

## Sighting of Indian Grey Hornbill *Ocyrceros birostris* in Jasdan, Rajkot District

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This individual was seen in the palace grounds for three consecutive days. On 13 March 2022, in the evening near the home of the second author in Hanuman *bagh*, he heard a call of a bird which was new for him. On investigating, an Indian Grey Hornbill was seen there. It went into a large tree. The call was recorded with a mobile phone. On 18 March, on *Dhuleti* evening, Jayantbhai and Arvindbhai from the Jasdan Nature Club heard the call of the hornbill at *Bhimkui* but they could not see the bird.

Decades ago, the Indian Grey Hornbill used to be resident in the Gir National Park area but with the passage of time and hunting pressure, this species became locally extinct in Gir. This species is presently seen in the jungles from north Gujarat to southern Gujarat. There have been recent sightings from Saurashtra, mainly from Gir area and Wadhwan, near Surendranagar. There could be two reasons for this sighting of the Indian Grey Hornbill in Jasdan; the first reason is that the range of this species is increasing since the past few years and it is now seen in Dholka, Sanand and Gandhinagar regions and so this sighting could be a part of this range expansion while the second reason is that the Forest Department of Gujarat recently caught a few hornbills from Balaram-Ambaji Sanctuary in North Gujarat and released these birds in Gir. This was done to re-establish the Indian Grey Hornbill in Gir National Park area. It is possible that this individual could have migrated locally from Gir and was seen in Jasdan.

The habitat of the Indian Grey Hornbill is forests or well wooded areas. It nests in tree hollows, feeds mainly on fruits of trees and helps in seed dispersal. Due to superstitions, the bill, bones of its legs and its flesh was used and hence, the hornbill was widely hunted. Further, due to rapid urbanization, large trees were cut down, reducing the natural habitat for this species. Now, due to the expanding range of this species and awareness regarding importance of forests, there is a good chance for the survival of the hornbill in Saurashtra. We should all strive to protect large trees, help in preserving forests and plant fruiting trees so that the Indian Grey Hornbill becomes a regular sight in Saurashtra. □

An Indian Grey Hornbill (*Ocyrceros birostris*) was seen in Jasdan, near Rajkot, for the first time recently. This species is a rarity in Saurashtra and was first seen by the first author on 8 March 2022. It was seen in the Jasdan Palace grounds, where there are large flowering/fruited trees. The hornbill was initially seen perched on a small *champa* tree. The first author had seen the Indian Grey Hornbill in the Gir National Park area more than 35 years ago and seeing it in Jasdan was a great surprise. The first author informed the second author regarding the sighting, and urged him to observe it well and if possible, to take photographs. The second author reached the area and after a long search, found the hornbill near the old *gaushala*, perched on a *peepal* tree. It was an unforgettable moment for the second author to see the hornbill in Jasdan. Watching with binoculars, it was seen that the bird had a ripe *peepal* fruit in its beak, and it went towards a building with glass, probably seeing its reflection and thinking there was another hornbill! After a few moments, it went inside a large neem tree, where the second author was able to see it well and take photographs. As the second author approached closer, it went inside the tree. It was not frightened or tired, and its plumage looked good. It preened its feathers and after some time, went towards another large *peepal* tree.