Flamingo

Bulletin of Gujarat Birds

bcsg

Vol. XVI 2
Apr - June 2018

Flamingo Bulletin of Gujarat Birds Vol. XVI-2, April - June, 2018

Editor: Bakul Trivedi, *M.S.*
Associate Editor: Prasad Ganpule
Assistance: Anuj Raina; Ashok Mashru; Maulik Varu, *M.D.*
Consulting Faculty: Bhavbhuti Parasharya, *PhD*; Geeta Padate, *PhD*; Indra Gadhvi, *PhD*; Jugalkishor Tiwari; Pranav Trivedi, *PhD*; Shantilal Varu; Uday Vora, IFS; Vinod Soni, *PhD*
Cover Photo: 'Indian Spotted Eagle' by Devvratsinh Mori
Layout and design: Pugmark Qmulus Consortium
Address for articles: 19/414, Satyagrah Chhavni, Satellite Road, Ahmedabad-380015, Gujarat. flamingo.bcsg@gmail.com / drbakultrivedi@gmail.com

Contents:

Bird Conservation Society, Gujarat (BCSG) was founded in 2000 with the objective of conservation of birds of the State through field research, documentation, training, awareness activities, networking with like-minded NGOs; and lobbying for protection of birds and their habitats. It is the only statewide network of bird-watchers, ornithologists and conservationists of Gujarat striving to achieve the above goal.

BCSG brings out a quarterly bulletin – 'Flamingo'. Articles, notes on bird-life of Gujarat, interesting bird sightings, knowledge about important bird areas, information / appeal regarding conservation issues 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.

For subscription and more information about BCSG : Jyoti Dhandhukia, 94, Avnish Society, Opp. Pavitrakunj Society, Near CTM Cross Road, Below CTM Overbridge, Ahmedabad-380026. M. 9725018556, E-mail: birdcsg@gmail.com
Subscription: Rs. 500 per annum to be paid by Cheque/DD in favour of BCSG payable at Ahmedabad. Donations to BCSG are exempt from IT under 80G. NEFT : Central Bank of India, A/c # 1215745262, IFSC: CBIN0280548

Email: birdcsg@gmail.com
Web: www.bcsg.co.in

Status and distribution of Indian Spotted Eagle in Gujarat

Devvratsinh Mori: Opp. Darbargadh, Wadhwan City 363030. devvratsinhmori@gmail.com

Devvratsinh Mori

Introduction

The Indian Spotted Eagle (*Aquila hastata*) is resident in the Indian Subcontinent (Grimmett *et al*. 2011). It is treated as a 'Vulnerable' species and thought to have a small and declining population, threatened by conversion and disturbance of forested habitats within its range (BirdLife International 2018). It is an uncommon to rare resident in India, patchily distributed from the Gangetic Plains, south to Gujarat and Maharashtra, Central India, eastern and Northeast India (Naoroji 2006).

Though widespread, it is poorly studied and not much is known about its status in Gujarat. I present here the status and distribution of the Indian Spotted Eagle in Gujarat, based on sightings (verified photographic records) collected from 2005 till now (May 2018).

Taxonomy

The Indian Spotted Eagle was earlier treated as a subspecies of the Lesser Spotted Eagle (*Aquila pomarina*) (Naoroji 2006). However, it was split and is now considered as a separate species, *Aquila hastata*, as it is morphologically and structurally distinct (Parry *et al*. 2002, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Further DNA studies confirmed this and recommended that the Indian Spotted Eagle be treated as a distinct species (Väli 2006). Some authorities treat it as *Clanga hastata* (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012, BirdLife International 2018, del Hoyo *et al*. 2018), while others like Grimmett *et al*. (2011), the Oriental Bird Club (OBC), the Dutch Committee (CDNA and CSNA) still follow the old nomenclature of *Aquila hastata*. Molecular studies on the genus *Aquila* were inconclusive and a conservative approach suggested maintaining a large genus *Aquila*, but excluding *A. clanga* and *A. Pomarina* (Helbig *et al*. 2005). I follow the taxonomy given in Grimmett *et al*. (2011) and treat the Indian Spotted Eagle as *Aquila hastata*, fully aware that other authorities treat it as *Clanga hastata*.

Prasad Ganpule

Identification

The identification of the Indian Spotted Eagle is quite challenging. It can be confused with Greater Spotted Eagle (*Aquila clanga*), Tawny Eagle (*Aquila rapax*), Steppe Eagle (*Aquila nipalensis*) and also dark morph Booted Eagle (*Hieraaetus pennatus*). In general, Indian Spotted Eagle is rather slim and small, with a small bill and thick fleshy-yellow or orange gape, which is visible from a distance. In juvenile plumage, it is usually dull brown, with white spots on wing coverts, and is often heavily streaked (or spotted) on the underparts. Adults are uniformly dark chocolate brown, duller and paler than Greater Spotted Eagles and lack the spiky nape seen in that species. In flight, Indian Spotted Eagle usually shows six well developed fingered primaries (seven in Greater Spotted Eagle, Tawny Eagle and Steppe Eagle, but beware of broken primaries in these species!). However, this is not diagnostic. In juvenile plumage, the barring on the secondaries is diagnostic; Indian Spotted Eagle has finely barred secondaries while in Greater Spotted Eagle, faint barring is seen only up to the middle of secondaries. In Tawny Eagle, these are broad and vaguely barred, while Steppe Eagle has distinct and broader barring on the remiges. Booted Eagle shows white shoulder patches (lacking in Indian Spotted Eagle), and different underwing pattern. Sometimes, confusion with Black Kite (*Milvus migrans*) is possible, but Black Kite is structurally different, has a different flight action and underwing pattern.

But, plumage in Indian Spotted Eagle is highly variable and a host of features are required to be studied before the identification can be confirmed. Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) state that there is long term confusion in the identification of the Indian Spotted Eagle and beyond specimen records, all other records require re-evaluation. BirdLife International (2018) states that, 'ascertaining its true status and distribution is hampered by identification problems and an unknown proportion of records of this species may actually relate to Greater Spotted Eagle; photographic evidence is therefore usually required to accept sightings'. This is borne out by the fact that there are many photos on the internet, posted on birding websites and labelled as this species, which are clear misidentifications. In view of this, it is necessary to be extra careful regarding the records of this species from Gujarat. It is also very important to obtain images of the birds in flight as the pattern on the underwings needs to be seen for correct identification. Some individuals remain extremely difficult to identify; see Ganpule (2016b) for an unidentified *Aquila* eagle seen in the Little Rann of Kachchh, initially identified as an Indian Spotted Eagle but then, after studying the photographs, the identification was inconclusive and it remained a mystery as the underwing pattern was not noted or photographed. Thus, if possible, it is important to get images of birds in flight.

Status in Gujarat

Since the Indian Spotted Eagle was split from the Lesser Spotted Eagle fairly recently, the historical records of this species from Gujarat are given as Lesser Spotted Eagle (*A. p. hastata*). Ali (1945) does not mention it for Kachchh. The same author, Dr. Salim Ali, did not come across this species during his travels in Gujarat (Ali 1954). Dharmakumarsinhji (1955) gave it as 'rare in Saurashtra', noting that he did not come across eggs of this eagle in the region, indicating it did not breed here. Naoroji (2006) mentions a record of the Indian Spotted Eagle from Banni, Kachchh, by Samant *et al.* (1995) and also gives a breeding record from Bhavnagar area. This breeding record given in Naoroji (2006) is surprising and I could not trace any details of this record. Khacher (1996) stated that this species has become scarce and all sightings needed to be recorded. In fact, Naoroji (2006) suggests this species as one of the 'raptors to watch' in India.

The recent reference texts differ regarding the occurrence and status of the Indian Spotted Eagle in Gujarat. Kazmierczak (2000) shows it as a winter migrant to Gir National Park area only (and does not give any other regional records for Gujarat) while Grimmett *et al.* (2011) give it as a resident in Gir area, and the rest of the state is shown as its former range with no recent records, but may survive. Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) do not show any record of the species at all for the state, which is incorrect, but it is possible that since the authors did not come across any specimen records from Gujarat, they did not consider it. But, this seems rather extreme when a few published records do exist from Gujarat. A recent update on the species was provided by Ganpule (2016a), who gave it as 'uncommon to rare winter visitor and possible resident. Probably breeding in south Gujarat area with recent records from Greater and Little Rann of Kachchh, Velavadar National Park, Bhavnagar, Marine National Park (Jamnagar) and Porbandar, and rare elsewhere with isolated records from all parts of the state'. Thus, apart from the general details given by Ganpule (2016a), there is very little data on the Indian Spotted Eagle in Gujarat.

Sightings

On 13 December 2010 near Wadhwan, Surendranagar, at around 11:30 hrs, I saw an eagle (*Aquila* sp.) in flight being mobbed by a Black Drongo (*Dicrurus macrocercus*), but the eagle was not clearly identified in the field because it was against the light. I took a few photos from long distance and identified it as an Indian Spotted Eagle. The identification was confirmed by experts. It was my first encounter with this species. I then carried out extensive surveys in Gujarat from 2010 to 2018 to look for it. I saw this species in various locations in Gujarat. Details of my sightings and those of other observers, from different places in Gujarat, are given in the table. Also, I have collected a record of an injured Indian Spotted Eagle which was rescued near Ahmedabad.

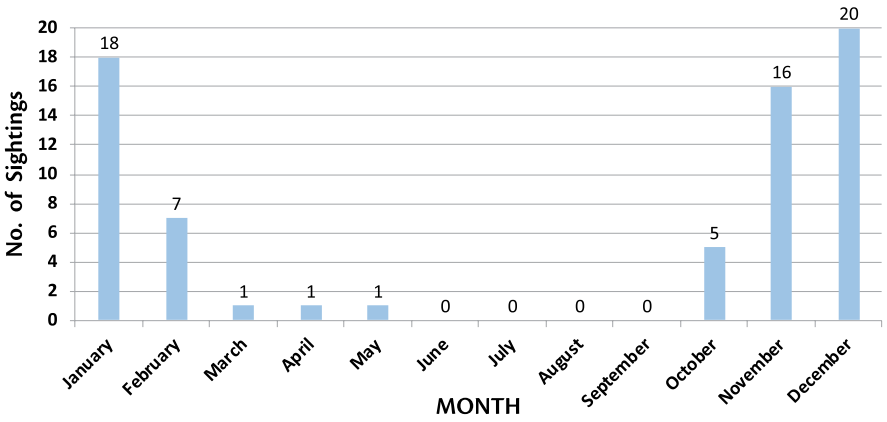
I have thoroughly searched for records of Indian Spotted Eagle from Gujarat. It is possible that I may have missed some personal records of birdwatchers who have not shared their images on birding forums, but I have tried to collect as many sightings as possible from different locations in Gujarat. Also, I have carefully browsed through all the photographs available on websites like INW (indianaturewatch.net), OBI (orientalbirdimages.org), BOG (birdsofgujarat.co.in), IBC (hbw.com/internetbirdcollection), blogs (birdingingujarat.wordpress.com), personal communication with bird watchers and various birding groups on social media like FB (Facebook.com), and other birding forums. I have collected many sightings from different location of Gujarat but a few individuals, which were posted as this species but are wrongly identified, have not been considered. The collected sightings of Indian Spotted Eagle from various locations from all over the state are given in map.

Photographic records of the Indian Spotted Eagle in Gujarat from 2005 to 2018

Sr. No.	Location	Date	Observer	Source	Remarks
1	Krushnakunj Lake, Bhavnagar	May 2005	Vishubha Raol	*pers. comm.*	
2	Ahmedabad outskirts	December 2005	Rajesh Shah	*pers. comm.*	
3	Little Rann of Kachchh	29 October 2008	Nirav Bhatt	*pers. comm.*	
4	Little Rann of Kachchh	December 2008	Saurabh Desai, Dhaivat Hathi	Desai (2009)	juvenile
5	Banni, Kachchh	9 November 2009	Vaibhav Mishra	OBI	
6	Naliya, Kachchh	November 2009	Amish Patel	INW	
7	Limbdi-Gurgadh Road, Charakla, Dwarka	20 December 2009	Maulik Varu, Kapilsinh Zala	*pers. comm.*	
8	Kanewal, Anand	1 January 2010	Bimal Patel	*pers. comm.*	
9	Banni, Kachchh	3 November 2010	Rohan Kamath	OBI	
10	Banni, Kachchh	21 November 2010	Girish Prahalad	OBI	
11	Wadhwan, Surendranagar	13 December 2010	Devvratsinh Mori	Author's sighting	in flight
12	Narda Lake, Anand	26 January 2011	Yagnesh Bhatt	*pers. comm.*	
13	Bhavnagar	11 December 2011	Maulik Varu	Varu (2014)	
14	Velavadar National Park	30 December 2011	Devvratsinh Mori	Author's sighting	
15	Velavadar National Park	6 January 2012	Kuldeep Kharade	OBI	
16	Velavadar National Park	28 January 2012	Stanislav Harvančík	IBC	juvenile in flight
17	Ahmedabad outskirts	3 February 2012	Sherwin Everett	*pers. comm.*	rescued individual
18	Velavadar National Park	28 October 2012	Shantilal Varu	BOG Website	
19	Sanand, near Ahmedabad	28 November 2012	Darshan Parikh	*pers. comm.*	
20	Untiyadra, Bharuch	13 Nov. 2013 to 17 Nov. 2013	Jugal Patel	*pers. comm.*	10 to 12 individuals seen for one week
21	Velavadar National Park	January 2014	Sunil Moteria	*pers. comm.*	
22	Surat	January 2014	Vijayendra Desai	FB	
23	Pariej, Anand	15 January 2014	Yagnesh Bhatt	*pers. comm.*	
24	Anklava, Bharuch	20 January 2014	Jugal Patel	*pers. comm.*	
25	Little Rann of Kachchh	26 January 2014	Devvratsinh Mori	Author's sighting	
26	Dholera	30 January 2014	Rajnikant Trivedi	*pers. comm.*	
27	Velavadar National Park	12 February 2014	Devvratsinh Mori	Author's sighting	
28	Surat	December 2014	Ankur Patel	FB	
29	Khijadiya Bird Sanctuary, Jamnagar	15 December 2014	Manish Acharya	*pers. comm.*	
30	Near Sachana, Ahmedabad	25 January 2015	Vipul Trivedi	BOG website	
31	Positra, near Dwarka	1 November 2015	Maulik Varu	Varu (2016)	2 juveniles in flight near the coast
32	Near Viramgam	14 November 2015	Avinash Bhagat	OBI	
33	Thol Bird Sanctuary, near Ahmedabad	15 November 2015	Anshuman Sarkar	eBird/OBI	
34	Ahmedabad outskirts	18 November 2015	Vipul Trivedi	eBird	
35	Ahmedabad	November 2015	Avinash Bhagat	FB	in flight
36	Porbandar	6 December 2015	Gaurang Bagda	eBird	Juvenile perched
37	Gosabara, near Porbandar	13 December 2015	Gaurang Bagda	eBird	
38	Little Rann of Kachchh	25 December 2015	Amish Patel	*pers. comm.*	
39	Hansot, Kantiyajal Road, Ankleshwar	December 2015	Jugal Patel	*pers. comm.*	

Indian Spotted Eagle....

Sr. No.	Location	Date	Observer	Source	Remarks
40	Surat	January 2016	Vijayendra Desai	FB	juvenile in flight
41	Vastana Road, Limbasi, Kheda	2 February 2016	Vishal Mistry	*pers. comm.*	
42	Gosabara, near Porbandar	7 February 2016	Prasad Ganpule	*pers. comm.*	
43	Kakrach, Amreli	4 October 2016	Ankit Shukla	*pers. comm.*	
44	Gosabara, near Porbandar	29 October 2016	Punit Karia	*pers. comm.*	
45	Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary	7 November 2016	Viral Patel, Pankaj Maheria	OBI	
46	Little Rann of Kachchh	14 November 2016	Viral Patel, Pankaj Maheria	OBI	
47	Dharasana, Valsad	6 December 2016	Pragnesh Patel	BOG website	
48	Pariej, Anand District	25 December 2016	Bhavesh Mengar	BOG website	
49	Vastana Road, Limbasi, Kheda	7 January 2017	Bhavesh Mengar	*pers. comm.*	
50	Vastana Road, Limbasi, Kheda	11 February 2017	Bhavesh Mengar	*pers. comm.*	
51	Vastana Road, Limbasi, Kheda	18 February 2017	Bhavesh Mengar	*pers. comm.*	
52	Udadvada, Valsad	4 October 2017	Anand Patel	BOG website	
53	Udadvada, Valsad	5 November 2017	Viren Desai	BOG website	
54	Pariej, Anand	November 2017	Bhavesh Kaushal	INW	
55	Velavadar National Park	November 2017	Raxit Gore	FB	
56	Wadhwana lake, Vadodara	10 December 2017	Mahamad Jat	*pers. comm.*	
57	Wadhwana lake, Vadodara	11 December 2017	Devvratsinh Mori	Author's sighting	
58	Velavadar National Park	15 December 2017	Rohit Pansare	eBird	
59	Vastana Road, Limbasi, Kheda	24 December 2017	Bhavesh Mengar	*pers. comm.*	
60	Vastana Road, Limbasi, Kheda	29 December 2017	Bhavesh Mengar	*pers. comm.*	
61	Vastana Road, Limbasi, Kheda	30 December 2017	Vishal Mistry	*pers. comm*	pale plumaged juvenile
62	Sultanpur Wetland, Navsari	8 January 2018	Saswat Misra	BOG website	
63	Vastana Road, Limbasi, Kheda	12 January 2018	Bhavesh Mengar	*pers. comm.*	
64	Pariej, Anand	14 January 2018	Dhaivat Hathi	*pers. comm.*	
65	Velavadar National Park	21 January 2018	Gaurang Bagda	eBird	
66	Mahuva, Bhavnagar	27 January 2018	Batuk Bhil, Ashok Mashru	*pers. comm.*	juvenile perched
67	Pariej, Anand	21 February 2018	Devvratsinh Mori	Author's sighting	
68	Viramgam	11 March 2018	Devvratsinh Mori	Author's sighting	
69	Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary	4 April 2018	Devvratsinh Mori	Author's sighting	



It is important here to note that all the above sightings have been verified and the identification confirmed. Only those sightings where the identification is beyond any doubt have been given here. There are many records of Indian Spotted Eagle given on the data sharing website 'eBird', but I have taken only those records where photographs have been posted. In some cases, the photographs are not very clear or there is only one photo; I have not taken records if there is any doubt regarding identification. While some of the sightings without photos may be correct, I have erred on the side of caution since this is a 'difficult to identify' species and also to present a correct picture regarding its occurrence here. Some of the sightings listed here are probably of the same bird(s) seen on different dates. I have not attempted to separately identify each individual in the table and only sightings have been reported here. The sighting of a group of 10-12 individuals for one week in Bharuch District by Jugal Patel is very interesting. It suggests that the species is present in good numbers there. These individuals were seen for five consecutive days. In the graph, these sightings are combined and taken as one sighting. Another interesting sighting is that of two juveniles near Poshitra, Dwarka, near the coast in extreme western part of Saurashtra. These juveniles were photographed in flight. This is also taken as a single sighting for the graph.

Discussion

Apart from the status and distribution of the Indian Spotted Eagle given recently by Ganpule (2016a), this is the first proper compilation of records of the species from Gujarat. With the availability of modern photographic equipment in the hands of good photographers, and an increasing number of birders, photographic records of this species from various parts of Gujarat have been reported. Thus, a true impression of its status and distribution here in Gujarat can be obtained based on these recent records as these are verified photographic records.

As can be seen from the above records, the Indian Spotted Eagle has been noted from almost all parts of Gujarat and is widely distributed. It is interesting to note that majority of the records are from October to March, mainly in the winter months. As can be seen from the graph, 88% (61 out of 69) of the sightings are from the winter months of November – February. There are no records in the monsoon season from Gujarat i.e from June - September. Also, there is just one record in the month of May. In a recent study in Belgaum, Karnataka, nesting was observed from March to July (Sant *et al*. 2013). The Indian Spotted Eagle is generally thought to breed from February/March till August (Naoroji 2006). While there are no direct observations of mating, eggs or chicks from Gujarat, it is possible that it could be breeding in south Gujarat, as it has been observed there in good numbers. Surveys should be conducted to see if the Indian Spotted Eagle breeds in south Gujarat. Apart from the breeding record given in Naoroji (2006), there is no other breeding instance of this species recently in the state. This record given in Naoroji (2006) seems to be from Velavadar National Park. However, at present, this area is regularly visited till 15 June when the park closes for the monsoon. But, there have been no reports of its breeding in this area. The lack of any records in the monsoon months indicates that it probably does not breed in Saurashtra and Kachchh. For south Gujarat, if sightings in the monsoon months are reported in the future, then it would indicate the probability of breeding.

It can be inferred from the above records that the Indian Spotted Eagle is mainly a winter migrant to Gujarat and is uncommon or rare. Velavadar National Park and Gosabara (also known as Mokarsagar) near Porbandar, are two places in Saurashtra where it is seen regularly. In south Gujarat, it has been noted from many locations. There are many sightings from central Gujarat too. The Little Rann of Kachchh is another area from where it has been frequently reported. It can be observed that this species is seen in diverse habitats in the state. Sightings have been reported from arid areas, wetlands, forests and even coastal areas. Sant *et al*. (2013) observed breeding in an area with cultivation (mainly paddy) and large trees in Belgaum, Karnataka. It seems that in the winter, there are no specific habitat preferences for the species. But, this requires further study.

Most of the sightings here are of juvenile or immature birds. It is possible that juveniles / immature birds wander before they attain adulthood and breed. But, again, this requires further study. The Indian Spotted Eagle is thought to be sedentary in India. However, it seems to be mainly a winter migrant to Saurashtra and Kachchh. Its status in south Gujarat needs more study. But, at present, it can be said that it is only a winter visitor to this region too. There are no reports of the Indian Spotted Eagle from north Gujarat. It is quite possible that it may be present and is overlooked. Similarly, it is surprising that it has not been noted in Junagadh and Gir-Somnath Districts. Bird watchers from these areas are requested to look out for this species. Assuming that the individuals seen here are migrating from other parts of the country, it is probably a short distance migrant in the winter, with juveniles and adults probably dispersing after the juveniles fledge. However, in Belgaum, Karnataka, adults nesting there remain in the area throughout the year and juveniles also remain there after fledging; in winter, the population increases and it seems that some individuals,

presumably from other nearby regions, come to this area for the winter months (Niranjan Sant, *pers. comm.*). Thus, it is possible that some birds do disperse after nesting, probably migrating short distances to suitable habitats in the winter. But, the individuals in Belgaum are sedentary. It will be interesting to find out the origins of the birds seen here in the state. This can be done by satellite tagging a few individuals seen in Gujarat and also ringing/tagging juveniles in nests in different parts of the country. However, the species is sensitive; small changes like cutting of branches on lower parts of the nesting tree resulted in the abandonment of the nest in incubation stage (Niranjan Sant, *pers. comm.*). So tagging, if done, would be possible or should be done only on almost fledged juveniles so that there is no disturbance to the nesting adults.

The Indian Spotted Eagle is a very less studied raptor in Gujarat. It is recommended that further studies be carried out on its ecology, habitat preferences, food etc. here in the state. Attention is sought to be drawn to this 'Vulnerable' species here in Gujarat with this note and it is suggested that sightings of the Indian Spotted Eagle in the future be properly documented and verified by raptor experts to remove any doubts regarding identification. It is important to find out if the species breeds here. Towards this, intensive surveys should be carried out in suitable areas of south Gujarat. Thus, the Indian Spotted Eagle remains an enigmatic species, needing much more work in the future in Gujarat.

[*We thank two reviewers for reviewing the draft manuscript – Eds*]

Acknowledgments

I sincerely thank Vishubha Raol for all his help. I thank Dr. J. Pranay Rao for helping with the identification of a few individuals and Niranjan Sant for giving information. I am grateful to Prasad Ganpule and Ashok Mashru for improving the draft manuscript. I specially thank Yagnesh Bhatt, Bimal Patel & Vishal Mistry for giving me the opportunity to study this species in Kheda District. I acknowledge help by Amish Patel, Ankit Shukla, Anuj Raina, Ashok Chaudhary, Batuk Bhil, Bhavesh Mengar, Darshan Parikh, Dhaivat Hathi, Gaurang Bagda, Jugal Patel, Malhar Raj Jinger, Manish Acharya, Maulik Varu, Mahamad Jat, Nirav Bhatt, Punit Karia, Rajesh Shah, Rajnikant Trivedi, Shantilal Varu, Sherwin Everett, Sunil Kini, Sunil Moteria, Viral Joshi, Vishal Mistry, and many other birders for sharing their valuable sightings. I would also like to thank Krunal Trivedi for helping with the map.

References

Ali, S. 1945. *The Birds of Kutch*. Oxford University Press. Published for the Govt. of Kutch.

Ali, S. 1954. The birds of Gujarat – Part I. *J Bombay Nat Hist Soc* 52 (2): 374-458

BirdLife International, 2018. Species factsheet: *Clanga hastata*. Downloaded from http://www.birdlife.org on 12/01/2018

del Hoyo, J., Collar, N. & Marks, J. S. 2018. Indian Spotted Eagle (Clanga hastata). *Handbook of the Birds of the World Alive*. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona. (retrieved from).

Desai, S., 2009. *Kachchh na nana rann ma bharatiya kala zummas ni nondh*. *Vihang* 3 (3): 13-15 [In Gujarati].

Dharmakumarsinhji, R. S. Undated (=1955) *Birds of Saurashtra, India with additional notes on the birds of Kutch and Gujarat*. Bhavnagar, Saurashtra. Published by the Author.

Ganpule, P., 2016a. The Birds of Gujarat: Status and Distribution. *Flamingo* 8 (3) – 12 (4): 2-40

Ganpule, P., 2016b. https://birdingingujarat.wordpress.com/2016/12/04/an-unusual-aquila-eagle-in-little-rann-of-kutch-gujarat/ [Accessed on 25 April 2018].

Grimmett, R., Inskipp, C., & Inskipp, T. 2011. *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*. 2nd ed. Christopher Helm & Oxford University Press. London.

Helbig, A. J., Kocum, A., Seibold, I., & Braun, M. J. 2005. A multi-gene phylogeny of aquiline eagles (Aves: Accipitriformes) reveals extensive paraphyly at the genus level. *Molecular phylogenetics and evolution* 35(1): 147-164

Kazmierczak, K., 2000. *A field guide to the birds of India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and the Maldives*. 1st ed. London: Pica Press / Christopher Helm.

Khacher, L., 1996. The birds of Gujarat - a Salim Ali centenary year overview. *J Bombay Nat Hist Soc* 93 (3) : 331–373

Naoroji, R., 2006. *Birds of prey of the Indian Subcontinent*. 1st ed. New Delhi: Om Books International.

Parry, S. J., Clark, W. S. & Prakash, V. 2002. On the taxonomic status of the Indian Spotted Eagle *Aquila hastata*. *Ibis* 144 (4): 665-675

Rasmussen, P. C., & Anderton, J. C., 2012. *Birds of South Asia: the Ripley guide*. 2 Vols. 2nd ed. Smithsonian Institution and Lynx Edicions. Washington, D.C. and Barcelona.

Samant, J. S., Prakash, V. & Naoroji, R. K., 1995. *Ecology & behaviour of resident raptors with special reference to endangered species*. Final Technical Report. Bombay Natural History Society, Bombay.

Sant, N., Shelke, V., & Shelke S., 2013. On the breeding biology of the Indian Spotted Eagle *Aquila hastata*. *Indian BIRDS* 8 (2): 29-32

Väli, U., 2006. Mitochondrial DNA sequences support species status for the Indian Spotted Eagle *Aquila hastata*. *Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club*. 126 (3): 238–242

Varu, M., 2014. https://birdingingujarat.wordpress.com/2014/07/20/indian-spotted-eagle-near-bhavnagar-gujarat/ [Accessed on 25 April 2018].

Varu, M., 2016. Short birding notes: Indian Spotted Eagles in Positra. *Flamingo* 14 (1): 20 □

Variable Sunbird in Gir National Park: a second record for Gujarat

Jitendra B. Devmurari: Near Primary Health Center, Sasan-Gir, Ta: Mendarda, Dist: Junagadh. jitendradevmurariwildlife@gmail.com

Jitendra Devmurari

On 22 February 2018, at around 09:40 hrs, I was bird watching near the Hiran River at Sasan (21° 10' 31" N, 70° 35' 15" E), in Gir National Park (henceforth Gir NP), which is a good place for birds as it is an area with large trees and water. I saw one sunbird (*Cinnyris* sp.) in a Bastard Teak or Palash or 'flame of the forest' (*Butea monosperma*). It was looking different from a Purple Sunbird (*Cinnyris asiaticus*) as its underparts were orange-yellow in colour, which became dark yellowish near the legs. The bird was very active and busy, feeding and going from one tree to another in search of nectar, making it difficult for me to take photos. After following it for about one and a half hours, I managed to take only two record shots. After returning home and watching the photographs, I could not identify it. I shared the images with my friend Dinesh Sadiya, but we were unsuccessful in identifying this bird. So, on the very next day, 23 February 2018, at 09:00 hrs, we visited the same place hoping to see it again and this time, take a few good photographs. After searching for around two hours in and around the same area, we heard its call and finally managed to locate it. It was perched very near to the ground, on a small branch of a bush. We took a few good photographs. We observed that this individual was chased by Purple Sunbirds. It flew away and we managed to see it again about 150 mts away from this place. It was seen foraging on the flowers of the 'flame of the forest' tree.

After studying the photographs and with the help of experts, it was finally identified as a male Variable Sunbird (*Cinnyris venustus*). We were surprised to know that this species does not occur in our region and is found in Africa. We were very much excited to find this rarity here in Gir NP. Hence, we kept observing it for the next few days. One interesting observation was that every time, it was seen at the same spot. It was chased by Purple Sunbirds many times. Since it was seen at the same spot frequently, we thought that it could be visiting this area since there was availability of food due to the flowering of the 'Palash' and also other flowering trees and bushes.

This is only the second record of the Variable Sunbird from Gujarat, and India. It was earlier noted in Khambhaliya, near Jamnagar, by local photographer Jeetu Jam (Jam 2009, Ganpule 2017).

[*The Variable Sunbird is resident in Africa, mainly in sub-Saharan Africa; five subspecies are recognized and the species is known to be nomadic and migratory (Cheke & Mann 2018). The Variable Sunbird is not known to occur in India and it is not included in the checklist of birds of India (Praveen et al. 2016, Praveen et al. 2018). There is a previous record of this species from Gujarat; see discussion in Ganpule (2017), wherein the earlier record of Variable Sunbird by Jeetu Jam (Jam 2009) from Khambhaliya, near Jamnagar, was formally reviewed.*

Regarding this individual seen in Gir National Park, there are many good photographs available for scrutiny. We can see that it has a metallic-blue crown, blackish blue wings, metallic-blue throat with blackish upper breast, deep orange breast and dark yellowish flanks. There is no doubt regarding the identification and it is a male Variable Sunbird. It is probably of the fazoqlensis or igneiventris subspecies, and is in worn plumage. The individual which was seen previously near Jamnagar was probably of the falkensteini subspecies. However, identification to the subspecies level is difficult and these individuals are best identified as Variable Sunbirds, without going into subspecific identification.

We sent the images of this individual seen in Gir NP to Clive Mann for his opinion. He stated (in litt., email dated 28 February 2018) that it looked like a Variable Sunbird and said that he had forwarded the images to senior bird watchers in East Africa for their views. He further informed us (in litt., email dated 2 March 2018) that this was a Variable Sunbird, probably of the fazoqlensis/igneiventris subspecies, which occurs in Eritrea and northern Ethopia; the opinion of senior bird watchers from East Africa was that the most likely cause for its appearance here was by ship-assistance from a Red Sea port rather than it being an escapee from captivity. Mike Blair, from the Ornithological Society of the Middle East (henceforth OSME), informed that no record of this species is known from the OSME region (in litt., email dated 5 April 2018). Thus, when this species has not been seen in the OSME region, its appearance in Gujarat is quite surprising. He further suggested that ship-assisted journeys between Dar-es-Salam or Mombasa and Mumbai/ Gujarat are greater than 4000 kms; the fastest ships taking at least 150 hours, which would make it difficult for a nectar-feeder to

survive (in litt., email dated 5 April 2018). An option he suggested was that some exotic species are smuggled by private planes and this could be one of the reasons for its appearance in Gujarat; an escapee from a private collector, which then survived in the wild.

It is now confirmed that two sightings of Variable Sunbird have been noted in Gujarat. With respect to the first sighting from Jamnagar, there were doubts regarding its origins and after a detailed discussion amongst senior bird watchers here, no decision was taken regarding its inclusion or exclusion in the Gujarat checklist. The record was reviewed by Ganpule (2017), and it was not added to the state checklist at that time, pending a decision by a committee. This sighting from Gir NP is the second sighting from the state. The identification in both these cases has been confirmed beyond doubt.

The main issue now is what could be the probable reason for the occurrence of this African species in Gujarat twice in the last ten years? Can both these sightings be attributed to ship-assistance? Is it possible that these are natural vagrants? Are these escapees from the pet trade? Here, it is pertinent to point out that chances of an escapee from the pet trade are less as the Variable Sunbird is not kept as a pet here and is not even sold as a pet in Gujarat (as per details obtained from birders who have knowledge about the pet trade in Gujarat). We could not find any details regarding this species in an extensive online search too. It is also not kept in any zoo in Gujarat. Confirmation was obtained earlier from a large private collection near Jamnagar that they did not have this species in their collection (Ganpule 2017).

It is important to note that the sightings were in two places with different habitats. This sighting from Gir NP is from a forest area and it is almost 50 kms from the coast. While Jamnagar is a port city, there is no major port near Gir NP and thus this sighting from Gir NP is intriguing. Further, this individual was observed over many days and its behaviour was like a wild-type bird, and it did not allow close approach. It was seen feeding on nectar of flowering trees and was observed in a forest area, indicating a wild type bird. The plumage seen in both the individuals recorded in Gujarat was different, which shows that both individuals could be of different subspecies (though we are not going into the details of subspecific identification). Thus, there is no doubt that these were two different individuals. If we speculate that these sightings are of genuine vagrants, then it would be extraordinary for this small bird to make the journey from eastern Africa to Gujarat, crossing the Arabian Sea (almost 2200 kms in a straight line). The African race of the Palestine Sunbird (Cinnyris osea decorsei) is known to regularly migrate with the rains but most other sunbirds are either sedentary or short distance migrants (Cheke et al. 2001). Thus, such a type of migration (especially long distances over the sea) is not known for this genus. But, in general, migration in sunbirds has not been studied in detail and more data is required to make any comment on this.

While it is difficult to be certain about the reasons for these sightings in Gujarat, it is a fact that the Variable Sunbird has now been noted twice in the last ten years. While genuine vagrancy cannot be completely ruled out, the probable reasons for its occurrence here are difficult to ascertain. We have to consider that whatever may be the reason for its appearance here, two sightings cannot be dismissed as 'of unknown origin' when it is known that the species is not known to be kept as a pet here in Gujarat. Thus, a decision needs to be taken regarding its inclusion in the Gujarat checklist.

We have decided to include the Variable Sunbird in the Gujarat checklist based on these two sightings. This is mainly due to the fact that two sightings, of two different individuals, have now been noted. The sighting by Jeetu Jam (Jam 2009), formally reviewed by Ganpule (2017), is treated as the first sighting for Gujarat and India, and this sighting from Gir NP is the second record. We accept it to the checklist based on these two photographic records from the state; from Khambhaliya in 2009 and this record from Gir NP in February 2018. We accept these records in the Gujarat checklist fully aware that the species is resident in sub-Saharan Africa and is not known to occur in India (or the Indian Subcontinent). We feel that there are three probable reasons for its occurrence here (in random order); ship-assistance, pet trade (smuggling?) and migration.

We could not find any published instances of possible vagrancy by ship-assistance in sunbirds. If ship-assistance is considered as a probable reason for the occurrence of the Variable Sunbird here, then a policy needs to be formulated for ship-assisted vagrants. But, this is a controversial subject with ornithologists having conflicting views. Different country checklists treat such records differently. For example, the British Ornithologists' Union Records Committee (BOURC) clarifies that 'ship-assisted vagrants may qualify for Category A (species in a natural state) provided that they are not fed, watered or receive any other direct human intervention during their journey' (BOURC 2005). We feel that this definition in itself is problematic as it will be almost impossible to verify if a bird has reached with or without human interference. Also, the definition of 'human interference' itself can be challenged.

However, in BOURC's 42nd report (BOURC 2013), it is stated that 'it is not the intention of BOURC to admit port-to-port or coast-to-coast transportees onto the British List and our guidelines state that suspected ship-assisted birds should only by admitted to the List if the species is considered capable of making an unassisted transatlantic crossing under favourable circumstances. In nearly all cases, the data are insufficient to draw a robust conclusion on this point. A decision on the provenance of an individual bird is

a call on balance of probability, and for admission to the list, the balance of probability must be judged to be overwhelmingly in favour of natural occurrence in a wild state'.

In the case of the Variable Sunbird, we do not even have adequate data to even judge if the species is capable of long distance migration. Thus, a policy, even if formulated, may leave a lot to be desired. Many countries keep such species in a separate list, which is again problematic as the origin of many such birds is almost impossible to determine. Thus, there is a difference of opinion on how to treat such records. If or when a policy is formulated in Gujarat on how to treat probable ship-assisted vagrants, such records can be re-evaluated.

Though we have added the Variable Sunbird to the Gujarat checklist, we urge bird watchers here to make inquiries regarding the smuggling or trade of exotic bird species in Gujarat. If more information is available about the pet trade or ship-assisted vagrants, we will have a relook at these records in the future and decide whether this species should be retained in the state checklist. We keep the Variable Sunbird in the Gujarat checklist with the understanding that these records will be reviewed if more information is available. It is also possible that information regarding its migration could be obtained in the future, confirming these records as of genuine vagrants. Thus, while adding this species to the Gujarat checklist at present, we will review it after a few years subject to more data being available.

We are very thankful to Clive Mann for his inputs. We thank Mike Blair for all this help. We are grateful to Praveen J for his comments on the draft manuscript – Eds]

References

BOURC, 2005. British Ornithologists' Union Records Committee: 31st Report (October 2004). *Ibis* 147: 246-250

BOURC, 2013. British Ornithologists' Union Records Committee: 42nd Report (October 2013). *Ibis* 156: 236-242

Cheke, R. & Mann, C. 2018. Variable Sunbird (*Cinnyris venustus*). Handbook of the Birds of the World Alive. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona. (retrieved from on 30 March 2018).

Cheke, R., Mann, C., & Allen, R., 2001. *Sunbirds: A Guide to the Sunbirds, Flowerpeckers, Spiderhunters and Sugarbirds of the World*. Helm Identification Guides, Christopher Helm, London.

Ganpule, P., 2017. First update to the Gujarat checklist: December 2017. *Flamingo* 15 (4): 17-20

Jam, J. 2009. http://www.indianaturewatch.net/displayimage.php?id=117928 [Accessed on 20 March 2017].

Praveen J., Jayapal, R., & Pittie, A., 2016. A checklist of the birds of India. *Indian BIRDS*. 11 (5&6): 113–172A.

Praveen J., Jayapal, R., & Pittie, A., 2018. Checklist of the birds of India (v2.1). Website: http://www.indianbirds.in/india/ [Date of publication: 31 March, 2018]. □

A 'putative' Eastern Yellow Wagtail from Gondal, Rajkot District

Hemanya Radadia: 31/C, "Shivkunj", Shardanagar Society Main Road, Kalawad Road, Rajkot. radadiahemanya@gmail.com

Hemanya Randadiya

Introduction

The Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*) is a polytypic species, with several recognised subspecies. Many of these subspecies like *M. f. beema*, *M. f. lutea*, *M. f. feldegg*, *M. f. thunbergi* etc. winter in India and the Indian Subcontinent (Grimmett *et al*. 2011). The taxonomy is complex and many of the subspecies are known to hybridize fairly regularly, thereby confusing distributional limits (Tyler & Christie 2018).

The Yellow Wagtail is now split into two separate species; Western Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*) and Eastern Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla tschutschensis*) (Banks *et al*. 2004, Dickinson & Christidis 2014, del Hoyo & Collar 2018, Tyler & Christie 2018). The taxonomy of Eastern Yellow Wagtail is still not resolved but Alström & Mild (2003) and Dickinson & Christidis (2014) recognise three subspecies: the nominate *tschutschensis, taivana* and *macronyx*. The occurrence of the Eastern Yellow Wagtail in India was disputed and it was treated as 'hypothetical' in the region by Rasmussen & Anderton (2012), who, for this species, stated that confirmation was needed regarding its presence here, but gave its probable occurrence in the Andaman Islands and India. However, recent sightings of Eastern Yellow Wagtails, in the winter, of the subspecies *tschutschensis and taivana* from Assam and the Andaman Islands proved that the Eastern Yellow Wagtail does occur in India (Vishwanathan *et al*. 2017).

Observation

On 21 January 2018, I was participating in a waterbird count on the outskirts of Gondal city in Rajkot district with Rajesh Radadia. On the banks of Veri Lake (22° 01' 06" N, 70° 48' 23" E), we saw several Yellow Wagtails of *thunbergi* and *beema* subspecies, along with a Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*).

Here, I observed a very unusual Yellow Wagtail. A photograph is given here. It was observed at the edge of the lake in an area which was barren and salty, with some scattered, dried vegetation. I did not note the call of this unusual plumaged individual as it did not call while we observed it. Since we were involved in the bird count, we then went to another area. I could take only one photo of this individual.

After coming home, I studied the photograph in detail. The bird looked very different from the usual Yellow Wagtail taxa seen here. It did not match with any illustrations given for Yellow Wagtail in Grimmett *et al*. (2011). The bird had prominent yellowish and white supercilium, blackish ear coverts and lores, and olive coloured crown which contrasted with the ear coverts. The throat, breast and vent were yellow, and looked freshly moulted, while the nape and mantle were greyish, with worn edges to greater coverts, indicating retained juvenile feathers. The freshly moulted head and some underparts were strongly contrasting with the juvenile, unmoulted upperparts, indicating that this was a first-winter bird moulting into first-summer plumage. I tentatively identified it as an Eastern Yellow Wagtail of the *taivana* subspecies.

Discussion

It was apparent to me that identification of any individual of a probable Eastern Yellow Wagtail, seen here in the winter, was quite complicated as it is well known that there are many hybrids of *M. flava* like '*superciliaris*' and '*xanthophrys*', which are similar to Eastern Yellow Wagtail and difficult to separate. I decided to contact several experts for their opinions on this bird. Their opinions are given here.

Mike Prince (*in litt*, email dated 25 February 2018), Dipu K. (*in litt*, email dated 6 March 2018), and Arend Wassink (*in litt*, email dated 25 February 2018) opined that it was not possible to safely identify this individual to any particular subspecies as the plumage did not match with known typical plumages; it looked like an intergrade, similar to a '*xanthophrys*' type individual. However, both '*superciliaris*' and '*xanthophrys*' usually have a dark crown, which was lacking here. But, it was possible that this individual was a result of crossing and backcrossing of genes of different subspecies (Arend Wassink, *in litt*). Thus, a few experts thought that while *taivana* could not be ruled out completely, it was not possible to conclusively identify this individual.

Nils Van Duivendijk (*in litt*, email dated 25 February 2018) opined that ' to me, this looks good for a first-winter *taivana* which is often just grey-and-white in autumn, and perhaps with some yellow developed in the winter range. For a first-winter *taivana*, it is not strange to have grey upperparts and no complete yellow supercilium yet. The solid dark ear-coverts and lore, just a little white below the eye and very prominent supercilium is of course just okay. Furthermore, the mainly (or even all?) wing-feathers are worn juvenile-type, and it could perhaps be a late hatched bird from anywhere, which has not moulted wing-coverts yet?' However, he suggested the image be sent to Per Alström or Paul Leader for their opinion as they were more experienced and experts in this.

I sent the image to Per Alström, and he replied (*in litt*, email dated 21 March 2018) that it was a first-winter male *taivana* moulting into first-summer plumage.

Thus, after obtaining many expert opinions, I identified this individual as a 'putative' Eastern Yellow Wagtail of the *taivana* subspecies. There is only one other recent record of Eastern Yellow Wagtail of the *taivana* subspecies from Gujarat, which was of an individual seen in Chhari-Dhand, in Kachchh (Varu 2016). This record was also treated as a 'probable' Eastern Yellow Wagtail.

These two records indicate the possible presence of the species in the state and Eastern Yellow Wagtail of the *taivana* subspecies could be a probable addition to the state checklist.

[*The identification of the Eastern Yellow Wagtail is very difficult, which is further complicated by the occurrence of similar looking Western Yellow Wagtail intergrades/hybrids like 'superciliaris' and 'xanthophrys'. There are lot of intermediate plumages and some individuals are very difficult to assign to any subspecies; see discussions in Garner (2015) and Perlman (2016) for more details of 'odd looking' Yellow Wagtails seen in the Middle East and Israel. There is a record of a hybrid, possibly a 'xanthophrys' Yellow Wagtail from Little Rann of Kachchh (Pawar 2011). This individual shows black crown and ear coverts, and a yellow supercilium, which is typical. Thus, such hybrids have been noted in Gujarat earlier.*

While typical or classic plumaged Eastern Yellow Wagtails are easy to identify, odd looking individuals, seen in the winter as vagrants in non-breeding plumage are difficult and the only way to identify such individuals is by DNA and vocal analysis. The call of Eastern Yellow Wagtail is harsher than the call of M. flava and is more similar to Citrine Wagtail (Motacilla citreola) (Alström & Mild 2003, Bot et al. 2014).

In first winter plumage, Eastern Yellow Wagtails can have a 'grey and white' rather than the usual 'brown and yellow' plumage, but there is considerable overlap and identification is not easy; Eastern Yellow Wagtails are best identified by their flight calls (Bot et al.

2014). In Alström & Mild (2003), Photo 152, taken in December in Hong Kong, a first-winter male taivana, with moulted adult-type head and some feathers of the underparts (with yellow) is shown. This individual is somewhat similar to the bird seen here, though the individual from Gondal shows a more advanced moult with much of the underparts looking more yellowish.

Regarding records of Eastern Yellow Wagtails from Gujarat, the individual seen by Varu (2016) in Kachchh was treated as a probable taivana. When this record was published, the occurrence of Eastern Yellow Wagtail in India was not confirmed and all the records from the country were under review. Hence, the identity of this individual could not be confirmed at that time. There is another record of a probable tschutschensis from Jamnagar (Agarwal 2016). The record given here of a probable taivana is now the third possible sighting from Gujarat. For the Jamnagar individual, tschutschensis is very similar to the 'dombrowskii' Western Yellow Wagtail. Expert opinion was sought for that individual, and though it was thought to be similar to a tschutschensis, the identification could not be confirmed beyond any doubt.

For the Kachchh bird by Varu (2016), the crown is of the same colour as the mantle (both olive-greenish coloured), and a broad yellow supercilium is present. The ear coverts are dark and contrast with the crown, and the throat is yellow. But, only one photo was available and so other features could not be studied in detail. Also, the supercilium curves slightly near the ear coverts (as seen from this angle) and this was a cause for concern as this feature is usually seen in intergrades. But, other features do match well with taivana and it lacks a darker crown usually seen in hybrids; expert opinion indicated that it could be a taivana but more images were needed for confirmation. For the individual seen in Gondal, the identification is even more difficult and experts were divided. But Per Alström, who has vast experience of wagtails, opined that it was a first-winter taivana moulting into first summer plumage.

Further molecular and vocal studies from Gujarat and India are required for this species. However, the Eastern Yellow Wagtail has now been accepted in the India checklist (Vishwanathan et al. 2017) and so its occurrence in the country is now confirmed. The identification of the individual seen in Kachchh and this bird seen in Gondal can be confirmed beyond any doubt only by DNA and vocal analysis. But till this issue is resolved by such studies, we can treat these photographic records as evidence of their occurrence in Gujarat. We feel that for the Eastern Yellow Wagtail, as a special case, a practical and pragmatic approach needs to be taken. So, we have decided to accept the species to the Gujarat checklist based on the records from Kachchh and this record from Gondal. This can be revised in the future if more data (both molecular and vocal) is available. Till that time, we accept these photo records. Hence, the Eastern Yellow Wagtail is an addition to the avifauna of Gujarat – Eds]

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Per Alström, Dipu K, Arend Wassink, Nils Van Duivendijk and Mike Prince for their expert comments. Special thanks to Prasad Ganpule for reviewing the draft manuscript.

References

Agarwal, K., 2016. eBird. https://ebird.org/view/checklist/S32378259 [Accessed on 25 March 2018].

Alström, P., & Mild, K., 2003. *Pipits and Wagtails of Europe, Asia and North America. Identifcation and systematics*. 1st ed. Christopher Helm,London.

Banks, R. C., Cicero, C., Dunn, J. L., Kratter, A. W., Rasmussen, P. C., Remsen, J. V., Rising, J. D., & Stotz, D. F., 2004. Forty-fifth Supplement to the American Ornithologists Union Check-list of North American Birds. *The Auk* 121 (3): 985- 995

Bot, S., Groenendijk, D., & van Oosten, H. H., 2014. Eastern yellow wagtails in Europe: identification and vocalisations. *Dutch Birding* 36: 295-311

del Hoyo, J. & Collar, N. 2018. Eastern Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla tschutschensis*). *Handbook of the Birds of the World Alive*. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona. (retrieved from https://www.hbw.com/node/1344120 on 25 March 2018).

Dickinson, E. C., & Christidis, L., (Eds.) 2014. *The Howard and Moore complete checklist of the birds of the world*: 2. Passerines. 4th ed. Vol. 2 of 2 vols. Aves Press.Eastbourne, UK.

Garner, M., 2015. http://birdingfrontiers.com/2015/11/20/more-on-taivana-wagtails-in-middle-east/ [Accessed on 25 March 2018].

Grimmett, R., Inskipp, C., & Inskipp, T. 2011. *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*. 2nd ed. Christopher Helm & Oxford University Press. London.

Pawar, V., 2011. Yellow Wagtail. http://orientalbirdimages.org/search.php? Bird_Image_ID=66339&Bird _ID= 2087&Bird_Family_ID=&Location=kutch [Accessed on 25 March 2018].

Perlman, Y., 2016.http://birdingfrontiers.com/2016/04/24/mixed-yellow-wagtails/ [Accessed on 25 March 2018].

Rasmussen, P. C., & Anderton, J. C., 2012. *Birds of South Asia: the Ripley guide*: field guide. 2nd ed. 2 Vols. Smithsonian Institution and Lynx Edicions. Washington, D.C. and Barcelona.

Tyler, S. & Christie, D. A., 2018. Western Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*). *Handbook of the Birds of the World Alive*. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona. (retrieved from https://www.hbw.com/node/57826 on 25 March 2018).

Varu, S., 2016. Probable Eastern Yellow Wagtail in Kachchh. *Flamingo* 14 (2): 21

Viswanathan, A., Sridharan, B., Prince, M., Kokane, P., & Kokane, A., 2017. Records of Eastern Yellow Wagtail Motacilla tschutschensis tschutschensis and M. t. taivana from India. *Indian BIRDS* 13 (6): 150–153 □

Baikal Teal at Bhavnagar: a first photographic record for Gujarat

Veer Vaibhav Mishra: Centre for Desert and Ocean, Moti-Virani, Kachchh 370665. vvaibhavm2008@gmail.com

Veer Vaibhav Mishra

The Baikal Teal (*Anas formosa*), also called the Bimaculate Duck or Squawk Duck, is a dabbling duck that breeds in eastern Russia and winters mainly in East Asia (Carboneras & Kirwan 2018). It is a rare winter migrant to India, with scattered and isolated records, mainly from northern and Northeast India (Grimmett *et al*. 2011).

On 4 February 2018, in the morning at around 08:45 hrs, I was watching birds with Andrew Allport & Beverly Allport at Krishna - Kunj Talav (21° 45' N, 72° 07' E), Victoria Park, Bhavnagar. We spotted a male Baikal Teal in a flock of Common Teals (*Anas crecca*). It was my second sighting of the Baikal Teal as I had seen the species earlier at Sultanpur Bird Sanctuary, Haryana, with Sharad Sridhar on 23 March 2013. So, I could easily identify it based on my previous experience. We took some photos and re-confirmed the identification. It was an adult male.

I shared this news with senior birders here. The news of this sighting was shared widely and many birders visited this site to see this individual because the Baikal Teal is a vagrant to Gujarat. There are only two previous records of the species from the state; a male was shot near Ahmedabad (Barton 1899) and another bird was collected from Bhimsar Lake, near Bhuj, in Kachchh (Maharao 1966). Both these individuals were sent to the BNHS and are kept in the specimen collection there (Abdulali 1968). Thus, this is only the third sighting of the species from Gujarat and the first photographic record from the state.

[*This individual was seen by many birders here. It was seen till early March in the same area. Hence, it was seen for one month here.*

An interesting observation about this individual seen in Bhavnagar was that there was a large protuberance on one side of its neck; probably a lump or a tumour. The bird was otherwise flying normally and appeared to be healthy as it was seen feeding, flying and moving around without any problems. It was last seen in early March and after that, it was not seen again even after an extensive search of the area. It is presumed that it migrated back to its breeding grounds. Since this individual came here and then migrated back, it seemed that the lump / tumour on its neck did not hamper its movements, it was flying normally.

The Baikal Teal is a vagrant to Gujarat. As stated by the author, this is only the third record from Gujarat and the first photographic record from the state. It is possible that it is overlooked amongst flocks of ducks here. The female Baikal Teal is similar to other female ducks (Anas sp.) and careful observation is required to identify it. Birders are urged to look for this species in the winter months in flocks of ducks here – Eds]

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank S. N. Varu and Jugal Tiwari for providing the references, encouragement and guidance for this note. I also thank Jasveen, our trip driver.

References

Abdulali, H., 1968. A catalogue of the birds in the collection of the Bombay Natural History Society-2. Anseriformes. *J Bombay Nat Hist Soc.* 65 (2): 418–430

Barton, E. L., 1899. Occurrence of the Clucking Teal (*Nettium formosum*) in Guzerat. *J Bombay Nat Hist Soc.* 12 (2): 429

Carboneras, C. & Kirwan, G. M., 2018. Baikal Teal (*Sibirionetta formosa*). *Handbook of the Birds of the World Alive*. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona. (retrieved from on 14 April 2018).

Grimmett, R., Inskipp, C., & Inskipp, T. 2011. *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*. 2nd ed. Christopher Helm & Oxford University Press. London.

Maharao of Kutch. 1966. The Baikal Teal *Anas formosa* Georgi: first record from Kutch. *J Bombay Nat Hist Soc.* 63 (1): 202 □

A large congregation of Great Knots and sighting of Red Knot near Jamnagar

Chirag Solanki: 18, Siddharth Colony, 49 Digvijay Plot, Jamnagar. birds_lover@yahoo.com

Chirag Solanki

On 27 December 2017, I visited Sachana Beach (22° 34' 7" N, 70° 10' 45" E), near Balachhadi, Jamnagar, with Dhaval Vargiya, Kishan Vinchhi, Bhargav Bhuva and Neel Sureja. When we reached there, it was high tide. After waiting for a while, with the gradual decline in water level, many waders (*Calidris* sp.) started appearing in the open sandy and muddy patches. With careful observation through binoculars, we saw a mixed flock of various waders, and I found a small group of about 15-20 Great Knot (*Calidris tenuirostris*). Within a few minutes, the count had risen beyond 100; it continued rising and to our surprise, there were more than 1200 Great Knot in this area. Most of them were busy feeding and did not get disturbed by our presence.

Chirag Solanki

During my subsequent visits to this place, I recorded the species here up to 1 January 2018 in such large numbers. Afterwards, when I visited this place again, there were hardly 10-12 birds present. However, on 26 January 2018, I again counted 832 Great Knots here with bird watcher Sunil Singhal. I immediately called my friend Yashodhan Bhatiya. He promptly came and started taking photos and video while I left. After coming home and watching the photos and video taken by him and referring to the field guides (Grimmett *et al*. 2011, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), we confirmed that there was a single Red knot (*Calidris canutus*) in the flock of Great Knots. It was identified by its short straight bill, smaller size (compared to Great Knot), uniform grey upperparts and prominent supercilium. So I revisited this area many times to find it but unfortunately, I could not locate it again.

The Great Knot is now classified as 'Endangered' owing to recent evidence showing a rapid population decline (BirdLife International 2016). It is an uncommon winter migrant to Gujarat, not seen in large numbers and usually found in the coastal areas of the state (Ganpule 2016). It has been noted in Jamnagar and Kachchh recently in small flocks (Mori 2017). There is a previous record of a flock of around 125 individuals from Jamnagar (Ganpule *et al*. 2012). However, such a large flock of more than 1200 birds has never been noted in Gujarat, or even from India before. Thus, this is a very important documentation of such a large flock of this endangered species from Gujarat. The presence of more than 800 individuals again in late January indicates that the individuals remain in the same general area during the winter. It is heartening to note such a large flock of this threatened species in the state and indicates that Gujarat is an important wintering destination for the species.

The Red Knot is a vagrant to Gujarat. Ganpule (2016) lists only three previous records from Gujarat; two from Narara, near Jamnagar, and one from Kachchh. It was photographed from Narara earlier (Naik 2012). Thus, this is only the fourth sighting of the species from Gujarat, and the third record from Jamnagar area. This sighting of a Red Knot in a flock of Great Knots is interesting and suggests that large flocks of Great Knots should be carefully scrutinized for Red Knots. In general, Red Knot is very rare on the western coast of India and Grimmett *et al*. (2011) show only one isolated record for

the entire western coast, from Goa. But, it has been noted four times now in Gujarat. It is possible that the Red Knot could be overlooked due to identification difficulties. Birders are urged to look for this species in the coastal areas of Gujarat.

These two important sightings, of a large congregation of Great Knots and a photographic record of Red Knot, are noteworthy records not only for the Jamnagar region, but also for the state.

References

BirdLife International., 2016. *Calidris tenuirostris*. The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species 2016: http://dx.doi.org/10.2305/IUCN.UK.2016-3.RLTS.T22693359A93398599. en. [Downloaded on 06 April 2018].

Ganpule, P., 2016. The Birds of Gujarat: Status and Distribution. *Flamingo* 8(3)-12 (4): 2-40

Ganpule, P., Varu, M., Zala, K. V. & Trivedi, A., 2011. Status and distribution of Great Knot Calidris tenuirostris in the Gulf of Kachchh, Gujarat, India. *Wader Study Group Bulletin.* 118 (3): 192–193

Grimmett, R., Inskipp, C., & Inskipp, T. 2011. *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*. 2nd ed. Christopher Helm & Oxford University Press. London.

Mori, D., 2017. Recent sightings of Great Knot in Gujarat. *Flamingo.* 15 (1): 7

Naik. K., 2012. '*Narara khate uttari kichadiyo*'. *Vihang* 6 (2): 11-12 [in Gujarati].

Rasmussen, P. C. & Anderton, J. C. 2012. *Birds of South Asia: The Ripley Guide*. 2 vols. 2 nd Ed. Smithsonian Institution and Lynx Edicions, Washington D. C. and Barcelona. □

Grey Heron preying on a Little Grebe

Neel Sureja: B-703, Spring Heights Appt., Patel Colony 24, Vikas Gruh Road, Jamnagar 361008. neelsureja5@gmail.com

Neel Sureja

On 3 December 2017 at around 07:30 hrs, a fine winter morning, I was at Vibhapar, a wetland near Jamnagar, for bird photography. In addition to the common birds observed in the area, I saw a few ducks (*Anas* sp.) in the wetland. I then noticed that a Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*) was hunting and saw it catch an immature or non-breeding Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*). It caught the grebe by its neck and gave a few vigorous shakes till the grebe was dead. It then swallowed the grebe whole. It was amazing to watch the heron swallowing the grebe. I initially identified the prey as a juvenile Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*) but then by careful scrutiny of the photographs, I saw that this grebe had a shorter neck and was smaller in size than a Great Crested Grebe. So, I concluded that this was a Little Grebe. Looking at its plumage, I thought that it was an immature or an adult in non-breeding plumage.

The diet of the Grey Heron is mainly fish, but the species is considered to be highly opportunistic; insects, mammals, birds, plant matter and carrion are taken (Martínez-Vilalta *et al*. 2018). The Grey Heron has been recorded to feed on small birds like Common Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*), chicks of other birds and ducks (ducklings), and also prey as large as Common Redshank (*Tringa totanus*) and Common Hoopoe (*Upupa epops*) (Greaves 1991, Martínez-Vilalta *et al.* 2018). A previous record from Jamnagar, of a Grey Heron feeding on a Five-striped Palm Squirrel (*Funambulus pennantii*) is known (Trivedi 2013). Thus, it has a very varied diet.

There is an instance of a Grey Heron choking on a Little Grebe; the heron caught the grebe but it could not swallow it, leading to its death by choking (McCanch 2003). But here, I observed that the Grey Heron could swallow the Little Grebe. Thus, this observation confirms that the Grey Heron can prey on the Little Grebe and swallow it successfully.

References

Greaves, C., 1991. Grey Heron catching, killing and swallowing Hoopoe. *British Birds* 84 (2): 57–58

Martínez-Vilalta, A., Motis, A. & Kirwan, G. M. 2018. Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*). *Handbook of the Birds of the World Alive*. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona. (retrieved from https://www.hbw.com/ node/52674 on 13 April 2018).

McCanch, N., 2003. Grey Heron choking on Little Grebe. *British Birds* 96 (2): 86

Trivedi, A. 2013. Grey Heron *Ardea cinerea* feeding on five-striped palm squirrel *Funambulus pennantii*. *Indian BIRDS* 8 (6): 166 □

Sightings of colour aberrant birds in Ankleshwar area

Jugalkishor H. Patel: At - Untiyadra, Ta: Ankleshwar, District: Bharuch 394125. jugalkishorhpatel@gmail.com

I had come across colour aberrant birds of four species around my village Untiyadra, in Ankleshwar taluka, Bharuch district, during 2014 and 2015. However, I had not given much attention to colour aberrant birds because of the general confusion that seems to exist in the birding world about colour mutations in wild birds; almost all whitish aberrations were called albino or partial albino, which is incorrect (Van Grouw 2006). I did not even take a photograph of a colour aberrant Red Avadavat (*Amandava amandava*) seen here due to lack of awareness about such birds. I realized the importance of recognizing the proper colour mutation in aberrant coloured wild birds after reading the two seminal papers by Hein Van Grouw (Van Grouw 2006, 2013). I report here four colour aberrant birds with the identification of the correct mutation.

Identification of the proper colour mutations in the field can be extremely difficult and is by no means always possible (Mahabal *et al*. 2016). Some mutations are hard to distinguish in the field (and in museum collections) because the colours of feathers with pigment reduction are easily bleached by sunlight and can even become almost white. For the correct identification and naming of colour mutations, it is necessary to know which changes have occurred to the original pigmentation (Van Grouw 2006). A comprehensive review of colour aberrant birds seen and recorded in India was done by Mahabal *et al*. (2016). The following four sightings of colour aberrant birds seen by me are given here:

Garganey (*Anas querqedula*): On 18 March 2018, I visited Panoli GIDC Lake (21° 32' N, 72° 58' E) for ducks (*Anas* sp). I spotted a flock of around 700 ducks comprising of three species; 70% Garganey, and the remaining 30% Northern Shovelers (*Anas clypeata*) with only four to five Common Teals (*Anas crecca*). While photographing these ducks, one colour aberrant pale brownish duck was seen, but it was quite far. I took another eight or nine photographs for identification. This bird was almost whitish-brown. It was identified as a female Garganey based on (i) as mentioned earlier, only three duck species were present (ii) The bird was smaller than the Northern Shovelers present there (iii) it was swimming and flying with the flock of Garganeys and (iv) supercilium and loral stripe were still visible.

As per my presumption, and with the help of the identification papers (Van Grouw 2006, 2013, Mahabal *et al*. 2016), I identified the colour mutation as possibly 'Brown'. Brown mutation is widespread among all species and, after progressive graying, is most frequently encountered in birds. Brown is a sex linked colour mutation. Most wild birds with the mutation brown are females, which was also seen here. Brown males are very rare in nature (Van Grouw 2006, 2013).

There is apparently only one published record of a colour mutated Garganey (Karuthedathu 2014) which was misidentified as 'Leucistic' by the original author and later, the mutation was correctly identified as probably 'Dilution' (Mahabal *et al*. 2016). I also searched for photos of colour aberrant Garganey on several popular websites, but could not find any other records. Hence, this is possibly the second published record of a colour aberrant Garganey from India.

Jugalkishor Patel

Brown Crake (*Amaurornis akool*): In August 2014, I invited my Valsad based friends, Mohammad Jat and Akshay, for bird watching. While coming here, they saw an almost white crake for a few seconds at Sisodra (21° 49' N, 72° 89' E), Ta: Ankleshwar. However, this bird was not identified or photographed on that day, but as the location was near my village, they informed me of this. Subsequently, when I visited the same location on 29 September 2014, I saw two Brown Crakes afar. One of them had an unusual colouration. Its upperparts were almost white while underparts were dark brownish. I took some record photos using a digital camera. This bird was very shy compared to its normal coloured partner. Thereafter, this colour aberrant bird was seen thrice more during my visits, but I did not give much attention to it then, misidentifying it as a partial albino (this however is wrong, as partial albinism is never possible).

Jugalkishor Patel

Now, I reanalyzed the photos and tried to identify the colour mutation observed in this Brown Crake and, as per my presumption, it may possibly be 'Partial Leucism'. I also realized that there is not a single published photograph or record of a colour aberrant Brown Crake. Hence, this could possibly be the first such record from India.

Red-whiskered Bulbul (*Pycnonotus jocosus*): In 2014, I came across two colour aberrant Red-whiskered Bulbuls at different locations.

Jugalkishor Patel

Red-whiskered Bulbul – An unusual whitish coloured Red-whiskered Bulbul was seen on 19 April 2014 at my village Untiyadra (21° 29' N, 72° 56' E), Ta – Ankleshwar. The bird immediately flew away but I was able to take one photograph for record. I believe that the mutation in this bird is 'Dilution'.

A second colour aberrant Red-whiskered Bulbul (first record) was seen by Yagnesh Bhatt at Sisodra (21° 30' N, 72° 52' E), Ta: Ankleshwar, on 29 June 2014, when we were searching for bitterns (*Ixobrychus* sp.) on canal road. The bird was seen only for a few seconds and Yagnesh Bhatt had succeeded in taking a single record shot of the bird. My assumption for the mutation in this bird is 'Progressive Graying'.

There are number of records of colour mutations in Red-whiskered Bulbul in India; five records were reviewed by Mahabal *et al*. (2016). Three were identified as birds with the mutation 'Progressive Graying' and two with the mutation 'Brown' whereas all these were misidentified as Albino or Leucistic by the original authors.

Expert opinion

As mentioned earlier, correct identification of mutation is very difficult; I sent the images of the first three birds (Garganey, Brown Crake and the first Red-whiskered Bulbul) to Hein Van Grouw, the leading expert on colour aberrations and Senior Bird Curator at the Natural History Museum, Tring, UK. His reply is given here with his due permission:

"Yes, I agree; the duck is a Garganey. You are pretty good with identification. The Garganey is indeed Brown, and I think the Bulbul is also Brown (but it probably looks a bit more gray due to the lighting of photo and as the plumage is a bit bleached already). The Crake, one can call Partial Leucism indeed, but the white feathers are almost certainly caused by Progressive Greying. However, Progressive Greying can be considered as a special form of Leucism".

I also sent the image of the second Red-whiskered Bulbul (photo by Yagnesh Bhatt) to Hein Van Grouw along with my opinion in a subsequent email. He confirmed that the colour mutation of the bird was indeed 'Progressive Greying'.

In August 2015, as mentioned earlier, a colour aberrant Red Avadavat was also seen at my village with Yogesh C Patel. But, being unable to photograph it, I have not included it here. These records of colour aberrant birds from Ankleshwar area are important to understand the various types of colour mutations seen in wild birds. The record of the colour aberrant Brown Crake is especially interesting, because there is no published record of colour aberration in this species earlier from India and this seems to be the first such record from the country.

[*In our previous issues, we have given many notes/articles on colour aberrant birds, with the correct mutation identified by experts like Hein Van Grouw. With increasing awareness, we are getting more information about such birds in Gujarat. These sightings are important as we get an idea regarding the various colour mutations in wild birds. The colour aberrant Brown Crake reported here is very interesting and as stated by the author, possibly the first such sighting of this species from the country - Eds*]

Acknowledgements

I am thankful to Mohammad Jat for sharing the location of the Brown Crake and to Yagnesh Bhatt for the photo of the Red-whiskered Bulbul. I am especially grateful to Hein Van Grouw for his help in identification of the correct colour mutation in the birds referred to here.

References

Karuthedathu, D., Das, V., Praveen, J., Ramchandra, V., Shrupali, S. & Nair, M.V., 2014. Some significant avian records from Odisha. *Indian BIRDS* 9 (1): 14-18

Mahabal, A., Van Grouw, H., Sharma R. M., & Thakur, S., 2016. How common is albinism really? Colour Aberrations in Indian birds reviewed. *Dutch Birding* 38: 301-309

Van Grouw, H., 2006. Not every bird is an albino: sense and nonsense about colour variation in birds. *Dutch Birding* 28: 79-89

Van Grouw, H., 2013. What colour is that bird? *British Birds* 106: 17-29 □

Courtship display and mating of Mallard in the winter near Rajkot

Krunal Trivedi & Akshay Trivedi: 'Gauri-nivas', Subhashnagar-1, B/h. Amrapali Cinema, Raiya Road, Rajkot 360007. krunaltrivedi2811@gmail.com

On 1 February 2018, we visited a pond at Raiya village, near Rajkot, in the evening at around 17:00 hrs. We observed Indian Spot-billed Duck (*Anas poecilorhyncha*), Common Teal (*Anas crecca*), Gadwall (*Anas strepera*), Northern Pintail (*Anas acuta*) and a pair of Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*). We visited this area in the morning and evening on 2 February 2018 and again in the evening on 3 February 2018.

The ducks were relaxing and not very active when we were observing them. In the morning, most of the ducks were roosting on the banks of the lake, except Eurasian Coot (*Fulica atra*) which were active. An interesting observation which we made there was seeing and photographing a pair of Mallard doing courtship display and mating in the evening on 1 February 2018 and 3 February 2018.

The Mallard pair, on all the three days, started becoming active after about 17:00 hrs. They were seen using the same mounds or places to roost. Generally, the female was seen following the male. After some time, the male started to pump his head and bob it several times. The male and female faced each other and the female replicated head pumping to show interest. If female did not respond to his display, the male swam away and displayed after sometime. This display was followed by mating. The female was submerged under the water during copulation, when the male held the female by her neck with his beak. After mating, both the male and the female swam rapidly for a short distance with the neck held low (known as nod-swimming), and with tail raised by the female. This behaviour was observed in the evening on two days. We also observed that when the pair was displaying, the female became territorial/aggressive and chased Spot-billed Ducks from the area. However, we did not observe it chasing Eurasian Coots, which came near to the pair. As per senior ornithologist Taej Mundkur (in litt, by email), Mallards can mate on the wintering grounds as a part of pair bonding. We kept visiting the place frequently till early March and saw the mating of Mallards twice more in this period.

The Mallard is a winter visitor to Gujarat (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). Within Indian limits, it breeds in small numbers in Kashmir lakes; egg laying was observed from March till early June (Shah *et al.* 2009). It is known that courtship often occurs in the winter, with pair bonds lasting until early or midway to the incubation period (Carboneras & Kirwan 2018). The mating of Mallards observed here in the winter (early February) is quite unusual. However, a similar observation was made in December in Sukhna Lake, Chandigarh (Kalsi 1990), when too mating was observed in the winter. Thus, this observation further confirms that Mallards may display and mate in their wintering areas.

Acknowledgements

We are thankful to Prasad Ganpule for his help in writing this note and to Ashok Mashru for taking interest and motivating us to write this note. We are grateful to Taej Mundukar for his valuable inputs.

References

Carboneras, C. & Kirwan, G. M., 2018. Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*). *Handbook of the Birds of the World Alive*. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona. (retrieved from https://www.hbw.com/node/ 52875 on 28 March 2018).

Grimmett, R., Inskipp, C., & Inskipp, T. 2011. *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*. 2nd ed. Christopher Helm & Oxford University Press. London.

Kalsi, R. S. 1990. Copulation in water by wintering Mallards. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers.* 30 (5-6): 15

Shah, G. M., Jan, U., Ahanger, F. A., Bhat, B. A. & Fazili, M. F. 2009. Egg laying, egg parameters and clutch size in Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*. *Indian BIRDS* 4 (3): 106–108 □

Sighting of Lesser Cuckoo near Mahuva, Bhavnagar District

Batuk Bhil: At Nikol, Ta: Mahuva, Dist: Bhavnagar. batukbhil@gmail.com

Batuk Bhil

Batuk Bhil

On 6 October 2017, while birding near Nikol village (21° 08' 64.09" N, 71° 85' 66.59" E), Ta: Mahuva, Dist: Bhavnagar, I saw a cuckoo (*Cuculus* sp.) perched deep inside a Neem tree. After careful observation, I noted that it was smaller in size, had slate-grey (speckled and faintly barred with brown) upperparts, contrastingly blackish tail and uppertail-coverts, white tips and spots at sides of tail, dark greyish head and neck. The throat and upper breast were blackish with some barring, while lower breast and rest of underparts were white and boldly barred black. It had a yellow eye-ring, and orange yellow legs. I took a few record shots. Based on my observations and photographs, I identified it as a Lesser Cuckoo (*Cuculus poliocephalus*).

This place is located about 500 mts from coast. I saw this individual here for two days. After that, I could not find it again. Whenever I observed it, it was perched deep inside a Neem or a Mango tree. Sometimes it came on the ground to catch insects and caterpillars. It did not call during the time I observed it.

[*The Lesser Cuckoo breeds in the Himalayas and winters in Sri Lanka; it is a passage migrant in the Peninsula (Grimmett et al. 2011). Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) show it as breeding in the Himalayas and wintering in Sri Lanka and give it as a passage migrant in the Western, and Eastern Ghats; it is shown as a passage migrant in south Gujarat. For Gujarat, there is a previous record from Dang forest (Shull 1962). There are other unconfirmed sightings from south Gujarat and Dang forest but it has not been photographed recently in the state.*

In general, cuckoos are notoriously difficult to identify and many times, they can be separated only by call. The Lesser Cuckoo is much smaller in size, has whiter boldly barred underparts, and is darker above. In juvenile plumage, it can be similar to other cuckoo sp. but is smaller in size and has bolder underpart barring. All these features were noted by the observer for this individual. But since identification is difficult, we sent the images to Clive Mann for opinion. He replied (in litt., email dated 8 October 2017) that it was a juvenile or an immature Lesser Cuckoo.

This is an important record for the state. It is possible that the Lesser Cuckoo could be a rare passage migrant or a vagrant here and is overlooked due to identification difficulties. Birders are requested to keep a watch for this species in the state – Eds]

References

Grimmett, R., Inskipp, C., & Inskipp, T. 2011. *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*. 2nd ed. Christopher Helm & Oxford University Press. London.

Rasmussen, P. C., & Anderton, J. C., 2012. *Birds of South Asia: the Ripley guide.* 2 Vols. 2nd ed. Smithsonian Institution and Lynx Edicions. Washington, D.C. and Barcelona.

Shull, E. M., 1962. Supplementary notes on 'The birds of Gujarat' from birds collected in the Surat Dangs. *J Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* 59 (2): 658-660 □

Unusual feeding behaviour by Little Cormorant

S. M. Dave: Department of Biotechnology, Hemchandracharya North Gujarat University, Patan 384265. davesanjay@gmail.com

Introduction & observation

Little Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax niger*) is found in lakes, reservoirs, lagoons and tidal creeks (Ali 1996). It is a common resident in Gujarat and seen in almost all parts of the state (Grimmett *et al*. 2011). However, there are no sightings or studies reporting Little Cormorant foraging in strong water current. No studies show cormorants (*Phalacrocorax* sp.) foraging in strong inland water currents, downstream of overflowing dams. I report here an instance of Little Cormorants feeding in strong water current downstream of an overflowing dam near Rajkot.

On 11 August 2007 at 18:30 hrs., I visited the irrigation dam Nyari-I (21° 14' N, 70° 42' E), near Rajkot. It was full and overflowing due to heavy rain upstream. The fishes were washed downstream of the ungated dam-wall in the heavy current and were trying to move against the water current. In doing so, they were swimming near the surface and sometimes jumped out of the water. Some of the fishes near the dam-wall were jumping over the dam-wall and falling in the water again. The fishes in inland waters tend to move upstream against the water current. Many fishes move upstream in a strategy of breeding in which the fish breed upstream, where ample food is available when the eggs hatch. Thus, when dams are overflowing, we frequently see fishes swimming or jumping in these waters.

Due to the heavy rain, the water level had reached approximately 1.5 mts over the dam. Downstream from the dam, at one place, the river bank was curved in such a way that the water was swirling at that point. The water level here was suitable for birds like Eurasian Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*), Black-headed Ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*) and Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*), which were observed foraging in this area. However, at other places, the water current was very strong. Five Painted Storks (*Mycteria leucocephala*), 14 Grey Herons (*Ardea cinerea*), and a Great Egret (*Casmerodius albus*) remained scattered on the bank and were trying to catch fish, swimming on the surface or jumping in the air, which is known as aerial feeding. Aerial feeding behaviour has been observed in Keoladeo National Park, Bharatpur earlier (Sivasubramanian 1988); Intermediate Egret (*Egretta intermedia*), Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*) and Pond Heron (*Ardeola grayii*) have been observed feeding on fishes jumping out of flowing waters.

The most interesting observation here was of eight Little Cormorants swimming in the water, against the current, even though the water current was strong. The place where the Little Cormorants were foraging was rocky, in the middle of the river. Rocks confined and channelized the water towards this place and the distance between these rocks was barely 20 cms. Foraging Little Cormorants swam against the water and foraged on fishes channelized in this water channel. The area where I observed Little Cormorants feeding was very shallow, less than two feet deep, and the cormorants were visible from a distance.

Discussion

Diving birds like cormorants have been observed feeding in tidal creeks; Pelagic Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax pelagicus*), a cormorant species found in the North Pacific, has been reported foraging in moderate water current at intermediate depth; they have been observed foraging in turbulent water in Southeast Alaska and Southern Vancouver Island, Canada (Holm & Burger 2002, Drew *et al.* 2013). However, such feeding behaviour, wherein the Little Cormorant was observed foraging by swimming against strong current in inland water systems has not been noted before.

It is obvious that the energy expended in swimming against strong currents is much more than when the birds forage in the still waters of lakes and ponds. However, it is possible that in this case, the chances of catching fish are much higher and the energetic costs are justified. However, this is a phenomenon which has not been studied in detail before and is largely unknown. But, it can be said that the Little Cormorant can forage in strong water current of overflowing dams.

The overflowing of check-dams and other reservoirs is frequently seen in the monsoon season in Gujarat. Further observations of such type of feeding behaviour, if seen in other avian species, need to be collected and a proper study is required.

Because of poor evening light, distance and low resolution mobile camera I could not take pictures of printable quality.

References

Ali, S. 1996. *The Book of Indian Birds*. BNHS, Oxford University Press, Mumbai.

Drew, G. S.; Piatt, J. F. & Hill, D. F. 2013. Effects of currents and tides in fine scale use of marine habitats in Southeast Alaska hotspot. *Marine Ecology Progress Series* 487: 275-286

Grimmett, R., Inskipp, C., & Inskipp, T. 2011. *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*. 2nd ed. Christopher Helm & Oxford University Press. London.

Holm, K. J. & Burger, A. E. 2002. Foraging Behavior and Resource Partitioning by Diving Birds During Winter in Areas of Strong Tidal Currents. *Waterbirds* 25 (3): 312-325

Sivasubramanian, C. 1988. Aerial Feeding by Median Egret (*Egretta intermedia*), Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*) and Pond Heron (*Ardeola grayii*). *J Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* 85(3): 611-612 □

Short Birding Notes

Rusty-tailed Flycatcher at Girnar, near Junagadh

On 12 December 2017, in the evening, I went for birding at Narayan dharo (stream), Bhavnath, Girnar, near Junagadh, with my friend Anand Vacchani. After seeing Brown-breasted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa muttui*), Taiga Flycatcher (*Ficedula albicilla*) and Red-breasted Flycatcher (*F. parva*), we planned to return, when we saw a flycatcher in the shade. We took some images and noted that it had a grayish-brown mantle, rufous tail, pale yellow lower mandible, large eye, indistinct supercilium and eye-ring. We identified it as a Rusty-tailed Flycatcher (*Muscicapa ruficauda*). We saw it for ten minutes. On the next day, early morning, we went to the same place but could not find it. After 08:45 hrs, we heard its call near the riverside. We heard it for some time but could not see it since it was in very dense bushes. It was not seen or heard again on subsequent visits. The Rusty-tailed Flycatcher is a vagrant to Gujarat (Ganpule 2016), with a recent record from Jamnagar (Pathan 2017). This is the first record of the species from Girnar.

Gaurang Bagda: Junagadh. gaurangbagda@gmail.com

Oriental Scops Owl rescued at Dholka, near Ahmedabad

On 1 March 2018, in the afternoon, an Oriental Scops Owl (*Otus sunia*) of the rufous morph was rescued from Dholka, near Ahmedabad, by Viraj Patel. It was found below a tree in an injured condition. It looked like a juvenile bird. It was brought to Ahmedabad for treatment. There seemed to be no external injury but some sticky material was found on its wing feathers, near the carpal joint. Its weight was 77 gms. It was given some treatment but unfortunately, it died on the same day. The Oriental Scops Owl is a rare resident in Gujarat, seen in south Gujarat forests, Gir NP and there is an isolated record from Gandhinagar (Ganpule 2016). This record from Dholka is surprising as there is no large forest area nearby.

Kartik Shastri: Ahmedabad. kartikgyps@gmail.com

Black-naped Oriole in Shoolpaneshwar Wildlife Sanctuary

We visited and stayed at Sagai Campsite in Shoolpaneshwar Wildlife Sanctuary from 30 March 2018 to 1 April 2018. In the morning on 1 April, at around 08:00 hrs, we saw and photographed a Black-naped Oriole (*Oriolus chinensis*). It was an adult, probably a male, and was identified by the presence of a broad black band across the nape and blackish wings. The bird was calling and moving from one branch to another on the top of a large tree. The Black-naped Oriole is a vagrant to Gujarat (Ganpule 2016), with only two sightings reported previously from the state; from Kachchh (Turk 2010) and Jamnagar (Joshi 2010). This sighting of the species from Shoolpaneshwar WLS is an important record for the state.

Dr. Maulik Varu, Shantilal Varu: Bhavnagar. drmaulikvaru@yahoo.com

Purple-rumped Sunbird in Morbi

A Purple-rumped Sunbird (*Leptocoma zeylonica*) pair was seen on the outskirts of Morbi city from November 2017 till January 2018. The male and female were regularly seen in the flowering trees in the area, and were seen by Ashok Mashru, Manoj Finava and me in the first week of November. We were surprised to note it here as this species is not known to occur in Saurashtra. It occurs from south to north Gujarat, extending further to north, with recent records from Idar and Patan. It is possible that it could be a local migrant here. This pair was not seen after January 2018. This sighting from Morbi is intriguing and suggests that the species could be a local migrant to the drier areas of the state in the winter.

Prasad Ganpule: Morbi. prasadganpule@gmail.com

Red-wattled Lapwing nesting successfully on rooftop of a building

A Red-wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*) pair laid four eggs on the rooftop of a closed building near my home in Jamnagar on 15 March 2018. Three chicks hatched on 10 and 11 April 2018. The surprising observation here was that on 11 April 2018, the parent Red-wattled Lapwings coaxed their one day old (or recently hatched) chicks to jump from the rooftop at around 08:30 hrs. All the three chicks jumped on to the ground and survived the fall. The height from which the chicks jumped was around 11 feet. The chicks were seen foraging, seemed to be uninjured and were observed over the next few days. Though the Red-wattled Lapwing is known to nest on rooftops (Murlidhar & Barve 2013), a previous observation noted that the lapwing chicks reaching the ground using rainwater drainage pipe (Kumar & Sharma 2011). This observation shows that the chicks can also jump from rooftops and survive a fall of more than 10 feet.

Jatin Dhruve: Jamnagar. j_dhruve@yahoo.com

White-bellied Minivet near Bhavnagar

On the afternoon of 28 February 2018, I went for birding in the hills of Malnath, located in Bhavnagar district, with my friends Raj and Ravi. While climbing the hill, we saw quite a few birds. We then saw a male White-bellied Minivet (*Pericrocotus erythropygius*). It was perched on a shrub and was continuously moving from one branch to another. I was able to take only one record photograph before it flew away. It was identified by its black upperparts with white wing patch, orange breast patch, whitish underparts, and orangish rump. The White-bellied Minivet is uncommon to rare in Bhavnagar district.

Hemal Patel: Bhavnagar. hemalpatel.116@gmail.com

Ruddy-breasted Crake near Rajkot

On 6 May 2018, Dr Rajesh Bhalodia, Pilubhai, Jignesh Rathod and I visited Baghi village, near Rajkot, which is our regular bird watching site. It is a marshy area near a check dam on Nyari River. The reeds here are very favourable for birds like munias (*Lonchura* sp.), weavers (*Ploceus* sp.), prinias (*Prinia* sp.), crakes (*Porzana* sp.) and bitterns (*Ixobrychus* sp.). We were busy observing a Red-rumped Swallow (*Cecropis daurica*) pair collecting mud for nesting. At around 07:00 hrs, we saw a crake which was reddish-brown in colour and foraging near the reeds. It was identified as Ruddy-breasted Crake (*Porzana fusca*). We took some photos and confirmed the identification. The Ruddy-breasted Crake is resident in south and central Gujarat, with a recent record from Rajkot area (Mashru 2018). Another sighting in August 2015 from Hanuman-dhara, near Padadhari, Rajkot District, is also known (Raju Karia, *pers. comm.*). This sighting in early May suggests it could be resident here in suitable habitat.

Dr Sunil Moteria: Rajkot. drsunilmoteria@gmail.com

Black-naped Oriole in Rajkot

On 7 March 2018, I was bird watching in Randarda, near Rajkot, in the morning at about 07:45 hrs. I observed two orioles (*Oriolus* sp.) perched on a tree. Initially, I thought it was an India Golden Oriole (*Oriolus oriolus kundoo*) but a prominent black mask extending beyond the eye and joining on the nape was noted and seen in the photos. I shared the photos with senior birders here and the identification was confirmed as Black-naped Oriole (*Oriolus chinensis*). As the birds were high in the tree, I could get only record images. The birds flew away due to some noise and I tried to follow them to get better images but could not see them again. It is possible that this was a pair. The Black-naped Oriole is a vagrant to Gujarat (Ganpule 2016) and this is the first record of the species from Rajkot area.

Priyank Dhami: Rajkot. priyank.dhami@gmail.com

Water Rail in Bhavnagar

On 18 January 2018, at about 07:30 hrs, I went for bird watching to a lake near Bhavnagar Airport (21° 45' 49" N, 72° 11' 01" E). There I saw and photographed a Water Rail (*Rallus aquaticus*). It was feeding near the edge of shallow water sparsely covered by dried *Prosopis juliflora* branches. I saw it up to 08:30 hrs, after which it disappeared somewhere inside the branches. I waited for a further 15 minutes but it did not come out. I visited this place many times after that and found its presence there up to 18 February 2018. Every time, I observed that it came out for feeding at around 07:00 hrs and went inside at around 08:30 hrs. I also tried to locate it in the evening hours but was not successful. Water Rail is a rare winter visitor to Gujarat, with a few sightings from Saurashtra (Ganpule 2016). There is no previous record of this species from Bhavnagar.

Kandarp Andharia: Bhavnagar. kandarpandharia053@gmail.com

Colour aberrant Great Cormorants in Bhavnagar

On 3 February 2018, at a wetland near Nava Bandar on Airport Road, Bhavnagar, we saw and photographed a colour aberrant Great Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*). At first, we thought it was an albino but then we observed that it had yellow on beak as well as normal colored eyes and feet (which ruled out albinism). We found another similar bird and we observed that these two colour aberrant birds were a part of a flock of 12 Great Cormorants, which were foraging together. After that, we tried to find out these birds but could not locate them again. The identification of the correct mutation in colour aberrant birds is often very difficult (Van Grouw 2013). Here, we think that the mutation was probably leucism, but we are not very sure. A colour aberrant Little Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax niger*) was noted recently near Junagadh (Vaghasiya 2016). This is another sighting of a colour aberrant cormorant sp. from Gujarat.

Kunj Joshi & Devanshi Trivedi: Bhavnagar. kunjjoshi251296@gmail.com
dktrivedi16@gmail.com

Colour aberrant Indian Robin in Junagadh District

On 16 May 2018, early in the morning, we went for birding to Baliyavad outskirts (21° 35' 13.3" N, 70° 34' 26.4" E), near Junagadh, with our group. We noticed one whitish bird on an electric cable. It looked unusual so we called our birder colleague Dr. Gaurang Bagda. Based on the size and shape of the bird, as well as observing its feeding habits, behavior and call, we identified it as a colour aberrant Indian Robin (*Saxicoloides fulicatus*). We took some photographs. It had white plumage with a pale brownish face and reddish (normal coloured) vent. It could be identified as an individual probably with the mutation 'brown' (Van Grouw 2013). This is another addition to the recent observations of colour aberrant birds in Gujarat.

Dr. Anand Vachhani & Dr. Viral Patel: Junagadh. vachhanianand@gmail.com

Eurasian Hobby near Rajkot

On 4 November 2017, while travelling on National Highway 27 near Rajkot, a Eurasian Hobby (*Falco subbuteo*) was sighted at around 08:00 hrs near Prabhu Farms, about 25 kms from Rajkot. It was perched on an electrical transmission wire. Another individual was also seen flying beside it. Eurasian Hobby is considered as mainly an autumn passage migrant here, with some sightings in winter and during spring migration from the state (Bhatt 2015, Ganpule 2016). While visiting the same location on the next day, 5 November 2017, one individual was again observed flying. Thus, these observations near a main highway with vehicular traffic indicate that the species is also seen during passage migration in areas where there is human activity.

Hemanya Radadiya: Rajkot. radadiahemanya@gmail.com

Water Rail near Sutrapada, Gir-Somnath District

On 30 November 2017, at around 07:20 hrs, a Water Rail (*Rallus acquaticus*) was seen and photographed on VPK Road, near Sutrapada (20° 48' N, 70° 36' E), Gir - Somnath District. It was easily identified by its long, downcurved red bill, olive-brown upperparts and white undertail coverts. It was seen again on 1 December 2017 in the evening at around 16:20 hrs and a third sighting was on 10 December 2017. It was feeding with Baillon's Crake (*Porzana pusilla*) and Purple Swamphen (*Porphyrio porphyrio*). The Water Rail is a rare winter migrant in Gujarat, with recent sightings from Jamnagar, Porbandar and Amreli districts in Saurashtra (Ganpule 2016). This sighting from Gir – Somnath district adds to the districts in which it has been seen in Saurashtra. I am thankful to Dr. Gaurang Bagda and Pranav Vaghasiya for their help in writing this note and I thank Meet Vala for the photograph.

Ravi Patel: Junagadh. rv.8980478450@gmail.com

Pin-tailed Snipe in Rajkot

On the evening of 22 January 2018, while visiting Nyari-I Dam near Rajkot, I saw a snipe (*Gallinago* sp.) in a muddy area at the edge of water. I took pictures of it perched on the ground and also in flight. It seemed different from a Common Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*) as it had a shorter bill, barred underwings and lacked white trailing edge to secondaries in flight. When perched, the 'pins' on the sides of its tail were visible and so it could be identified as a Pin-tailed Snipe (*Gallinago stenura*) conclusively. The Pin-tailed Snipe is an uncommon winter visitor to Gujarat, with isolated sightings from Saurashtra (Ganpule 2016). This is probably the first photographic record from Rajkot area.

Raju Karia: Rajkot. dealwiserajkot@gmail.com

Orange-headed Thrush nesting in Dadara & Nagar Haveli

I observed a nesting pair of Orange-headed Thrush (*Zoothera citrina*) at Vasona, Dadra & Nagar Haveli (Union Territory), in October 2017. I photographed the pair on 15 October 2017 at around 12:30 hrs in the afternoon. The male was observed hunting for insects while the female was sitting in the nest, probably incubating. My first sighting of the Orange-headed Thrush from the Union Territory was on 11 June 2017, when I observed 3-4 individuals foraging on the ground. After that, this sighting of a nesting pair shows that the species is resident in this area. Orange-headed Thrush is given as a rare resident in south Gujarat (Ganpule 2016). Though it is known to be resident here, there are very few nesting records of this species from Gujarat. This year too, I have noticed an active pair in the same area, but have refrained from documentation to avoid disturbance in their activity.

Saswat Mishra: Silvassa, Dadra & Nagar Haveli (UT). paulmshr@gmail.com

Grey-bellied Cuckoo near Vasad, Anand district

On 6 March 2018, I saw a small, orange-coloured cuckoo (*Cacomantis* sp. or *Cuculus* sp.) perched in the canopy of a tree near the Mahi Sagar River, Vasad village, in Anand district. I could not identify the bird at first sight. I tried to take some photos but it flew away to another tree. I was then able to approach it and got good photos. I shared the images with my bird watcher friends and it was identified as a hepatic morph Grey-bellied Cuckoo (*Cacomantis passerinus*). The Grey-bellied Cuckoo is common in the southern part of Gujarat during the monsoon and not usually seen in the winter (*pers. obsv*). An interesting aspect of this sighting is that this individual was seen in early spring, which was a surprise sighting for this area in this season.

Pratik G Nagrecha: Vasad. pratiknagrecha55@yahoo.com

Colour aberrant Baya Weaver near Navsari

On 27 October 2017, we went for birding in Navsari outskirts area. At about 10:15 hrs, on the other side of the road, there was a big flock of Baya Weavers (*Ploceus philippinus*). Suddenly, a completely white coloured Baya Weaver emerged from the dry, tall grass. At first, we thought that it was a pet bird that had escaped from its cage. We managed to take 6-7 photographs of the bird before it flew away. After seeing images in camera, we realized that it was a colour aberrant Baya Weaver. Another thing we noticed was that this bird was separate from the main flock and wandering a little far from the rest of the flock. We could not identify the correct mutation in this individual, but it was probably leucistic or ino, based on the criteria given in Van Grouw (2013).

Priyank Kapdi, Jay Desai, Neel Tandel: Navsari. prnkkpd.pk@gmail.com

Black-naped Monarch in Bhavnagar

On 20 April 2018, in the afternoon at around 14:00 hrs, I saw and photographed a Black-naped Monarch (*Hypothymis azurea*) near my home in Bhavnagar. It was seen in my backyard where there are large trees. This individual seemed to be a female based on its plumage, as it had a brownish mantle. It was seen for 10 days near my home and was seen catching insects from the trees in the afternoon. After 30 April 2018, I could not see it again. The Black-naped Monarch is fairly widespread in Gujarat and seen in some parts of Saurashtra but, it is uncommon or rare in Bhavnagar.

Aamir Matli: Bhavnagar.

References

Bhatt, N., Ganpule, P. & Solanki, J. 2015. Status of Eurasian Hobby in Gujarat. *Flamingo* 13(4): 3-6

Ganpule, P., 2016. The Birds of Gujarat: Status and Distribution. *Flamingo* 8(3)-12(4): 2-40

Joshi, K., 2010. '*Jamnagar ma kali-od pilak ni nondh*'. *Vihang* 4 (4): 37-38 [In Gujarati].

Kumar, A., & Sharma, R. K., 2011. Observations on breeding behaviour and vocalizations in Red-wattled Lapwing, *Vanellus indicus* (Aves: Charadriidae) from northern India. *Journal of Experimental Zoology India* 14 (1): 333–338

Mashru, A., 2018. Sighting of Ruddy-breasted Crake and Water Rail in Rajkot. *Flamingo* 16 (1): 13-14

Muralidhar, A. & Barve, S., 2013. Peculiar choice of nesting of Red-wattled Lapwing Vanellus indicus in an urban area in Mumbai, Maharashtra. *Indian BIRDS* 8 (1): 6–9

Pathan, F., 2017. Short Birding Notes: Rusty-tailed Flycatcher in Jamnagar. *Flamingo* 15(1): 17

Turk, A., 2010. '*Kachchh ma kaliod pilak ni sarva pratham nondh*'. *Vihang* 4 (4): 37 [In Gujarati].

Vaghashiya, P., 2016. Sighting of aberrant coloured Little Cormorant near Junagadh. *Flamingo.* 14: (2) 17

Van Grouw, H., 2013. What colour is that bird? The causes and recognition of common colour aberrations in birds. *British Birds* 106 (1): 17–29 □

Editorial

Greetings friends!

We are very happy that quality issues of 'Flamingo' are being published on a regular basis. This would not have been possible without the incessant flow of information on bird sightings and other articles from birder friends. Bird experts who help us in reviewing the notes deserve a special mention:

We thank Niranjan Sant and Nirav Bhatt, who helped us in reviewing the article on Indian Spotted Eagle in Gujarat, published in this issue. We are also grateful to the various species specialists for their contributions in the articles on 'Variable Sunbird' and 'Eastern Yellow Wagtail'. We thank all the many Indian, and foreign faculty who, in spite of their busy schedules, have regularly helped us with identification, reviewed notes and articles, and gave valuable comments in the past issues. I would like to specially thank Praveen J., who is always ready to help with comments on any notes or articles that we send to him, for all his help.

I am delighted to announce at this point that, the executive committee of BCSG has decided to split the 'Newsletter' from 'Flamingo'. While 'Flamingo' will be published as a 'Bulletin of Gujarat birds', 'Newsletter' will be sent to BCSG members online as per the need to share society related information with members.

We are also progressing fast towards our big project on preparing a photographic field guide on birds of Gujarat with updated distribution maps. We already have made announcements on sending bird photos as per the protocol conveyed to the members on email.

Looking forward to our joint participation in the BCSG publications. Best wishes and happy birding!

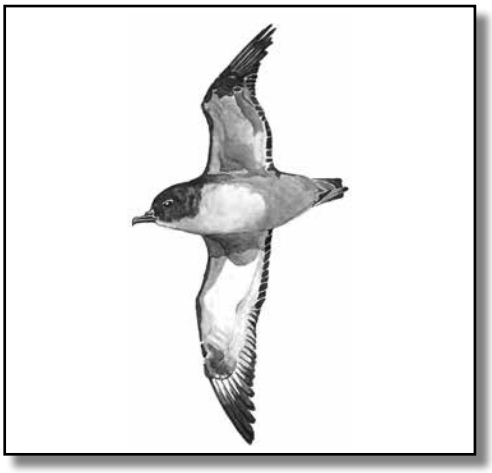
ABSTRACTS

Vocal mimicry by Sykes's Lark: Jack of all calls and master of few – vocal mimicry by Sykes's Lark by Taylor Crisologo *et al*. *Avian Biology Research* 10 (3): 174-180

The authors carried out a study on vocal mimicry by Sykes's Lark (*Galerida deva*), referred to as Tawny Lark in the paper. Flight calls of Sykes's Lark, wherein mimicry was noted, were recorded near Amreli (Gujarat) by Viral Joshi (the second author). A total of 16 recordings were collected, and it was observed that it mimicked 34 species; the most commonly mimicked species were Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark (*Eremopterix griseus*) and Greater Short-toed Lark (*Calandrella brachydactyla*). Sykes's Lark mimics both passerine and non-passerine, and migratory and resident, species. It is speculated that the ability to mimic more species may be related to sexual selection and male fitness could be attributed to mimetic accuracy and repertoire; mimicry may also provide hints to the avian biodiversity of the area.

Saker Falcon in Gujarat: Records of Saker Falcon from Gujarat by Devvratsinh Mori & Yogendra Shah. *Indian BIRDS* 13 (6): 158–159

The authors collected records of Saker Falcon (*Falco cherrug*) from Gujarat in the last few years. The species is now listed as 'Endangered' and so the records are important. The authors attempt to provide an understanding of its current status in Gujarat. Records of the Saker Falcon from Gujarat are now only from the Greater-, and Little Rann of Kachchh. The authors conclude that the Saker Falcon is now a rare winter visitor to Gujarat and limited to these two areas, with only a few sightings each year.



Short-tailed Shearwater in Gujarat: Spring records of Short-tailed Shearwater from Gujarat by Trupti Shah *et al. Indian BIRDS* 14 (2): 50–52

The authors give two records of the pelagic Short-tailed Shearwater (*Ardenna tenuirostris*) from Gujarat; one from Nal Sarovar and one dead bird recovered from Mahuva, Bhavnagar in April and May 2017 respectively. The individual from Nal Sarovar was seen in flight and photos and video taken. For the individual from Mahuva, it was recovered from the coast and a post mortem was conducted and some plastic material was found in its stomach. Identification of Short-tailed Shearwater is difficult and it can be confused with Sooty Shearwater (*Ardenna grisea*). A detailed identification note is given on separating the two, compiled by Dipu K, Praveen J and Prasad Ganpule. The species is a vagrant to India and these records were the first for Gujarat and the species is an addition to the state checklist.

Ehrenberg's Redstart: Sighting of Ehrenberg's Redstart from Thol by Hardik Bhatt. *Indian BIRDS* (*in press*).

The author reports a sighting of Ehrenberg's Redstart (*Phoenicurus p. samamisicus*), a subspecies of Common Redstart (*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*), from Thol Bird Sanctuary, near Ahmedabad. The author saw and photographed this individual in February 2018. It was identified as an Ehrenberg's Redstart by the prominent white patch on the wings. This is the first record of the Ehrenberg's Redstart from the Indian Subcontinent. While the nominate Common Redstart has been noted earlier, this was the first record of the *samamisicus* subspecies from India. The Common Redstart is also an addition to the state checklist.

□

"If the direct assault on wildlife had done considerable damage and continues to do so even today, it is a set of indirect effects which today threatens to produce an almost total collapse. What set these into motion needs to be examined if we are to prevent the extinction of most of our birds and other animals. Since most of the developments were initiated for the betterment of the general population and considerable gains have accrued, many of those wanting to halt the processes find themselves isolated. Issues tend to be separated into those involving human welfare versus those for wildlife. The same refrain was heard in the late forties by political and social activists is today carried forward by the more aggressive, more powerful 'development' lobby with the political leadership invariably responding to populist appeals.

Fortunately, though it has taken time, the general public has begun to realise that issues are not trees and animals against human beings, but that they involve groups aiming for highly personal gains at the cost of social benefits, and that efforts are aimed at quick short term gains, heedless of long term losses, and at highly exploitative economics contra sustainable utilisation of resources."

- Lavkumar Khachar