Thus, it was quite unusual to see this bird surviving in the wild with what appeared to be a serious injury.

Common Pigeon: On 26 April 2016, at around 09:30 hrs, I saw a Common Pigeon drinking water from the Narmada Canal water supply line (water had spilled due to valve leakage) and was shocked to see a major injury on its chest. The water which the bird was drinking through its beak was surprisingly coming out directly from a large wound on its breast. Another interesting thing was that some food grains and dust were also clearly seen on the wound. I suspected that some raptor must have attacked it but the pigeon was able to escape. Or it might have been injured by some sharp object or by collision. I could

not determine the exact cause of the injury. After that, I went there regularly and documented the Rock Pigeon drinking. Luckily for me, the bird was visiting this spot regularly. After almost 10 days, the wound was partly healed, and the size of the wound had reduced noticeably. Although water was still leaking from the wound when the bird drank, it was very less. I continued documenting it but after 2-3 days, I could not see that injured bird. But, on 2 May 2016, once again this Rock Pigeon visited the spot and was drinking water but this time, the wound had totally healed and there was no leakage from the breast. The wound had healed completely! As it was a free-flying wild bird, it is unlikely that any veterinary doctor would have treated it and it looked like the wound had healed naturally.

It is amazing that how nature heals wounds, sometimes even really large ones, as in these cases. The ability of the birds to survive in the wild with serious injuries shows the resilience of these birds and is a part of the natural healing process in avian species. It is important to note here that waste thrown in the water, like glass bottles and other sharp objects, can cause injuries to birds. Proper waste management is essential for the well being of the birds in ponds and lakes. □



Short Birding Notes



Black-throated Thrush *Turdus atrogularis* in Madhavpur, near Porbandar

On 30 November 2020, as a part of my daily routine, I was filling up the water pots for birds in and around Osho Ashram, Madhavpur (Ghed), near Porbandar. It was around 13:00 hrs when I saw an unusual bird which I felt I had never seen before. So, I sat there for some time to observe and photograph it. Upon seeing and photographing the bird, I sent the images to my friend Dhaivat Hathi, and he felt it was some thrush species (*Turdus* sp.) but he could not identify it and so advised to share the images with Dhaval Vargiya and Prasad Ganpule. They identified the bird to be a probable first winter Black-throated Thrush (*Turdus atrogularis*), which was quite an unusual sighting for this region. The bird was seen there from 30 November 2020 to 3 December 2020. Since there only photos showing the front parts for scrutiny, the features like dark bill, dark breast markings with dark streaked malar stripe, and streaked flanks all pointed to the identification as first-winter Black-throated Thrush. Upperparts were not visible in the photo but were pale greyish-brown. The Black-throated Thrush is vagrant to Gujarat (historically sighted twice in the state) but, an adult male was photographed in the winter of 2019 in Kachchh (Kapdi & Kulkarni 2020). This is the first time it has been sighted outside Kachchh.

I am thankful to Dhaivat Haathi and Dhaval Vargiya for helping me to draft this note.

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Sighting of Tickell's Thrush *Turdus unicolor* in Rajkot City

On 1 April 2021, in the morning at around 10.15 hrs, at a garden near Shastri Nagar, Nana Mauva Road, Rajkot, I observed that an unfamiliar bird was hopping in the grass. Curious regarding the identity of this bird, I took some photos, because its plumage was looking different from the common birds seen here. After taking some photos and videos, I shared the photos with senior birders here. Ashok Mashru confirmed the identification of this bird as a Tickell's Thrush (*Turdus unicolor*) and also informed me that this was the first sighting and photographic record of Tickell's Thrush from Rajkot District. I visited the garden again on 4 April with fellow birdwatchers Pinkesh Tanna, Priyank Dhami and Jayson Dholariya, and observed the Tickell's Thrush foraging under a *peepal* tree, eating fallen fruits. The bird stayed here for 10 days. It is possible that it may have come to Rajkot during its return migration. The Tickell's Thrush has been reported from Girnar WLS and nearby areas but this is an important record for Rajkot.

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Grey Hypocolius *Hypocolius ampelinus* near Mahuva, Bhavnagar

On 18 February 2021, we were returning back after photographing the Black-capped Kingfisher (*Halcyon pileata*) near Mahuva. At about 17:00 hrs, near Malan Bandhara Wetland, we saw around 20 Rosy Starlings (*Pastor roseus*) feeding on a piloo tree (*Salvadora persica*). We saw a different bird in this group and on observing with binoculars, confirmed that a female Grey hypocolius (*Hypocolius ampelinus*) was feeding on the ripened fruits of the tree. We took some photographs. The bird was going inside the tree and coming out after a few minutes and it was quite shy. We looked around for the male but did not find any other hypocolius. This individual stayed here for three days and was not seen after that. We were elated with this sighting since the first author [BB] had been searching for this species for the past three years in habitats with *Salvadora persica* trees in this area. Bhalodia & Mashru (2016) listed records of the Grey Hypocolius outside Fulay but do not give any record for Bhavnagar District. This is the first photographic record of the Grey Hypocolius for this area.

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Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus* in Little Rann of Kachchh

On 4 October 2020, at around 09:00 hrs, I was bird watching in the western part of Little Rann of Kachchh, near Venasar Village, with Jignesh Miyatra and Jayesh K. Joshi. Due to a good monsoon, the small lakes and ponds in the area were full of water. In a small lake with reeds, I saw and photographed a Water Rail (*Rallus aquaticus*). The bird was foraging on the edge of the lake, in the open, and we would see it well for more than five minutes and also take good photographs. After foraging in the open for a few minutes, it disappeared back into the reeds. I have been bird watching in this area for more than 10 years now but this is the first time I had seen a Water Rail here. I am not aware of any recent records of Water Rail from Little Rann of Kachchh and this was a surprise sighting for the area.

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Colour aberrant Greylag Goose *Anser anser* near Nalsarovar

On 17 December 2020, at around 08:00 hrs in the morning, we were on our routine birding around the outskirts of Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary. We were in the search of Greater White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons*) which had been seen in this area a few days ago. While scanning flocks of Greylag Geese (*Anser anser*), we saw a white looking Greylag Goose. We were surprised and went nearer and took some photographs. This bird was looking pale whitish, and moving in a large flock with other Greylag Geese. We observed the bird for almost 25 minutes before it flew away with the other birds. It was a colour aberrant individual but we could not identify the correct mutation.

[We sent the photos to Hein Van Grouw who replied that 'The Greylag Goose appears to have a form of Dilution (there are many different dilution mutations). It is not Progressive Greying; Progressive Greying causes feathers without melanin (white), and this Goose does not have a single white feather. The Plumage is lighter all over, but still pigmented'.

We thank Hein Van Grouw for helping with the identification of the correct mutation – Eds]

Latif Alvani & Kamruddin: At – Nalsarovar.



A colour aberrant Indian Robin *Saxicoloides fulicatus* near Jamnagar

On 29 May 2020, we were on a birding trip in the outskirts of Jamnagar. There, we saw a white-colored, sparrow-sized bird, on a *Prosopis juliflora* tree. After careful observation, we confirmed that it was a colour aberrant Indian Robin (*Saxicoloides fulicatus*). However, we could not identify its gender as it was almost completely white except for a few dark feathers on the face. We observed the bird for about one hour and took photos. It had normal coloured eyes, bill and feet. Based on its colour and after searching on internet, we concluded that it was probably an individual with the mutation 'Progressive Greying' or 'Leucism'. We could not identify the correct mutation in this bird. An Indian Robin with the mutation 'Brown' has been reported earlier (Van Grouw *et al.* 2016). We had never seen such a bird earlier and this is possibly the first such record from this region.

Ankur Gohil, Vishwas Thakkar & Anand Prajapati: Jamnagar.



Sighting of melanistic Baya Weaver *Ploceus philippinus* near Rajkot

In September 2007, I saw and photographed a Baya Weaver (*Ploceus philippinus*) in the reeds at Nyari River, near Rajkot. This bird was having yellow band on breast but had black belly and vent. I identified it as a partially melanistic Baya Weaver. Melanism is abnormal deposit of melanin, which results in increased black or reddish-brown colour. Colour aberrant birds are now frequently reported from Gujarat and other parts of India. Van Grouw *et al.* (2016) listed nine instances of melanism in Indian birds. However, there is no report of melanism, partial or otherwise, in Baya Weaver. This is another record of a colour aberrant bird from Gujarat and adds to our knowledge regarding colour aberrant birds in the state.

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Colour aberrant Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis* near Dahod

On 22 December 2020, I went for bird watching and photography along with my father Dharmendra Khatri and my father's friend Akil Kharodwala to a lake near the village of Kharach, in Dahod District. We went to see the Red-crested Pochards (*Netta rufina*) which are seen there in the winter. We saw many ducks and waders. Our attention was drawn towards two flocks, of 15 birds each, of Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*). One bird in this flock caught our attention as it was white in colour. We took photos and showed them to Shakir Kadiwala, who informed us that this was a colour aberrant Little Grebe. This bird had whitish plumage, and the eye looked red. We could not identify the mutation in this bird. This was the first time I had seen a colour aberrant Little Grebe here.

I thank Akil Kharodwala for taking photographs.

[We sent the photos to Hein Van Grouw, who informed that 'the Little Grebe's colour is affected by a mutation causing an incomplete melanin synthesis. As a result all the pigment is still present, but is not as dark coloured as it normally should be. It is most likely the mutation Brown (but bleached further by the (sun) light), or a dark form of Ino'.

We are very grateful to Hein Van Grouw for helping with the identification of the correct mutation in this bird – Eds]

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Verditer Flycatcher *Eumyias thalassinus* in Kachchh

On 2 November 2016, while birding in Mandvi area, Kachchh, I saw an unusual bird wandering among the branches of a Banyan tree. So I took a few photos and shared them with senior birders. It was identified as a Verditer Flycatcher (*Eumyias thalassinus*). Previously, in 1964, M. K. Himmatsinhaji had recorded it in Kachchh (Himmatsinhaji 1964). Then, senior birder Shantilal Varu had seen this species in 1988 and 1999 (*pers. comm.*). I was very happy to know that this sighting of the Verditer Flycatcher had happened after a span of 17 years. On 1 November 2019 and 5 December 2019, I again recorded this species in the same area. It seems that the Verditer Flycatcher could be a regular visitor to Kachchh but is overlooked.

Urmi Jani: Bhuj.



Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia* in Bhavnagar

On 20 November 2020, I was birding near Avaniya Lake, Bhavnagar. Around 08:00 hrs, I saw a Common Grasshopper Warbler (*Locustella naevia*) in the bushes near the lake. I immediately took photographs and observed the bird closely. The underparts were cream-coloured or yellowish-buff, with a few dark brown spots and streaks on the breast and flanks. The vent was boldly marked. The upperparts were marked with blackish spots. The bill was longish looking.

It was identified as a Common Grasshopper Warbler based on these features. The Grasshopper Warbler is generally uncommon in our area and very rarely seen in Bhavnagar. This is another photographic record of the species from Gujarat.

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Cinereous Tit *Parus cinereus* in Jamnagar District

On 2 January 2021, I visited Churi Aai Temple near Jamjodhpur, Dist: Jamnagar, with Shantilal Varu, Dimple Varu, Ashvin Trivedi and S. P. Jadeja. The area consists of a temple, surrounded by well wooded habitat. There we saw and photographed a Cinereous Tit (*Parus cinereus*). Excepting few well wooded areas like Barda Forest, this species is uncommon to rare in Jamnagar District. Hence this sighting is worth reporting.

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Sightings of Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush *Monticola saxatilis* near Dahod

The Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush (*Monticola saxatilis*) is a vagrant/rare passage migrant to Gujarat; it has been reported by me from Rampura Grassland, Dahod, earlier (Patel 2017). I regularly visit this area in all seasons. I have observed the Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush for three consecutive years in the month of February in the Rampura Grassland near Dahod. I have observed it in the month of February of 2018, 2019 and 2020. I have seen it feed on the ground in the grass and perch on the trees or on open rocky perches. It is surprising that this species has been seen for three years now in the month of February in this location. It is possible that it could be on its return migration and the Rampura Grassland is a suitable habitat for it. These sightings add to our knowledge regarding the occurrence of this species in Gujarat.

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Sighting of Fork-tailed Drongo Cuckoo *Surniculus dicruroides* near Vadodara

On 27 June 2020, we were on a birding trip en-route to Narukot, as the core sanctuary area of Jambughoda WLS was not yet open. We were walking on a road with dense trees and also driving in patches. Having heard calls of Indian Cuckoo (*Cuculus micropterus*) the previous week in the same area, we were keenly looking for cuckoos. We noticed a strange looking, drongo-like bird, idly perched for a considerable amount of time and behaving differently than drongos (*Dicruridae* sp.). It was a strange sight since drongos sally frequently for insects. On taking a few photographs, we saw that the bird had a glossy-blue plumage with a deep, long, forked tail. It also had a slightly curved, thin bill which indicated it to be Fork-tailed Drongo Cuckoo (*Surniculus dicruroides*). After checking previous records on eBird, we came to know that Fork-tailed Drongo Cuckoo has not been photographed in Vadodara. This is an important sighting of the Fork-tailed Drongo Cuckoo from Vadodara District.

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Western Crowned Warbler *Phylloscopus occipitalis* in Mahisagar District

On 20 September 2020, during a family outing to Bakor, in Mahisagar District, I was enjoying the evening at Jarmai Mata Temple. I went out for some bird watching. It was the end of the day and the weather was overcast; not the best light to take bird photographs. I saw a lot of activity in the upper canopy of the trees. One bird in particular caught my eye as it looked like a Green Warbler (*Phylloscopus nitidus*) with a very pale beak and wing-bars. I waited for it to settle on the lower branches in the open to take a photo. I was able to get a good photo. I posted the photo on the social media and it was identified as a Western Crowned Warbler (*Phylloscopus occipitalis*) by senior birders based on the all pale beak, the grayish mantle, crown stripes and pale legs. The Western Crowned Warbler is uncommon here and I was surprised to see it in this area in September.

Ayaz Mansuri:



Banded Bay Cuckoo *Cacomantis sonneratii* in Dadra & Nagar Haveli

On 17 January 2021, at around 11:00 hrs in the morning, I was photographing some flycatchers in the Dadra & Nagar Haveli Wildlife Sanctuary outskirts area. I was with other bird watchers and we were at an elevated part of the forest. While scanning the valley with our binoculars, we saw and heard calls made by a Banded Bay Cuckoo (*Cacomantis sonneratii*). After some time, it descended towards the undergrowth of the forest and was seen well by us. We took some good photographs and confirmed the identification. The Banded Bay Cuckoo is a rare resident in the forests of south Gujarat (Ganpule 2016) and this sighting in the winter is interesting. This was the first time I had seen this cuckoo here.

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Spotted Crake *Porzana porzana* in Vadodara

On 10 March 2020, on the occasion of the festival of Holi, we went to Timbi Lake, situated in Waghodia Tehsil of Vadodara for bird watching. We reached there a bit late. It was around 08:15 hrs in the morning. The sun had already risen and was shining bright. We were walking in the marshy area with scattered reeds and suddenly, a small bird foraging on the fringes of reeds caught our attention. Just by looking at it from a distance, made us sure that it was a crane (*Porzana* sp.). As the sunlight was in the opposite direction, we were not sure about the exact species. As soon as we went a little closer, we could easily identify it as the Spotted Crake (*Porzana porzana*). We took some photographs and confirmed the identification. The Spotted Crake is quite uncommon to rare in Vadodara area and this is an important record for Vadodara District.

Vikrant Vyas: Vadodara



Asian Pied Starling *Gracupica contra* near Surat

On 29 October 2020, I was passing on a road behind the L & T factory in Hazira, Surat. There, I saw a group of starlings perched on a *Prosopis juliflora*. After watching with binoculars, I found that two of the starlings were Asian Pied Starlings (*Gracupica contra*). I took some photographs and confirmed the identification. On 30 October 2020, I revisited the area and found one bird and on 31 October 2020, no bird was found. This species is uncommon in South Gujarat. I had not seen the Asian Pied Starling in this area before and was surprised to find this bird here.

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Feather frame

A visit to 'flamingo city' in Greater Rann of Kachchh

The breeding of Greater Flamingos (*Phoenicopterus roseus*) was seen at *anda bet*, also known as 'flamingo city', in the Greater Rann of Kachchh, in the late monsoon period in 2020 by the personnel of the Border Security Force. The breeding was successful, with hundreds of nests, eggs and chicks seen there. Photographs from a visit to the area are presented here – all photos by Border Security Force (BSF).



