

An incidence of brood parasitism: Purple-rumped Sunbird *Leptocoma zeylonica* feeding a juvenile Grey-bellied Cuckoo *Cacomantis passerinus*

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The Grey-bellied Cuckoo (*Cacomantis passerinus*) breeds in the Himalayas and it is a widespread resident and winter migrant in the country, but

unrecorded in NW India (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). For Gujarat, it is resident as well as a monsoon migrant and seen in the forest areas of the state from north to south Gujarat, in Gir NP area in Saurashtra, with scattered records from elsewhere in Saurashtra and Kachchh (Bagda *et al.* 2015, Ganpule 2016).

On 2 November 2018, we noticed a pair of Purple-rumped Sunbirds (*Leptocoma zeylonica*) feeding a fledgling of an unidentified, small-sized, juvenile black-coloured cuckoo (*Cacomantis* sp.) at Gavier Lake (21° 07' N, 72° 44' E), near Surat, Gujarat. With the help of Grimmett *et al.* (2011), we identified the small-sized cuckoo, which had a prominent reddish gape and the overall plumage was dark greyish, as a juvenile Grey-bellied Cuckoo. Unfortunately, we were not carrying a camera with us when we observed this unusual behaviour.

We visited Gavier Lake again on 3 November 2018. We were able to hear calls but could not see the birds due to the dense vegetation. Later, on 6 November 2018, we finally photographed a female Purple-rumped Sunbird feeding the fledgling of the cuckoo. We noticed the pair feeding the cuckoo fledgling every day. The male bird also actively participated in feeding and raising the fledgling. Both the foster parents were feeding the fledgling simultaneously. The feeding used to be at a peak in the morning and evening. One day, we noticed two pairs feeding the fledgling. After observing for a while, we found that there were actually two cuckoo fledglings and two different pairs of Purple-rumped Sunbirds were raising them. They both were raising the fledglings nearby each other's areas. The fledglings were grown up and always seen perching high on trees like the Neem tree (*Azadirachta indica*), which made it difficult to document or take good photos. Both the fledglings were seen together in one instance. Observations were made till 19 November 2018. Later, we did not notice the fledglings around Gavier Lake. We assumed that the fledglings might have left the sunbird pairs and fledged. All

observations were made at Gavier Lake, which has been adopted by Nature Club Surat.

Most members of the cuckoo family (*Cuculidae*) are known brood parasites. The Grey-bellied Cuckoo is known to usually lay eggs in nests of small passerine birds. It is a well known reproductive strategy reported in cuckoos. The female cuckoos are usually host-specific and lay their eggs in nests of passerine birds and then leave all parental care to the hosts. Here, Purple-rumped Sunbirds were acting as foster parents of the cuckoo fledglings.

The Grey-bellied Cuckoo is known to be brood parasitic; the hosts are mainly warbler species with closed nests with narrow entrance, like Common Tailorbird (*Orthotomus sutorius*), Plain Prinia (*Prinia inornata*), Ashy Prinia (*Prinia socialis*), and Zitting Cisticola (*Cisticola juncidis*), as well as two species of sunbirds (*Leptocoma* sp.) (del Hoyo *et al.* 2020, Praveen & Lowther 2020) and sunbirds were observed to be hosts here. Other birdwatchers from different states of India have posted photographs of brood parasitism in cuckoos on Facebook and on the website 'OBI' (Oriental Bird Images). However, there are very few such observations from Gujarat and we request birdwatchers to report brood parasitism behaviour in cuckoos from Gujarat.

Acknowledgments

We would like to thank Shri Snehal Patel, Shri Bhavanisinhji Mori, Shri Ashish Vakil and Nature Club Surat for their constant support and motivation.

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