

Fourth update to the Gujarat checklist: December 2022

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This paper is the fourth update to the Gujarat checklist; the checklist was published in 2016 (Ganpule 2016), the first update in December 2017 (Ganpule 2017), the second update in March 2020 (Ganpule 2020) and the third update in December 2021 (Ganpule 2021), which took the number of species documented within the boundaries of the state of Gujarat, along with the adjoining Union Territories of Diu & Daman, and Dadra & Nagar Haveli, to **612**. This paper reviews important records, lists recent additions to the state checklist and discusses other significant sightings from the state, from 1 January 2022 (when the third update was published) till 31 December 2022.

The records of the following species have been reviewed:

Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*): A Mute Swan was seen at Dhinchada Lake, Jamnagar, on 9 January 2022. The sighting was well documented with photographs and there was no doubt regarding the identification. Only a single individual was seen. This bird remained at the same place till the second week of April and it was seen by a multitude of bird watchers. There are many photographs of this bird posted on 'eBird' from this location and during this period.

The origin of this individual was a matter of great debate as the Mute Swan is a rare vagrant to India. Though this individual was seen flying around the lake frequently, there were a few factors which led many bird watchers believe that this individual was probably an escapee from an aviary or of captive origin. These are as follows:

- 1) The bird allowed close approach
- 2) It was seen in the same place/lake for more than 3 months
- 3) It remained here till the lake had almost dried up (the water was very shallow and only a small area was covered with water) in the second week of April
- 4) The temperatures in April were above 40° C but the bird remained at the lake in these conditions for many days.

This swan disappeared after the second week of April. It was believed that it may have shifted to a nearby water body or it could have been hunted by the locals there since it was very approachable. The sighting of the Mute Swan in the same location for more than 3 months can be considered as unusual as this species is a rare winter vagrant to India. The Mute Swan was added to the 'India Checklist' based solely on two birds collected across the Line of Control in Gilgit, Kashmir (Praveen & Kichloo 2020). A record of a single individual near Pune,

Maharashtra (Trevenen 1923) could not be concluded as a wild vagrant (Praveen & Kichloo 2020). Thus, there is only one accepted record of this species for India. However, there are a few records of the Mute Swan from Sindh, Pakistan (Baker 1915) well before independence but it was not noted in Gujarat even then. While it is possible that extreme cold weather can drive down a few individuals to the Indian Subcontinent (as genuine wild vagrants), this sighting from Jamnagar is unlikely to be of a wild vagrant based on the details given above. Further, it is known that a large private aviary near Jamnagar has swans in its collection and the Mute Swan is one of the species kept there. Thus, this sighting of a Mute Swan from Jamnagar is likely to be of a bird of captive origin or an escapee from a private collection.

This sighting was widely discussed among senior bird watchers here and looking into the details recorded for this individual and considering the rarity of this species for India along with the presence of the Mute Swan in a private aviary near Jamnagar, it was decided that this sighting should not be included into the Gujarat checklist. Hence, the Mute Swan is not accepted to the state checklist.

Egyptian Goose (*Aloochen aegyptiaca*): An Egyptian Goose was seen and photographed near Nada bet, in Greater Rann of Kachchh, and was reported in newspapers on 9 January 2023 – see <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/ahmedabad/rare-sighting-egyptian-goose-spotted-in-nadabet/articleshow/96842519.cms>.

The Egyptian Goose is native to Africa, south of the Sahara. This is a species which is very common in private collections and in aviaries. It is considered as an invasive species (after introduction) in a few countries like the USA and UK. Even in India, it can be found in zoos and in the pet trade. The location of the sighting makes it interesting as there are no large cities or known aviaries nearby. However, it should be noted that this goose is a strong flier and can easily turn up in odd locations. While a feral population is not yet known to be present here, this individual was most likely an escapee from a private collection. Hence, the Egyptian Goose is not added to the Gujarat checklist and this record is considered to be that of a likely escapee.

The following species have been added to the state checklist after the publication of the third update:

613. Lesser Noddy (*Anous tenuirostris*): A Lesser Noddy was seen and photographed near Mahuva, Bhavnagar, in July 2022 (*see elsewhere in this issue*). The photos show all the diagnostic

features of the species and there is no doubt regarding the identification. The Lesser Noddy is an addition to the avifauna of Gujarat.

614. Pectoral Sandpiper (*Calidris melanotos*): A Pectoral Sandpiper was photographed at Pariej, Kheda district, in December 2020 (*see elsewhere in this issue*). More photos are uploaded on 'eBird' – see details at: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S118849256>. This individual was photographed from different angles and all the features are seen well and the identification is correct. The Pectoral Sandpiper is an addition to the avifauna of Gujarat. Though this sighting was made in December 2020, the identification was confirmed only recently and hence, this species is added to the state checklist this year, after the publication of the record.

615. Green-crowned Warbler (*Phylloscopus burkii*): A Green-crowned Warbler was photographed near Bhuji, Kachchh in December 2022 (*see elsewhere in this issue*). This was a surprise sighting for Gujarat as this warbler is mainly seen in the Himalayas. There are a few records of this species from Central India (Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh) but it is a rare vagrant to the western part of the country. This well documented sighting of a Green-crowned Warbler is a first for Gujarat.

Details of some vagrant and interesting species which were seen or photographed in Gujarat from 1 January 2022 till 31 December 2022:

Spanish Sparrow (*Passer hispaniolensis*): A male Spanish Sparrow (*Passer hispaniolensis*) was photographed at Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary in January 2022 (Alvani 2022). This was the first photograph of this species for Gujarat. The Spanish Sparrow was added to the Gujarat checklist based on a sight record from Kachchh (Ganpule 2016). This sighting further confirms the occurrence of the Spanish Sparrow for Gujarat.

Long-eared Owl (*Asio otus*): The Long-eared Owl is a vagrant to Gujarat, with records only from Kachchh. A Long-eared Owl was photographed at Velavadar National Park, near Bhavnagar in February 2022 (Vegad *et al.* 2022). This was the first sighting of a Long-eared Owl for Saurashtra.

Northern Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*): A male Northern Wheatear was photographed at Modhva Beach, Mandvi, Kachchh, in April 2022 (Varu *et al.* 2022). This sighting further confirms that the addition of the Northern Wheatear to the Gujarat checklist was correct.

Common Swift (*Apus apus*): The Common Swift was added to the Gujarat checklist based on a record from Saurashtra

(Lavkumar 1958). Recently, a Common Swift was seen and photographed from Mahuva, near Bhavnagar in September 2022 (Batuk Bhil, *pers. comm.*). A number of photos were taken but these are not very clear. The identification can be done based on the features seen in these photos and it is very likely to be a Common Swift. Another Common Swift was seen by me in the western part of the Little Rann of Kachchh on 15 August 2022 in the late evening. Unfortunately, photos could not be taken due to the failing light but the bird was seen well with binoculars. Having seen Common Swifts in the Himalayas, I was certain of the identification. While the Common Swift is given as a vagrant with no recent sightings by Ganpule (2016), it is likely that this species is an autumn passage migrant / vagrant in Gujarat and is likely to be overlooked due to identification difficulties.

Fork-tailed Swift (*Apus pacificus*): A Fork-tailed Swift was photographed near Mahuva, Bhavnagar, by Batuk Bhil in September 2022 (Batuk Bhil, *pers. comm.*). Only one photograph was taken. This photo shows the long tapered tail and the white rump patch seen in this species but other details are not very clear. Though this record is most likely to be correct, the quality of the photograph makes conclusive identification difficult. However, like the Common Swift, the Fork-tailed Swift is also likely to be an autumn passage migrant / vagrant to Gujarat. Bird watchers should look out for both these species in August and September in Gujarat.

Indian Swiftlet (*Aerodramus unicolor*): The Indian Swiftlet was added to the Gujarat checklist based on a photo record near Surat (Maheria *et al.* 2020). There was only one photograph available and this was identified by experts as an Indian Swiftlet. Since the publication of this record, the identification of this bird has been questioned – it has been suggested that this could be a Little Swift (*Apus affinis*) or even an Asian Palm Swift (*Cypsiurus balasienis*).

But, after this photo record, the Indian Swiftlet has been sight recorded in the Dang Forests by me along with a group of bird watchers in April 2022. The sighting was made by us and the bird was seen well. The identification was confirmed by the lack of white rump (eliminating Little Swift) and the tail was much shorter than what is seen in Asian Palm Swift. I took some photographs but these were somewhat blurred as it was difficult to get good photos of this bird in flight. However, since we were aware of the significance of this record, we took detailed notes and confirmed the identification.

Even considering the photo record by Maheria *et al.* (2020) as disputed, the occurrence of the Indian Swiftlet in the Dangs is not surprising. There is another record on 'eBird' from the

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Dang Forests in early March 2022, but a photograph is not available. This record could also be correct. As explained in Maheria *et al.* (2022), the Indian Swiftlet has been photographed very near the Gujarat border in Tansa WLS and its occurrence in the Dang Forest is thus expected. Further photographic records will help in substantiating the presence of this species in Gujarat. Bird watchers are urged to look out for and photograph this species in South Gujarat forests.

Discussion

This update brings the species list for Gujarat to **615** and in line with the recently published field guide to the birds of Gujarat (Ganpule *et al.* 2022), wherein 615 species are listed for the state till 31 December 2022. All the species listed in the field guide are as per the Gujarat checklist and the subsequent updates (including this update). The field guide also lists an additional 46 species as unconfirmed, escapee, possible or hypothetical; details are provided for all these species. Readers can refer to this update and the earlier updates to understand the reasons/discussions regarding inclusion or exclusion of certain species for the state. More details of the field guide, including how to order it, are available at: <https://bcsg.co.in/field-guide/>

Three species have been added to the Gujarat checklist in the past one year. More and more people are now indulging in bird watching as a hobby and this has resulted in a large number of sightings being shared on the social media and on other forums. With so much information now available, birders are finding it easier to 'tick' rare species since news of sightings spreads quickly. Since photographs are shared on the social media, the identifications are duly scrutinized by a larger group of experts and this has helped in correct identifications for rare species. With a good field guide now available for the state, it is hoped that birders will be inspired to visit the 'less visited' areas of the state and increase our knowledge of the birds in Gujarat.

The next update will again aim to carry new and interesting records from Gujarat.

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