

## 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.



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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.



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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



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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.



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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 Crane (*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.



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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.



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**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.



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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.



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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> )



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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.



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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.

## References

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

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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.*