

Acknowledgements

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Beak deformity in Sand Lark *Alaudala raytal* near Navlakhi, Morbi District

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There are numerous salt-pans near Navlakhi, in Morbi District. The Sand Lark (*Alaudala raytal*) is quite common in these salt-pans, especially around small temples where local villagers put grains and keep pots filled with water for the birds. At such places, more than 20 Sand Larks are usually present in the morning and late evening, feeding on the grains and drinking water. I visit this area frequently to watch waders and other birds. I report here two instances of beak deformity in Sand Larks observed in this area.

mandible could have led to difficulties for this bird during feeding and while drinking. But, surprisingly, on a visit to the



On 19 February 2019, while photographing Sand Larks, I saw an individual with a deformed beak (photo 1); both the mandibles were overgrown, making the bill rather long, with a curved upper mandible and a gap was visible between the mandibles. This bird had normal movements and was seen feeding on the grains. A different individual, again with a beak deformity, seen on 15 August 2021, had a very long lower mandible, while the upper mandible was short but not like in normal birds (photo 2). This individual also had a deformed/diseased left foot. It was possible that the long lower

same area on 17 April 2022, I happened to see this Sand Lark again (photo 3). Since the bill was so distinctive, I recognized this individual immediately. Though it was difficult for this bird to pick up grains, it was actively feeding by lowering its head, picking up a grain in its beak and swallowing it. It was noted that this individual was in worn plumage; when seen earlier in August 2021, it was in fresh plumage and the difference between the fresh and worn plumage can be seen in the photos presented here. The

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photos also show that the lower mandible had grown even longer than what was seen earlier and the left foot was further deformed. The time period between the first and the second sighting was eight months. It was quite astounding that this individual, with such extreme beak deformity and foot disease was surviving and undergoing moult.

The bill deformity, known as Avian Keratin Disorder (AKD), seems to be present in Sand Larks of both subspecies – *A. r. raytal* and *A. r. adamsi*; instances of bill deformities in Sand Larks from Uttar Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh and Bangladesh

have been documented earlier (Ganpule & Alström 2022). The reasons for bill deformities in Sand Lark are not known and could be the result of a virus or environmental contaminants / chromosomal damage. The exact reasons for bill deformities in Sand Larks need further study.

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Asian Brown Flycatcher *Muscicapa dauurica* breeding in Jambugoda WLS

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Photo: Dhyey Shah

On 27 June 2020, while exploring Jambugoda Wildlife Sanctuary (22° 21' N, 73° 40' E) in search of Indian Pitta (*Pitta brachyura*), we saw a *Muscicapa* flycatcher entering a nest made in a *Butea* sp. tree. The nest was quite high up in the canopy (c. 5 m from the ground). The nest could be described as compact and cup-shaped. A bird was already sitting on the nest when we spotted the nest, and was presumably incubating. On taking pictures, we immediately identified the bird as an Asian Brown Flycatcher (*Muscicapa dauurica*) based on the bill shape, plumage and the date. The nest too somewhat fits with what is mentioned in Clement & Bonan (2020). Later, another bird visited the nest and fed the incubating bird and went away. Before arriving, the bird uttered a loud series of what we can transcribe as whistles, slurry notes and short trills. All of this confirmed that the birds were indeed breeding and had probably already laid the eggs. Ganpule (2016) mentioned that there are isolated breeding records of Asian Brown Flycatcher along with a report from Gir National Park. It is mentioned that it also may breed in other parts of Gujarat, but detailed study was required.

There are several recent records of Asian Brown Flycatchers from Gujarat during the monsoon / summer months (Bagda 2022, Modi 2022, Shah 2022). On searching 'eBird', we found pictures of an individual carrying nesting material and building a nest in Gir (Bagda & Vachhani 2019). It has been recorded from Rampara Sanctuary in July (Mashru 2016) and there exists a previous breeding record from Gir National Park (Mundkur 1990). This confirms that the Asian Brown Flycatcher does indeed breed within the forests of Gujarat. We request birders visiting forests in Gujarat during the summer to look out for such nests which may help us in understanding the bird's breeding range in the state.

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