

Occurrence of Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps indica* in Vansada National Park, Gujarat

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Introduction

The Emerald Dove (*Chalcophaps indica*), also known as Asian Emerald Dove or Grey-capped Emerald Dove, is a small, terrestrial, metallic-plumaged bird native to tropical and subtropical parts of Southeast Asia. It is resident species in Himalayas, from Uttarakhand to Arunachal and Assam Valleys, and in Bangladesh, Western Peninsula including the Dangas in Gujarat, Eastern Ghats, North-east Peninsula, East-central Peninsula, Sri Lanka, and Andaman & Nicobar Islands. There are six subspecies of the Emerald Dove, of which *C. i. indica* is distributed in India, South China, Malaysia, Philippines, Indonesia and west Papuan Islands (Ali & Ripley 1983, Grimmett *et al.* 1998, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012, Gill *et al.* 2020). We report here the occurrence of the Emerald Dove in Vansada National Park, in South Gujarat.

Study area

The Vansada National Park (20° 51' 16" to 21° 21' 22" N, 73° 20' 30" to 73° 31' 20" E), henceforth VNP, is a tropical moist deciduous forest located on the northern banks of Ambika River, in Navsari District (Figure 1). It is known for its rich biodiversity and is further classified for subtypes, namely: southern moist mixed deciduous forests, bamboo breaks and tropical riverine forest (Champion & Sheth 1968, Singh *et al.* 2000). It mostly covers a region of hilly terrain with low lying hills ranging from altitudes of 110 to 360 meters above sea level. These hills are the northernmost extensions of the Sahyadri Range (Western Ghats). *Kala-Amba* is situated in one of the densest and remotest pockets of VNP. With the onset of rains, a few parts of the national park become inaccessible as most of the roads and trails get waterlogged or swampy due to the moisture-retaining black cotton soil.

Observations

As a part of pre-monsoon monitoring, a visit to the check post of *Kala-Amba* was done on 24 June 2008 by the second author (RV) and the first author (MJ), who was Range Forest Officer of VNP at that time, for allocation of duties among the forest staff. While returning to the forest guest house, a flock of dark green birds caught our attention on the forest road, near *Sadad Devi*. When we tried to get a closer look, the birds flew away and disappeared into the forest. They were smaller than Common Pigeon (*Columba livia*) and the first author managed to note their size. They had dark metallic green colour with some tint of reddish-pink on their beaks; however, it was

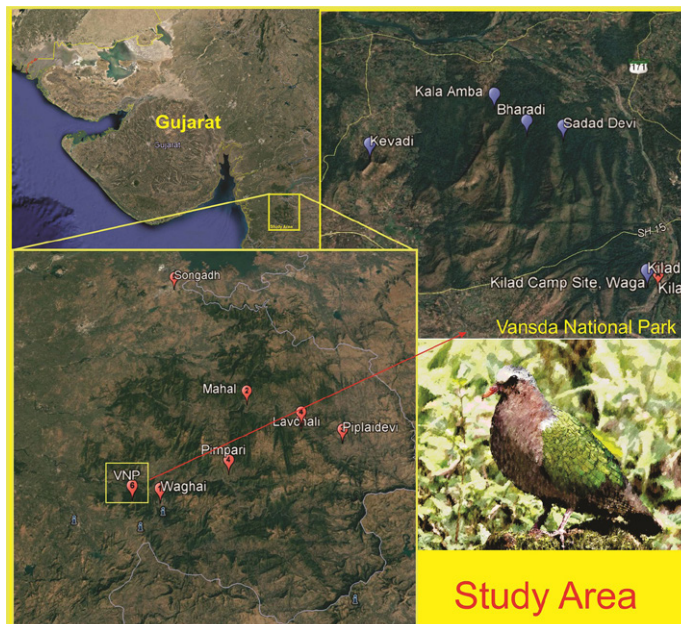


Figure 1: The map of Gujarat showing location of the Vansada National Park (blue pins indicate sighting localities within VNP) and red pins indicate sightings of the species at various locations in South Gujarat. (Maps courtesy: Google Earth). A photo of Emerald Dove is given in the lower right corner.

difficult to identify the species. Two weeks later, the same site was revisited by the first author on 8 July 2008. He was equipped with binoculars and a camera and was carrying a field guide. The flock of same birds was spotted on a 'pag-dandi' (forest trail) of Bharadi area. After careful observation, the first author tried to go nearer and managed to get photographs. After referring to the literature / field guide and comparing photos, it was confirmed that the flock of birds was of Emerald Doves. The species was spotted recently on 15 February 2021 by second author (RV) in a mango orchard at *Kala-Amba*, in a village located on the northern edge of VNP.

To learn more about its distribution in VNP, recent records, including photographs of the species, were searched on websites such as ebird.org, orientalbirdimages.org and birdsofgujarat.co.in and are given in table. Based on this data, it seems that the Emerald Dove is frequently seen in various parts of VNP. There could be other records by birders which we may have missed as these have not been shared publicly. But, we have tried to collect as many recent records as possible from VNP.

Discussion

The Emerald Dove is considered as a winter migrant, and as an uncommon and rare resident in Gujarat (Ganpule 2016). It has been recorded previously from Dang forests in South Gujarat

Sightings of Emerald Dove in Vansada National Park

No.	Date of Sighting	Location	Observer(s) & Source
1	24 June 2008	Sadad Devi, VNP	Present study
2	8 July 2008	Bharadi, VNP	Present study
3	26 December 2014	VNP	Viral Patel & Pankaj Maheria http://orientalbirdimages.org/images/data/emerald_dove_2997.jpg
4	26 December 2014	VNP	Viral Patel; https://birdsofgujarat.co.in/locationwise_bird_detail.php?id=308 Pankaj Maheria; https://birdsofgujarat.co.in/locationwise_bird_detail.php?id=2313
5	10 September 2016	VNP	Hiren Joshi; https://birdsofgujarat.co.in/locationwise_bird_detail.php?id=3870
6	24 January 2017	VNP	Anand Patel; https://birdsofgujarat.co.in/locationwise_bird_detail.php?id=3810
7	14 April 2017	VNP	Viren Desai; https://birdsofgujarat.co.in/locationwise_bird_detail.php?id=4240
8	14 April 2017	VNP	Dhyey Shah, Ketan Shah & Trupti Shah; https://birdsofgujarat.co.in/locationwise_bird_detail.php?id=5231
9	3 May 2018	VNP	Anand Patel; https://www.birdsofgujarat.co.in/bird_detail.php?id=13884
10	28 May 2018	VNP	Pragnesh R. Patel; http://orientalbirdimages.org/images/data/emerald_dovevansada_national_park_south_dang_regionnavsari_districtgujarat_state29thmay2018.jpg
11	3 March 2018	VNP	Saswat Mishra; https://birdsofgujarat.co.in/locationwise_bird_detail.php?id=8043
12	13 June 2018	VNP	Saswat Mishra; https://ebird.org/checklist/S46534268#flag-110371561
13	24 July 2018	VNP	Viren Desai; https://birdsofgujarat.co.in/locationwise_bird_detail.php?id=10156
14	30 August 2019	Kilad, VNP	Vivek Upadhyay; https://ebird.org/species/emedov2/IN-GJ
15	15 February 2021	Kala Amba, VNP	Present study
16	26 March 2021	VNP	Vishal Mistry; https://ebird.org/checklist/S84202338#flag-320640071

(Ali 1954). Salim Ali collected a few specimens from Mahal and Waghai forests of then Dang District, and its occurrence was noted at Piplaidevi, Pimpri, Laochali (in Dangs) and in Songadh (now in Tapi District), as the western-most limit of the species in India. Ali suspected its distribution towards the north of its known range in Gujarat, towards Rajpipala and south of Narmada River. Khacher (1996) emphasized the probability of its occurrence in Shoolpaneswar Wildlife Sanctuary, Narmada District, and suggested a further study of its distribution within this area of Gujarat. Pandey *et al.* (2004) and Patel (2021) noted its rare occurrence in Purna Wildlife Sanctuary, Dang.

A detailed biodiversity survey conducted by Gujarat Ecological Education & Research Foundation (GEER) reported 115 avian species belonging to 39 families from Vansada National Park; it included six species of doves and pigeons, from the family Columbidae. However, there is no record of Emerald Dove from this area (Singh *et al.* 2000). In the present study, the species was found in Kala Amba, Sadad Devi and Bharadi areas of VNP, which has not been reported before. Hence, this is the first study which has given the records of this species from VNP. Local people in this part of the national park identify the Emerald Dove by the local name 'nilamholi'. Interactions with local Dangi, Bhil, Kunkna and Kotwaliya tribes revealed that this species is regular in small flocks of five to seven birds in VNP. Records given here in the present study (and on speaking with other bird watchers) indicate a fairly wide distribution of the Emerald Dove in these parts of Gujarat. However, a

detailed study is required to understand its distribution range, particularly towards northern and western parts of its known distribution in the state, to know if it occurs in Central Gujarat.

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Third update to the Gujarat checklist: December 2021

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This paper is the third update to the Gujarat checklist; the checklist was published in 2016 (Ganpule 2016), the first update in December 2017 (Ganpule 2017) and the second update in March 2020 (Ganpule 2020a), which took the number of species documented within the boundaries of the state of Gujarat, along with the adjoining Union Territories of Diu & Daman, and Dadra & Nagar Haveli, to **609**. This paper reviews important records, lists recent additions to the state checklist and discusses other important records from the state, from April 2020 (when the second update was published) till 31 December 2021.

The records of the following species have been reviewed:

African Sacred Ibis (*Threskiornis aethiopicus*): An African Sacred Ibis was seen and photographed in Vadodara (Baroda); it was seen multiple times in April-end and first week of May 2020. The sighting was reported in the local edition of the newspaper 'The Times of India' dated 13 June 2020 – link here: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/vadodara/african-sacred-ibis-spotted-in-vadodara/articleshow/76345782.cms>.

The photographs show well the main identification features of the bird and there is no doubt that it is indeed an African Sacred Ibis. This species is mainly an sub-Saharan (African) species, but is now seen in Europe and parts of the Middle East due to a combination of factors; escapees from private collections, introduction of free flying birds and in a few cases, genuine vagrants. Feral colonies exist in Europe (France, Spain and Italy) and in Taiwan. Yésou & Clergeau (2005) discuss the European status of this species and give details of its occurrence in the Middle East; it is seen in Iran, Iraq and parts of UAE. The distribution data from eBird confirms this as sightings have been reported from many parts of the UAE and also from Iran. The sightings from Iran are the nearest from Gujarat.

The occurrence of the African Sacred Ibis in Vadodara is quite intriguing. It is difficult to be sure whether this is a case of genuine vagrancy, an escapee from a private collection, a ship-assisted vagrant, or a range expansion from the introduced, but free flying, populations seen in the Middle East / Iran. The India Checklist v5.1 (Praveen *et al.* 2021) has added this species in Appendix 2 and not accepted it into the main India Checklist. It will be interesting to see whether there are more records of the African Sacred Ibis from Gujarat in the future. This sighting was discussed with senior bird watchers here and it was decided to not accept it to the Gujarat checklist at present since it was of unknown origin and this individual being an escapee from a private collection was possible.

White-throated Needletail (*Hirundapus caudacutus*): An unusual sighting of at least 5 White-throated Needletails has been reported from Girnar Mountains in October 1999 recently on eBird; see eBird checklist <https://ebird.org/checklist/S68117345>. Detailed field notes were taken and all the important identification features were seen by the observer.

The White-throated Needletail is distributed across the Himalayas (from northern Pakistan to Arunachal Pradesh) and also breeds from Central Siberia, Russian Far East, northern Japan, Mongolia, China to Korea; the northern populations are migratory (wintering mainly in New Guinea and Australia) and the Himalayan populations are sedentary or partially migratory (Chantler & Kirwan 2020). The wintering areas of the Himalayan populations are not well known. Since the northern populations are long distance migrants, there are many instances of vagrancy for this species. It has been seen in Seychelles and the Rodrigues Island, as well as in Europe, as a vagrant (Chantler & Kirwan 2020).

Regarding the Gujarat record, it is likely to be correct since plumage details were seen well and needletails are unlikely to be mistaken for other swift species. However, it should be