

## Short Birding Notes



### **Black-bellied Terns *Sterna acuticauda* near Gandhinagar**

On 26 October 2019, we (Rahul Rathore, Mihir Mishra, Rakesh Singh and I) were wandering near Sabarmati River, around Karai Village, Gandhinagar District. Flocks of egrets (*Egretta* sp.), Little Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax niger*), and a few waders were seen along the edge of the water. We saw some River Terns (*Sterna aurantia*) diving to catch fish. We realized that there were at least three species of terns there; River Terns with a deep forked tail, black cap and yellow-orange beaks, Whiskered Terns (*Chlidonias hybrida*), which had a black belly and were much smaller in size with shorter tail and the third species is what caught our eye as it had a black belly with a very deeply forked tail, orange beak and it was smaller in size compared to the River Terns. We referred to field guides and immediately confirmed these terns as Black-bellied Terns (*Sterna acuticauda*). There were 6 individuals there and we took several photographs. The Black-bellied Tern is now rare in our state and there is only one recent record of the species from Bharuch (Andharia 2018). Thus, this is an important sighting of Black-bellied Terns from Gandhinagar District.

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### **Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia* on Adalaj-Koba Road, near Gandhinagar**

On 9 October 2019, early in the morning while I was exploring the area around Ambapur Village, on Koba-Adalaj main road, I saw a small water body near a *gaushala*. I thought it would be a good place for birding and soon saw a few species of warblers like Booted Warbler (*Iduna caligata*), Sykes's Warbler (*Iduna rama*) and Blyth's Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus dumetorum*). After a while, I saw a small bird flying towards a pool of water. As it landed just in front of me, I noted that it was heavily streaked on the back, had a short tail, which seemed to be growing, and was olive-brown in colour. I could not identify it in the field and so took a few pictures and later posted these on 'Ask ID' Facebook page. Many experts confirmed this individual as a Grasshopper Warbler (*Locustella naevia*). There have been many recent records of Grasshopper Warbler in Gujarat but this seems to be a first record for Gandhinagar.

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### **Lesser Cuckoo *Cuculus poliocephalus* near Bhavnagar**

On 6 October 2019, in the evening at around 16:00 hrs, we went for the birding at Malnath Hills, near Bhavnagar. We saw many common birds there and at around 17:15 hrs, we noticed two cuckoos (*Cuculus* sp.) perched on a nearby tree. We observed these birds for a few minutes and took record photographs, and noted that the birds were chasing each other and flew away. After coming home, we studied the photographs and concluded that the photographed bird was a hepatic morph Lesser Cuckoo (*Cuculus poliocephalus*), based on the bright rufous head and nape (which was unmarked), broader dark barring on the underparts and vent, rufous barred upperparts and small size. The Lesser Cuckoo is thought to be a rare passage migrant in Gujarat, with a recent sighting from Mahuva, near Bhavnagar (Bhil 2018). This is another sighting of the species from Bhavnagar and suggests that it could be a rare but regular passage migrant through this region.

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