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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

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noted that the Silver-backed Needletail (*Hirundapus cochinchinensis*), which also breeds in the Himalayas and whose wintering areas are also not well known, is very similar to the White-throated Needletail; it has a paler greyish throat patch and smaller, duller pale patch on the back. Thus, confusion between both these species is possible. Since a photograph is not available, it was decided that this record should be treated as 'Needletail species' rather than identifying it to the species level. At present, the White-throated Needletail is not accepted to the Gujarat checklist though its occurrence here is possible and more likely than Silver-backed Needletail, as vagrancy for White-throated Needletail has been reported many times in other parts of the world. In general, birders here do not pay attention to swifts / martins / swallows and hence, it is likely to be overlooked. Bird watchers are requested to photograph these species in the state.

Oriental Pied Hornbill (*Anthracoceros albirostris*): An Oriental Pied Hornbill was seen and photographed in Surat in March 2020 (Patel 2021). The editor's note in this paper explains that since it is known that a few zoos as well as private collections have this species, it was decided not to accept this species to the Gujarat checklist. Unless there is evidence of range expansion or wild vagrancy in the future, acceptance to the state checklist would not be proper. Hence, the Oriental Pied Hornbill is not accepted to the Gujarat checklist at present.

Upcher's Warbler (*Hippolais languida*): The Upcher's Warbler breeds from Turkey, Syria, Israel, Iran, SW Kazakhstan, other parts of Central Asia, Afghanistan and parts of SW Pakistan; it winters in E Africa (Svensson 2020). There are no records of this species from India so far.

An Upcher's Warbler sighting has been reported from Gandhinagar on eBird. The photographs show a warbler with greyish-brown plumage, heavy bill, and darkish tail. Some feathers on the mantle are bleached white while few primaries and secondaries show whitish (bleached) edges, suggesting a somewhat aberrant plumage. The observer has reported that expert opinion indicated that it was an Upcher's Warbler. Looking at the photos in detail, it is indeed similar to Upcher's Warbler. The date of the sighting is October, which would suggest an individual in migration.

The identification of Upcher's Warbler is difficult and it can be confused with other warblers like Sykes's Warbler (*Iduna rama*) and Eastern Olivaceous Warbler (*Iduna pallid*). This sighting was discussed here in detail and it was decided that even though identification could be correct, the plumage in this individual is somewhat odd and it is difficult to identify it as an

Upcher's Warbler conclusively without any doubt. Hence, this species is not accepted to the Gujarat checklist at present. If experts opine unanimously that it is indeed this species, then, the record can be reviewed again in the future.

Grey Nightjar (*Caprimulgus jotaka*): A sighting of a purported Grey Nightjar has been reported from Kumkotar, near Vansada National Park; the bird was seen, call recorded but photographs could not be taken (Raina *et al.* 2020). The editor's note in this paper explains in detail why the Grey Nightjar is not accepted to the Gujarat checklist. While the sonogram of the recorded call is similar to the sonograms of calls of Grey Nightjar, a lot is still not known regarding the calls of Indian Jungle Nightjar (*Caprimulgus indicus*) and Grey Nightjar. The movements of Grey Nightjar in the non-breeding season require further study. It should be noted that photos were not taken for this bird. Thus, with so many unknown factors, it would not be proper to accept this species to the Gujarat checklist. Other opinions are also in congruence with this and at this time, based only on call, it was decided not to accept this species to the state checklist. But, birders are requested to record calls of both these nightjars so that more data is available.

Nilgiri Wood Pigeon (*Columba elphinstonii*): A sighting of a Nilgiri Wood Pigeon has been reported from Purna Wildlife Sanctuary, in Dangs in South Gujarat, in March 2016 (Jambu & Patel 2021). The individual was seen well but a photograph is not available. The plumage details given match with this species and the plumage details were noted with binoculars.

The Nilgiri Wood Pigeon is endemic to the Western Ghats. The closest sightings from Gujarat are reported from just north of Mumbai and from Nashik in Maharashtra; the Nashik sighting is quite near to the Gujarat border. This sighting from Purna WLS is likely to be correct and the occurrence of Nilgiri Wood Pigeon in Gujarat will not be unexpected. However, all recent additions to the Gujarat checklist have been based on photographic records. In view of absence of photographic evidence, it was decided not to accept this species to the Gujarat checklist at present.

The following species have been added to the state checklist after the publication of the second update:

610. Red-breasted Goose (*Branta ruficollis*): A Red-breasted Goose was seen in Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary in the first week of January 2021 (Alvani & Multani 2021). This individual was seen with Bar-headed Goose (*Anser indicus*) and Greylag Goose (*Anser anser*). It was seen for more than one month in this area and birders from all parts of India came to

see this rarity. A Red-breasted Goose, presumably the same individual, was seen in Thol Bird Sanctuary in March 2021. It is likely that this bird moved from Nalsarovar to Thol. Another Red-breasted Goose was seen recently, in December 2021, at Little Rann of Kachchh; photographs were posted on the social media. This was the second consecutive winter in which this species was seen in Gujarat. Based on these well documented sightings, it was added to the Gujarat checklist.

611. Sooty Gull (*Ichthyaetus hemprichii*): A Sooty Gull was seen and photographed near Porbandar in the first week of May 2021 by young birder Konark Karia (Karia & Karia 2021). This individual was seen twice in the same area over a period of four days. The bird was photographed from different angles and the identification confirmed beyond doubt. This was the first confirmed record of a Sooty Gull from Gujarat and it was accepted to the state checklist.

612. Christmas Island Frigatebird (*Fregata andrewsi*): A large-sized frigatebird was seen and photographed near Mahuva in May 2021 after the Cyclone 'Tauktae' (Bhil & Bhil 2021). The bird was seen well and alongside a Lesser Frigate (*Fregata ariel*), which confirmed its large size. The large size, long bill, blackish breast-tabs, broad wings, and whitish lower belly led to its identification as a Christmas Island Frigatebird. Expert opinion was taken and it was identified as a second-cycle female Christmas Island Frigatebird.

In general, identification of frigatebirds in juvenile and second-cycle plumages is very difficult; Great Frigatebird (*Fregata minor*) and Christmas Island Frigatebird are especially similar at these ages (David James, *in litt.*, email August 2021). In such plumages, identification cannot be confirmed beyond doubt unless for birds with very long axillary spurs (not present in this individual) or very prominent carpal bars. However, the authors confirmed that this bird had prominent carpal bars, which is also seen in one photograph, which is indicative of Christmas Island Frigatebird.

Based on the plumage features seen in this individual, the identification could be made as a Christmas Island Frigatebird. It was thus accepted to the Gujarat checklist.

Details of some vagrant and interesting species which were photographed in Gujarat:

Lesser Frigatebird (*Fregata ariel*): The Lesser Frigatebird was added to the Gujarat checklist based on an injured bird recovered on the banks of Tapi River [reported in 'Chatak' Vol 4 (11-12): 39-40]. A Lesser Frigatebird, an adult male, was seen and photographed along with a Christmas Island Frigatebird near Mahuva (Bhil & Bhil 2021). Since it was an adult male, the

identification was easy and this was only the second record of the species from Gujarat.

Persian Shearwater (*Puffinus persicus*): An injured Persian Shearwater was recovered from Porbandar in April 2021 (Tank & Vargiya 2021). The bird was taken for treatment but unfortunately, it did not survive. The diagnostic identification feature – dark brown axillaries, were seen and photographed, which confirmed the identification. The Persian Shearwater was included in the Gujarat checklist based on two off-shore records (Munshi & Naik 2016, 2017). This is the first confirmed record of Persian Shearwater on land (inside the state).

Yellow-eyed Pigeon (*Columba eversmanni*): The Yellow-eyed Pigeon was added to the Gujarat checklist based on a sight record from Little Rann of Kachchh in October 2006 (Malik 2010). However, a photographic record from Little Rann of Kachchh in December 2005 was published recently (Cooper & Kay 2021). A group of three Yellow-eyed Pigeons was seen and photographed by the authors. This is the first photo record of the species from Gujarat and it further confirms that the Yellow-eyed Pigeon does occur here. Its addition to the Gujarat checklist is thus correct.

Namaqua Dove (*Oena capensis*): The Namaqua Dove was added to the Gujarat checklist based on a sighting from Jamnagar (Trivedi & Trivedi 2018; Patel & Raol 2018). Doubts were raised that it could have been an escapee though the editor's note explained in detail why this species was accepted to the Gujarat checklist. After the Jamnagar record, the Namaqua Dove has been seen in Nalsarovar regularly (multiple times in the past two years) and also in Mahuva and Pariej. There are numerous photographs of this species from these locations on the social media. There remains no doubt that the addition of the Namaqua Dove to the Gujarat checklist was correct and these records further support the hypothesis that the species is expanding its range.

Golden Eagle (*Aquila Chrysaetos*): The Golden Eagle was added to the Gujarat checklist based on a record of an individual which was seen near Palanpur for more than two months (Prajapati *et al.* 2018). It is surprising that after this first sighting, the Golden Eagle has been seen in Kachchh twice in the past three years; near Khavda (Khojani 2020) and by me (along with a group of more than five bird watchers which included Ashok Mashru, Manoj Finava and Kapilsinh Zala) near Vighakot, near the India-Pakistan border, in late January 2021. Out of these two records, the record by Khojani (2020) is a photographic record while ours was a sight record since cameras are not allowed in that area. But, we saw the bird closely in flight and noted all the diagnostic features. All of us

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concluded that it was a juvenile or immature Golden Eagle based on the white patches in the under wings at the base of primaries and secondaries, dark plumage, the large size, white base to tail and the golden nape, which was seen well by us. Is it possible that the Golden Eagle could have been a rare vagrant to Gujarat but was overlooked previously? Future records, if any, will help in determining its status here.

Rock Bunting (*Emberiza cia*): The Rock Bunting was added to the Gujarat checklist based on records from Saurashtra and Kachchh (Trivedi 2016). Recently, a Rock Bunting was photographed near Pavagadh Hill, Vadodara (Devvratsinh Mori, *see elsewhere in this issue*). This sighting from Central Gujarat is a first for this region. It is possible that this species could be overlooked among the other bunting species occurring here.

Slaty-legged Crake (*Rallina eurizonoides*): A Slaty-legged Crake was photographed in Vansada National Park (Mitul Desai, *see elsewhere in this issue*). There are only two previous records of the Slaty-legged Crake – one from Dadra & Nagar Haveli (Mishra 2017a) and the other from Porbandar (Niranjani 2020). This is the third record of the species from our state.

Loten's Sunbird (*Cinnyris lotenia*): The Loten's Sunbird was added to the Gujarat checklist based on records from Dadra & Nagar Haveli (Mishra 2017b). It was not noted inside the state boundaries but recently, it has been photographed from Navsari District (Pravin Patel & Anil Patel, *see elsewhere in this issue*). Thus, the occurrence of the Loten's Sunbird inside the state boundary is confirmed and it is possible that it could be more widespread in parts of Navsari District.

Thick-billed Warbler (*Arundinax aedon*): The Thick-billed Warbler was added to the Gujarat checklist based on records from Kachchh; two specimens were collected by Dr. Salim Ali near Bhuj (Ali 1960). A Thick-billed Warbler was recently photographed near Jamnagar (Hiren Khambhayta, *see elsewhere in this issue*). This is the first photographic record of the species from Gujarat and it confirms that the Thick-billed Warbler does still occur here. It was listed as a historical species in the recent Gujarat checklist (Ganpule 2020b).

Orange-breasted Green Pigeon (*Treron bicinctus*): The Orange-breasted Green Pigeon was added to the state checklist based on a photographic record from Gir National Park area (Dave 2021). An Orange-breasted Green Pigeon was recently photographed again in Gir National Park and it is the second record of the species from Gujarat (Hitesh Chauhan, *see elsewhere in this issue*). Both the sightings have been in the winter months.

Grey-headed Lapwing (*Vanellus cinereus*): The Grey-headed Lapwing was included in the Gujarat checklist based on sight records from reference texts like Grimmett *et al.* (2011) and Rasmussen & Anderton (2012), but, the exact details of these records could not be traced (Ganpule 2016). This species has been recently photographed twice in Gujarat; once in Timbi Irrigation Reservoir near Vadodara (Chandrarao *et al.* 2021) and once at Nava Talav near the Little Rann of Kachchh (see eBird checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S97459214>). These are the first photographic records of this species from Gujarat and confirm its occurrence here. It is possible that the Grey-headed Lapwing is a winter vagrant, visiting suitable habitats in the state.

Yellow-browed Warbler (*Phylloscopus inornatus*): The Yellow-browed Warbler was included in the Gujarat checklist based on a photographic record from Shoolpaneshwar Wildlife Sanctuary; for more details of the record, see Ganpule (2020a). Recently, in December 2021, a Yellow-browed Warbler was seen and photographed in Girnar WLS by Gaurang Badga – see eBird checklist for photographs of this individual <https://ebird.org/checklist/S98834372>. This bird had pale legs, pale-orange base to bill, greenish mantle, mottled ear-coverts, prominent median-covert wing bar, white-edged tertials and dark shadow between the wing-bars. All these features are seen in Yellow-browed Warbler and there is no doubt regarding its identification. This is the second record of this species for Gujarat. There are very few confirmed sightings of this species from western India and it is possible it is overlooked. The addition of this species to the Gujarat checklist is further confirmed by this sighting.

Discussion

It can be seen that after the publication of the second update, three more species have been added to the Gujarat checklist. The recently published checklist of the birds of Gujarat (Ganpule 2020b) also listed 609 species. The addition of three species takes the state checklist to **612**.

The recent Gujarat checklist (Ganpule 2020b) updated the taxonomy and the rationale behind the taxonomic decisions for a few species was explained in detail. The taxonomy for new additions will also be looked at closely and decisions will be taken after consulting the taxonomy given in the main taxonomic authorities like Howard & Moore World Checklist, IOC, Clements / eBird and other sources will also be looked at if required. The taxonomy for the recently added species is straightforward and there are no taxonomic issues for these species.

As explained in the recent Gujarat checklist (Ganpule 2020b), BCSG is going to publish 'A field guide to the birds of Gujarat' in the near future. The field guide will have species numbers as per the recent Gujarat checklist. The numbers for the three recently added species are as per the numbers which will be given in the field guide. Thus, the recent checklist and the numbers used in this paper for newly added species will be complementary to it. This will be helpful for bird watchers in finding the species easily and will make the field guide more user friendly.

It can be seen that in the period between the second update and the third update, new species have been added, many interesting records have been noted and birders are exploring almost all the regions of the state. It is necessary to mention here that even though our state is well explored, there are still many areas which are less frequented by birders; information from coastal regions of South Gujarat, areas in Kachchh near the India-Pakistan border, occurrence and distribution of pelagic species and data from few other places in coastal Saurashtra is still lacking. Bird watchers are urged to visit these places so that more data can be obtained from these areas.

The next update will again aim to carry new and interesting records from Gujarat.

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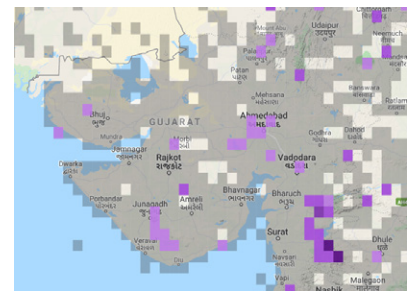
A photographic record of Ultramarine Flycatcher *Ficedula superciliaris* from Thol Bird Sanctuary and an update on its status and distribution in Gujarat

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Jagrut Shah

Prasad Ganpule and Naushad Theba. They confirmed the bird as a female or first-winter Ultramarine Flycatcher. The photos showed an individual with greyish-brown underparts and



whitish underparts, with blue-cast to uppertail-coverts and tail, which matched with the description given in Grimmett *et al.* (2011) for the species. Further, the call also matched with the call of Ultramarine Flycatcher. Thus, it was confirmed as an Ultramarine Flycatcher, and was the probably the first photographic record for Thol Bird Sanctuary. There is a record of this species from Ahmedabad, which is near to Thol, by Kedar Champhekar, who photographed it in Centre of Environment Education (CEE); the photos are posted on eBird. There are records from other parts of Central Gujarat, from Gandhinagar and Anand Districts but I could not trace any previous record for Thol.

For Gujarat, Mashru (2012) provided the distribution of Ultramarine Flycatcher in Gujarat, listing sightings from different regions of the state. After this, there have been many records from different parts of Gujarat. A map showing the sightings of Ultramarine Flycatcher from Gujarat, based on records from 'eBird' is given here (Map 1). Based on these records, it can be seen that the Ultramarine Flycatcher is fairly widespread in Gujarat, occurring in almost all parts of the state. Though the records from eBird are fairly comprehensive, there are personal records by bird watchers which have not been uploaded on eBird. These records are mainly from Saurashtra, Kachchh and from other well forested parts of the state (from the forests of northern Gujarat to the Dangs in southern Gujarat).

This shows that the Ultramarine Flycatcher is not rare, but is somewhat uncommon in Gujarat, and is distributed widely in

The Ultramarine Flycatcher (*Ficedula superciliaris*) is a small, compact, arboreal flycatcher and it breeds in the Himalayas, from Jammu & Kashmir to Assam, is resident in Northeast India, and is a winter migrant to Central India, Western Ghats and eastern parts of India (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). It is a winter migrant to Gujarat, but is uncommon and rare, with sightings from Saurashtra, Kachchh and northern Gujarat, and there are isolated records from other parts of the state (Ganpule 2016).

A small flycatcher was photographed at 10:00 hrs at Thol Bird Sanctuary, in Mehsana District, Gujarat, on 23 November 2018. I was photographing a Common Woodshrike (*Tephrodornis pondicerianus*) on a tree and I spotted a small bird, which was foraging on the twigs of Dodder (*Cuscuta epithymum*). The site was a likely habitat for different species of birds such as flycatchers, sunbirds, warblers and tits. At first sight, I considered it as the female of Taiga Flycatcher (*Ficedula albicilla*) but after hearing the call, I realized it was something different. I managed to take two to three record photographs as it was foraging very quickly in the trees and did not perch for a longer time. Within five to six seconds, it flew away.

While preparing a checklist of my sightings for the day, I checked the photos and shared them with Ashok Mashru,