

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]

References

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

David Cooper & Brenda Kay: Unst, Shetland, Scotland UK. davidcooper.alba@gmail.com



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].

References

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

Anika Tere: A-17 Janki Duplex, Behind Manjalpur Township No. 2, Darbar Chokdi, Manjalpur, Vadodara 390 011.
anikatere@rediffmail.com

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