

## First breeding record of Black-naped Monarch *Hypothymis azurea* and Black-headed Cuckooshrike *Coracina melanoptera* in Kachchh, along with other interesting observations

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**Photo 1**



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**Photo 2**

On 28 June 2020, I was on my routine birding trip to Kotdi area, Ta: Mandvi, in Kachchh. I have been observing nesting of Indian Pitta (*Pitta brachyura*) in this area every year since 2011. This time too, a pair of Indian Pitta was nesting in the area. While observing the nest of the pitta, I saw a male Indian Paradise Flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi*) chasing a small bird which I could not identify due to the dense canopy. After a few minutes, the bird came on a perch and I was surprised to see that it was a female Black-naped Monarch (*Hypothymis azurea*), a rarity for Kachchh. On 2 July 2020, I revisited the same spot and this time found that both male and female Indian Paradise Flycatcher were chasing the Black-naped Monarch female. The female monarch had a grass twig in its bill. I followed it and found its nest (Photo 1). It was built on an *Acacia nilotica* tree, at the junction of three hanging branches. The nest was very well camouflaged and looked like a nest of a Purple Sunbird (*Cinnyris asiaticus*). There are a few winter records of the Black-naped Monarch in Kachchh but this is for the first time that its breeding has been noted in Kachchh.



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**Photo 3**

During my above described visits, I saw a male Black-headed Cuckooshrike (*Coracina melanoptera*) in that area. On 12 July 2020, during my third visit, I was surprised to see its nest (Photo 2). Both the male and female were present. The female was sitting inside the nest and sometimes with food (Photo 3). The nest was smaller in size and built on a *Prosopis cineraria*, which is locally known as *Khijado*. On 26 July 2020, I found two chicks inside the nest. This is also the first breeding record of this species in Kachchh.



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**Photo 4**

I noted other important observations in the same area, which are as follows:

- 1) The sighting of a pair of Indian Paradise Flycatchers and their behavior was suggestive of their breeding in the area.
- 2) On 2 July 2020, an Asian Brown Flycatcher (*Muscicapa latirostris*) was seen and photographed in the same area (Photo 4). The presence of this species in July is suggestive of its breeding. However, I could not locate its nest due to the dense canopy. But, the record of this species in July in Kachchh is certainly odd and worth investigating further in the next monsoon season.
- 3) On 28 June 2020 and 2 July 2020, a Tickell's Blue Flycatcher (*Cyornis tickelliae*) was seen and seemed to be active in breeding. This species is also not common in Kachchh and the sighting in June and July is also suggestive of its breeding in this area.
- 4) On 2 July 2020, a nest of Marshall's lora (*Aegithina nigrolutea*) was seen on a Neem tree at a height of about four feet. The nest had three eggs and the female was busy in incubation. I continued observing the nest. It was noted that the eggs hatched on 22 July 2020. The parents continued feeding the chicks and all three chicks were seen moving outside the nest on 8 August 2020. It was surprising to see the nest of the Marshall's lora at a height of only four feet on the tree. The nest was easily visible and the activities of the parents could be observed without any disturbance to the birds. Due to a very heavy monsoon in Kachchh this year, the nest was damaged when the chicks had hatched. However, a few locals put a plastic tray as support for the nest. The nest had better support due to this addition and the parents did not seem to be disturbed by this. The chicks continued to be fed by the parents in the nest and also in the tray. Eventually, all the three chicks were seen hopping outside the nest and taking short flights on the nesting tree. Thus, all three chicks fledged.

### Discussion

Due to the unique geography and habitats of Kachchh, the avifauna here is slightly different than what is seen in other parts of Gujarat. Many species, which are commonly seen in Saurashtra, are either rare or absent in Kachchh. Regarding the Black-headed Cuckooshrike and Black-naped Monarch, both these species are fairly commonly seen in the forested and well wooded areas of Saurashtra – especially in Gir National Park and surrounding areas and in other well wooded areas in the region. But, Black-headed Cuckooshrike is a vagrant to Kachchh (Ganpule 2016), and there are only a handful of records from this area. It was seen earlier by me at this location

in July 2017 (Goswami 2017), and there are two records from Mandvi – In April 1963 (Himmatsinhji 1964A), and later by S. N. Varu (*pers. comm*). There is another record from Than, near Nakhatrana, by Darshit Mehta in July 2014 (photo on <https://www.birdsofgujarat.co.in>) but this is the first breeding record of the Black-headed Cuckooshrike in Kachchh. Similarly, the Black-naped Monarch is also widespread in Saurashtra but it is rare in Kachchh (Ganpule 2016). A first record of this species from Kachchh was from Mandvi in January 1963 (Himmatsinhji 1964B). Another record from Chavda Rakhal, near Bhuj, in March 2006 is known (Varu 2007) but, there are no records of any of these species breeding in Kachchh.

I also conducted an online search of the websites 'Oriental Bird Images' (OBI) and 'Birds of Gujarat' (BOG) for records of these species from Kachchh. I could only find one other photographic record of Black-naped Monarch from Kachchh by Pankaj Maheria while the photographic record of Black-headed Cuckooshrike from Kachchh is by Darshit Mehta, referred to here earlier. Thus, these breeding records of Black-headed Cuckooshrike and Black-naped Monarch are significant and prove that they breed here in Kachchh. It will be interesting to know if these species are regularly breeding here or this year, due to the very heavy rainfall and subsequent suitable conditions, breeding was seen.

My other observation of an Asian Brown Flycatcher in the same area in the month of July is also noteworthy. This species is known to breed in Gir National Park area and possibly in other well wooded areas of Saurashtra but it is not known to breed in Kachchh. Further study is needed to confirm if the Asian Brown Flycatcher also breeds in this area. The presence of Indian Paradise Flycatcher and Tickell's Blue Flycatcher here in the months of June and July is not very surprising. Both these species, though uncommon in Kachchh, are known to occur here.

The fact that Marshall's lora breeds in Kachchh is well known. However, there are no detailed studies carried out on its breeding biology and many aspects of its breeding are not known – like the incubation period and fledging period. Though my observations were not part of a detailed study, I observed that the incubation period was around 18-20 days and the fledging period was around 21 days (approximately three weeks). However, these observations are the result of a casual study and not part of a breeding study and hence it is possible that there might be some error here. It is surprising that the Marshall's lora remains a less studied species even though it is fairly common in some habitats in Kachchh and its nesting is commonly seen here.

## ....Breeding record

### Conclusion

The breeding records of Black-headed Cuckooshrike and Black-naped Monarch confirm that both these species breed in Kachchh. It is possible that the breeding occurred this year to an unusually heavy monsoon, with rains more than 250% of normal. This habitat, in Mandvi Taluka, supports very good vegetation and it is likely that the Asian Brown Flycatcher could also be breeding here. The breeding of Marshall's lora in this area is not unusual but the breeding biology of this species needs further study. This area should be monitored from late May till September in the coming years to see whether the Black-headed Cuckooshrike and the Black-naped Monarch continue to breed here.

### References

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## Breeding of Small Pratincole *Glareola lactea* near Jamnagar

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Jamnagar has always been on high priority when it comes to birding, bird studies and bird photography. Birding in Jamnagar is always a treat for all birders and especially when we talk about waders, we cannot forget Jamnagar. We present here a few observations about the breeding of Small Pratincole (*Glareola lactea*) near Jamnagar and draw attention towards the impact of human activities on the breeding of this species near Jamnagar.

The Small Pratincole is a resident in almost all parts of India and it is a breeding migrant to Pakistan (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). It is a Least Concern species (BirdLife International 2020) and is mainly found near lakes, pools, freshwater marshes, rivers, agricultural fields, dam sites, irrigation canals etc. For Gujarat, it is a common to uncommon resident and local migrant, with sightings from all over the state (Ganpule 2016). We thought it was not very common around Jamnagar but after intensive

search, we were able to find the Small Pratincole at several places. We were lucky to observe its nesting near Jamnagar.



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