

## Heart-spotted Woodpecker in central and south Gujarat

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Woodpeckers (Picinae) in the Indian Subcontinent are represented by 32 species (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). In Gujarat, 10 species of woodpeckers have been recorded (Ganpule 2016). We present here the current status of Heart-spotted Woodpecker (*Hemicircus canente*) in central and south Gujarat, and also give a breeding record of the species from Vansada National Park in south Gujarat.

The Heart-spotted Woodpecker is distributed in Southeast Asia (Gorman 2014); occurring over a large area, but is thinly distributed from W to NE India and possibly Bangladesh, through Burma (Myanmar) to Thailand and Indochina. In India, the species is given as a resident in the Western Ghats, in western Madhya Pradesh, NE India and in the Eastern Ghats (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). In this species, both the males and females are predominantly black, with 'heart-shaped' black spots on white shoulders, with broad white scapular patches and barring of flight feathers. The female has buffy white forehead and crown while it is black with small white spots in males. The throat is whitish and the underparts are dark olive-grey. The tail is strikingly short and rounded. It is a monotypic species, with clinal increase in size from SW to NE India, with individual variation but no significant geographical pattern; as a result, proposed race *cordatus* (W India) is unsustainable (Winkler *et al.* 2018).

For Gujarat, Ali (1954) recorded the species in the Dang area, saying that it was not uncommon, but breeding season of the species was not noted. Monga & Naoroji (1984) saw it in the Rajpipla forests, extending its range north of the Tapti River. This species was recorded on transects on four occasions (involving seven individuals) in Purna Wildlife Sanctuary, in the Dangs (mean encounter rate: 0.11 birds/km, SD=0.23), where it was confined to moist deciduous forest with

bamboo (Trivedi & Soni 2006). In the recent Gujarat checklist (Ganpule 2016), it is given as an uncommon to rare resident in forest area from south to central Gujarat. Here, it is important to note that a majority of the previous sightings of the Heart-spotted Woodpecker are from the Dangs forests.



Pragnesh Patel

### Observations

On the morning of 11 March 2017, we were in eastern part of Vansada National Park (henceforth VNP), at around at 08:00 hrs, when the third author [MB2] heard a call; it was not loud and was like a *kee.... kee.....krrrrrick*, and so we followed this call to see which bird was uttering it. We noticed a pair of adult Heart-spotted Woodpeckers high on the branches of a Teak tree (*Tectona grandis*). But the pair was quite far and also, was quite shy. The birds were changing branches every few seconds, and it was not easy to take proper photographs. Finally, we were able to take some record photos and both the birds were immediately identified as Heart-spotted Woodpeckers using the available field guide (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). The second author had seen it in VNP earlier (Bhatt 2010). The species was identified by the contrasting black and white pattern and a distinctively small body with a large wedge-shaped head, making them easy to identify, and the identification was further confirmed by its call. On the second day, at around 09:30 hrs, we visited the same place and saw four Heart-spotted Woodpeckers. But their activities were a bit different from the previous day. Two birds were looking like juveniles, with paler plumage. They were keeping near to

### Sightings of Heart-spotted Woodpecker in central Gujarat

Sr. No.	Place	Date	No. of Birds	Observer (s)	Source
1	Dhobikuva Nursery, Pavagadh	2009	2	R. D. Jadeja	<i>pers. comm.</i>
2	Shoolpaneshwar Wildlife Sanctuary	20 March 2013	1	Mukesh Bhatt	Author's sighting

the female and it was feeding them insects collected from the tree trunk and branches. Thus, we were able to see recently fledged chicks along with the adults. We inferred that a nest would be present somewhere near this area. We also observed that the male Heart-spotted Woodpecker was very shy compared to the female.

We asked birdwatchers regarding the status of this species in Gujarat. We gathered records of the Heart-spotted Woodpecker from various locations in Gujarat from birding websites, social media websites (Facebook) and by personal communication with birdwatchers. While there were many sightings collected from VNP and Purna WLS, we found only two recent records from central Gujarat, which are given here. However, we noted that there are no photographs of this woodpecker from Gujarat on popular birding websites like Oriental Bird Images, Indianaturewatch and Internet Bird Collection. There are many sightings of the Heart-spotted Woodpecker from VNP and Purna WLS on the data sharing website 'eBird' which are not shared here.

#### Breeding Observation

On 26 November 2016, at around at 08:00 hrs, the fourth author [PP] visited VNP along with his friends Anand Patel and Viren Desai. At one place, Anand Patel heard a call and thought that it was the call of a Heart-spotted Woodpecker. So we went in the bush and started searching there. Suddenly, a female Heart-spotted Woodpecker was seen on a tree, but it was quite far. After watching it for quite a long time and waiting to see what it was doing, we observed that it was perching and flying from one branch to another branch for another fifteen minutes. After some time, we noted that it was perching continuously on a tree trunk. We observed that it went inside to its nest on the same trunk. The nest was highly camouflaged. The tree trunk in which the nest was situated was having some cream coloured, fungus-like material along with some insect nest like protrusions, which surrounded the nest. We could not identify what this was. The fourth author [PP] took some photographs from a distance and left the place. After that, the fourth author visited the same place till March 2017, and the nest and the birds were still there at same place, indicating nesting at this location. Thus, this was further evidence of this species nesting in VNP.

#### Discussion

From the above details, it can be seen that the Heart-spotted Woodpecker is fairly common in VNP and Purna WLS. The other locations where it has been noted are Shoolpaneshwar Wildlife Sanctuary and from Pavagadh. The historical records are also from these same areas. From these records, it is evident that it has been noted only in the forest areas of south and central Gujarat, and is absent in Saurashtra and Kachchh. It might be more common in central Gujarat than these sightings suggest but, we have been unable to get more records from this region. It is possible that local bird watchers may be having personal records but have not shared these widely.

The nesting and juveniles observed by us are evidence of the species breeding here, at least in VNP. It could be breeding in other areas also, but more details are needed to confirm this. Dharmakumarsinhji (1955) gives the nesting season of the Heart-spotted Woodpecker to be from January to March. Winkler *et al.* (2018) state that the nesting season is from November to April. We observed fledged juveniles in early March, while a nest was observed in late November, which is similar to the nesting season described in the reference texts. Ali (1954) did not record the breeding of the species here, and there are no other observations/publications regarding its nesting here. Thus, these observations by us are important and confirm that the Heart-spotted Woodpecker breeds here.

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## Nesting of Lesser Goldenback in Vadodara

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### Introduction

The Lesser Goldenback (*Dinopium benghalense*), which is also known as Black-rumped Flameback or Lesser Golden-backed Woodpecker, is a resident species of the Indian Subcontinent (Grimmett *et al.* 1998, Ali 2002). It is a species of open, dry or wet tropical forest, plantation, well-wooded gardens, open woodland and is commonly found around human settlements, avoiding dense forests (Arlott 2014, Gorman 2014). It is a 'Least Concern' species as the population trend is stable (BirdLife International 2018). Though the male and female look similar, the adult male has a red crown and crest, while female has black fore-crown spotted with white, and red hind-crown and crest (Grimmett *et al.* 1998, Ali 2002, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012, Arlott 2014). In India, its nesting season is reported to be from February to August but varies with the weather conditions (Ali 2002, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). The Lesser Goldenback is known to nest inside a tree cavity, which might be a natural hollow or the nest is entirely excavated by the birds. The eggs are laid simply on wood chips at the bottom of the nesting cavity. There are previous records of Lesser Goldenback occupying a nest box (Osmaston 1922) as well as nesting in an earthen wall (Singh 1997). Santharam (1997) has observed the species nesting in a cavity after usurping a nest of a Yellow-crowned Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos mahrattensis*), suggesting the opportunistic and readily adaptive behaviour of the bird.

The Lesser Goldenback is a common resident in Gujarat (Ganpule 2016). We observed its nesting from mid-April to early June at Sayaji Baug (22° 18' 45.45" N, 73° 11' 22.34" E), located in Vadodara city, Gujarat.

### Observations

From 15 April 2018 to 25 April 2018, we observed that three Lesser Goldenback were frequently involved in chasing each other early in the morning, accompanied by squeaky calls in between, which seemed to be their pre-breeding behaviour. They would occasionally peck on the trunks of trees amid the chase, called 'drumming', attracting a mate and claiming territory. After the courtship rituals, the pair selected a nesting cavity in the trunk of *Mitragyna parviflora* tree - 'Kalam' or 'Kalo Kadamb' in Gujarati - (22° 19' 02.39" N, 73° 11' 16.38" E) in a vertical hollow created by a fallen branch growing out of the main trunk. The opening was carved out wide by the pair as per their requirement. The height of the tree was 15.8 mts, canopy cover 34.7%, dbh 1.61 mts and nest-hole height was 8.7 mts. The eggs were probably laid around 4 May 2018, as the female was seen in the cavity for many hours for the first time. On 15 May 2018, we could observe the male and female frequently making visits to the cavity, carrying food material to feed the hatchlings. We used to observe the cavity from 06:00 – 08:00 hrs and 17:00 – 18:00 hrs daily, because this was the time during which the pair was observed to be very actively involved in caring for the young ones. In early morning of 21 May 2018, two juveniles were seen peeping out of the cavity while their parents took turns to guard the cavity one after the other. The female was seen coming down on to the ground and collecting ants to feed the young ones. After feeding, she sat in the cavity. After sometime, the male came with food, gave a call, after which the female came out and then fed the young. Both the parents were observed guarding the cavity. The juveniles were slightly duller than the parents. The nestlings fledged but remained inside the cavity and finally on 4 June 2018, both the juveniles left the nest.