

## Black Bittern....

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## Wintering of Sykes's Nightjar *Caprimulgus mahrattensis* in Vadodara

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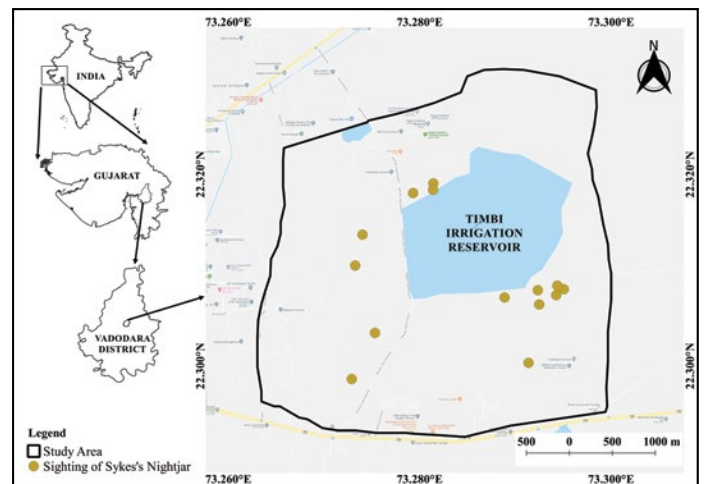


The Sykes's Nightjar (*Caprimulgus mahrattensis*) is a summer visitor to SW Afghanistan (Seistan), mostly resident in Pakistan and Mekran Coast and winter visitor from central to south and east India. It has been reported to breed from SE Iran, S Afghanistan, Pakistan and Kachchh in western India. It probably also breeds in Saurashtra, Rajasthan and parts of north Gujarat (Ali & Ripley 1983, Holyoak 2001, Cleere 2010, Grimmett *et al.* 2011, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). This species is an uncommon winter visitor and has been recorded from different parts of Gujarat; Velavadar National Park, Little Rann of Kachchh, Great Rann of Kachchh. There are isolated records from other parts of the state (Ganpule 2016).

Owing to its extremely large range and stable population trend, this species has been listed as 'Least Concern' (Birdlife International 2016). It can be found in varied habitats such as arid and semi-deserts with scattered thorn scrub, in dry and stony scrubland, on clay or gravel plains, saltpans and stony wastelands and sandy areas with tamarisk bushes, mostly camouflaged in the midst of the sandy ground (Kazmierczak 2000, Holyoak 2001, Cleere 2010, Grimmett *et al.* 2011, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). This small and short-tailed, sandy-grey nightjar has lightly spotted blackish-brown crown, scapulars with blackish spots and cinnamon markings, large white patches on either side of lower throat, occasionally extending across whole of throat, and irregular buff spotting on nape forming indistinct collar (Holyoak 2001, Cleere 2010, Grimmett *et al.* 2011, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Here we report the wintering of this species at Timbi Irrigation Reservoir, Vadodara, Gujarat.

### Observations

On 3 December 2018, while surveying for mammals around Timbi Irrigation Reservoir (22° 18' 29" N, 73° 17' 42" E), at 20:12 hrs, we came across a bird, which was resting besides grass tussocks. This small bird was totally camouflaged, with upperparts having sandy colouration with light brown spots all over the body. We took some photographs, from which we identified it as a nightjar. Later, the bird was identified as a Sykes's Nightjar with the help of standard field guides such as Grimmett *et al.* (2011) and Rasmussen & Anderton (2012). The literature as well as 'eBird' data indicated this species to be new to the area and hence, an extensive search was initiated immediately. On 4 December 2018, at 19:07 hrs, we found it again, resting on a mud road in the same area. When we tried to move closer to the bird, it stood and started bobbing its head and moved away. Subsequent to this, it moved a short distance to the side of the mud road and settled down. A small video of the same was also recorded (Naria 2019).



Later, on 10 December 2018, again while surveying nightjars around Timbi, at 21:22 hrs, we saw another nightjar but at a different location. While we were observing it for some time, it suddenly flew and landed on the path somewhere ahead of its earlier location with a small moth in its beak. Within no time, it gulped the protein rich meal.

For a better understanding of the population and distribution of the Sykes's Nightjar in the area, we explored the surroundings of Timbi at night from December 2018 to February 2019. A total of 19 sightings of Sykes's Nightjar were noted in 10 visits to the area and the distribution of the species is shown in the map.

### Discussion

Though an uncommon winter visitor to Gujarat (Parasharya *et al.* 2004, Ganpule 2016), this species was found to be breeding in the Greater Rann of Kachchh (Tiwari & Dadu 2010). During our surveys, a total of 25 sightings of nightjars were noted on 19 occasions. Once, we came across five individuals in one night at different locations, which indicate that the species is seen in good numbers in this area. Though some of the sightings may be of the same individual seen at different times and dates, there is no doubt that more than five birds were present in this area. The only historical record, which we found for Vadodara district, is of a specimen, a female (GS290), collected by Salim Ali on 18 November 1945 from Dabka, on the dry grassland at the edge of a jheel (Ali 1956). Ali (1956) also states that 'elsewhere not noted' in Gujarat, but observed that Hume obtained a specimen in north Gujarat between Deesa and Suigam, and who stated that it occurs in Kachchh and Saurashtra as well. Padate *et al.* (2001) did not come across the species during their survey in the Vadodara district. The sightings here, over a period of more than two months, suggest that the species is a winter visitor here. The wintering of Sykes's Nightjar in small groups around

Timbi Irrigation Reservoir of Vadodara district appears to be a hitherto unrecorded fact and adds to our knowledge regarding the distribution of the species in Gujarat.

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## Sighting of Moustached Warbler *Acrocephalus melanopogon*, Marbled Duck *Marmaronetta angustirostris* and Asian Desert Warbler *Sylvia nana* at Nal Sarovar

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We present here sightings of Moustached Warbler (*Acrocephalus melanopogon*), Marbled Duck (*Marmaronetta angustirostris*) and Asian Desert Warbler (*Sylvia nana*) from the Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary from the winter season of 2018-2019. These sightings were made during the course of routine bird watching in the area.

### Moustached Warbler

On 24 November 2018, we visited Vadla Wetland. At first, we saw a Water Rail (*Rallus aquaticus*) but it disappeared quickly into the reeds in the area. So, we were just waiting quietly for it to come out again. Meanwhile, we observed some other common birds like Bluethroat (*Luscinia calliope*) and some warblers (*Acrocephalus* sp.). There were five warblers foraging



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at the same place. We photographed all of them and believed that these were Paddyfield Warblers (*Acrocephalus agricola*). Later, at home while inspecting the photographs on the