

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]

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

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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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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.

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