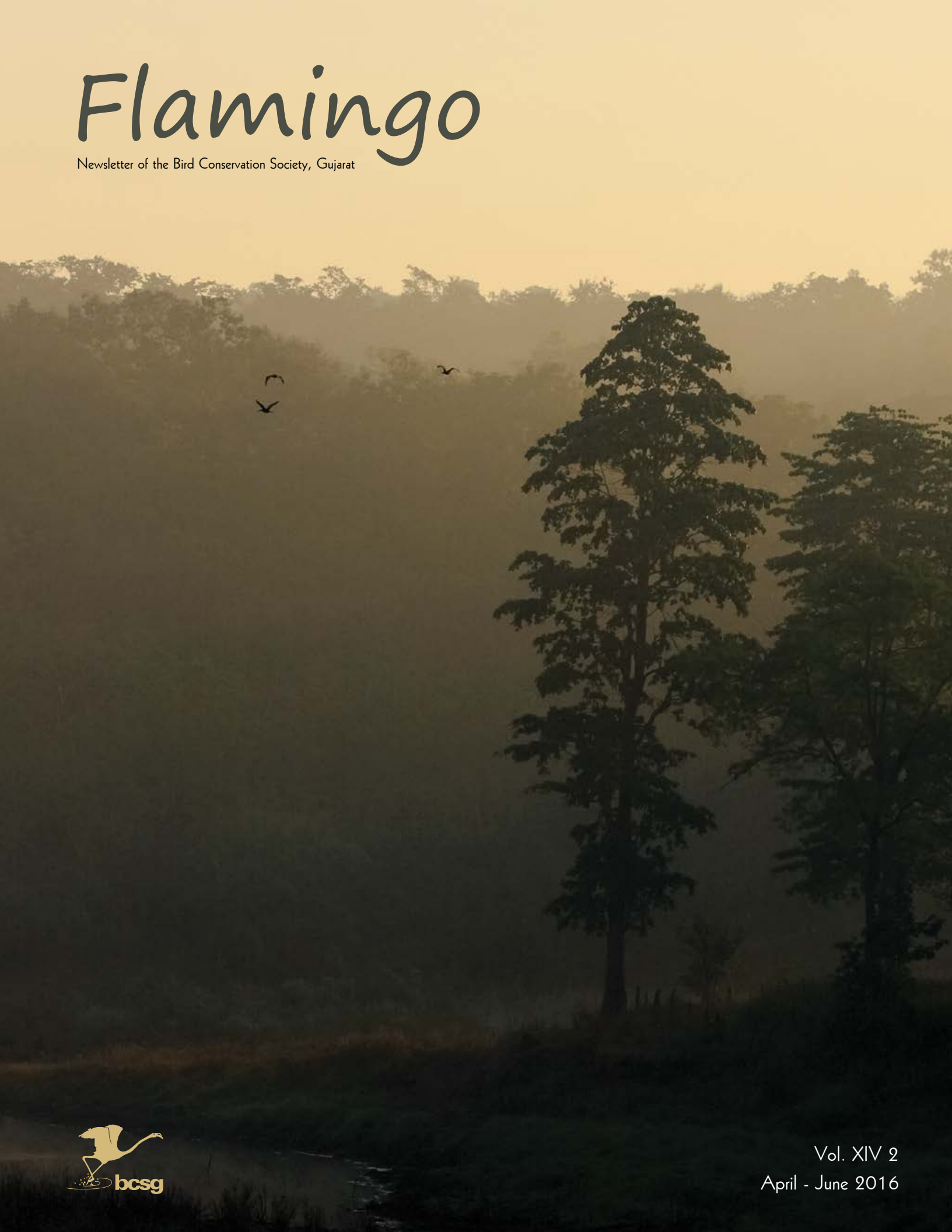


Flamingo

Newsletter of the Bird Conservation Society, Gujarat



Vol. XIV 2
April - June 2016

Habitat Concerns....

Plight of tropical Thorn forest

Thorn forests, locally known as 'Rakhals', are under threat. The scrub forests of Kachchh are fragile and represent a very precious ecosystem. Dominated by *Acacia senegal*, *A. leucophloea*, *A. nilotica*, *C. rothii*, *Balanites* sp., *Capparis* sp., *Ziziphus* sp. and bushes and trees of medium height, the thorn forests of Kachchh are the back bone of all life in the area.

The Maldharis (cattle herders) fall back on the thorn forest for feeding their cattle. The endangered and endemic fauna finds a safe refuge for their survival in this habitat. The Chinkara, Caracal, Pangolin, 2 species of Hedgehogs; Long-eared and Pale Hedgehog, Wolf, Desert Cat, Jungle Cat, etc all survive in these thorny jungles. This habitat also supports birds like White-bellied Minivet, White-naped Tit, Marshall's lora and many other resident and wintering species.

Stone quarries, cutting trees for charcoal, over grazing, wood for fuel, lopping for cattle and agriculture farm fencing are some threats to this habitat. The most dangerous threats are conversion of thorn forests to agriculture land (illegally), and grant of this land for windmill installations.

Defining an ecologically fragile habitat as barren, useless and fit for windmills, stone quarries or converting it to agriculture are some of the activities that are happening in such an ecosystem. It is a must that the decision makers value this ecosystem and help to preserve it.

- Jugal Tiwari

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Jugal Tiwari



Jugal Tiwari

White-naped Tit



Veervatbhav Mishra

Marshall's lora



Jugal Tiwari

White-bellied Minivet

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BCSG brings out a quarterly newsletter – 'Flamingo'. Articles, notes on bird-life of Gujarat, interesting bird sightings, knowledge about important bird areas, information / appeal regarding conservation issues, reports on society's events and activities are published in 'Flamingo'. For publication of articles/notes in the Flamingo, both the common English and scientific names must be given when a bird species is mentioned for the first time and later references, common English name only. Common English and scientific names should follow Richard Grimmett, Carol Inskipp and Tim Inskipp (2011), Birds of Indian Subcontinent, Second edition. Oxford University Press, New Delhi. If the nomenclature is adopted from other source, full reference should be given.

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Editorial....

Please accept our greetings ! This issue carries notes on a couple of interesting bird encounters; Large-billed Reed Warbler (LRW) and Audubon's Shearwater (AS), and unearth one intriguing historical record about the Lesser Fish Eagle.

Nalsarovar has great potential to spawn surprises. Its vast expanses and myriad of micro habitats attract a huge variety of water-birds in great numbers. Rajani Trivedi, who spotted the (LRW) along with Kasam Sama Sidani - a local and a boat-man with a difference, loves to explore this complex wetland, which never disappoints him!

Awareness about pelagic birds is on the rise. Gujarat, with its longest coast-line on the western edge of peninsular India, tends to receive an array of deep-sea bird specimens, which get caught in the cyclones cropping up periodically in the Indian Ocean, and eventually drift to the shores. The check-list of pelagic birds is increasing. While confirming the identification of AS, Prasad Ganpule aptly cautions bird-watchers in taking pictures, physical measurements and blood samples (where possible) while rescuing such specimens, to make identification of the species easier. Deep sea birding, off the coast of Gujarat, too needs to be encouraged and promoted, to increase our understanding of pelagic birds.

The Dang forest in south Gujarat marks the uppermost extension of Western Ghats. It showcases some of the bird species of that region, which otherwise would look quite outlandish for the dry and arid image of Gujarat. Dr. Jayesh Joshi, a radiologist and a bird-photographer from the neighbouring district of Navsari, has beautifully captured the spirit of Dang and the essence of its bird-life through his lenses.

Gujarat has many awesome birding destinations to show-off. The Eco-tourism drive has inspired the Forest Department to raise eco-campuses at some of these picturesque locations. But to give a thrust to sustained eco-tourism activity, we need to look beyond impulsive 'Van-mahotsavs'. It's very essential for these eco-sites to have robust infrastructure, to be well-equipped with a knowledgeable, trained and committed staff to satiate the expectations of the eco-sensitive tourist. Involving local stakeholders and engaging them actively in the process is the backbone of eco-tourism. Sh. Lavkumar Khacher's ruminations on the issue are quite telling even in the present scenario.

In the end, I invite more and more authors from here in Gujarat, and from out of the state, to share their significant birding experiences from Gujarat with 'Flamingo', a national-level bird-magazine focused exclusively on one state, the only one of its kind.

- **Bakul Trivedi, M.S.**

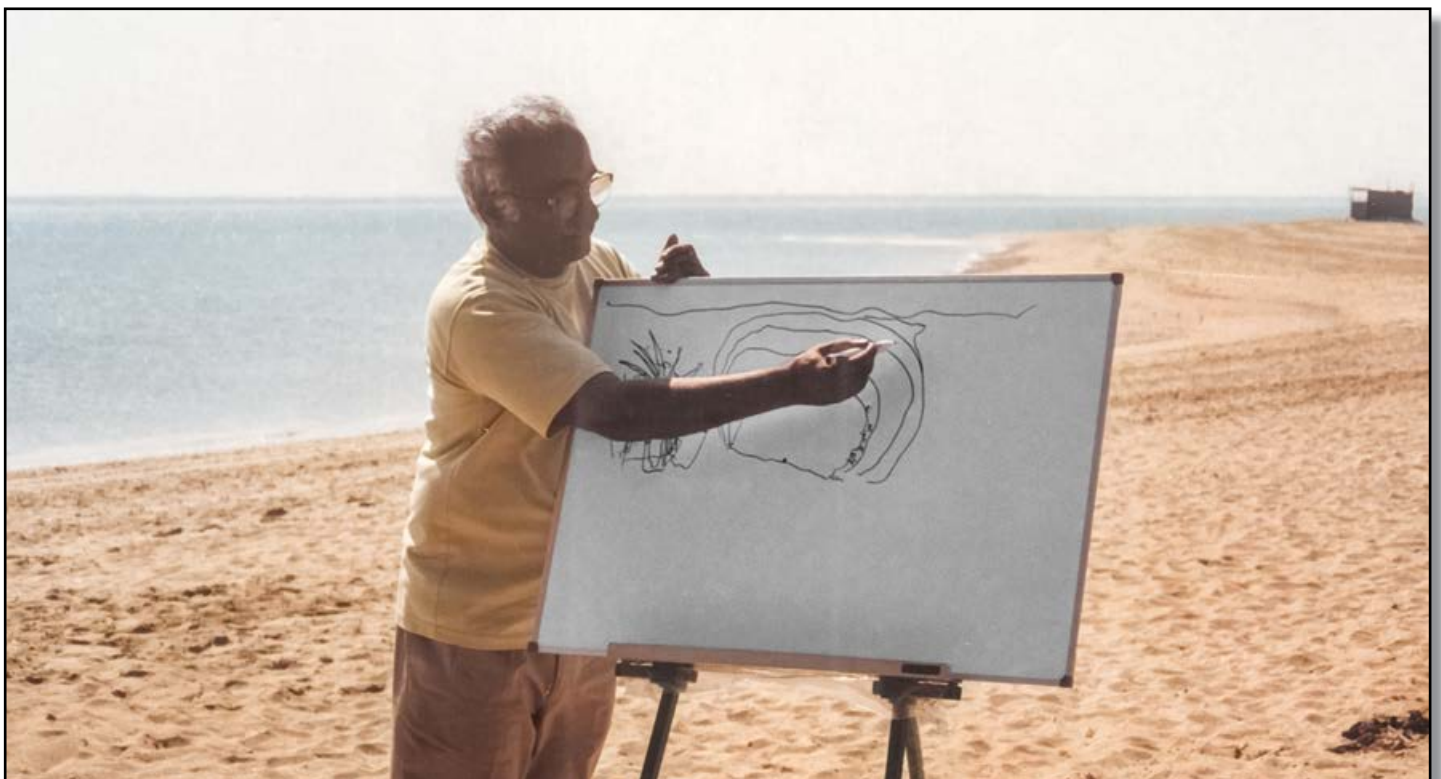
If I am asked what my single, most significant contribution has been in influencing Gujarati Society, I would point to the acceptance of permitting children out during term time by schools. Today, more school groups are spending so called academic time on excursions than anywhere in India! I propose to recommend to government to accept this huge segment of our society as a very valuable, highly sensitive target group for whom the state must admit to a high sense of responsibility even as the Administration is gearing itself to generate a vigorous promotion of tourism in the State. Our children, specially those that are “held captive” in sanctified reformatories which schools and institutions of education have progressively become, must be at the very center of any planning involving promotion that might even remotely determine the future. Tourism cannot be seen as something having no bearing on our children and youth. I consider it my bounden duty, at this juncture, to utter a warning against any casualness in this regard. My experience as a Naturalist, and an Educator compels me to advice considerable caution. Despite all the glitter and sound generated by “Vibrant Gujarat” and because of it, the youth cannot be left out. It is they who will be most attracted and most exploited.

When I spearheaded the call for conserving the easily approachable corals of Pirotan Island off Jamnagar, it was for our children that I had demanded conservation measures. Alas! Today, Pirotan is being touted as a tourist destination and the very first exclusion has been of the well organised and

tightly managed education programme that I had privilege of initiating and operating on the island in the 1980s. Already there are far too many visitors - children being “also ran”. Considerable live coral is being trampled underfoot and the sand dunes littered with plastic, paper, tobacco pouches etc., that are the hallmarks of Gujarati holiday makers. Even so the island is not receiving the numbers it should and that too without any damage. Careful and imaginative management systems and supporting infrastructure are lacking. In any case, we do not want to take international tourists to demonstrate our poorly developed civic and ecological sensibilities.

If Pirotan can be held up as a starkly demonstrative proof for taking a strong stand against encouraging tourism to wildlife sanctuaries and National Parks, we have another glaring example at the much touted Nal sarovar. I, for one, would never take any of my friends to the visitors’ point in what actually is a fantastic avifaunal extravaganza that needs no glossy brochures to promote. We had been very actively involved in drawing up management systems for the Nal sarovar early in our conservation drives. What indeed has happened to those enthusiastically discussed and put together blue prints of making Nal sarovar a great experience begs to be queried.

Even before any publicity, what has happened to the Geera Falls in northern Dangs should substantiate my fears. Already, with the pushing of a motorable road to the top of the falls we have unsightly litter draping the cliffs and floating in the



pool below. Thousands of young people had literally been baptised into the conservation movement under this cascade!

Focusing critical scrutiny on the Hingolghadh Nature Education Sanctuary, itself a direct result of the youth education programme, visitation by holiday makers is snowballing under the guise of Eco-tourism! Merely notifying protected areas and announcing with fanfare programmes, without a great deal of careful planning can only result in adverse effects which would counter all the publicity to draw tourists. All that we will succeed in doing is to insert the proverbial thin edge of the wedge in loosening the remaining restrictions and neutralizing the small measure of protection they afford. In attempting to draw visitors from outside the State, we shall be overwhelmed by numbers.

That the Gujarati, who can afford a holiday, prefers destinations outside the state should be taken note of. A large majority of Gujaratis do not travel to satiate a thirst for alcohol and in any case, the discerning tippler does not need to go places for his premium drink. He gets it in the comfort of his home. Let us accept the dismal truth that government and the tourism industry has not paid attention to the kaleidoscope of the Gujarati countryside and even today, much of the enthusiasm would appear to be resulting from a vision of glitter of monetary gains. Nothing can be more dangerous than unplanned exploitation of natural resources and, wide open spaces, expanses of blue winter skies, rose tinted dawns and gold flecked sunsets, boisterous winds and sun glittering off ocean waves are all resources - fortunately inexhaustible. In drawing crowds to specific locations, it is the noise, the jostling, the dust and the heat that need to be guarded against. Not only will dollars and euros remain dreams, the large majority of rupee spenders will be justified in continuing to spend their money elsewhere.

Having sounded deep pessimism, let me repeat - Gujarat in fact is a tourists' delight and there can be few regions on Earth more endowed with sparkle and colour than rural and (remaining) wilderness Gujarat and while sharing an enthusiasm to showcase these, I certainly want to ensure that degradation does not set in. Government and those keen to make Gujarat a world destination for holiday makers must examine the paradigms that hold the tourism industry in a rigid frame. For a start, the locations I have mentioned earlier need to have very innovative plans drawn up by specially constituted committees. We have the expertise and very considerable experience in organizing ecologically sound guidelines. Having drawn up blue prints, we shall need systems operating whereby individuals are trained and performances continually checked and upgraded to operate

the infrastructures and the services provided. It is absolutely unrealistic to close areas given the immense pressures on all sides. But, I do not want Nature to justify itself through revenues earned, rather, I want to see that revenues earned result in removing the basic pressures and help in enhancing Nature.

Few people seem to pause and ask why so many of our holiest locations are sited where they are. Sitting on the plinth of Koteswar temple in Western Kachchh I gained the understanding and the reason become starkly clear. The solitude, the immense expanses of water and an overarching sky were forceful.

The question is immediately posed: "will drawing crowds not but shatter the magnificent isolation?" It is such questions that need to be answered before Koteswar and other places like it are "popularized". Should I say "vulgarised"? It would seem impossible and yet, with care and persuasive guiding, I do not see why literally thousands cannot experience what I did. Investment will need to be in maintaining the natural ambiance and preventing the raucous intrusion of vehicles, loud speakers and flashing neon lights. Paradoxically a motivated press of humanity can enhance the splendor of a natural setting as is experienced daily at Har-Ki-Pedi in Haridwar during the 'Ganga aarti' at sundown.

Similarly, there was something magnificent in being able to look into the eyes of a full grown, wild lion from two meters. Those who scoff at the 'lion shows' fail to recognize the great success in establishing a confidence between two species that have been arch rivals down the ages. The lions of the Gir must not be equated with the lions of the Sherengati, as indeed should not the coral pools off Pirotan to those of the Great Barrier Reef of Australia. How do we highlight the very great uniqueness of our 'tame' Lions and 'trampable' corals from the 'fierce' lions and less approachable corals of distant lands? This is the challenge for us even as we strive to 'sell' Gujarat as a 'destination'.

What we must advertise is Gujarat as an entity, not specific locations. Gujarat of sunlight, of blue skies and restless winds, of calm seas and stretches of beaches dazzling white, of huge flocks of approachable pelicans, flamingos and other birds, of a cordial and hospitable people with a colourful history of blending attitudes, faiths and a deep veneration of Life. But even as we lure visitors let us plan vigorously to encourage our youth to take to kayaking, wind surfing, sailing, para-gliding, trekking and rock climbing. Let the mistake not be made of developing tourism in isolation of the people. This is where the challenge lies, and I am here to pose this challenge. Let the people be the motivators and the beneficiaries. □

Photo-essay : Habitat and Avifauna of the Dangs

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Text: Ranjitsinh Devkar : Dept. of Zoology, Faculty of Science, M. S. University, Vadodara. rv.devkar-zoo@msubaroda.ac.in



The northern zone of Western Ghats extends into Gujarat, in the form of an undulating, hilly landscape. Dang District in Gujarat is a piece of paradise that was referred to as “Dand Arayanaka”

or the bamboo forest. It continues to provide an ideal habitat for a plethora of organisms, including birds. This photo-essay provides glimpses of the magnificent habitat of the Dangs and some of its gorgeous, feathered inhabitants. Dang also attracts ethno biologists and social scientists for studying traditional medicines and socio-cultural aspects of various tribals inhabiting this region. It boasts of about many species of birds, especially those occurring in the Western Ghats. Ubiquitously prevalent conservation issues such as habitat loss, anthropogenic pressure on forest resources, urbanization, poaching, habitat fragmentation, etc. are serious problems in the

Dangs and has led to the local extinction of key species such as Indian Tiger (*Panthera tigris*) and Indian Bison (*Bos gaurus*), to name a few.



A Golden-fronted Leafbird (*Chloropsis aurifrons*) in search of food.



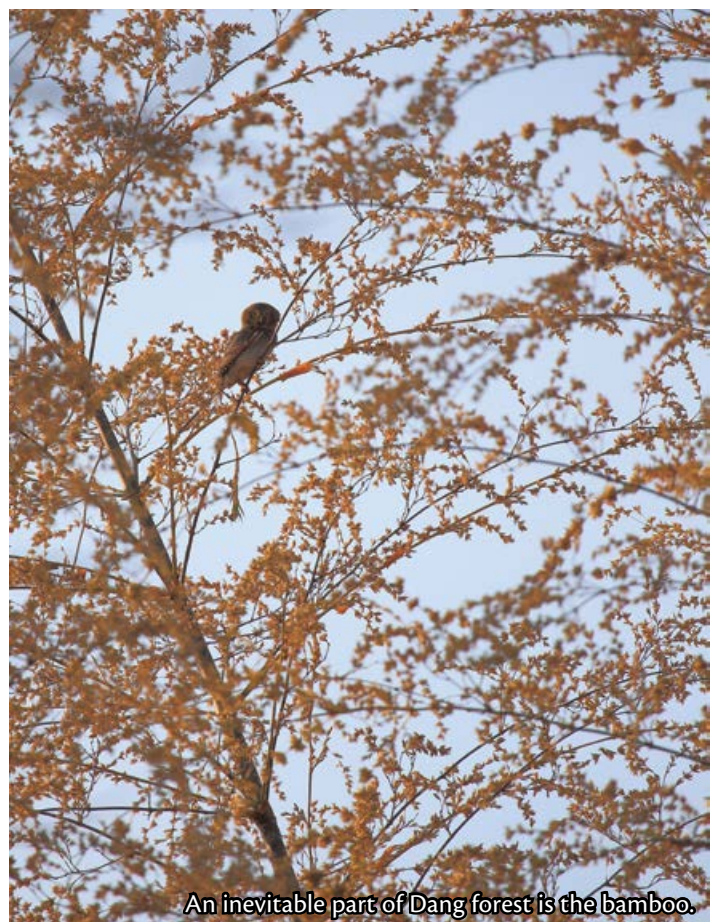
Water, wherever it travels, it sprouts a new seed of life.
The mesmerizing Gira waterfall in the monsoon.



Flowering of Simal (*Bombax ceiba*) in late winter is a showstopper in the Dangs, and attracts a variety of birds.



Malabar Trogon (*Harpactes fasciatus*) is highly sensitive to habitat fragmentation and hence has got elusive in this terrain. In this picture, the male shows off his plumage.



An inevitable part of Dang forest is the bamboo.



The wilderness of Dang is all about the forest. Teak (*Tectona grandis*) has a dominating presence here.



The sun kissed red leaves of Mahudo (*Madhuca longifolia*) in early summer. Also referred as 'Kalpyruksha', this tree is highly revered by the tribal inhabitants of Dangs.



The 'two-note whistle' of an Indian Pitta (*Pitta brachyura*) can be heard in the pre-monsoon season while walking on nature trails in Dang.



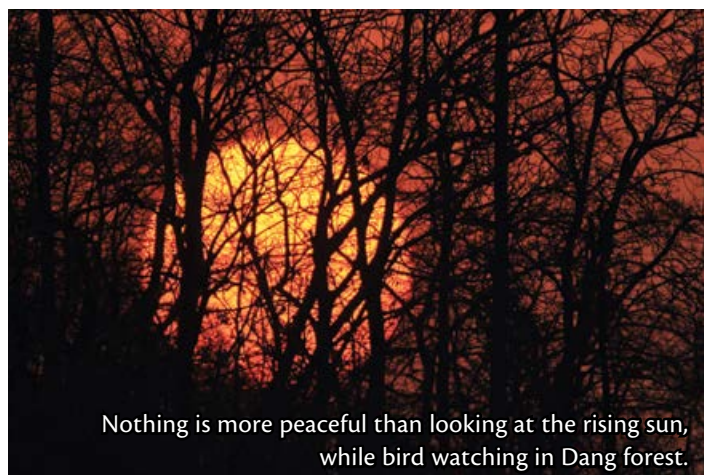
White-bellied Woodpecker (*Dryocopus javensis*) is amongst the larger sized woodpeckers in the area, with a characteristic booming call.



The Rufous Woodpecker (*Micropternus brachyurus*) is elusive to shutterbugs due to its camouflage.



The Shama (*Copsychus malabaricus*), a song bird and an inhabitant of the bamboo forest of Dang.



Nothing is more peaceful than looking at the rising sun, while bird watching in Dang forest.

Status and distribution of Ruddy-breasted Crake in central and south Gujarat

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Introduction

The Ruddy-breasted Crake (*Porzana fusca*) is a widespread resident species in Indian Subcontinent (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). The northern subspecies *P. f. fusca* is distributed in north-eastern parts of the country from northern Pakistan through Kashmir and Nepal to Assam whereas the southern subspecies *P. f. zeylonica* occurs in Sri Lanka, and the Western Ghats strip, northward, at least up to Bombay (Ali and Ripley 2001). It occurs in swampy localities, edge of inundated rice-fields, reedy banks of canals, spillages and marshes, etc. (Ali and Ripley 2001). Its records in peninsular India are scanty (Ali and Ripley 2001, Grimmett *et al.* 2011, Rasmussen and Anderton 2012).

In Gujarat, Ali (1945, 1954) did not record the species either in Kachchh or in Gujarat mainland. Dharamakumarsinhji (1955) did not record it in Saurashtra region of Gujarat. Grimmett *et al.* (1999) did not show its record in Gujarat but had shown an isolated record on Gujarat-Rajasthan border (probably an old record). Khacher (1996) mentioned having seen the species during winter in Gujarat but did not specify the location. Subsequent field guide by Kazmierczak (2000) showed a single asterisk mark (*) on Gujarat map meaning that the species is localized or patchily distributed. Based on published records and personal discussion with late Shri Lavkumar Khacher, the species was included in the checklist of Gujarat (Parasharya *et al.* 2004). Grimmett *et al.* (2011), in their second edition showed its occurrence in Gujarat by placing single asterisk (meaning, locally or patchily distributed) as they directly adopted species distribution maps from Kazmierczak (2000). Very recently, Bhatt (2015) photographed it near Nal sarovar Bird Sanctuary, Gujarat and based on distribution maps given in recent field guides, opined that 'its status in Gujarat is unclear' and also appealed birdwatchers to lookout for the species in wetland areas.



Mohammed Jai

In this paper, we provide evidences of occurrence of Ruddy-breasted Crake in Gujarat over larger geographical area round the year and propose that it is a widely distributed in central and south Gujarat and it is a resident species of Gujarat state.

Methods

We have reviewed published information (Khacher 1996, Kumar *et al.* 2007, Trivedi 2010, Kadam & Jardosh 2011, Patel 2012, Desai 2012), incorporated our own records and records of fallow birdwatcher friends. Authors of this note had observed the Ruddy-breasted Crakes at various wetlands of central and south Gujarat during 2008 to 2016. During most of the sightings, the bird was photographed and the information was either published or the photographs were shared on social media. All such information is compiled to generate distribution map and records over twelve months annual cycle to establish status and distribution of the species.

Observations

B. M. Parasharya: A single crake was seen by one of us (BMP) in the paddy field (*Oryza sativa*), adjacent to Narda tank (22°34'57.99"N, 72°37'19.84"E) near Limbasi, Matar tahsil, Kheda on 07 September 1993 during regular bird census in paddy growing area. The recorded information remained in the field notes till recently. The record was dug out during compilation of records of the species.

Rajni Trivedi: One of us (RJ) saw one Ruddy-breasted Crake near Vahanvati Mata Temple (22°33'45.88"N, 72°37'35.30"E) near Pariej Tank, Kheda District during winter of 2008-2009 (Photograph 1). Since then, one bird was seen regularly every year at the same site during winter, till 2015-16. A single crake was also recorded on 28 February 2010 at a wetland, near Traj village (22°40'26.63"N, 72°38'46.64"E) of Matar tahsil, Kheda district, Gujarat. The same information was published in 'Vihang' (Trivedi 2010).

Tarun Joshi: One bird was photographed by one of us (TJ) at Naghrama Tank (22°37'6.05"N, 72°39'0.60"E), in Matar tahsil of Kheda District, Gujarat on 03 June 2012. The crake repeatedly came out from *Typha angustata* growth for some specific food item and hence it could be photographed.

Jugalkishor Patel: Details of records of one of us (JK) around Untiyadara village in Ankleshwar tahsil are as under:

The Ruddy-breasted Crake was seen for the first time on 28 June 2012 in the morning for a few seconds at village Utiyadara (21°29'48.48"N, 72°56'40.86"E) of Bharuch District, Gujarat. Utiyadara is a small village on the border of Bharuch and Surat districts, 17 km southwest to Ankleshwar town. The sighting place is grassland dominated by couch grass (*Cynodon dactylon*) and other grass species, near a stream. The stream was totally covered by Lesser Indian Reed Marsh (*Typha angustata*). Generally, the stream is full with canal water. Two days later, on 01 July 2012 the bird was seen again at the same place.

On 25 April 2013, it was again spotted with Slaty-breasted Rail (*Gallirallus striatus*) in a small pond within a farm (called *Khet Talavdi*) adjoining a small pond '*Sim Talavdi*' (pond at the edge of farming area which is relatively larger than '*Khet Talavdi*'). On 26th April, four Ruddy-breasted Crakes were spotted in a *Sim Talavdi*. This place is ca. 100 meter away from the last year's sighting. The *Sim Talavdi* & *Khet Talavdi* were covered by *Typha angustata* growth with some patches of Marsh Glory (*Ipomoea aquatica*). Due to damage in main canal of Kakrapar/Ukai dam, entire area including the pond was dry and the crakes were seen in dry open patches of Marsh Glory & other vegetation. The crakes were seen

till 29th April. The photographs were taken on 28th April 2013. Two months later, one crake was seen on road near canal in July 2013 (exact date of sighting not available) at Parvat village 21°30'00.22"N, 72°52'50.08"E), Ta-Hansot, District-Bharuch, ca. 10 km areal distance from earlier place. At this place also, large area was covered with *Typha angustata*.

In January 2014 (between 10-25 January 2014), the Ruddy-breasted Crake was sighted beside a branch canal adjoining to Industrial Tank of Panoli GIDC (21°32'3.75"N, 72°58'9.28"E) in Bharuch District. This area was also covered with *Typha angustata* and *Prosopis juliflora* (*gando baval*) growth.

Interestingly, all the sightings were in summer/monsoon season (April to July) and near *Typha angustata* growth.

However, Bharat Patel – a farmer has seen or heard the crake calling throughout the year since last 6 to 7 years in his Sugarcane Farm at Vav village (21.14' 45.98"N, 72.59' 19.43"E), Ta- Kamrej, District Surat. There is a small '*Khet Talavdi*' beside his farm, which is covered with unknown grasses and a few *Typha agustata* plants. Hence, the crake might be a permanent resident species of this area.

Rajendra Desai: One crake was seen by one of us (RD) in the pond of Kelsi village near Billimora (20°46'8.50"N, 72°58'39.99"E) in Gandevi tahsil of Navsari District during 2010-2011. Later, he along with Akshay Desai and Ashok Naik saw four crakes together in Fadvel pond (20°44'29.16"N, 73°10'28.42"E) on 25 January 2012 (Desai 2012). During the winter of 2014-15, this pond was cleaned up of *Typha* growth and hence could not locate any crake within the pond but one was seen in the nearby ditch.

Piyush Patel: Very recently, on 07 February 2016, one of us (PP) saw three Ruddy-breasted Crakes at village tank of Majigam village (20°44'52.40"N, 73° 2'16.57"E), Ta-Chikhli, Navsari District. The birds were foraging at the corner of the tank in mud near *Typha angustata* growth and were photographed. Fifteen days later, M. U. Jat also took some high resolution photographs of the same birds.

Moreover, we came across three more records from south Gujarat which are as follow: Yogesh Patel received one sick crake from a villager at Pal village (21°11'40.17"N,

Ruddy-breasted Crane....

72°46'27.37"E) near Surat on 18 October 2011. Suspecting dehydration, the bird was given primary treatment and handed over to Nature Club, Surat (Patel 2012). Divyesh Kadam and Darshan Jardosh observed one crane at Gavier Lake (21° 7'44.23"N, 72°44'4.43"E), Surat on 03 July 2011 (Kadam and Jardosh 2011). Rajesh Halpati photographed one Ruddy-breasted Crane at Tena tank (21°13'45.97"N, 72°40'38.04"E) near Surat town on 18 January 2015. The photograph was shared by him on Facebook.

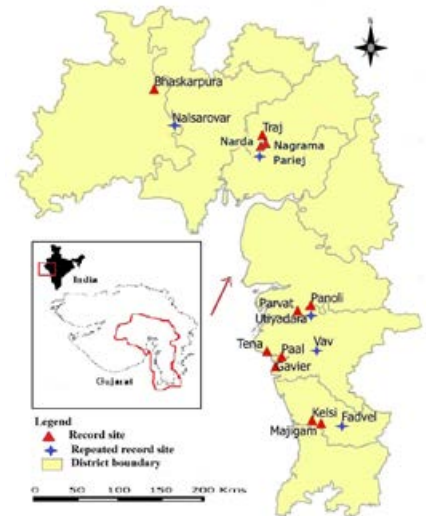
Some more records in central Gujarat are as follow: Vishal Mistry (*Personal Communication*) and other birdwatchers are monitoring this species in Kheda district which needs separate reporting and hence not listed here. Devvrat Mori had also taken a picture of the species at Pariej tank near Tarapur (Kheda District) which was shared on Facebook. He had also taken a photograph of this crane at Bhaskarpura wetland (22°58'45.18"N; 71°55'29.83"E) of Lakhtar tahsil, Surendranagar District (Devvrat Mori, *Personal Communication*).

Discussion

Records of Ruddy-breasted Crane in English publications are scanty. Species distribution maps in recent field guides (Kazmierczak 2000, Grimmett *et al.* 2011) show an isolated record (o) on Gujarat-Rajasthan border, close to Mt. Abu. This could be an old record as this mark was present even in the first edition by Grimmett *et al.* (1999) and Kazmierczak (2000). An additional isolated record with exact location uncertain is shown by a single asterisk mark * on Gujarat. The asterisk mark was shown by Kazmierczak (2000) and subsequently by Grimmett *et al.* (2011). Probably, this single asterisk mark of Kazmierczak (2000) refers to an extensive review paper on birds of Gujarat by Khacher (1996). Khacher (1996) very firmly stated that he has seen the species in Gujarat but did not mention location and date of sighting. Obviously, this sighting record for Gujarat by an authentic birdwatcher was considered and was reflected as an asterisk mark on the species distribution map (Kazmierczak 2000).

Bhatt (2015) photographed a Ruddy-breasted Crane and claimed that the species is not known to occur at Nal sarovar. However, there exists a published record of the species from Nal sarovar itself (Kumar *et al.* 2007).

Probably after reviewing the recent field guides (Kazmierczak 2000, Grimmett *et al.* 2011, Rasmussen and Anderton 2012), Bhatt (2015) made an opening statement that status of this species in Gujarat is unclear. When the note



on Ruddy-breasted Crane was published, there already existed two published papers in English (Khacher 1996, Kumar *et al.* 2007) and four notes in vernacular language (Trivedi 2010, Kadam and Jardosh 2011, Patel 2012, Desai 2012) showing records of the species both in central and south Gujarat!!! The question is 'should we accept the status of the species as given by the field guides only and ignore the information published in English and Gujarati (vernacular) language?' If the authors of the field guides have not referred to the reports published in English or vernacular language for some reasons, shall we say the status as unclear?

One should refer to published records, both in English and vernacular language and incorporate the same to improve status and distribution of the species. Due importance to our own Gujarati publication should be given when the authors are reliable birdwatchers. One should not expect the authors of English field guides (most of them are foreigners) to read bird related literature of vernacular language and improve on their distribution maps. Errors in distribution maps in the first edition of the field guide by Grimmett *et al.* (1998) are well known. Hence, balanced review of available information (irrespective of language and media) is essential.

There are several records from wetlands of Kheda district which indicate its wide-spread distribution within the district. In south Gujarat also, there are several records from Bharuch, Surat and Navsari districts which indicate its wide spread distribution in south Gujarat. Its regular

occurrence at same location at Pariej tank, Utiyadara, Vav village and Fadvel tank indicates its site fidelity.

Nal sarovar and Bhaskarpura are perennial wetlands with extensive aquatic vegetation. Both the wetlands are now regularly fed with Narmada canal water. Similarly, Kheda, Bharuch, Surat and Navsari districts (from where there are maximum records of the species) are having extensive canal network and irrigation throughout the year. As a result, growth of aquatic vegetation (mainly emergent vegetation) is profuse which provides adequate habitat to the species. With increasing canal network and subsequent seepage, habitat of Ruddy-breasted Crane is likely to expand and one should not be surprised to hear about its records from entire Gujarat. It has been listed in Birds of Kachchh (Tiwari 2007) without highlighting this record. Recently, the species is listed from the wetlands of Banswada district of Rajasthan (Barve 2006) too – a few kilometers north to Kadana dam of Dahod district, Gujarat.

As the species is largely crepuscular (Ali & Ripley 2001) and skulking from vegetation, it is less frequently sighted. Unless searched carefully in the vegetation at the right time, it is difficult to observe and photograph the species. It is recorded during April to July in Gujarat, which also happens to be breeding season of the species (Ali & Ripley 2001). Hence, the species is likely to be a breeding resident of Gujarat; however, substantial evidences of its breeding are required.

As per the account given above, it can be concluded that the species is distributed widely in appropriate aquatic habitat of central and south Gujarat and it may be a resident breeding species of Gujarat.

Acknowledgement

We are grateful to D. N. Rank for improving the manuscript. We acknowledge Darshana Rathod for preparing distribution map. We are thankful to the birdwatcher friends who shared their information and photographs on social media which helped to enrich database of Ruddy-breasted Crane.

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Sighting of Large-billed Reed Warbler in Nal sarovar

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On 7 September 2014, I visited Nal sarovar Bird Sanctuary (22° 45' N, 72° 00' E), near Ahmedabad. Nal sarovar, spread over 120 sq. km., is a natural shallow lake, with lagoons and numerous small islands. The open water, marshy areas and other diverse micro-habitats attract a wide variety of birds and it is one of the best areas for bird watching in Gujarat. It was declared as a 'Ramsar' site recently.

On one of the roads in the area, I saw a small bird being hit by a motorcycle. As I was following the motorcycle rider, I noticed this incident and stopped to investigate. I found a small sized *Acrocephalus* warbler lying on the road. It was slightly injured but otherwise looked normal. I picked it up and put it in a nearby tree. I took some images of the bird and tried to identify it. The bird looked uninjured and flew away after a few minutes. It was probably stunned by the impact; hence it has the bill open in all the photos.

It was small in size, similar to a Blyth's Reed Warbler (*A. dumetorum*), but rather long billed. Its smaller size and different shape ruled out possibility of Clamorous Reed Warbler (*A. stentoreus brunnescens*). I tentatively identified it as either a Blyth's Reed warbler or a Large-billed Reed Warbler (*A. orinus*).

[The images show a rather long-billed *Acrocephalus* warbler, with a broader bill base, and a completely pale lower mandible. It is in moult, with some new feathers still growing. The rather long claws, long and strong bill with entire pale lower mandible, indistinct supercilium, brownish upperparts, creamish white throat with brownish tinged flanks and the long tail were suggestive of Large-billed Reed Warbler, based on Svensson et al. (2010), Timmins et al. (2010) and Drycz et al. (2016).

The enigmatic Large-billed Reed Warbler was known only from a single specimen collected in Himachal Pradesh (Hume 1869). It remained unknown till it was re-discovered wintering in Thailand (Round et al. 2007). Since then, many specimens have been discovered in museum collections, misidentified as Blyth's Reed Warblers (Svensson et al. 2008, Koblik et al. 2011, Kvartalnov et al. 2011) including a specimen from Mussoorie, Uttarakhand (Pearson et al. 2008) and two more specimens from Kangra, Himachal Pradesh (Svensson et al. 2008). It is now known that it breeds in north-eastern Afghanistan (Timmins et al. 2010) and Tajikistan (Ayé et al. 2010, Kvartalnov et al. 2013) and is believed to winter in south-east Asia. It is listed as 'Data Deficient' by BirdLife International (2016).



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Its status in India is unclear. Except for the specimens collected more than a century ago, there are no confirmed records. The recent photographs of purported Large-billed Reed Warblers taken in the wild in India have been controversial. A photograph from Kolkata (Sen 2007) was treated as unconfirmed (Svensson et al. 2010). Raju et al. (2009a) reported a sighting from Kanha National Park in Madhya Pradesh, but subsequent mist-netting of some individuals next year at the same place proved that they were Blyth's Reed Warblers (Raju et al. 2009b). The tail-fanning behaviour supposed to be distinctive of Large-billed Reed Warbler was shown by these mist-netted Blyth's Reed Warblers and hence is not useful for identification. Das (2009) and Ray (2009) photographed a bird at Koikhali in West Bengal (images on the website <http://orientalbirdimages.org>), which is posted by editors of the website with the remark 'appears to be this species'. Thus there are no confirmed photographic records of the Large-billed Reed Warbler from India. Whether it is genuinely rare or overlooked is not known.

The identification of Large-billed Reed Warbler from photographs is very difficult and generally biometric data is required to conclusively separate Large-billed Reed Warbler from Blyth's Reed Warbler. In view of this being such a difficult species to identify, our editorial board decided to send the images to Lars Svensson, the acknowledged expert on the Large-billed Reed Warbler, for his opinion. His detailed reply is given below, with his permission:

"Interesting bird indeed! As you know, the Large-billed Reed Warbler holds a special place in my heart. And this is what it surely looks like!

I assume your reporting observers have managed to firmly exclude the considerably larger Clamorous Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus stentoreus brunnescens*) from the discussion. They should be familiar with this quite regular bird in Gujarat, but it is best to put this question. On the other hand, even without a certain evaluation of the size of the bird, I must say I am not aware of any *brunnescens* with such completely pale pinkish-yellow lower mandible, they seem to always have a rather dark outer part of the lower mandible. So already this

fact should exclude such a mistake. And such a pale lower mandible is typical of *orinus*. If you are aware of a larger bill colour variation within Clamorous Reed Warbler than I here anticipate, please tell me.

These two, *brunnescens* and *orinus*, are the only really long-billed 'Acros' occurring in India, so it is a matter of one of them. Blyth's Reed Warbler can be excluded on the too long bill (*dumetorum* has a long bill, but not this long), and also on the long and thin claws typical of *orinus*. In collections, I often have first spotted a misidentified *orinus* in the *dumetorum* trays on the long and thin claws.

This being an adult, as complete wing moult and pale brown iris colour show, I am still a little surprised that it has advanced so far with moult. One secondary is clearly growing, and when secondaries are moulted, primary moult has usually reached at least halfway. So it is reasonable to assume that the moult of flight-feathers started at least two weeks earlier. Which I find surprisingly early. It could be a bird which failed to breed and started autumn migration early.

The other thing which is surprising, and which makes this record both controversial and exciting is the locality. To find a moulting adult Large-billed Reed Warbler in Gujarat is totally at odds with previous records and expected migration routes and wintering areas. I had assumed that this species migrated eastward along the southern side of the Himalayas to winter in Burma and Thailand and adjacent areas. But maybe there is also a small wintering area in SW India previously overlooked?"

Looking at the very detailed reply and the explanation given above, and since the observer was very confident that the bird was much smaller than the Clamorous Reed Warbler and he had experience of seeing Clamorous Reed Warblers in Gujarat, our editorial board decided to accept this sighting as a Large-billed Reed Warbler. Also looking at the images, and as stated above, the bird does look different from a Clamorous Reed Warbler. This is very significant as other than this record, the previous specimen records are the only known records for India.

This is the first record for Gujarat and is very interesting. Birdwatchers should look at all Blyth's Reed Warblers and Clamorous Reed Warblers here closely and take as many images as possible as there is a possibility of the occurrence of Large-billed Reed Warbler. In this case, since the observer was not aware of the significance of the sighting, he did not take morphometric measurements and photos with the bird in hand and thus lost a golden opportunity. It is recommended that whenever it is possible to obtain such data, observers should take photos and measurements.

We are very thankful to Lars Svensson for all his help and support in identification of this difficult species – Prasad Ganpule]

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□

Audubon's Shearwater in Surat: An addition to the avifauna of India

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On 23 July 2009, a volunteer of 'Nature Club Surat' informed me about recovery of a strange looking bird from Surat. It seemed to be suffering from extreme dehydration. Though it was kept in captivity for two days and given treatment, unfortunately, it did not survive. After careful observation of the specimen and with the help of field guide (Grimmett *et al.* 2011), I identified it as an Audubon's Shearwater (*Puffinus lherminieri*). I took several photographs.

Audubon's Shearwater is a pelagic bird and breeds in the Maldives (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). This individual could have been blown towards the coast of South Gujarat due to the cyclonic disturbance which was present at the time.

Audubon's Shearwater is not known to occur in India and hence this is an addition to the avifauna of India.

[The photographs show all the diagnostic features of Audubon's Shearwater; the blackish upperparts with dark sides of breast, whitish underparts, and most importantly, the white wing lining, axillaries and flanks. Hence, there remains no doubt that it is indeed an Audubon's Shearwater (also known as Tropical Shearwater *Puffinus bailloni*).

Regarding its occurrence in India, there are no records shown in the latest reference books (Grimmett *et al.* 2011, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012) for India. A record from Porbandar (Jhala 2016) was most probably this species, but it could not be conclusively identified as photos showing the underwings were not taken. Earlier records referring to *P. lherminieri* were believed to be of Persian Shearwater (*P. persicus*) and this taxon was not considered for the India checklist, though it is stated that "it is very much possible" (Praveen *et al.* 2013). Hence this can be treated as the first confirmed record of this species from mainland India.

It is unfortunate that measurements or blood samples were not taken for this specimen. As given in the editor's note in Jhala (2016), the taxonomy in this species is very complex. Without measurements / DNA analysis, it is not possible to identify it to the sub-species level. However, looking at the beak and head structure, and the pink tarsus seen in this individual, it could be the subspecies breeding on the Chagos Islands, which is currently treated as *nicolae*. Geographically, birds from Maldives, British Indian Ocean Territory or Seychelles are likely to occur here as vagrants. However, without measurements / DNA, it is best to treat this as Audubon's

Shearwater, without going into sub specific identification or describing its origins.

We would like to thank Praveen J and Dipu K for all their help – P. Ganpule]



Mukesh Bhatt



Mukesh Bhatt



Mukesh Bhatt

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Breeding of Clamorous Reed Warbler at Nal sarovar

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On 15 April 2014, we visited Nal sarovar Bird Sanctuary (22° 45' N, 72° 00' E). Nal sarovar, spread over 120 km², is a natural shallow lake, with lagoons and numerous small islands. It is declared as a 'Ramsar' site recently, in 2012.

In an area with reeds, we observed a Clamorous Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus stentoreus brunnescens*) frequently going into the reeds with insects/worms. We suspected that there could be a nest with chicks and that the warbler was engaged in feeding its young ones. We searched and located a nest with three chicks, which were visible just above the rim of the nest. We observed the nest for some time from a distance without disturbing the parents. The Clamorous Reed Warbler continued to feed its young ones with both the male and the female sharing feeding duties. We took some photos and then we left the place so as not to disturb it further.

On another visit to the area on 8 June 2015, we again observed a nest of a Clamorous Reed Warbler. This time there were two chicks in the nest and both birds were observed feeding the chicks.

The nesting of Clamorous Reed Warbler has been observed by the second author [KS] at Nal sarovar since past several years. We had seen a nest in late March 2010 (Trivedi 2010). The species is said to breed at Pariej and Kanewal Tanks in central Gujarat (B. M. Parasharya, *Pers Comm.*). Nests have been observed by the second author in many locations inside Nal sarovar area and up to 50 nests have been seen in one season. There could be more nests, as the area in which the birds are seen is quite large. Breeding has been observed from April – July, with nest building usually starting in late March – early April. It is a common breeding bird in the Nal sarovar Bird Sanctuary area.

[According to Ali & Ripley (2001), the Clamorous Reed Warbler is a winter visitor, passage migrant and also a resident breeder in India, with breeding recorded in north-western India and Pakistan. It is stated that the Clamorous Reed Warbler 'Breeds mostly in northwestern India and Pakistan - Kashmir (very common in Srinagar valley), Punjab, Uttar Pradesh (Oudh, Bahraich), N.W.F.P. (Kurram valley), Baluchistan (Quetta, Chagai, Malezai, Makran coast), Sind (Karachi, Narra), Rajasthan (Sambhar Lake), West Khandesh (Tapti river), and the Bombay area (nest not actually found in the last three localities)']



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For Gujarat, Ali (1955) does not give any details regarding its breeding and Dharmakumarsinhji (1955) presumed that it did not breed in Gujarat, but was a winter visitor. There are no published records of breeding of the Clamorous Reed Warbler in Gujarat. It was believed that it is mainly a winter visitor to Gujarat, and this is reflected in the latest field guides; Grimmett et al. (2011) give it as mainly a winter visitor (though it is shown to be resident for a small area in south Gujarat), while Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) give it as a passage migrant in Gujarat. However this status will have to be revisited, as the nesting observed in large numbers in Nal sarovar over a period of many years shows that the Clamorous Reed Warbler is a breeding species in Gujarat – Eds]

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Specimen of Lesser Fish Eagle from Sasan, Junagadh

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Specimen collections are important for the study of birds. These collections are useful to study morphological details, DNA etc. Various museums have collections which are used by ornithologists / researchers. In India, BNHS and ZSI have good collections while the Natural History Museum, Tring, UK, has one of the biggest bird collections in the world. Museums in USA also have collections of birds from India.

The Field Museum of Natural History, Chicago, USA, (henceforth FMNH) has a collection of more than 800 bird specimens from Gujarat. These birds were collected from various regions of Gujarat from 1938 to 1951. The details of these specimens are posted online and can be viewed at http://fm1.fieldmuseum.org/birds/brd_index.php. While browsing online through this catalogue of birds in the FMNH, I came across an entry of a specimen of a Lesser Fish Eagle (*Ichthyophaga humilis plumbea*), Sex: Male, FMNH Number: 228875, from Sasan, Junagadh. Lesser Fish Eagle is classified as 'Near Threatened' (Bird Life International 2012)

This was very intriguing as the Lesser Fish Eagle is not known to occur in Gujarat and no record is shown for Gujarat in the reference books while the Grey-headed Fish Eagle (*Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus*) is known to occur here with isolated records in winter (Grimmett *et al.* 2011, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Hence I decided to check if this entry was correct and whether the specimen was a Lesser Fish Eagle. I wrote an email to the bird curators at the museum for details of this specimen and asked for photos if possible to check if it was correctly identified.

I received a reply from Josh Engel, who along with John Bates of the FMNH, rechecked the specimen and took photos. It is indeed an adult Lesser Fish Eagle, collected from Sasan, Junagadh (now Gir National Park area) on 3 February 1949 by Walter Koelz. The photos show the all brown tail, which is diagnostic for identification.

Lesser Fish Eagle is not included in the Checklist of birds of Gujarat (Parasharya *et al.* 2004) and is also not shown in any other reference books for Gujarat. It is resident in the Himalayas and south-western India, with an isolated record shown from central India (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). Hence it is a vagrant here. This specimen record has been overlooked by all authorities. Further, from the



time this specimen was taken till today, there have been no published / sight records of the Lesser Fish Eagle from Gujarat. Thus, this is an addition to the avifauna of Gujarat.

Acknowledgements:

I thank Josh Engel and John Bates of the FMNH for checking and sending photos of the specimen.

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Sighting of aberrant coloured Little Cormorant near Junagadh

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Albinism has been recorded in many vertebrate taxa (Halls 2004). It is a genetic anomaly in which an autosomal recessive gene causes an absence of the enzyme tyrosinase, resulting in a total lack of melanin pigment in skin, scales, hair, feathers and eyes (Van Grouw 2006). The occurrence of aberrant colouration such as melanism, albinism or leucism is rare in birds (Sage 1963). A complete loss of all pigment is the most severe aberration in plumage patterns. It results in a bird with white plumage and lack of pigments in soft parts.

On 27 April 2014, during a birding trip near Auzat River (21° 24' N, 70° 30' E), Junagadh, Gujarat, I sighted a bird perched beside a Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*). It was white in colour but I was sure that it was not an egret. It had webbing on its feet and a different beak from egrets. It was identified as a Little Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax niger*), having white coloured feathers. For further observation, I went close to it and observed the red eye and pink webbed feet, and took photos. I suspected the bird to be an albino. The skin and eye colour of albinos is pink because the blood can be seen through the transparent, non pigmented tissues (Van Grouw 2006, Cook *et al.* 2012). Albinism in birds is very rarely observed, not only because albinism is rare, but also because albinos have low survival rates and do not survive beyond fledgling (Van Grouw 2006), and hence this was interesting. After 18 days of observation, I came to know that there was a colony of Little Cormorants near this individual's roosting site.

In cormorants, very few records of albinism are found in published literature. Most of earlier records were misidentified, since birders often reported leucism as 'partial albinism', or full leucism as albinism, which is incorrect (Van Grouw 2006). Albinism has been reported in Great Cormorant (*P. carbo*) (Goula & Parchas 2012), Bank Cormorant (*P. neglectus*) (Nelson 2005), Cape Cormorant (*P. capensis*) (Cook *et al.* 2012) and Guanay Cormorant (*P. bougainvillii*) (Delord *et al.* 2012), though it is possible that the mutation was not correctly identified in these cases.

[Since identification of the proper mutation in plumage aberrant birds is very difficult, we decided to send the images to Hein Van Grouw, the leading expert on plumage aberrations due to mutations in birds. His detailed reply is given below, with his permission:

The 'white' Little Cormorant does seem to be white, but when you observe it more closely then you can see that very pale



Pranav Vaghashiya

pigmentation is present, especially at the base of the feathers (e.g. in the tail). Also some (new) feathers are clearly pale coloured instead of white (e.g. in shoulder plumage) and therefore it is NOT Albino. This bird is, in my opinion, Ino. For more details about Ino, see Van Grouw (2013). Ino birds do also have reddish eyes, but they do not have the eye sight problems Albinos have and therefore Ino birds can survive in the wild and Albinos cannot. As the very pale colour of Ino plumage bleaches very quickly further in the (day) light, the plumage soon seems to be clear white, and that in combination with the reddish eyes makes the confusion with Albino understandable. However, as already stated above, Albino birds do not survive in the wild; not because they are white but because of their bad eye sight. Therefore you'll never find a (semi) adult Albino bird in the wild as they would not have survived their juvenile stage of life'.

We are very thankful to Hein van Grouw for his help in the identification of the correct mutation in this individual – Eds]

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Tagged Greater Sand Plover from Kachchh

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On 10 April 2015, at Modhva coast near Mandvi in Kachchh, a Greater Sand Plover (*Charadrius leschenaultii*) was seen and photographed with an aluminum ring on the right tarsus and an orange plastic tag marked "TA" on the right tibia.

Information about the ringing and tagging was obtained from Colin Jackson and is follows:

Ring no. A70821 (Nairobi, Kenya Ring) - right tarsus.
Ringed: 8 November 2004

Location: Mida Creek, Kenya. Coordinates: 03°19'S 39°58'E.

Age Class: 4 (adult). Wing: not measured. Mass: 71.9 gm.
Time: 23:00 hrs.

Ringer: Francis Argyle.

The bird was then re-trapped and colour-flagged on a later date. The details of which are as follows:

Colour flag: Orange with black script 'TA' on right tibia.

Date re-trapped: 16 September 2013. Location: as above.
Age Class: 4 (adult).

Wing: 144. Mass: 78.3 gm. Time of capture: 04:15 hrs.

Ringer: Colin Jackson.

With the bird seen on 10 April 2015, it makes this Greater Sand Plover to be 10 years 5 months and 3 days old since it was ringed (as an adult). Distance of this sighting from the ringing site is 4,308 km. This individual was probably on its return migration to its breeding grounds in Central Asia/Mongolia.



As per details provided by Colin Jackson, this is the first sighting of a tagged Greater Sand Plover from Eastern Africa to anywhere. There was one individual ringed in Sudan in 1981 that was recovered in Syria in 1982, but that is the only other recovery of this species. Hence this sighting was very exciting. He further informed that their team is colour-flagging Terek Sandpipers (*Xenus cinereus*) with white flags and Lesser Sand Plovers (*Charadrius mongolus*) also with white flags. Hence all birdwatchers are requested to look out for colour flagged waders in Gujarat and report sightings of such birds.



Prashant Tewari



Jaysukh Parekh

[The tagged Greater Sand Plover was seen again at Modhva, Kachchh on 29 March 2016, by Jaysukh Parekh and the photos were put on the Oriental Bird Images website. It was the same bird and it is remarkable that this individual was seen at the same location after one year, and shows that Greater Sand Plovers are faithful to stopover sites on migration – Eds]

□

Sightings of rufous morph Oriental Scops Owl

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Amreli District

We visited a forest area near Bhad village (21° 12' N, 71° 14' E), Ta: Khambha, Dist. Amreli, on 10 January 2016 with our birder friends Bhavesh Baladhiya, Himanshu Vegad, Chhaganbhai Shiyal, Bharat Vegad and Ramesh Makwana. There, we saw and photographed a small, rufous coloured owl roosting in a Banyan tree (*Ficus benghalensis*). We did not hear its call. After carefully observing the bird and taking photographs, we concluded that it was a rufous morph Oriental Scops Owl (*Otus sunia*). There are very few previous records of this species in Gujarat.



Rakesh Bhaliya

Gandhinagar District

We regularly go for birdwatching to 'Aranyaa Udyan', in the eastern part of Indroda Nature Park, Gandhinagar (23° 12' N, 72° 39' E). It is a well wooded area with large trees. On 1 February 2016, at around 08-30 hrs, we saw a small, rufous coloured owl roosting in a 'Chandan' tree (Sandalwood, *Santalum album*). Near this place, there is a small water point with many big trees and Bamboo thickets. We took some photos and identified the owl as a rufous morph Oriental Scops Owl (*Otus sunia*). The bird stayed at the same place for the whole day and was undisturbed by other small birds which came near to it. At around 19-30 hrs, it started preening and then flew away. We went to the same place on the next day but could not locate it. After nightfall, we used call playback to check if the Owl was still there. It responded once and called from a Mango tree (*Mangifera indica*).

The Oriental Scops Owl has been noted by us earlier in Gandhinagar. On 12 October 2014, a small grey-brown coloured owl was seen in 'Punit Van' area for a few minutes. However it was disturbed by other birds and hence we could not confirm its identity. However on 16 October 2015, a small grey coloured owl was seen and photographed in the same area. This time we could take photos and it was confirmed as an Oriental Scops Owl. It was a grey morph bird.

As per our knowledge, Oriental Scops Owl is uncommon in Gujarat.



Irshad Theba

Oriental Scops Owl...

[There are very few previous records of this species in Gujarat. Dharmakumarsinhji (1955) collected two specimens near Bhavnagar and suspected them to be of the subspecies *rufipennis*. There are two subspecies of the Oriental Scops Owl in the Peninsula: the nominate *sunia* and *rufipennis*. *Rufipennis* occurs in 'N Maharashtra through Western Ghats and S E Ghats' and *sunia* in a large area extending from Nepal to Assam, E Bangladesh and through NE Peninsula in Madhya Pradesh and Orissa (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). For Gujarat, the authors give its distribution for south Gujarat and Gir area in Saurashtra, showing it as a resident in our area, with *rufipennis* shown as occurring here. There are three colour morphs in this species; rufous, brown and grey. Regarding identification of the above birds, there is no doubt that these are Oriental Scops Owls. The two birds are clearly of rufous morph.

Oriental Scops Owl was seen and photographed by Mukesh Bhatt in Dang forest (Bhatt 2012) and it is known to occur in the region all round the year (Mukesh Bhatt, pers. comm., verbally). It is presumably resident in the Dang forest area as

many birdwatchers have photographed it in the area in different seasons since then. However these records from Gandhinagar (Central Gujarat) and from Amreli District in Saurashtra are noteworthy.

We thank Abhinand C and Praveen J for their help – Eds]

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Great Bittern at Porbandar

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Kartik Pomal

On 18 Januray 2015, I visited Gosabara wetland, Porbandar with Manojbhai Tank and Jaymeet Solanki. There we photographed a Great Bittern (*Botaurus stellaris*). There are very few records of this bird from Gujarat. Hence this sighting is worth reporting.

[There have been recent records of Great Bittern from Gujarat; Bagda (2014) from Junagadh and Trivedi (2015) from Nal sarovar. Also there are records of Great bittern in November and December 2014 from Gosabara (Rughani 2014). Birdwatchers are requested to send their sightings of Great Bittern from Gujarat so that its status and distribution can be understood – Eds]

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Kartik Pomal

Short Birding Notes



Grey-bellied Cuckoo in Kachchh

On 5 July 2015, at Than near Dhinodhar hill, Kachchh, the first author along with Mahendrabhai, photographed an unfamiliar bird, looking like a Cuckoo (*Cuculus* spp.). Call was not heard. The second author (KP) shared the images with other birdwatchers to confirm its identification. It is well known that immature Cuckoos are notoriously difficult to identify if call is not heard. However for this individual, it was identified as a juvenile, grey-morph Grey-bellied Cuckoo (*Cacomantis passerinus*). The status of Grey-bellied Cuckoo in Kachchh is interesting. It is widely distributed in Gujarat but only one previous record from Kachchh is reported. (Bagda *et al.* 2015), Hence this sighting is significant. [The editors would like to thank Tim Inskipp for helping with the identification of this bird]

Manoj Tank, Kartik Pomal Kachchh.



Booted Eagle preying on Eurasian Sparrowhawk

On 7 February 2016, I was bird-watching in the Little Rann of Kachchh, Bajana, with Asheem, Dr. Sunil Moteria, Jignesh Rathod, Pilu Sitapara, and Manish Kardani. At around 16.00 hrs, we spotted a raptor with a kill in its talons. After watching with binoculars, we could confirm that it was a Booted Eagle (*Hieraaetus pennatus*) with the kill of a Eurasian Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter nisus*). Though we did not see the eagle actually killing the sparrowhawk, we inferred that it was a fresh kill. While we were taking photographs, a Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*) came near the Booted Eagle and tried to snatch the kill from it. This continued for a few minutes. The Booted Eagle then flew away with the kill, with the Peregrine Falcon following it. Eurasian Sparrowhawk is unusual prey for this eagle and the opportunistic behaviour of the Peregrine Falcon, which was trying to rob the eagle of its prey, was interesting.

Rajesh Bhalodia Rajkot. Email: rajshilp_1991@yahoo.com



Probable Eastern Yellow Wagtail in Kachchh

On 17 February 2013, a probable Eastern Yellow Wagtail [*Motacilla (flava) taivana*] was seen and photographed near Chhari-Dhand, Kachchh. Treated as conspecific with *M. flava* by Grimmett *et al.* (2011), there are no confirmed records of *M. f. taivana* from India, as the earlier specimens were misidentified (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Based on the broad yellow supercilium, olive-green crown and mantle, dark ear coverts and darkish lores, this could be identified as a probable Eastern Yellow Wagtail. [I wish to thank Praveen J for helping with the identification]

Shantilal Varu. Kachchh. Email: snvaru@yahoo.in



Forest Wagtail in Kachchh

On 30 January 2016, we saw a Forest Wagtail (*Dendronanthus indicus*) at Chadva Rakhal, Ta: Bhuj. Second author took few record photos. Mostly it is recorded in evergreen and deciduous forests. In Kachchh, previously Himmatsinhji had seen it at Bhuj in his garden on 10 January 1967 and again at Vijayvilas, Mandvi on 31 December 1969. (Himmatsinhji 1967, 1970). Hence this sighting in Kachchh after a long period of 46 years is worth publishing.

Shantilal Varu, Gani Khatri, Jaysinh Parmar, Mahendra Tank. Kachchh. Email: snvaru@yahoo.in

Short Birding Notes...



Bridled Tern from Kachchh

On 17 May 2011, I was birding with Dr. Nirmala Sridhar in the Naliya grasslands of Kachchh, when we saw three Jackals killing a Bridled Tern (*Onychoprion anaethetus*). The Bridled Tern perhaps got drifted away from the prevailing strong winds from the Pingleswar coast side and was weak and unable to fly. We went close to conclusively identify the bird and took some photos. It could be identified as a Bridled Tern based on the narrow white supercilium and dark upperparts. Many Pelagic birds are seen on Gujarat coast in the monsoon season, as they get drifted by the strong winds. There are three earlier records of Bridled Tern from Gujarat; two from Surat (Thakor 2012, Kasambe *et al.* 2014) and one from Ahmedabad (Rafique 2012). This appears to be the first sight record of this species from Kachchh.

Jugal Tiwari Kachchh. Email: cedointia@yahoo.com



Scaly-breasted Munia in Kachchh

On 5th December 2015, I saw 9 Scaly-breasted Munia (*Lonchura punctulata*) near Modhva village (22.77° N, 69.47° E), Ta: Mandavi, Dist: Kachchh. The area was a scrub forest, mainly consisting of *Prosopis juliflora*, *Acacia nilotica* and *Zizyphus mauritiana*. I took a few photos of the birds. On the next day, I went to the same place again but did not find them. According to senior birders J. K. Tiwari and Shantilal Varu, it is rare in Kachchh. J. K. Tiwari recorded it near Naredi village of Abdasa on 10th March 2008 and near Nakhatrana on 3rd February 2013 (pers. comm., verbally). Hence there are very few records of this species from Kachchh. Photo : Ashish Gohil

Dilipsinh Chudasama. Kachchh. Email: raaj_software@yahoo.com



Tickell's Thrush in Vansada National Park

On 6 February 2015, I visited Vansada National Park, Dang with Mitul Desai. There we saw a bird looking like a female Indian Blackbird (*Turdus merula*). I took some photos and was initially confused regarding its identification. After discussing with Arpit Deomurari and Viral Joshi, it was confirmed as a Tickell's Thrush (*Turdus unicolor*). There are very few records of Tickell's Thrush from Gujarat, with only one previous sighting from Vansada National Park (Bagda 2016). Hence this sighting is worth publishing.

Mohammad Jat. Valsad. Email: mohammed796@gmail.com

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BCSG Events

JCT-BCSG capacity building seminar / training on handling Avian Emergencies during Makar-Sankranti (kite flying festival)

A training program meant for educating participants on avian emergencies during Makar-Sankranti festival (due to kite flying) was conducted on 27 December 2015 at Ahmedabad. The program was attended by more than 70 participants from different corners of the state. The first presentation was made at AMA Ahmedabad, followed by a live training session by Jivdaya staff and doctors at Jivdaya Charitable Trust (JCT), Panjrapole.

The first session was chaired by the Mayor of Ahmedabad, Gautam Shah, senior state forest department officials, senior doctors of JCT and vice-president of BCSG, Bhavbhuti Parasharya.

The technical session was held at JCT campus, for teaching participants about handling emergencies, especially injured birds, during Makar-Sankranti. Participants were divided into five teams each, and routed through different training stalls, with emphasis on medical basics like first aid techniques, bird-handling, feeding and rescue methodology. The programme was appreciated by the visiting participants, who learned a lot from the team of professional doctors and volunteers, working dedicatedly for wildlife rescue and release.



Birding in LRK : 23-24 January 2016

A bird-watching program was organized at Little Rann of Kachchh (LRK), Wild Ass Sanctuary, Bajana, with an aim to study the avian diversity of the Rann, especially Raptors, which are seen in good numbers in the winter. The participants were asked to report at Bajana Forest Office by 9.00 am on 23 January 2016. The special dignitaries present during the morning session were Hem Kumar Pande, Additional Secretary, MoEFCC; PCCF, Dr. S. C. Pant and D.C.F., S. M. Saiyad. A post-breakfast audio-video presentation on 'Raptor Identification' was given by senior birder Nirav Bhatt, who explained the field identification of Raptors, which is a very challenging subject. The session was well appreciated by everyone present, including forest officials. A speech by Hem Kumar Pande, and Dr. S. C. Pant, focused on the rich wildlife heritage of LRK and threats to its habitat which have emerged in the recent years. This was followed by a brief speech on the role of BCSG, and its efforts towards conservation, by Vijaya Nadgoda and Shubha Lagavankar.

After lunch, the participants were taken for a jeep safari, covering a distance of more than 25km. The aim was to look for resident and migratory birds. A camp fire at night, with

poetry and jokes by BCSG senior member Bhanubhai Advaryu, made everyone to crack up with laughter.

The second day's session started with a visit to Kharagodha, where every participant got a chance to see the rare Macqueen's Bustard, and an opportunity to understand its habitat preferences. The post-lunch session, the last in the list, was at Tundi Tower and nearby wetland, giving participants an opportunity to see a large number of Flamingos, Cranes and wetland birds.

The forest department staff appreciated the programme and assured help to BCSG for their conservation activities.



Jessore Sloth Bear Sanctuary: 12-13 March 2016

Jessore Sloth Bear Sanctuary, in Arravali hills, was chosen for a two day bird-watching programme in coordination with Arravali Adventure, Palanpur. The programme witnessed a healthy participation of 52 people, including members and non members, coming from different areas of the state. The two day programme was segregated into two bird count sessions, to be covered by 3 teams (each team was named after special birds of Jessore). The first day's trek covered the circumference of the lake, and the forest beside the lake. The first day's session ended with a talk on Jessore Sanctuary by RFO R. K. Jhalundra, followed by a powerpoint presentation on the flora and fauna of Jessore Sanctury by Anuj Raina and Kailash Jani. The second day's birding required a strenuous trek to the mid of Jessore hills via Kedarnath Temple.

The two day bird count totaled 113 species, of which 15 were migratory, including wetland and forest birds. Some special birds seen were Red Spurfowl, Jungle Owlet, Indian Grey Hornbill, Brown-headed barbet, Indian Scops Owl,

Indian Nightjar, Bonelli's Eagle, Shaheen Falcon and a pair of Woolly-necked Storks. The session ended with the felicitation of Dr. Navinbhai Shah and Dr. Jitubhai Vaid (Jitubhai Patel) from Disa, who have been regularly contributing towards conservation by plantations.



A Tip for Longevity - People say you can't make a living from bird watching. That's perhaps true but, it is also true than man does not live by bread alone. Just look at the people who have no such hobbies and spend all their time solely on earning a living. After 60, when they retire from official chair, they don't know what to do with all the time in their hands and just spend it watching the clock! If they had cultivated a hobby like bird watching, perhaps they would have lived longer to enjoy their pension.
- Dr. Salim Ali



Dharmakumarsinhji in the field (Courtesy : 'Sixty Indian Birds')

Raol Shree Dharmakumarsinhji (April 1917 to January 1986)

R. S. Dharmakumarsinhji was youngest among the three sons of late Maharaja Bhavsinhji of Bhavnagar. His childhood spent at Nilambaug palace Bhavnagar and schooling and higher education was at Rajkumar College, Rajkot as well as at Harrow School, England.

He had keen interest in nature and wildlife specifically in birds. He started systematic study on birds in India. He was a wonderful author! In the year 1955 he produced a legendary book "The Birds of Saurashtra" in which he described around 350 species. All the colour paintings/drawings in his book were prepared by Somalal Shah by observing the birds in hand!! He himself was a wonderful artist and had prepared many drawings of birds and animals. His contribution to Indian ornithology is great. He authored four books and 118 scientific articles on birds and natural history in various scientific journals and well known natural history magazines.

In 1950 the Indian Government appointed him to survey five states – Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Rajasthan and Punjab and make recommendations on suitable areas to be declared national parks and wildlife sanctuaries. Over the next three decades he held several conservation-oriented government positions. He was India's first Honorary Wildlife Warden. He also contributed as Vice Chairman of the Indian Board for Wildlife, and a member of the Rajasthan and Gujarat Wildlife Advisory Boards.

R. S. Dharmakumarsinhji would be a classic example of an absolute amateur who achieved full recognition as an ornithologist of enviable reputation. He was the epitome of how a shikari, a photographer, an artist, and a birdwatcher could carve for himself a niche, among scientists, without any formal scientific training.

- I. R. Gadhvi

Department of Marine Science, Bhavnagar

“ Down the millennia of biological evolution, the capacity to cope with the powers of elemental nature has been the driving force of life. The rewards have been the comforts. The disability for whatever reason to stand up to the external forces meant death. Death then refined life! Avoiding death developed a strong thread woven into the fabric of instincts and avoiding it a hallmark of a successful life. Fear of death has driven mankind to extremes of intellectual achievements, damnations and absurdities. Even in this age of so called scientific enlightenment we have not come to terms with death. Death is the cessation of life and instead of making it a preoccupation it is living life vigorously and purposefully that alone can place it in its correct perspective. ”

- Lavkumar Khachar



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