

Spanish Sparrow *Passer hispaniolensis* at Nalsarovar – a first photographic record for Gujarat

Kamruddin Alvani: At - Nalsarovar.



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On 3 January 2022, at around 09:00 hrs, I was birding in the Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary. I saw a few Greylag Goose (*Anser anser*) feeding. In another area, a large number of Common Cranes (*Grus grus*) were present. I scanned the whole area and moved ahead. In a few small trees by the roadside, Black-headed Buntings (*Emberiza melanocephala*) and Red-headed Buntings (*E. bruniceps*) were seen in good numbers. When I was observing these buntings, a large flock of House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) flew in and perched on a dry *Prosopis juliflora* tree. These were the migratory *parkini* subspecies which are seen in the winter in Gujarat in large numbers. In this flock of sparrows, I saw that one bird looked different; it had chestnut crown, bill with yellowish base, black breast, prominent black streaking on the flanks, faint white line behind eye and black chin. I could not identify this sparrow and so I took a few photographs. I shared the photographs with Sunil Kini and Saswat Mishra, who identified this sparrow as a male Spanish Sparrow (*Passer hispaniolensis*) in non-breeding plumage based on the streaked flanks and head pattern.

The Spanish Sparrow is a winter migrant to India, wintering mainly in the northwest part of the country (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) stated that this species is a winter migrant to NW India in the states of Haryana,

Rajasthan and Gujarat. For Gujarat, there is only one previous record of a Spanish Sparrow; an individual was seen in Kachchh and the sighting was reported on eBird (Ganpule 2016). It was accepted to the Gujarat checklist based on this sight record by an experienced observer. However, a photo was not taken at that time.

This sighting from Nalsarovar is thus the first photographic record of the Spanish Sparrow from Gujarat and confirms that the addition of the Spanish Sparrow to the Gujarat checklist was correct. It is likely that this species could be a regular winter migrant to our state but is overlooked in the large flocks of House Sparrows seen here. It is known that the Spanish Sparrow is highly sociable and often associates with other sparrow and weaver species, and is also seen with Rosy Starlings (*Pastor roseus*) (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Flocks of House Sparrows should be carefully scrutinized to check for the occurrence of Spanish Sparrow as this individual, seen in Nalsarovar, was present with House Sparrows and would have been easily missed if I had not carefully checked all the birds.

Acknowledgements

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References

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