

Short Birding Notes



Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* at Ranagadh, Nal Sarovar

On 2 November 2019 we were birding around Ranagadh area of Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary. At about 08:30 hrs, while scanning the area with binoculars, we saw a few stints, plovers and other waders from a distance. As we approached closer we realised that there was a small plover (*Charadrius* sp.) which appeared a little different from the regularly seen Little Ringed Plover (*Charadrius dubius*). On closer observation we could identify it as a Common Ringed Plover (*Charadrius hiaticula*) from its prominent breast-band, white hind collar, orange legs and the missing yellow eye-ring. The second author visited the place several times after the initial sighting and recorded a small flock in the same patch, up to March 2020. This sighting is unusual for two aspects: The Common Ringed Plover is an uncommon to rare winter visitor in Gujarat with only scattered sightings from Porbandar, Bhavnagar, Kachchh, and a few sightings from Nal Sarovar and South Gujarat (Ganpule 2016) and so a small flock seen here is noteworthy. Further, these sightings, for more than four months in the same area, suggest that these birds remain at the same site in the winter if the habitat is suitable. This is an important inland sighting of this species from Gujarat.

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Unusual interaction between a Short-toed Snake Eagle *Circaetus gallicus* and Black Drongo *Dicrurus macrocercus*

On 4 November 2018, we observed a Short-toed Snake Eagle (*Circaetus gallicus*) perched on the topmost branch of a tree in Velavadar National Park. It was surrounded by few Black Drongos (*Dicrurus macrocercus*). At first, we thought that the drongos were mobbing the eagle, as they were visibly pecking on its head. But, we noticed that the behaviour here appeared to be something different. The drongos were not aggressive and the eagle sat quietly and was unusually calm, unlike in a situation where it was being mobbed. It seemed like the Black Drongos were picking something turn by turn from the Short-toed Snake Eagle's head and we assumed that the drongos were removing parasites. The situation was more like a symbiosis between predator and prey! The Black Drongo is known to mob birds of prey and we frequently see it mobbing raptors in Little Rann of Kachchh. Since we had seen mobbing behaviour earlier, we could recognize that this was something unusual. However, such a symbiotic relationship between a Short-toed Snake Eagle and Black Drongo has not been documented earlier. It could be that this was an opportunistic alliance between the eagle and the drongo where the drongos got food and the eagle was rid of parasites. [We request birders to report more such unusual interactions or instances of symbiotic relationships in birds – Eds]

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Chestnut-tailed Starling *Sturnia malabarica* in Kachchh

On 28 November 2019, in the afternoon, I saw and photographed a Chestnut-tailed Starling (*Sturnia malabarica*) near Dhunai, on Bhuj-Mandvi Road, Kachchh. The bird was perched on a *Prosopis juliflora* and the identification was confirmed by senior birder Shantibhai Varu. This species is vagrant to Kachchh and there are only a few earlier records – at Vijay Vilas Palace in 1969 (Himmatsinhji 1970), at Naliya in 2000 by Kavi Tej and R. D. Jadeja and at Loriya in 2002 by Shantibhai Varu (Shantibhai Varu, *pers comm.*). This is another sighting of this species from Kachchh. This sighting, in the early winter, may be indicative of this species being scarce winter visitor to Kachchh. More sightings will help in knowing about its status in Kachchh.

I thank Shantibhai Varu for confirming the identification and giving details of the past records of Chestnut-tailed Starling in Kachchh.

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