

Photographic record of the Indian Cuckoo *Cuculus micropterus* from Dahod and a review of its past records from Gujarat

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During my trip to Dahod and surrounding areas in first week of September 2010, I had photographed a cuckoo (*Cuculus* sp.) on 6 September 2010 in the outskirts of Dahod city (22° 50' N, 74° 15' E). Recently, while reviewing my old images, I realized that the cuckoo in this image was a little different from the fairly common Eurasian Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*) which is usually seen here. Though similar in size, it had a prominent, broad terminal tail band and broad black horizontal bars on breast. Moreover, its grey head was looking distinct from its body colour. I could identify it as an Indian Cuckoo (*Cuculus micropterus*). To confirm my identification, this image was sent to Krys Kazmierczak. Agreeing with my identification of this bird as an Indian Cuckoo, Krys wrote that 'in addition to the tail pattern, the broad dark bars on the underparts as well as the grey of the head contrasting with the brown upperparts are indicative. It appears to be an adult male.'

I looked at the published records of the species from Gujarat and found that its presence in Gujarat is poorly documented. Ali (1954) had not come across the species in Gujarat. However, Shull (1962a & 1962b) had collected specimens from Dang forest in south Gujarat (specimen skin 778636 in American Museum of Natural History). Monga & Naoroji (1983) also recorded it from Rajpipla forest, adjacent to

Narmada River. There exists a vernacular name for the species – ભારતીય કુકુક (‘Bharatiya Kuhukanth’). Parasharya *et al.* (2004) listed it as a migratory species in the Gujarat checklist.

Till 2004, it was known to occur in south Gujarat, up to the Narmada River (Joshi & Jat 2004). After that, there were two dubious records from central Gujarat. Jain *et al.* (2005) listed it from the Gujarat University campus, Ahmedabad, and Iyer (2005) from Thol Bird Sanctuary. The record by Jain *et al.* (2005) is quite doubtful as they had failed to record the much common, resident and widespread Common Hawk Cuckoo (*Hierococcyx varius*) but listed a rare and range restricted species as common and resident, which itself suggests that the record of Indian Cuckoo was a case of mistaken identity. Besides listing Indian Cuckoo, Iyer (2005) had also listed Common Cuckoo and Common Hawk Cuckoo from the Thol Bird Sanctuary, indicating his awareness about the differences of the characters amongst the species. Unless there is photographic evidence, it is quite difficult to distinguish Indian Cuckoo from Common Cuckoo and Common Hawk Cuckoo. However, if call is heard, then the identification is easier. Neither Jain *et al.* (2005) nor Iyer (2005) have given photographic evidence to support their identification. Iyer (2005) does not give further details of the sighting and it is not known how the identification was made. Probably, only for these two unconfirmed records, Ganpule (2016) had to show its distribution in central Gujarat too.

In the recent past also, there are records of the species from south Gujarat – south of Narmada River (Joshi & Jat 2004, Mashru 2004, Mishra 2016) but except Mishra (2016), none have supported their records with photographic evidence. Hence, the present photograph of a male Indian Cuckoo from Dahod is an important record for the state.

Ali & Ripley (2001) opined that the Indian Cuckoo did not occur in the arid regions of Pakistan, Rajasthan, Kachchh, Saurashtra and N Gujarat. However, in the distribution map given in the same book, its range is shown in south Gujarat, Saurashtra and central Gujarat. In fact, till 2001 (the publication date of the revised edition of the handbook), the Indian Cuckoo was not reported from central Gujarat or Saurashtra region! Hence, the distribution map seems incorrect.

The Indian Cuckoo occurs through the Himalayas to Assam, NE Peninsula and Central India. Within Central India, its distribution is shown along Narmada River in Madhya Pradesh

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and Gujarat (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). As the species is known to wander up to Pakistan (Roberts 1989, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), the present record of the species ca. 200 kms north of the Narmada River is not surprising. If it can turn up in Pakistan, it may turn up any where in Gujarat, but, we need to have proper documentary proof of its occurrence in the arid regions of the state.

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Nesting of Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* in a small water body near Gandhinagar

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The present observations started with the random photo of a Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*) I took almost five years ago, when I saw a pair in a small water body. This location was near Uvarsad, Gandhinagar, when I was returning from my village on the way from Ahmedabad to Gandhinagar. This lake is very small in size (about 50×150 mts) and is located near Uvarsad Village Road, which is very crowded and there is a constant traffic of small and heavy vehicles. I used to visit my village every month and as I am passionate about nature and birds, I observed the habitat here. This small lake has been

overlooked and is not known to many birders. Breeding and nesting of Purple Heron was observed in the rainy season at this particular site. A single nest was observed at this location for the past five years in a large heronry.

Many *Acacia* trees and few tiny 'bets' (small islands in the lake) are present in this lake. Along with the nest of the Purple Heron, nesting of many other heronry birds was observed on trees in this lake. The nesting of Black-headed Ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*), Red-naped Ibis (*Pseudibid papillosa*), Indian Pond Heron (*Ardeola grayii*), Black-crowned Night Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*), Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*), and Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) was observed at this site. In the midst of this heronry, a single nest of Purple heron was seen on an *Acacia* tree. This nest was the only nest of this species observed in the almost 350-400 other nests in the same lake. Both birds were involved in building the nest and the male actively participated in collection of nesting material whereas the female built and shaped the nest. I visited this site regularly and I observed the incubation period and egg hatching. An incubation period of around 25-30 days was observed. On 15 August 2017, I observed three juveniles in the nest and nesting was successful that year with the juveniles fledging. On 14 July