

Short Birding Notes



Rescue of a Great Bittern *Botaurus stellaris* at Mandvi, Surat

On 9 December 2022, I got a call, early in the morning, from a local person informing that a heron-like bird was injured and attacking people going near it. The location was near Kakrapal Left Bank Canal, at Mandvi, Surat. So, I went there with staff of the Forest Department working at Mandvi. We reached the site and found that the bird was a Great Bittern (*Botaurus stellaris*). We observed that when the bird was feeling threatened, it tried to protect itself by hiding into the bushes and strangely, attacking everyone who went close to it! After communicating with experts, we found out that among all bittern species, only the Great Bittern shows this kind of behaviour – especially when panicked. Afterwards, we gently rescued the bird without causing it any harm and safely transferred it to the Mandvi Animal Hospital for preliminary examination where it was found with no physical injury and seemed to be completely healthy. Finally, we decided to release it back and we chose a safe site close to the rescue area and released it back in the wild. The Great Bittern has been recorded earlier at Parvat near Kosamba, in Surat and at Amalsad, Navsari (Patel *et al.* 2020). But, it is rare here.

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Winter sighting of Indian Pitta *Pitta brachyura* in Gir National Park

On the morning of 25 December 2022, we were on a safari ride inside the Gir National Park, and we stopped our gypsy to photograph a Crested Serpent Eagle (*Spilornis cheela*). The area was covered with dense trees and was wet because of a water spring. The visibility was not good, when suddenly, I saw a small but colourful bird on the ground. First, I thought that it was some myna species, but when I saw it with my binoculars, I was surprised. It was an Indian Pitta (*Pitta brachyura*). Even our gypsy driver was surprised! I immediately took out my camera and photographed the bird. I could take only a few photos because of the low visibility and the bird was constantly moving from one place to another, picking dead leaves. We did not hear it call and it was silent. We then observed another Indian Pitta near the first bird. This is the first time we had seen an Indian Pitta in the winter. This species is a monsoon migrant to Gujarat (Ganpule 2016) and is gone by October from Gir NP area (pers. observation). This December-end sighting is quite unusual for Gir.

Jitendra Devmurari: At – Sasan.



Malabar Whistling Thrush *Myophonus horsfieldii* in Polo Forest

On 19 February 2022, I was planning to head out to Polo Forest alone on my bike because on weekends, the Polo Forest road is generally closed by forest officials for vehicular traffic due to lack of sufficient parking. As usual, Rahul Rathore called the night before to join in and so did Rakesh Singh and Gaurav Singh. The plan was to reach Polo Forest by 07:30 hrs to maximize our chances of avoiding the weekend rush, but as luck would have it, we got late by almost 45 minutes by the time we reached there. We stopped our car along the bank of the river as we saw some bird activity. Rahul, Rakesh and Gaurav went down near the river to investigate while I was keeping an eye on the road. It was then that a myna-sized bird flew across the road and I caught a glimpse of it. The bird seemed dark, almost black, against the sun. My first instinct was that it was an Indian Blackbird (*Turdus simillimus*) as I knew there are records of this species up north in Mt. Abu and the habitat is similar here. I called the team up and we tried to locate the bird and managed to get a couple of photographs before it vanished deep into the forest. On reviewing our photos, we noticed that it was not a blackbird but a Malabar Whistling Thrush (*Myophonus horsfieldii*) based on the blue upperparts, blue-scaled underparts and darker head. This is probably the first record of the Malabar Whistling Thrush from Polo Forest. I thank Rahul Rathore for the photograph given here.

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