

## Sighting of Large-billed Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus magnirostris* near Mahuva, Bhavnagar: a second record for Gujarat

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On 10 October 2019, at around 14:45 hrs, I was birding near my home and taking photographs of a Rusty-tailed Flycatcher (*Muscicapa ruficauda*). While taking photographs, I noticed that a warbler (*Phylloscopus* sp.) came and perched on the branch. I was able to take five photos before it flew away. Out of these five photographs, two photographs showed well all the features of this warbler. I noted that it was larger sized than a Greenish Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochiloides*), with longer and all dark bill. It had dark green upperparts, greyish

underparts, a large looking eye, broad and dark eye stripe, yellowish-white supercilium with dark crown and greyish ear-coverts. I identified it as a Large-billed Leaf Warbler (*Phylloscopus magnirostris*) based on the above features. I shared the photographs with other senior birders here and the identification was confirmed by them too.

The Large-billed Leaf Warbler breeds in the Himalayas and winter in the Western and Eastern Ghats (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). It is a vagrant in Gujarat and there is only one previous record of the Large-billed Leaf Warbler from the state; an individual was seen in Little Rann of Kachchh (Ganpule 2016). Thus, this is the second record of a Large-billed Leaf Warbler from Gujarat. It is possible that it could be a vagrant during passage migration and needs to be looked out for in our state.

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## Observations of Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* as predator and prey

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The Common Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*), also known as Indian Myna, is a member of the family *Sturnidae*, a native to Asia. This species is very widely distributed across Asia, including Iran, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Myanmar, Malaysia, Singapore, peninsular Thailand, Indo-China and China (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005).

This myna has been introduced in many other parts of the world such as Canada, Australia, Israel, New Zealand, New Caledonia, United States, South Africa, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, islands in the Indian Ocean (Seychelles, Mauritius, Madagascar, Maldives, Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep archipelago) and also on islands of the Atlantic, such as Ascension and St Helena (Ali & Ripley 2001). The distribution range of the Common Myna is increasing to such an extent, that in the year 2000, the IUCN Species Survival Commission declared it among the 'World's 100 worst invasive

species' (Lowe *et al.* 2000). The Common Myna is omnivorous and an opportunistic feeder. The diversity of ingredients found in its dietary spectrum includes various species of insects, arachnids, crustaceans, reptiles, small mammals, seeds, grain, fruits and discarded waste from human habitation (Mathew *et al.* 1978, Ali & Ripley 2001). We were able to observe three instances of Common Myna, whereby it preyed on lizards (reptiles) on two different occasions and localities; the other observation is an account of an attempted predation of a Common Myna by a frog. Detailed observations are given as follows:

**Observation I:** On 1 July 2015, few mynas were observed foraging under the dense hedge cover in the garden of Vishwamitri River Project office, Karelibaug, Vadodara. Suddenly, a myna somehow was able to catch a live lizard, about 6-8 cm long, from the grass cover. The myna continued to repeatedly poke its beak and attack the lizard on the head.



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After striking at the head many times, the beak of the myna almost tore apart the lizard's head, which was dead by then. Later, the bird flew away with the dead lizard in its beak, far from the other birds, onto a distant wall. The myna then sat on the wall and began to swallow the prey. The lizard was identified as a supple skink (*Riopa* sp.) on careful observation with the help of binoculars.

**Observation II:** On 16 June 2018, a myna was observed carrying some unusual prey in its beak, flying from the road side forest, to finally land in the open, at Shivarajpur, Jambughoda, Panchmahal. The myna was observed intensively poking its beak on the prey it was carrying. On careful observation of the prey item, it was identified to be a large adult garden lizard (*Calotes versicolor*).

**Observation III:** We were able to record a myna being caught by an Indian bullfrog (*Hoplobatrachus tigerinus*). On 2 October 2018, during our bird watching trip to a small village pond near Rajapur, Padra, Vadodara, we heard extremely sharp and unusual distress calls from a bird in the vicinity of the pond. Upon walking in the direction of the sound, we could see a medium-sized bird fluttering on the ground and crying out frequently. We identified the bird to be an adult Common Myna, which was trying to fly but was somehow unable to take off. Upon carefully watching the bird with the help of binoculars, we were surprised to see that the bird was actually struggling to escape the jaws of a very large frog. The frog was persistently pulling the myna downwards and making attempts to swallow it whole, but the myna was trying equally hard to save its life. After a few minutes of this tussle, the myna was finally able to break free from grip of the frog's jaws and hurriedly flew away. The entire event continued for about five to eight minutes. We were quickly able to identify the frog species due to its large size (approx. 15 cm) to be an Indian bullfrog. This observation with photographic evidence depicts a record of a predatory attempt, where the Common Myna as a prey struggled to escape predation by a large Indian bullfrog. This frog species is a voracious feeder and attacks almost anything that is moving, pounces upon its prey and immediately swallows it. If need be, it uses its anterior

limbs to thrust larger food into its mouth. In addition to a great variety of insects, it feeds on mice, shrew, young frogs,



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earthworms, roundworms, juvenile snakes, and small birds. Vegetable matter and several odd objects have also been found from the contents of its stomach. Lizards like spiny-tailed lizard (*Uromastyx* sp.), common wolf snakes (*Lycodon aulicus*), Brahminy Worm Snake (*Ramphotyphlops braminus*), Thread Snake (*Leptotyphlops* sp.) and young Rat Snake (*Ptyas mucosus*) have also been recorded to be a part of its diet (Khan 1973, Daniel 2002, Rahman *et al.* 2012).

All three observations are noteworthy, especially the observations of lizards preyed by the Common Myna during the months of June-July; this being the breeding season of the species suggests a possibility that the myna might be preying on lizards due to the need for additional nutrition for its hatchlings or chicks. The attempted predation of the Common Myna by the frog shows that this frog attempts to prey even on birds the size of this myna.

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## Grey-Bellied Cuckoo *Cacomantis passerinus* in Indroda Nature Park, Gandhinagar

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calling from the top of a tree. It was continuously calling. It was photographed on 19 July 2018 at the same location, on top a *desi baval* (*Acacia nilotica*), at around 16:00 hrs by the second author. On 23 July 2018 at 11:00 hrs, the bird was busy in foraging and seen feeding on hairy caterpillars. On the same day, another male was observed near the camp site of INP by the second author. On 1 August 2018, at 15:00 hrs, one hepatic female was seen near the campsite of INP on a Neem tree (*Azadirachta indica*). The aerial distance between the two locations is approximately 2-3 kms. At both the locations, the birds were seen till the middle of August and were frequently seen and heard calling. The female was seen only 2-3 times and mostly preferred to perch in the canopy and was seen flying across from one tree to another to catch insects.

The Grey-bellied Cuckoo is shown to be resident in southern Gujarat (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). However, the species is widely distributed in the state, and thought to be a resident in south Gujarat and a monsoon migrant to Gir National Park area; there are isolated records from other parts of Saurashtra and northern Gujarat (Bagada *et al.* 2015). For central Gujarat, there was a recent sighting in early summer from Vasad, Anand (Nagrecha 2018). There are now many records of the species from Saurashtra from areas like Hingolghadh and Rampara (near Rajkot) posted on the website 'eBird'. Though there are many sightings of the Grey-bellied Cuckoo from various districts in the state now, there is paucity of data regarding its occurrence in Gandhinagar. It is interesting that two males and one female were seen in Gandhinagar over a period of almost one month. It is possible that it is an uncommon monsoon migrant in this district. Further sightings will help in understanding its status and distribution here.

### References

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The Indroda Nature Park (henceforth INP) is situated in Gandhinagar, which is the capital of Gujarat. INP is a well-wooded forest with dense vegetation of trees, shrubs, herbs, climbers, and grasses. The INP is situated on both banks of the Sabarmati River. As a large part of INP is less disturbed, vegetation dependent fauna including insects, reptiles, amphibians, birds and some mammals are regularly seen here. In INP and its surroundings, Asian Koel (*Eudynamis scolopaceus*), Sirkeer Malkoha (*Taccocu leschenaultia*) and Common Hawk Cuckoo (*Hierococcyx varius*) are seen regularly while the monsoon migratory Jacobin Cuckoo (*Clamator jacobinus*) and Eurasian Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*) have also been noted. In July 2018, Grey-bellied Cuckoo (*Cacomantis passerinus*) was recorded from INP, which is uncommon/rare for Gandhinagar.

On 18 July 2018, at 15:15 hrs, in the Botanical Garden of INP, a familiar call of a cuckoo was heard by the first author, and an adult male Grey-bellied Cuckoo was seen perched and