

Flamingo

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Red-backed, Brown, Isabelline and Red-tailed Shrike in Gujarat

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Recent DNA, morphological and vocal studies have resulted in taxonomic changes in shrikes (*Laniidae*). Details about taxonomy, morphological characteristics and identification of Red-backed Shrike (*Lanius collurio*), Brown Shrike (*Lanius cristatus*), Isabelline Shrike (*Lanius isabellinus*) and Red-tailed Shrike (*Lanius phoenicuroides*) are given in Pearson (2000), Worfolk (2000), Harris & Franklin (2000) and Lefranc & Worfolk (2013), which are widely used reference guides. These changes have been incorporated in the latest reference books for India, namely Grimmett *et al.* (2011) and Rasmussen & Anderton (2012), wherein Isabelline Shrike and Red-tailed Shrike are now treated as separate species.

All four of the above species occur in Gujarat. Hence their current status and distribution, along with taxonomic details, is discussed below. Since identification is many times difficult, especially of first-winter birds, Worfolk (2000), along with Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) and Lefranc & Worfolk (2013) was mainly used for identification, and expert opinion taken for some difficult individuals. A host of features are usually required to be studied for separating these species.

Red-backed Shrike



Prasad Ganpule

Fig 1: Red-backed Shrike

Red-backed Shrike breeds in the west and central Palearctic and winters in Africa, and the eastern sub-species *kobylini* occurs here; it is unclear if the nominate *collurio* occurs in India (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). However some authorities like Cramp & Perrins (1993), Worfolk (2000) and Yosef *et al.* (2012) consider that the Red-backed Shrike is best treated as monotypic.

For Gujarat, Grimmett *et al.* (2011) show only isolated records for Kachchh and Saurashtra, while Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) show it as a passage migrant in Kachchh, but give in text as 'mainly south Gujarat', which is erroneous as there are no records from south Gujarat. Ali (1955) collected specimens in Kachchh, and stated it as 'a not uncommon passage migrant', but did not note it in Saurashtra or south Gujarat.

Red-backed Shrike is a regular autumn passage migrant in Gujarat and seen from late August / early September till about mid - November. It is easily seen in Kachchh, but is scarcer in Saurashtra and north Gujarat. It is common in Banni and Naliya in Kachchh. Outside of these areas, Khachar (1996) noted it in Hingolghadh, near Rajkot, and it has been recorded from Little Rann of Kachchh and surrounding areas (*pers. observ.*, one individual on 3 November 2011, images on birding websites like www.orientalbirdimages.org, www.indianaturewatch.net), from Patan (in north Gujarat) and in Poshitra, near Dwarka, Jamnagar District (*pers. observ.*, three individuals on 21 September 2014, **Fig 1**). Sightings have been recently reported from Rajkot and Junagadh (Shamshersingh & Shukla 2016). It could be more widespread but is probably overlooked. More observations outside Kachchh would help in understanding its distribution in other areas in Gujarat. There are unconfirmed reports of Red-backed Shrike in December /January from the state, and may represent overwintering birds, but this can be proved if there are regular, documented sightings in the future. There is only one (probable) record of Red-backed Shrike during spring (return) passage (Ali 1955), and it seems it does not occur in Gujarat during spring passage.

Brown Shrike (*L. cristatus cristatus*)



Fig 2: Brown Shrike

Prasad Ganpule

The nominate Brown Shrike (*L. c. cristatus*) breeds in eastern Siberia, from the Russian Altai and the Ob river, eastwards through northern and eastern Mongolia (where it is sympatric with *isabellinus*) to the Pacific and is a winter visitor in India, mainly to eastern India (Worfolk 2000, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

Only two isolated winter records of Brown Shrike are shown for Gujarat (Kazmierczak 2000, Grimmett *et al.* 2011), while Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) do not show its occurrence in Gujarat. Ali (1955) collected two specimens from the Dang

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forest area in south Gujarat and noted that it was not seen elsewhere in Gujarat, Saurashtra or Kachchh. The same two records are probably shown in the above mentioned reference texts for Gujarat. Himmatsinhji (1995)

recorded it in Kachchh, though considered the identification as tentative, and remarked that it would be interesting to know if there are confirmed sightings in north Gujarat and Saurashtra.

I have noted Brown Shrike three times in the last few years (**Fig 2**) and there have been other sightings recently from Gujarat. I have tried to collect as many records (photographs) posted on different birding websites, to get an idea of its status and distribution in Gujarat.

As can be seen from the records given in the table, Brown Shrike is a rare winter migrant to Gujarat. Sightings in all the winter months are indicative that there are at least some individuals wintering in Gujarat. In the winters of 2015-2016, and 2016-2017, more birds were noted here; a sighting near Bhuj, Kachchh (Parekh 2016), from Jamnagar on 6 December 2016 (Maulik Varu, *pers. comm.*) and from Girnar Wildlife Sanctuary, Junagadh, in January 2016 (Naman Doshi, *pers. comm.*). An adult was photographed in Naliya, Kachchh, on 12 September 2016 (Punit Mehta, *eBird*) and a first-winter individual was noted near Porbandar on 25 December 2016 (*pers. observ.*). Since there have been many sightings here, in almost all parts of the state, it can be said that this extends its range eastwards towards Gujarat.

It is possible that the Brown Shrike is overlooked due to identification difficulties. There are many photos of shrikes from Gujarat posted on birding websites as Brown Shrikes. However, most of them are misidentified. I have also not considered sightings posted on 'eBird' without photos. I have taken only sightings where the identification is confirmed with photographs. My personal observation is that the Brown Shrike is a rare, but regular, winter migrant to Gujarat, with at least a few individuals wintering here.

Brown Shrike (*L. c. lucionensis*) (Philippine Shrike)



Fig 2a: Philippine Shrike

Jaysukh Parekh (Suman)

Also known as 'Philippine Shrike', it breeds throughout eastern China, south to Guangdong and west to Sichuan, Japan and Korea and winters in south eastern China, Philippines, Indonesia, and in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands and Sri Lanka in the Indian subcontinent (Worfolk 2000). It is a regular migrant to south India (Mohapatra & Santharam

Sightings of Brown Shrike in Gujarat

Map Reference No	Location	Date	Observer
1	Galkund, Dang Forest, S Gujarat Chikhli, near Surat, S Gujarat	20 April 1946 25 March 1948	Ali (1955)
2	Bhuj and Mandvi, Kachchh	Unknown (winter)	Himmatsinhji (1995)
3	Near Morbi	21 October 2008	Author's Sighting
4	Near Charakhla, Jamnagar	20 December 2009	Maulik Varu, K V Zala; <i>in litt</i>
5	Near Morbi	3 February 2011	Author's Sighting
6	Randarda, near Rajkot	15 January 2012	Ashok Mashru; <i>in litt</i>
7	Greater Rann of Kachchh	30 November 2012	Mishra (2012); OBI
8	Velavadar National Park, near Bhavnagar	4 December 2013	Saikia (2013); OBI
9	Banni Grassland, Greater Rann of Kachchh	5 December 2013	Tiwari (2013); IBC
10	Velavadar National Park, near Bhavnagar	4 January 2014	Kharade (2014); OBI
11	Saladi, near Amreli	28 December 2014	Author's Sighting
12	Velavadar National Park, near Bhavnagar	1 January 2015	Esha Munshi; <i>eBird</i>

OBI: www.orientalbirdimages.org, IBC: www.ibc.lynxeds.com

1992, Balachandran & Alagar 1994, Balachandran & Sehgal 2008), especially to the south-east coast of India (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). It is not known to occur in Gujarat.

On 11 March 2012, I noted a Philippine Shrike near Shivilakha Dam, near Bhachau, in eastern Kachchh (23° 25' N 73° 38' E). A brief description as noted in the field is given below:

'An adult Shrike with black mask (thin in front of the eye) and faint supercilium above eye, lavender-grayish head and nape, brown back and tail, whitish throat, and faintly rufous washed underparts. The bill was blackish with a paler base to lower mandible (probably a female?)'.

The lavender-grayish head and nape was very distinctive and contrasted with the brown back, and was immediately obvious in the field, and hence it could be identified as a Philippine Shrike. The similar *cristatus* Brown Shrike has a brown head while Isabelline Shrike (*arenarius* and *isabellinus*) would not show lavender-grayish head. Though seen well with binoculars, I could only get a record photograph from a considerable distance as the bird was very wary and did not allow close approach. However, a Philippine Shrike has been noted and also photographed in November 2012 in Kachchh (Parekh 2012), and the photo is given here (**Fig 2a**).

These records are well west of its normal wintering range, and are the westernmost sightings of the Philippine Shrike known so far for India, and it seems to be a vagrant to Gujarat. These are the only two records reported from Gujarat till now.

Isabelline Shrike



Prasad Ganpule

Fig 3: Isabelline Shrike - *arenarius*

The taxonomy of Isabelline Shrike is complicated. There are three sub species recognized for the Isabelline Shrike; *arenarius*, *isabellinus* and *tsaidamensis* (Yosef & ISWG 2008). The taxon breeding in Mongolia is now *isabellinus* (previously known as *speculigerus*) while *arenarius* (previously *isabellinus*) breeds in the Tarim basin, China (Worfolk 2000).

Birds wintering in India are mainly *arenarius*, while *isabellinus* is not definitely known for our region (Rasmussen & Anderton

2012). This taxonomic uncertainty is reflected in the comments made by Ali (1955) for Isabelline Shrike specimens collected in Gujarat, and to some extent in Abdulali (1976).

Worfolk (2000) explains in detail the taxonomy of Isabelline Shrike, alluding to Pearson (2000), who pointed out the new taxonomic nomenclature. This nomenclature was contested by Panov (2009), who prefers to follow the old nomenclature for Isabelline Shrike (namely *L. i. isabellinus*, *L. i. speculigerus* and *L. i. tsaidamensis*), pointing out errors in Pearson (2000). But further research on the type series (Pearson *et al.* 2012) confirms that the nomenclature given by Pearson (2000) is correct. Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) also follow this nomenclature and the same is followed here.

The situation in Gujarat regarding Isabelline Shrike complex is as follows:

arenarius: also known as 'Chinese Shrike', this taxon is a very common winter migrant to Gujarat. It is seen in almost the entire state in suitable habitat. A majority of Isabelline Shrikes seen here are of the *arenarius* type, which has pale lores and plumage, brownish wings not contrasting with mantle and pale rufous tail. The white primary patch is usually not present, but sometimes a small patch may be seen. Underpart colour usually ranges from a faint rufous to sometimes a more strongly washed orange, but many birds seem to have almost pure whitish underparts. Another feature seen here is that some individuals have completely gray upperparts with almost no sandy-brown coloration.

Hence, there is a lot of individual variation seen in the *arenarius* type birds occurring here. Some examples are given below:

A typical individual seen near Amreli, on 28 December 2014, with pale base to bill, pale lores, pale rufous underparts, sandy grey-brown mantle and greater coverts, slightly rufous ear coverts. This type of individuals are very common here (**Fig 3**).

Another *arenarius* type individual with very diffuse mask, grey brown mantle and wings, rufous rump and tail with faint barring (**Fig 4**). Tail barring is sometimes present (Small 2000) but is not usually noted in the individuals here. Seen in Little Rann of Kachchh on 19 October 2014.

A more strongly marked individual, with pale lores, grey-brown upperparts, buffish supercilium, strongly marked flanks and wings with a small white primary patch (**Fig 5**), seen in Little Rann of Kachchh on 22 December 2013.

isabellinus: Also known as 'Daurian Shrike', this taxon is given as 'not definitely known for the region' (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). It has a uniform appearance, with sandier upperside and buffish underparts, a complete face mask,

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pointed wings, reddish tail and white primary patch. The wings are blackish and contrast with the mantle. Supercilium and ear coverts are buffish, and flanks are often richly orange toned.

Though rare, *isabellinus* type individuals, with complete black mask, larger white primary patch and strongly rufous underparts are seen in Gujarat, examples of which are given below:

1. An individual in the northern part of Little Rann of Kachchh on 1 February 2014 (**Fig 6**) showed a complete black mask, sandy upperparts, strongly rufous flanks and tail, blackish wings with white primary patch, which is very similar to *isabellinus*.
2. Another individual seen on 14 January 2016 in Little Rann of Kachchh (**Fig 7**) had a complete face mask, reddish tail, white primary patch, sandy upperparts and pale rufous underparts, which was similar to *isabellinus*. However,



though seen well, I could get a photograph only from the front.

There are some photographs posted on birding websites (OBI, IBC) from Gujarat, in which individuals similar to *isabellinus* can be seen. Since *isabellinus* breeds from the Russian Altai, through northern China and Mongolia, and winters in Saudi Arabia and eastern to central Africa (Worfolk 2000), it is quite possible that some birds may straggle to Gujarat. Also there is a continuous cline from *isabellinus* to *arenarius* (van Duivendijk 2011), and it is possible that birds from entire range may be occurring here. Thus, it can be said that *isabellinus* type individuals do occur here but whether they are winter visitors or passage migrants/vagrants is not known.

***tsaidamensis*:** Breeding in northern China (Qinghai) and described as similar to *arenarius* but larger, it is more similar to *isabellinus*, and the wintering area of this taxon is not known (Worfolk 2000). However, phenotypes of male *tsaidamensis* in Plate 2 in Panov (2009) are similar to *arenarius* but larger, with pale plumage and pale lores, dark bill and creamish underparts with restricted rufous, but with a larger white primary patch. Hence, there are differences in the description



given for this taxon. But specimens of *tsaidamensis* in the St. Petersburg Museum, Russia, show that this taxon is very similar to *arenarius*, but significantly larger, with a prominent white primary patch (Lars Svensson, *in litt.*). Though this form is said to be non-valid (Small 2000), it is accepted by Yosef & ISWG (2008) and Gill & Donsker (2015), who, along with Pearson (2000), give its wintering range as India and Pakistan. This is somewhat surprising as there have been no published records in recent literature (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012) of this taxon wintering here. In Gujarat, some *arenarius* type Isabelline Shrikes seen here are very dull in plumage, do seem to be noticeably large in size and have a white primary patch, which is similar to *tsaidamensis*, but this can only be proven if the birds are trapped and morphometric measurements are taken.

On 25 December 2015, a large, pale Isabelline Shrike with a prominent primary patch, pale lores and restricted rufous on underparts was photographed (**Fig 8**) in the Banni area in Greater Rann of Kachchh. This individual was similar to a *tsaidamensis* type Isabelline Shrike, and differs from *arenarius* by its larger white primary patch, larger size and very pale plumage as given in Panov (2009). Expert opinion was taken for this bird; Lars Svensson commenting that this individual fits well with *tsaidamensis*. He further stated that two parent birds of this sub species seen by him in Tibet, China, looked the same. This is probably the first photographic documentation of this taxon in India. The sub-specific identity of such birds can be further confirmed by trapping and measuring these individuals. Hence, this taxon is best considered to be 'data deficient' for Gujarat at present and further study is needed to ascertain its status here.

Red-tailed Shrike (*L. phoenicuroides*)

Also known as 'Turkestan Shrike', it was split from Isabelline Shrike and is now considered as an independent species based on differences in morphology, vocalisations, behaviour and migration routes (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). This treatment is also favoured by Panov (2009), who gives references from various Russian sources for treating this as an independent species. It is also accepted as a separate species by Gill & Donsker (2015).

Red-tailed Shrike is generally described as having striking head pattern with white supercilium and throat, solid black lores, blackish wings, rufous crown with grey brown mantle and dark rufous tail (Worfolk 2000). The contrast of rufous crown with grey-brown mantle is considered diagnostic.

The status of Red-tailed Shrike in India is interesting. While it is shown as an autumn passage in Gujarat by Grimmett *et al.* (2011) and Rasmussen & Anderton (2012), the latter authors



Fig 8: Isabelline Shrike - *tsaidamensis*

Prasad Ganpule

state that 'birds reported from extreme western India (mostly Kachchh) are closer to Isabelline Shrike; pure *phoenicuroides* winter extralimittally'. A specimen collected from Radhanpur (north Gujarat) in January is stated to be closer to *isabellinus* (Abdulali 1976). A question mark regarding its occurrence for Gujarat is shown in the breeding and distribution map (see Figure 1) in Worfolk (2000), while Grimmett *et al.* (2011) state 'small numbers migrate through NW subcontinent'.

I carried out surveys in Saurashtra and Kachchh during passage migration season in September / October in the past three years to specifically search for Red-tailed Shrikes. Though I remember seeing 2-3 individuals of probable Red-tailed Shrikes in Kachchh before 2008, I had noted it as Isabelline Shrike, without going into detailed sub-specific identification at that time. There is a recent record of a Red-tailed Shrike from Kachchh in September (Tewari 2015). Small numbers are known to migrate through Kachchh (Jugal Tiwari, *pers. comm.*), with a recent record in September 2016 (Tiwari 2016). I also searched websites like orientalbirdimages.org, www.indianaturewatch.net and www.ibt.lynxeds.com to find Red-tailed Shrike sightings from Gujarat, but failed to find any other photographs of it.

In the last three years, I saw three Red-tailed Shrikes, which were seen in September, during autumn passage. These individuals were identified on the basis of the criteria given in Worfolk (2000) and Rasmussen & Anderton (2012). Of these, one was seen in Saurashtra and two in Kachchh. One Red-tailed Shrike was seen in a scrub forest near Morbi in September 2014, photographed (**Fig 9**) and could be identified based on its typical face pattern; showing pure whitish supercilium and throat, solid black mask with black lores (meeting over the bill), rufous crown, whitish underparts, sandy-grayish brown upperparts, and blackish wings with a white primary patch (which was more visible when seen in flight). The identification was confirmed by Tim Worfolk

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(*in litt.*), who agreed that it was similar to a *phoenicuroides*. I observed another individual, a first-winter bird, in Khadir, Kachchh, on 5 September 2015. The individuals seen here are similar to *phoenicuroides* rather than *isabellinus*. So, it seems that the Red-tailed Shrike is a rare autumn passage migrant in Gujarat, and further records can prove this.



Fig 9: Red-tailed Shrike - *phoenicurooides*

Red-tailed Shrike (*L. phoenicurooides*) 'karelini' morph

The 'karelini' morph of the Red-tailed Shrike has grey upperparts and crown (with no contrast and is usually pale plumaged), white supercilium and throat, whitish underparts and a rufous tail. It is treated as a hybrid between *phoenicurooides* and *collurio* (Panov 2009) but some authorities consider it to be a valid sub-species of Red-tailed Shrike (van Duivendijk 2011).

The 'karelini' morph birds dominate in the lowland areas north and west of Lake Balkash, Kazakhstan, while the '*phoenicurooides*-type' birds occur in the mountain areas south and east of Lake Balkash (Wassink & Oreel 2007). This morph is not known to occur in India and is not illustrated in either Grimmett *et al.* (2011) or Rasmussen & Anderton (2012), and also not described in these texts.

On 14 September 2014, I went for bird watching to a scrub forest near Morbi, Gujarat (22° 43' N 71° 07' E). It is locally known as 'Jambudiya Vidi' and is a typical scrub forest interspersed with grassland. At around 16:00 hrs, I observed a shrike which had pale, concolorous brown-grayish crown and upperparts, prominent white supercilium and throat, black mask, blackish wings with large primary patch, reddish tail and whitish underparts (Fig 10, 11). I identified it as a 'karelini' morph Red-tailed Shrike, based on the lack of rufous on crown, brownish-grey upperparts and the colour of the underparts, which appeared to me as white in the field, although subsequent examination of the images revealed a slight pinkish-buff wash to the breast and flanks. Since I had never seen such an individual here, and it is not known to occur in

this area, but breeds in Kazakhstan, I sent the images to Arend Wassink, author of 'Birds of Kazakhstan'. He confirmed that it was a 'karelini' type individual.



Fig 10: Red-tailed Shrike - *karelini* morph



Fig 11: Red-tailed Shrike - *karelini* morph

This sighting of a 'karelini' type individual from Gujarat is surprising and has not been reported before from India. This location lies east of its normal passage migration route and it is possible that some individuals may be taking an easterly route to their wintering grounds, thus passing through Gujarat.

Hence, Red-tailed Shrike of both types – *phoenicurooides* and *karelini* – occur in Gujarat. This is significant considering that Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) do not give pure *phoenicurooides* as occurring here and the sighting of a 'karelini' morph individual is a first for India. Thus, it can be confirmed that a few Red-tailed Shrikes do occur in Gujarat, probably as rare autumn passage migrants.

Conclusion

These shrikes, in general, are difficult to identify and are especially confusing in first-winter plumages. That this group represents an identification challenge can be shown by the fact that in Plate 8, in Collar & Inskipp (2012), the individual shown as an adult Turkestan Shrike from Bengaluru, Karnataka, is misidentified, and it is an adult Brown Shrike of the *cristatus* subspecies. Thus, there are many cases of mistaken identification in these species, which can also be seen in various shrike photos posted on the internet on birding websites.

Further confusion is sometimes caused by nomenclature, as the Isabelline Shrike was earlier known as 'Rufous-tailed Shrike', a name which is similar to 'Red-tailed Shrike', though both are now separate species. Hence, birdwatchers are urged to use the names used here to avoid confusion arising due to similar sounding names.

For Gujarat, further study is needed to understand the ecology and habitats of Isabelline Shrikes wintering here. Ideally, some individuals should be trapped, and measurements taken, to know the sub-specific identity of the birds wintering here, as it seems all three sub-species of Isabelline Shrike occur in Gujarat. Red-backed, and Red-tailed Shrikes are autumn passage migrants in Gujarat and more sightings will help in understanding their distribution here. Brown Shrike is a rare winter visitor, with scattered records across the state and could be regular in well wooded areas, while the Philippine Shrike is a vagrant to Gujarat.

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'Diluted' Little Grebe near Jamnagar

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Vishwas Thakkar



Vishwas Thakkar

On 25 June 2017, I was on a birding trip to the outskirts of Jamnagar (22° 19' N 70° 03' E) with my friend Umesh. We found a few water birds in a small pond and decided to stop there. While photographing the birds, we saw a Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*), which was looking different due to its whitish appearance. On careful observation, we noted that it had non-pigmented white feathers on most of the body except a slight brown-blackish tinge on crown, head and mantle. Its eyes and bill appeared to be normal in color. It was seen with a few normal plumaged Little Grebes in the pond and hence we could compare it with conspecifics. Initially, we thought it could be an albino. But after referring to Van Grouw (2013), we came to know that identifying the correct mutation in the field is quite difficult and this individual was not an albino, since it appeared to have normal coloured eyes. We could not identify the correct mutation.

[As stated by the observer, the identification of the correct mutation is often quite difficult. We sent the images to André Konter, who has extensive experience of aberrant colourations in grebes (*Podicipedidae*). His detailed reply regarding this individual is given below:

The problem is sun bleaching; with the bird in your hand, you can have a look at the colour of the feathers at the base which remain rather unaffected by the action of the sun.

It is clear from the start that we are in the presence of a genetic mutation; any age related or other cause is to be excluded. Albinism and leucism can also be excluded.

Brown and isabel dilution are unlikely to be the cause as the chestnut parts in the neck would not have been much affected. With silver dilution, the upper head and back would still be dark. We remain with pastel dilution and the two forms of ino as candidates for the cause. What I can see in the photos is that the bill and skin at the base of the bill are affected by the mutation. A still rather dark greyish colour survives in the upper head whereas in the back, some light brownish tints mix with greyish tints. The eyes appear unaffected.

With ino, the eyes should be affected (however, I am unable to tell the effect on yellow eyes) and the upper head should have more brownish tints. With pastel dilution, the colour of the upper head should have turned into a silvery grey (this is the case here), the eyes are generally not affected (this is also the case) and bare parts may or may not be affected (this criterion does not help). At the end, I conclude that this grebe is most probably affected by pastel dilution'.

Hein Van Grouw stated that 'we can assume this bird is an adult and therefore should be in breeding plumage. In normal-coloured breeding plumage, this species has a large reddish-brown patch at the front, and the pigment responsible for this colour is phaeomelanin. The rest of the plumage is eumelanin. As in the aberrant bird, all the phaeomelanin is (almost) absent and the eumelanin is strongly reduced, this aberration must be a form of dilution'.

*Thus, this individual was identified as a bird affected with dilution. Dilution is defined as a quantitative reduction of melanins. Worldwide, there have been many reports of aberrant plumages in different subspecies of Little Grebe (Konter 2015). The subspecies of Little Grebe in India is *albescens* (Llimona et al. 2017), and there are three records of aberrant coloured Little Grebes from India, including a record from Gujarat; an albino from Madhya Pradesh (Bharos 1996), a 'white' individual near Baroda, Gujarat (Patankar 2004), and a leucistic bird from Dungarpur district, Rajasthan (Sharma et al. 2010). However, it is possible that the correct mutation in these cases was not properly identified as per the criteria given in Van Grouw (2013).*

As awareness increases, there have many been recent reports of colour aberrant birds from Gujarat (Patel 2016, Trivedi 2016, Vaghasiya 2016, Rafique 2017) and this sighting is an addition to such observations here in the state.

We are very grateful to André Konter and Hein Van Grouw for all their help – Eds]

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European Nightjar: a passage migrant in Kachchh

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- *europaeus* – N & C Europe, east through NC Asia (mainly South of c. 60° N) to Lake Baikal region.
- *meridionalis* – NW Africa and Iberia, east through S Europe, Crimea, Caucasus and Ukraine to NW Iran and Caspian Sea.
- *sarudnyi* – Kazakhstan from Caspian Sea, east to Kyrgyzstan, Tarbagatai and Altai Mountains.
- *unwini* – Iraq and Iran, east to W Tien Shan and Kashgar region, north to S Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan and south to W & N Pakistan.
- *plumipes* – E Tien Shan (NW China and W & S Mongolia).
- *dementievi* – S Transbaikalia and NE Mongolia.

The European Nightjar (*Caprimulgus europaeus*), also known as Eurasian Nightjar, is a nightjar that breeds throughout Northern and Central Europe; from South Scandinavia, western and eastern Europe, NW Africa, to Central Asia, NW China and NE Mongolia; it is highly migratory and winters in sub-Saharan Africa (Cleere & Christie 2017). Despite decreasing population trends, due to its large numbers and huge breeding range, it is classified by the IUCN as 'Least Concern' (BirdLife International 2016). The main threats to the species are habitat loss, disturbance and a reduction of its insect prey through pesticide use.

The preferred habitat of the European Nightjar is dry, open country with some trees and small bushes, such as forest clearings or woodlands. There are six recognised subspecies, although the differences are mainly clinal; birds become smaller and paler in the east of the range and the males have larger white wing spots. Birds of intermediate appearance occur where the subspecies' ranges overlap. The subspecies and their ranges, taken from Cleere & Christie (2017), are as follows:

However, there is some variation in the descriptions of the subspecies. Cleere (2010) describes the subspecies *unwini* as being greyish, while Ayé *et al.* (2012) describe this as paler, plainer and more greyish with more sparsely marked undertail-coverts.

For the Indian Subcontinent, it is said to be widely distributed and a common breeding bird and passage migrant in Pakistan, with a few birds possibly over-wintering occasionally (Cleere & Christie 2017). For India, it is an autumn passage migrant in north-western India, mainly in Kachchh, with stragglers recorded from Jodhpur (Rajasthan), Mumbai city (Maharashtra) and Gorakhpur (Uttar Pradesh) (Ali & Ripley 2001). Grimmett *et al.* (2011) show it as a passage migrant in Kachchh, and give isolated records from Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Uttar Pradesh.

For Gujarat, it has been recorded only in Kachchh as an autumn passage migrant. Lester (1904) does not mention sighting the European Nightjar in Kachchh. Ali (1945) noted the European Nightjar in Kachchh, from 17 September to

European Nightjar....

24 September, and stated that it was fairly abundant in the third week of September, with the subspecies given as *unwini* (= *unwini*). However, from a study of specimens by Abdulali (1972), both *unwini* and *sarudnyi* are given for Gujarat; specimens from Kachchh are mainly *unwini*, with only one specimen of *sarudnyi* from Jalandar Bet (Kachchh). Ali (1954) noted that most birds were gone by the third week of October, and were not observed on return (spring) migration. However, Dharmakumarsinhji (1955) states that, 'it is a post monsoon migrant departing in March' and 'it migrates to Saurashtra in the winter season', which is rather surprising, as the European Nightjar is not known to be a winter visitor here, and is only an autumn passage migrant. It is further stated by the author that the birds were seen roosting under *Acacia* sp. trees, and were also flushed from salty reed marshes.



Shivam Tiwari

Observations

I have been observing the European Nightjars during autumn passage in Kachchh. Sightings of the species collected from Kachchh are given below in the table. Inferring from the sightings listed in the table, the European Nightjar arrives in Kachchh, mainly in September, but few birds may arrive as early as August. The majority of sightings have been in September, with most of the birds departing by October.

There is only one recent sighting of the European Nightjar from outside Gujarat; an individual was photographed in August 2011, in Jodhpur, Rajasthan (Devasar 2011, photo by Pradip Krishen, posted on the OBI website). All the other recent records of the species are only from Kachchh. A total of 50 European Nightjars were seen in the Banni region of Kachchh from 25 September 2015 to 4 October 2015 (Tiwari 2016). Hence, it is a fairly common autumn passage migrant in Kachchh.

Roosting: The birds roost in tropical thorn forests, with sparse shrubs and usually in rocky terrain. They roost on boulders and rocks, surrounded by shrubs and *Acacia* sp. trees, relying on their sublime camouflage and surrounding vegetation for safety.

Feeding Habits: Some European Nightjars feeding in the Banni region were observed to perch on *Salvadora persica* branches in the night. The stomach contents of a road kill specimen found on 12 September 2008 contained large brown beetles, which had been partly digested. The stomach contents of specimens collected by Ali (1954) in Kachchh contained Dung Beetles and Crickets.

Sightings of European Nightjar in Kachchh

Sighting By	Date	Place	Remarks
Satheesan <i>et.al.</i> (1994)	26 September 1987	Bhuj, Kachchh	Aircraft – hit bird (probable)
Jugal Tiwari	12 September 2008	Kachchh	Road kill, male, stomach content - beetles
Jugal Tiwari	19 September 2008	Kachchh	Road kill, male
Jugal Tiwari	24 September 2008	Kachchh	Road kill, female
Jugal Tiwari & Atul Jain	October 2008	Gachdo, Kachchh	Roosting in stony and hilly area
Jugal Tiwari	29 September 2015	Near Jatavira, Kachchh	Resting on the ground at sunset
Veer Vaibhav Mishra	29 September 2015	Near Jatavira, Kachchh	Road kill, female
Veer Vaibhav Mishra	30 September 2015	Near Jatavira, Kachchh	
Author's sighting	11 September 2016	Dhinodhar hill, Kachchh	Male roosting on rocky slope among <i>Acacia</i> sp. trees and shrubs
Author's sighting & Jugal Tiwari	12 September 2016	Near Dhinodhar, Aral village, Kachchh	Male roosting, <i>unwini</i> subspecies

Vocalisation: At 11:00 hrs on 29 September 2015, in the Banni Grassland near Chhari-Dhand, a single bird was heard calling; the call was a territorial 'churr', similar to the calls described by Cleere (2010). But generally, European Nightjars are silent during migration. Ali (1954) noted that the birds were silent except for an occasional quick repeated 'chuck-chuck-chuck' call.

The European Nightjar is a regular passage migrant through north-west India. The subspecies that passes through the region is *unwini*, and the passage of *sarudnyi/plumipes* subspecies is also probable. Birders in north-western India should keep a watch for the movements of European Nightjars during the autumn passage migration season from August till October. Though it has not been noted outside Kachchh, it is very probable that it could occur in suitable habitat in Saurashtra too. We need to conduct surveys in other areas of the state for this species in the autumn migration season.

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Ruff in almost full breeding plumage in Jamnagar

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Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax* or *Calidris pugnax*), is a common winter migrant to Gujarat (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). It is commonly seen in Jamnagar in the salt pans and the coastal areas of the city.

On 16 June 2017, I was watching and photographing birds in a marshy wetland near the Gandhinagar area of Jamnagar. There, I saw that three Ruffs flew in and started feeding. I was surprised to see that two of the birds were males in almost full breeding plumage. I took a few pictures of the two birds. The third individual was in non-breeding plumage and so could not be sexed. It can be seen from the photos that the birds were not in their full breeding plumage, as the head tufts were missing. However, the extensive white coloured 'ruff', black breast and the black scapulars were clearly seen in one bird while the other bird had a fully developed black 'ruff' and blackish upper parts.

The presence of these birds in mid-June in Jamnagar is unusual and rare but it has been reported earlier. An individual with a blackish, extensive 'ruff' was photographed in Jamnagar earlier (Patel 2009), and according to senior birdwatchers here, individuals have been reported in similar, near full breeding plumage in Jamnagar area a few times before. A sighting of a Ruff in active moult, starting to acquire breeding plumage, seen by Rajdeepsinh Jadeja in Bedi area, Jamnagar, on 10 May 2017 (*pers. comm.*), confirms that some birds start to acquire breeding plumage in their wintering areas.



Ruff...

The most probable reason for the sighting of these birds in near full breeding plumage could be the early return of males from their breeding areas. The mating strategy in Ruff is extremely complex and there are three types of males; independent, satellite and 'female-type' males, which are called 'faeders' (Jukema & Piersma 2006). The satellite males lack the



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head tufts and facial wattles, but have ruff, which is usually white or pale yellowish, lacking solid black in the ruff or head tufts (Farrell *et al.* 2015). But here, one individual had a solid blackish ruff, which was unlike a satellite male.

It seems unlikely that these were birds which stayed back (over-summering birds), as such individuals usually do not attain breeding plumage. It is well known that many waders stay back during the summer in Gujarat and are seen in the lakes and coastal areas of the state. A few waders (including Ruffs) are seen all round the year in Jamnagar also. In a study on Ruffs in Kenya, only females stayed back and over-summered (Pearson 1981), and in shorebirds in Pulicat Lake (Andhra Pradesh and Tamil Nadu), Ruffs were not recorded in

June and July, but were seen from August till May (Kannan & Pandiyan 2012). Mostly, Ruffs start to arrive in Jamnagar in the month of July (*pers. obsv.*). Males, who play no part in nesting and chick care, leave the breeding grounds earlier, in late June or early July, followed by the females in mid-July, and juveniles from late July to August (Van Gils *et al.* 2017). In Ukraine, the earliest observations of autumn migration of Ruff were on 18 June (Strus 2014). Hence, some individuals are very early autumn migrants.

An observation of Ruffs in breeding plumage was made in Suru Valley, Ladakh, on 18 July 1977, when a flock included a number of males in full breeding plumage (Prins & Namgail 2017). Thus, it is most probable that these individuals seen in Jamnagar were early autumn migrants, in almost full breeding plumage, and not birds which over-summered / stayed back.

Acknowledgements

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Re-sighting of tagged Greater Sand Plover at Modhava, near Mandvi, Kachchh

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It was a matter of luck, to click a very small tag on the leg of a wader on a six kms long beach, where thousands of birds are moving around, flying and foraging.

As the same, tagged, Greater Sand Plover was reported for two consecutive years at same spot and almost at the same time, we were hopeful to sight the bird once more and started to visit Modhava as many times as possible. We visited Modhava beach, near Mandvi, Kachchh, on 8, 10, 20, 25, and 31 March 2017, and again on 4 April 2017.

After photographing many birds, on 25 March 2017, we saw one Greater Sand Plover which seemed to have a tag on its leg. It was in a mixed flock of waders, which had around 40 Greater Sand Plovers. On enlarging the image on my computer, I was overjoyed to see that it was the same individual seen in the previous years, with an orange plastic tag marked 'TA' on the right tibia. The ringing details for this individual have been given earlier (Tewari 2016).

It is extraordinary that this same individual was seen at the same place, almost at the same time, for three consecutive years during migration. It reaffirms the observation that Greater Sand Plovers are faithful to stop-over sites on migration.

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I was very excited when I saw a tagged Greater Sand Plover (*Charadrius leschenaultii*) and Lesser Sand Plover (*Charadrius mongolus*) last year in March 2016 at Modhava beach, near Mandvi, Kachchh (Tewari 2016, Parekh 2017).

Sighting of Red-breasted Parakeet in Tena village, Surat

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The Red-breasted Parakeet (*Psittacula alexandri*) is listed as a 'Near Threatened' (NT) species by IUCN (BirdLife International 2013). It is resident along the foothills of the entire Himalayas, in North-eastern India, and the Andaman Islands (Grimmett *et. al.* 2011).



A single Red-breasted Parakeet was seen and photographed on 6 November 2016 in Tena village, near Surat. Gujarat is home to three species of parakeets; Plum-headed Parakeet (*Psittacula cyanocephala*), Alexandrine Parakeet (*Psittacula eupatria*) and

Rose-ringed Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*). This could be the first record of Red-breasted Parakeet in Surat District; maybe even a first in the state, as there is no past data or record of this species here. The Red-breasted Parakeet can be identified easily by its 'moustache' like black stripe below its beak, uniform grey-blue head, narrow line from forehead to eye, salmon pink breast and upper abdomen and green-yellow tipped beak.

There can be many reasons behind the sighting of this bird beyond its native range, but the main reason seems to be pet trade. Such introductions by humans have often led to the successful establishment of many exotic birds and expansion of ranges beyond native areas. In general, feral populations of Red-breasted Parakeets are known to occur in cities like Mumbai, Chennai and Bangalore. This bird could have been surviving in the wild, as it was seen with a group of Rose-ringed Parakeets. It came with the flock of Rose-ringed Parakeets and sat on a tree and started feeding. The flock remained there for 4-5 minutes and flew off far away on the arrival of a Eurasian Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*). The sighting of this species in Gujarat is interesting.

[A Red-breasted Parakeet was seen again on 4 December 2016 at Tunda village, about 10-15 kms north-west of Tena village, where it was seen earlier. The bird was not with the Rose-ringed Parakeets group and was seen alone. On speaking

with the villagers, we came to know that it was being seen there since the last three months. We will keep looking for this individual – Palak Thakor & Pradip Sharan, Surat]

[The Red-breasted Parakeet is not included in the checklist of birds of Gujarat (Parasharya et al. 2004, Ganpule 2016). As explained above, this individual is most probably an escapee from the pet trade, which is a major problem. If a feral population is established and survives in the future, then it can be considered in the state checklist. This sighting is similar to the sighting of Vernal Hanging Parrot (*Loriculus vernalis*), reported from Morbi earlier (Ganpule 2011), which was not included in the Gujarat checklist. At present, these sightings are best treated as isolated records. Hence, this species is not included in the state checklist at present – Eds]

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Orange-headed Thrush in Surat

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On 16 June 2015, Nature Club Surat received a call regarding an injured bird. As soon as the call was received, a volunteer was deployed for rescue. After reaching the spot, the volunteer found that an Orange-headed Thrush (*Zoothera citrina*) had been recovered in an injured condition. After examining the bird, the first author discovered that it was just dehydrated. After bringing it to the rescue center, the bird was given plenty of water to drink and kept for 24 hrs to observe its recovery. After it looked to have recovered sufficiently, it was decided

to release it at Gavier Lake, Surat, which is around 10 kms from the rescue site. The Orange-headed Thrush flew away strongly as soon as it was released and perched on a tree close to the lake. On 29 May 2016, an Orange-headed Thrush was observed by Ashish Chaudhari at Gavier Lake. This species is an uncommon resident in south Gujarat (Ganpule 2016), and these sightings from Surat confirm its occurrence here.



Acknowledgements

Special thanks to Mukesh Bhatt and Ashish Chaudhari for sharing valuable Information and photos.

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Sighting of Spotted Crake and Water Rail near Surat

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Pravin Patel



Pravin Patel

There is a large wetland between Palanpore and Ichchhapore villages (21° 12' N, 72° 43' E), about five kms west of the Surat city, south Gujarat. The wetland is fed by Ukai canal and waste water from the city and so it remains filled throughout the year. On 13 March 2017, it was a holiday due to *Holi-Dhuleti* (festival of colours). We visited the wetland in the morning and at around 10:30 hrs, a bird similar to a Brown Crake (*Amaurornis akool*) was seen. We tried to go closer but immediately, it ran into the thick reeds and grass. Pravin Patel, who was with me, could take a single photograph. After scrutinizing the photograph properly, we could confirm that it was a Spotted Crake (*Porzana porzana*). It is rare in our region and it was a lifer for us, so we were very happy. We waited for half an hour but it did not come out. We decided to visit again the next day. Early morning on 14 March, we went to the same place but it was in vain as we could not see it. In the evening, Pravin Patel visited the location again and at around 17:00 hrs, he noticed some movement in the grass. After a few moments, a Spotted Crake came out in the open and was seen clearly

and photographed. After that, from 15 March to 11 April 2017, we regularly observed the Spotted Crake at the same place between 06:00-07:30 hrs in the morning and 17:00-19:00 hrs in the evening.



During these days, a Water Rail (*Rallus aquaticus*) was observed in the same wetland, around 300 to 400 mts away from the location of the Spotted Crake. The Water Rail was easily identified due to its long red bill and bigger size. We kept observing both the birds. After 26 March 2017, the Water Rail was not seen but the Spotted Crake was regularly seen till 11 April 2017.

Both the birds were active during morning and evening, between the hours stated above. On 28 and 29 March 2017, the temperature of Surat city reached up to 42° C, and during these two days, the Spotted Crake was seen only between 06:00-06:30 hrs in the morning and 18:45-19:15 hrs in the evening. But on 30 and 31 March 2017, the temperature dropped to 37° C and the Spotted Crake was seen between 06:00-08:00 hrs in the morning and 17:30-19:15 hrs in the evening.

The Spotted Crake and Water Rail are rare winter visitors to Gujarat (Ganpule 2016). Recent records of Spotted Crake are from Rajkot, Amreli and Ahmedabad (Mashru & Trivedi 2012) while the Water Rail has been noted near Surat in south Gujarat, in Kachchh, and in some places in Saurashtra (Shah 2004, Jadeja & Shah 2007, Joshi & Karia 2015).

The sightings near Surat, of both these species, over a period of 3-4 weeks are important, and indicate that they may remain in the same area in the winter months.

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Display by Macqueen's Bustard in Little Rann of Kachchh

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The Macqueen's Bustard (*Chlamydotis macqueenii*), also known as the Asian Houbara, is a small to mid-sized bustard, and categorized as a 'Vulnerable' species (BirdLife International 2017). Three subspecies of the Houbara Bustard were recognized earlier: *C. u. undulata*, the nominate subspecies found in North Africa; *C. u. fuertaventure*, the Canarian Houbara, and *C. u. macqueenii* or the Macqueen's Bustard, from Central Asia and the Middle East, which is now considered as a separate species. The Macqueen's Bustard is an uncommon winter visitor in Gujarat, mainly seen in the Little – and Greater Rann of Kachchh, with isolated records from Saurashtra (Ganpule 2016).

On 18 October 2015, at around 09:00 hrs, we were birding in the eastern part of the Little Rann of Kachchh. Our guide took us to an area in the Rann with scattered shrubs and grassland near Kharaghoda (23° 13' N, 71° 39' E), where the Macqueen's Bustard is known to occur. After we reached there, we waited for it. After waiting for some 15-20 minutes in our car, the bustard appeared from the bushes, though

it was a little hesitant. It cautiously approached closer and after some time, it started displaying some unusual behaviour. It started opening up its tail feathers like a fan and ducking its head into the body while doing this. We observed this behaviour and took many photos. We did not see any other individual(s) in its vicinity.



It is possible that this type of a display could be a threat display. This individual may have felt threatened by our presence and thus given this display, but this is just conjecture. In a study of different types of behaviours of the Macqueen's Bustard, such tail fanning is seen in 'threatening', and is usually directed towards members of the same or opposite sex, or is a 'predator defence display' (Launay & Paillat 1990). Here, it is more probable that it was a predator defence display. In images of the Macqueen's Bustard posted on the popular website orientalbirdimages.org, three images show the male displaying (Devasar 2006, Mistry 2008, and Bhatt 2010), by erecting the neck feathers and fluffing up its body feathers. However, the tail is not fanned in these images, which is different from what we saw. While it is well known that the Macqueen's Bustard has a spectacular courtship display (BirdLife International 2017), it is unlikely that the display by these birds here could be a courtship display. Very little is known about the behaviour of this species during its wintering in India, and it is more likely that these are threat displays. Behavioural study of this species in the winter will help in its conservation.

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Sightings of Eurasian Hobby in Porbandar from 2014 to 2016

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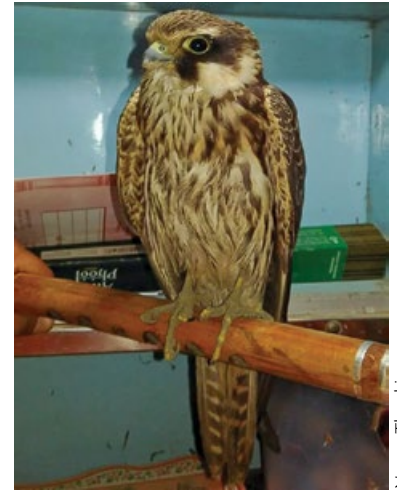


Dhaval Vargiya

The Eurasian Hobby (*Falco subbuteo*) is a small, migratory falcon breeding mostly in the Himalayas, from Kashmir to at least Nepal and probably Bhutan; it winters mainly in Africa and south-east Asia and is a widespread autumn passage migrant in Gujarat (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). It has been described as an uncommon / rare passage migrant in Gujarat (Ganpule 2016).

In a study on the Eurasian Hobby in Gujarat, 36 (66%) out of the 55 sightings recently reported from the state were from August to December, which were considered to be from the autumn migration period (Bhatt *et al.* 2015). Our sightings from Porbandar also support this as all our sightings are from November (three) and December (four). Out of the seven observations, five were in 2014 & 2016 and two are of individuals rescued due to collision with electric wires in 2015. The Karly wetland is situated in the middle of Porbandar city, and electric wires pass through the wetland. On an average, 20 waterbirds are rescued each year from this wetland due to collision with electric wires. In November and December 2015, on both occasions, locals reported to the second author that

a single Eurasian Hobby was found in an injured condition. Both times, the bird was rescued immediately and shifted to the Porbandar Bird Sanctuary for treatment. Unfortunately, both birds did not survive. On 17 November 2016, the first author observed three individuals hunting and feeding on flocks of Globe Skimmer (*Pantala*



Nayan Thanki

flavescens) dragonflies near Vindhyavasini temple of Gosabara Wetland (Mokarsagar Wetland), Porbandar. Sightings of Eurasian Hobby from Porbandar are presented in Table 1. These sightings add to the already known distribution of the Eurasian Hobby in Gujarat and support its status as mainly an autumn passage migrant here. Also, we request the relevant department to take action regarding the power lines in Karly wetland.

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Sightings of Eurasian Hobby in Porbandar during 2014-2016

No	Date	Location	Observer	No of Birds	Remarks
1	30 November 2014	Gosabara, Mokarsagar	First Author	1	<i>pers. obsv.</i>
2	28 December 2014	Gosabara, Mokarsagar	First Author	1	<i>pers. obsv.</i>
3	29 December 2014	Gosabara, Mokarsagar	First Author	1	<i>pers. obsv.</i>
4	16 November 2015	Karly Wetland	Second Author	1	Rescued, but died during treatment
5	5 December 2015	Karly Wetland	Second Author	1	Rescued, but died during treatment
6	17 November 2016	Gosabara, Mokarsagar	First Author	3	Observed feeding on flocks of Globe Skimmer dragonflies
7	25 December 2016	Gosabara, Mokarsagar	First Author	1	<i>pers. obsv.</i>

Breeding of Watercock near Surat

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Anand Patel



Anand Patel

During my search for Watercock (*Gallicrex cinerea*) in the areas surrounding Jahangirpura, on the outskirts of Surat city, I saw and photographed one male Watercock at Dandi Road on 23 July 2016 at around 15:40 hrs. On the next day, a male and one female Watercock were sighted and photographed in flight at Admor village, near Surat. Thereafter, whenever I got time, I visited the place for observation of this Watercock pair. However, this location is about 20 km away from my home and so I again started searching for Watercock nearer my home and found Watercocks at five locations on the Jahangirpura – Hazira road.

One of the locations was just 4 kms away from my home. On 24 August 2016, after returning from my duty at SMIMER Hospital, I went to the place at around 15:30 pm. After a long wait, I saw a chick from far and my first impression was that it was a chick of a Purple Swamphen (*Porphyrio porphyrio*). I photographed it and when I zoomed the photo in my camera for observing the details, I was shocked to see a female Watercock at the corner of the photograph. So I waited for some time and then photographed both the female Watercock and the chick together.

This area is besides the main road, so there is lot of noise of vehicles here. The female Watercock was constantly calling and trying to keep the chick near her. Then the mother Watercock went nearer to its chick and gently steered it into the grass when both disappeared. The total observation time was around two minutes and I could take many photographs.



Breeding Records: Watercock is a regular and common summer visitor to the irrigated area of Bharuch and Surat districts of Gujarat, arriving in the first week of May, when males are in breeding plumage and they stay here till mid-September. It is very much possible that they are nesting here (Patel 2015). Watercock is widely distributed in Gujarat. However, there are only two published records of its breeding in Gujarat; one is a historical record by Lester in and the second is by Uday Vora in 1995 at Velavadar National Park (Mashru 2017). Lester (1897) collected eggs from a shikari in Kachchh, who did not see the bird; the measurements and colour of eggs coincident with the description of Watercock eggs given by Barnes (1891). Except these, no published records of nesting, eggs or chicks of Watercock from Gujarat are known. Surprisingly, there are no recent photos of the chicks even on birding websites or in the social media. Hence, this photographic evidence of breeding of Watercock in south Gujarat is important. Here, it is worth mentioning that Jugal Patel has seen more than 85 Watercocks during the monsoon of 2016 in a radius of 15 km from his village; observations are mainly from Bharuch and Surat districts (*pers. comm.*). Hence, this is further evidence that the Watercock is a common summer visitor to Surat - Bharuch districts, and breeds here.

Acknowledgements

I am thankful to Jugal Patel for inputs and for his help in finalizing the manuscript.

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□

Sighting of Slaty-legged Crake from Dadra and Nagar Haveli; an addition to Gujarat checklist

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Saswat Mishra



Saswat Mishra

On 26 August 2017, I visited Madhuban Dam forest (20° 12' 43.9" N 73° 03' 28.5" E), near Silvassa, in Dadra and Nagar Haveli (Union Territory). The northern part of Madhuban Dam is in Gujarat while the southern part is in Dadra & Nagar Haveli. The area is a Western Ghats type dense forest. Some parts such as Tinoda and Vasona are reserved forests; still hunting of birds is common in these forests by the local people. The weather was sunny and humid. There were light showers in the morning, but after that, it was sunny.

At around 16:30 hrs, I sighted and photographed one adult and one juvenile Slaty-legged Crake (*Rallina eurizonoides*) in this area. The adult was easily identified by its chestnut head and upper breast, and black and white barring on the underparts. The chick was dark brownish in colour and smaller in size. I could take photos of both, the adult and the juvenile.

The adult Slaty-legged Crake was very agile and came out of the grass and bushes for feeding (possibly on insects) along with its chick. It became alert once I started approaching. The chick quickly went inside the bushes, but the adult picked up some insects and ran away into a distant bush. After 15 minutes, the adult came out in the open again and foraged for some time before disappearing in the forest. This was my first sighting of a Slaty-legged Crake from Dadra and Nagar Haveli, and seeing it with a juvenile was indicative that it could be breeding in the area.

[Dadra & Nagar Haveli is a Union Territory (UT) and its geography is unique. Dadra is separate, land-locked and surrounded by Gujarat on all sides, while Nagar Haveli is between Gujarat and Maharashtra; with Gujarat to the north and Maharashtra to the south. In view of its location, BCSG considers Dadra and Nagar Haveli, along with Diu & Daman – another UT which is again bordered by Gujarat, as an extension of the state and the Gujarat state checklist includes sightings from both these UT's. The location of this sighting is also very near Gujarat, about half a km from the actual state boundary (Source: Google Earth).

The photos taken by the author leave no doubt that it is indeed a Slaty-legged Crake and as stated by him, the sighting of a juvenile along with the adult indicates that it could be breeding here, which is quite surprising. The Slaty-legged Crake is a breeding visitor to some parts of the Western Ghats (southern Maharashtra, Goa, Karnataka and northern Kerala) and in the foothills of the Himalayas, and is resident in North-east India, with isolated records from the Peninsula; there are no records of the species shown for Gujarat (Grimmett et al. 2011). This species is not included in the recent checklist of the birds of Gujarat (Ganpule 2016) and it is an addition to the avifauna of the state – Eds]

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A clarification regarding the age/sex of Masked Shrike sighting published in the previous issue - *Flamingo* 15 (2): 6. In the editor's note given in this paper, the individual was thought to be 'probably a male'. Krys Kazmierczak suggested that it was probably a female, in fact, or possibly an immature male. He consulted Tim Worfolk, an expert on shrikes, who wrote 'there are no signs of any browner and more worn retained juvenile primaries or secondaries and it is an adult. There are two generations of median and greater coverts on this bird, the more worn outer coverts have solid black-centres so must be adult, and are not retained juvenile feathers. As to the sex, I suspect it is a female - greyer and less glossy black than the male (browner females occur but perhaps mainly/all 1st summer birds)'. Hence, the individual is an adult and probably a female. We thank Krys Kazmierczak and Tim Worfolk for clarifying the age/sex of this individual. - Eds.

Velvet-fronted Nuthatch in Shoolpaneshwar Wildlife Sanctuary

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Mukesh Bhatt

The Velvet-fronted Nuthatch (*Sitta frontalis*) is an insectivorous, sparrow-sized bird. It is widely distributed throughout the Indian subcontinent, in the Himalayas from Uttarakhand, east to Arunachal Pradesh; NE India and Bangladesh; hills of the peninsula and Sri Lanka, Eastern and Western Ghats and central India (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). For Gujarat, Ali (1955) collected specimens from the Dang forest and noted that it was fairly common in moist deciduous forests, with breeding noted in April. Dharmakumarsinhji (1955) and Trivedi & Soni (2006) also reported the species in Dang forest, Purna WLS and Ratanmahal WLS in the forest belt of south Gujarat. It was considered as possibly locally extinct in Ratanmahal WLS (Trivedi & Soni 2006). It is given as an uncommon resident in the forest belt of Gujarat (Ganpule 2016). We present here recent records of the species from Shoolpaneshwar WLS.

On 25 December 2016, at around 08:00 hrs, during a birding trip in the northern part of Shoolpaneshwar Wildlife Sanctuary in Narmada district, we were with Anil Bharadwaj, who took us to a specific location where we could see this bird. When we reached there, we saw that one adult pair was preying on

insects from branches of a Teak tree (*Tectona grandis*). We could only take record photographs because of the distance.

Other birdwatchers have also sighted this species here in the past three years. We gathered records of the Velvet-fronted Nuthatch from Shoolpaneshwar WLS, which are given in the Table. These records show that the Velvet-fronted Nuthatch is not very common and there are only a few records of the species recently from this area.

Acknowledgements

We thank Anil Bharadwaj for his company and for showing us this bird in the sanctuary.

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Recent records of Velvet-fronted Nuthatch from Shoolpaneshwar WLS

Sr. No.	Date	No. of Birds	Observer	Source
1	07 May 2014	-	Mukesh Bhatt	Author's sighting
2	07 March 2015	1	Kunan Naik	Naik 2015
3	18 March 2016	1	Arpit Deomurari	Deomurari 2016a
4	15 May 2016	1	Irshad Theba	Theba 2016
5	24 July 2016	1	Arpit Deomurari	Deomurari 2016b
6	25 December 2016	2	Devvratsinh Mori, Viral Joshi & Mukesh Bhatt	Author's sighting

Short Birding Notes



Besra in Vansada National Park

On 1 May 2017, I photographed an adult Besra (*Accipiter virgatus*) in Vansada National Park, Dang district. It was easily identified as an adult due to its typical plumage. I was very surprised to see that it was with a fresh kill of a Yellow-footed Green Pigeon (*Treron phoenicopterus*), which it had just started to feed on. Besra is rare in Gujarat, with recent records from Polo forest and Shoolpaneshwar WLS (Khadakkar *et al.* 2016). The previous record from the Dangs is of a specimen collected by Shull (1962). Hence, this is an important record for Vansada NP and the kill of a Yellow-footed Green Pigeon is also unusual, as it usually feeds on small birds such as barbets, bulbuls, sparrows, warblers etc. (Naorji 2006), and not on larger birds like pigeons. This photographic record confirms that the Besra still occurs in the Dang forest.

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Indian Blue Robin in Gir

On 27 February 2017, I went on the morning safari to Kamleshwar dam, Gir National Park. There is small bridge near Adhodiya area, where I saw a bird similar to a Tickell's Blue Flycatcher (*Cyornis tickelliae*), which was hopping on the ground. On closer observation, I saw that it had a white supercilium, and was a male Indian Blue Robin (*Luscinia brunnea*). On 2 and 3 April 2017, I saw probably the same individual at the same place. It was feeding in cow dung. The Indian Blue Robin is known to be a vagrant in Gujarat during autumn and spring passage, with a recent record from Porbandar (Vargiya & Legha 2017). These sightings in Gir indicate that it probably stays in the same location for an extended period, before migrating back to its breeding grounds. However, further observations are required to confirm the same.

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Forest Wagtail in Shoolpaneshwar WLS

On 8 January 2017, I was on a birding trip with Dr. Nilay Desai at Shoolpaneshwar WLS. On the way from Sagai Eco-Campsite to Ninai Waterfall, we stopped our vehicle at a small rivulet to search for birds. Suddenly, one Forest Wagtail (*Dendronanthus indicus*) perched near us on the ground. It was easily identified due to its distinct plumage. I took 4-5 images before it flew away. The Forest Wagtail has been noted in Shoolpaneshwar WLS before, but it is generally regarded to be uncommon in south Gujarat. It could be a regular winter visitor to this area, and further sightings will help in knowing its status here.

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Bar-tailed Godwit near Nalsarovar

On 7 September 2016, I was birding at Bhaskarpara wetland (23° 58' N, 71° 57' E), near Nalsarovar, Surendranagar district. It is a large, open water body adjoining the Viramgam-Surendranagar Road. I sighted and photographed a Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*) in the area. It was identified by its tail barring, upturned bill and streaking on the breast sides. It was a solitary bird, feeding at the edge of the marshes and was in non-breeding plumage. The Bar-tailed Godwit is mainly coastal in Gujarat (Grimmett *et al.* 2011), and there are no inland records of this species here. Hence, it is interesting that this was seen in an inland freshwater lake.

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Bill locking behaviour in Coppersmith Barbet pair

On 23 May 2017, I was observing a pair of Coppersmith Barbets (*Megalaima haemacephala*) in a tree outside my house in Rajkot city. This pair had nested in a hole in the tree and successfully raised chicks. Probably the same pair then started preparation for a second brood at the same nest site. The female was roosting in the nest hole every night. It was on the fifth day after the chick had flown off from the nest that I observed that the female uttered a sharp 'breeding' call from the nest hole. In response to this call, the male, perched nearby, came and locked beaks with the female and both pulled each other. This was repeated many times. An earlier report of such bill locking behaviour in this species was from Rajasthan, where it was presumed to be a territorial fight between males (Sharma 1993). A similar observation of bill locking in this species was observed by Krunal Trivedi, in Rajkot, in March 2017. In that observation, the male was pulling and swinging the female, which was perched on a lower branch, by locking beaks. So it is possible that this could be a part of courtship ritual in this species, and needs further study.

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Black-headed Cuckooshrike in Kachchh

On 17 July 2017, I photographed a male Black-headed Cuckooshrike (*Coracina melanoptera*) near Kotdi Mahadevpuri village, near Mandvi, Kachchh. The bird was sitting on a branch of *Prosopis juliflora* and calling frequently, presumably since it was the breeding season. I searched nearby, but could not find another individual. This species was first recorded in Kachchh by M. K. Himmatsinhji at Vijay Vilas Palace, Mandvi, on 4 April 1963 (Himmatsinhji 1964). After that, S. N. Varu saw it again at Vijay Vilas Palace on 10 October 1982 and Darshit Mehta saw it at Than, near Nakhatrana, in July 2014 (*pers. comm.*). Thus, there are very few records of the Black-headed Cuckooshrike in Kachchh and it is a vagrant here in Kachchh.

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Breeding of Orange-headed Thrush in Gir

On 27 June 2017, I visited Paniya Sanctuary of Gir forest with Dangarbhai and Haribhai. There, we saw a nest of an Orange-headed Thrush (*Zoothera citrina*). The nest was built on a Banyan tree (*Ficus benghalensis*), at an approximate height of four meters. The bird was sitting in the nest, presumably incubating. The breeding of Orange-headed Thrush in Gir forest has been recorded previously, when a fledgling was seen on Andhari-Sasan route in Gir NP (Vaja & Vaghasiya 2016). However, this time, a nest was located for the first time, which is further confirmation of the breeding of this species in Gir. [While nest photography is discouraged by us, this photo was taken very quickly without disturbing the bird as informed by the author – Eds]

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Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse near Surat

I, along with my friend Dr. Ashok Patel, went for bird photography to Tena wetland area, Surat (21°13' 57.5" N 72°40' 07.3"E) on 30 July 2017. I saw a bird on the ground which we first thought was a Grey Francolin (*Francolinus pondicerianus*). But once I took photographs, we could see that it was a Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse (*Pterocles exustus*). We confirmed with senior birdwatchers here that the Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse is rare in south Gujarat. This was the first time we had noted it here. It is an addition to the checklist of Surat area.

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Orange-headed Thrush near Rajkot

On 19 June 2017, we were on a birding trip to Bhutnath area, Halenda Village, near Rajkot. We saw and photographed a male Orange-headed Thrush (*Zoothera citrina*) here. We observed it for some time, noted its behaviour, and managed to get good photographs. It was feeding in the scrub forest there. After a week, the second author visited the same area again, but it was not seen. Though it is now known that the Orange-headed Thrush breeds in Gir National Park (Vaja & Vaghasiya 2016), and has been recently seen in Jamnagar too (Pathan 2017), this was the first time that we had sighted it near Rajkot. This indicates a wider distribution of the species in Saurashtra.

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Orange-headed Thrush in Jessore Sloth Bear Sanctuary

On 9 July 2017, during my regular weekend birding trek to Jessore Sloth Bear Sanctuary, Banaskantha district, I saw an Orange-headed Thrush (*Zoothera citrina*) at around 09:15 hrs, at an elevation of 575 mts asl. I was observing birds in dense foliage, when it hopped over a branch and quickly flew away. The bird was shy and silent, and no call was heard during the period. The nearest geographical distribution of the species is from Mt. Abu, Rajasthan. This sighting in the monsoon, during the breeding period of the species, suggests that it could be a monsoon migrant here. The status of the Orange-headed Thrush in Jessore is not known and needs further study.

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Recent sightings of Watercock in Saurashtra

Porbandar: Two male Watercocks (*Gallicrex cinerea*) were seen at Gosabara (Mokarsagar Wetland Complex) (21° 33' N, 69° 46' E) of Porbandar district on 26 July 2016 by us along with Zeel Badiyani. The males were very vocal in the evening. No female was observed and we did not see any nest. The males were seen for two days in the area.

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Wadhwan: A Watercock (*Gallicrex cinerea*) pair was seen at Bhogavo River, Wadhwan, on 25 June 2014, at around 08:00 hrs. This was my first sighting of the species near Surendranagar. It has not been reported from Surendranagar area earlier (Mashru 2017).

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Surendranagar: Watercock (*Gallicrex cinerea*) pairs were seen at Surendranagar Dam, from 18 July 2016 to 18 August 2016 regularly. A maximum of four males and two females were observed. After 18 August 2016, the grass in this area became too dense and high, and further observations could not be made.

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Red Avadavat in Jamnagar

One Red Avadavat (*Amandava amandava*) was seen and photographed among a small group of Indian Silverbill (*Euodice malabarica*) in the reeds and grassy area near Gandhinagar railway station, at Jamnagar, on 30 November 2014 at around 17:00 hrs. The Red Avadavat is a common to uncommon resident in Gujarat. It is regularly seen near Rajkot (Ashok Mashru, pers. comm.), which is not very far from this location. This is possibly the first photographic record from Jamnagar.

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Sightings of Pacific Golden Plover in south Gujarat

Navsari : On 14 May 2017, we visited Navsari outskirts area. We reached a wetland at around 17:00 hrs. We saw and photographed three Pacific Golden Plovers (*Pluvialis fulva*) in almost full breeding plumage. After that I visited that area in the evening on 15 May 2017, and found a single individual there. Priyank visited the site in the evening on 16 May 2017 and saw three birds and on 18 May 2017, he saw eight birds. The Pacific Golden Plover is uncommon in Navsari area.

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Valsad : On 17 October 2012, I visited Magod Dungri village, Valsad district, for birdwatching. At around 18:15 hrs, I saw three Pacific Golden Plovers (*Pluvialis fulva*) in the coastal area near the village. The birds were in non-breeding plumage and I could take a photo of one of the birds. It was readily identified by its plumage. There is a recent sighting of the Pacific Golden Plover from Valsad district (Jat 2010), but it is uncommon here.

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Black Bittern in outskirts of Daman

On 8 June 2017, we visited Kalai Lake, situated in the outskirts of Daman, south Gujarat. The habitat is marshland and swampy area. This place is home to many species of waterfowl, herons etc. and is a good place for birdwatching. Here, we saw and photographed a Black Bittern (*Dupetor flavicollis*), which was an unexpected find. Black Bittern is under-recorded in some of the districts of south Gujarat and thus, this is an important record for Daman region.

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Alpine Swift in Porbandar

On 14 December 2015, while birding with Vijay Patel, Brajesh Sayem, Anna and Erik Buchwald at Odadar coastal area (21° 34' N, 69° 39' E) of Porbandar, four Alpine Swifts (*Tachymarptis melba*) were spotted by Erik in flight. The Odadar coastal area is mostly sandy, with some patches of rocky beaches. The Alpine Swifts were identified based on their larger size, long and pointed wings, white upper-breast and belly, and brown band across the breast. Alpine Swift is described as common to uncommon (probably nomadic) winter visitor to Gujarat (Ganpule 2016). This was the first time we have noted Alpine Swifts in Porbandar area.

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ABSTRACT

How much is a bird worth? The economic value of avian ecological services exceeds billions of dollars worldwide.
LIVING BIRD (Summer 2017): 18-20, by Çağan H. Şekercioglu



A very interesting analysis of the economic value of birds is presented in this paper. The author says that the question 'why should we care about birds?' is offending for him and that explaining the economic and ecological value of birds to people raises their interest and support for bird conservation.

The paper discusses the main benefits of birds in their various roles and tries to evaluate the economics for each service provided by a bird. The services are then categorized and an attempt is made to evaluate the monetary value. The main aspects discussed are:

Seed dispersal and pollination: Many tree species depend on birds for seed dispersal. Examples of bird dispersed timber tree species are given and it is stated that two valuable African mahogany species, *Entandrophragma utile* and *Khaya anthotheca* rely almost entirely on birds for seed dispersal. Thus, these are important for the timber trade. Specific details like the estimated cost of replacing Clark's Nutcrackers' seed dispersal of Whitebark Pine is \$1,980 to \$2,405 per hectare and \$11.4 to \$13.9 billion across the range of Whitebark Pines in the U.S.A. This shows the value of seed dispersal services. Birds as pollinators are important and bird pollination, especially in the winter, when most insects are inactive, is overlooked.

Pest Control: The economic advantages of birds as natural pest controllers are discussed. In Dutch apple plantations,

reduction in insect pests by birds resulted in 66% increase in yield of apples. Similarly, birds in a Jamaican coffee plantation increased coffee yield by \$310 per hectare by preying on coffee berry borer beetles. In Malaysia, oil palm farmers put up Barn Owl nest boxes to control rodent populations and in Israel, experiments with a trained Barn Owl significantly reduced seed consumption by rodents. Barn Owls are known to eat more than 11000 mice in a lifetime and are very beneficial to farmers. Many other examples are discussed where birds are helpful. The author states that birds themselves as pests are over-estimated. Studies have found that crop losses due to birds are less than 1% of production.

Scavengers and sanitary services: Here, the case of the drastic decline in vulture populations in India and the increase in potential disease vectors is discussed. The increase in population of feral dogs and the cases of rabies deaths in humans is detrimental to the economy in India. Here, the author strangely discusses the case of bubonic plague in Surat in 1994, saying that increase in disease vectors by reduction in vulture population could be a possible cause of plague. But, this seems rather far-fetched as at that time, the reason for plague was not a decrease in vulture population. Other important services are domesticated birds as a source of food, bird feathers for textiles and guano for fertilizer. Culturally also, birds play an important part by their roles in the arts and religion, and the huge benefit to the local economy by bird watchers spending large amounts of money for seeing birds in various parts of the world.

This is a very important paper and if the actual benefits of birds are explained to people, it will certainly help in conservation. For Gujarat, it can be shown that the large harrier population around Velavadar National Park is beneficial to farmers since the harriers prey on insects which destroy crops. Specific studies can be conducted and the value of birds can be explained in monetary terms. The value to the local economy in undeveloped areas due to bird watching tourism can be easily demonstrated.

All policy makers, forest department staff, ornithologists, amateur birders and NGO's should be sensitized to the economic value of birds and urged to study this paper. BCSG will do its bit for this cause. □



Manoj Dholakia

Harriers at Velavadar

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A beehive, or an ant colony would appear to be ideals for society to emulate and frequently bees and ants are held up as paragons of responsibility. Unhappily, human beings are not bees or ants shackled to evolution imprinted responses, they are intellectual individuals within social organisation. At both ends there have to be self regulating limits. Unfortunately, an organisation itself cannot give, it can be used (and abused). Its systems can be manipulated. Here in lies the danger of expecting institutions to deliver - they can not, the individuals operating them can.

Without getting involved with larger systems like government, I may give an example of a garden where each plant is carefully nurtured to attain its maximum beauty, yet gently curtailed from overpowering others - a bud rubbed off here, a stem bent there. The gardener delighting in attending to his charges. It is the gardener on whom the responsibility lies, not the plants that make the garden. Even so, each plant has its requirements to give of the best. If every institution is seen as a garden, the vitality and vibrancy is palpable. A garden is laid out for specific effects, similarly institutions are set up for identified objectives. It is those objectives that need to be continually checked; are they being achieved?

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- Lavkumar Khachar

