

# Flamingo

Newsletter of the Bird Conservation Society, Gujarat



## Habitat Concerns....

Great Indian Bustard (GIB) epitomizes grassland but it equally requires agriculture fields, pasture land, fallow land etc. depending on its various requirements. In Gujarat, GIBs can be seen only in Kachchh, especially in the Abdasa taluka which also has a sanctuary called Kachchh Bustard Sanctuary - the smallest sanctuary of India. Owing to the small size of the protected area, the species is struggling to survive outside the Sanctuary, mainly in the revenue areas. These revenue areas are the prime bustard habitats - important refuge of GIB, Lesser Floricorn and MacQueen's Bustard, but regrettably they are considered as 'wasteland' in Government records.

Owing to jurisdictional limitations Forest Department is not authorised to manage such wastelands as 'bustard habitat'. So it becomes easy to alter such areas for infrastructural development, and this is how many of such prime bustard habitats have been given away for the installation of windmills, solar power plants, installation of high transmission power-lines etc. It is very crucial to note that research studies carried out abroad have revealed that bustards are predominantly prone to collide with power-lines because of their low height flight and comparatively small binocular field with large blind area. This renders them blind to the direction of flight while scanning below and makes them more susceptible to collision.

In last 15 years about six GIBs have died due to collision with the power-lines. Such power-lines have also been proven fatal for many other important bird species like flamingos, pelicans, storks, egrets, sarus, vultures etc. We need to understand that some green energy and the sparkling electricity have a dark side which is emerging as a fatal and serious threat to the wildlife. It is high time now, Government should either make the powerlines underground or mark it with bird diverters or reflectors, at least in and around the prime wildlife habitats.

- **Devesh Gadhvi**

deveshgadhvi@gmail.com



<b>Editor:</b>	Bakul Trivedi, M.S.
<b>Consulting Editors:</b>	Bhavbhuti Parasharya, <i>PhD</i> ; Pranav Trivedi, <i>PhD</i> ; Prasad Ganpule
<b>Associate Editors:</b>	Ashok Mashru; Indra Gadhvi, <i>PhD</i> ; Jugalkishor Tiwari; Ketan Tatu, <i>PhD</i> ; Maulik Varu, <i>M.D.</i>
<b>Editorial Assistance:</b>	Anuj Raina; D. N. Rank, <i>PhD</i> ; Dishant Parasharya, <i>PhD</i> ; Janki Parasharya
<b>Assistance in layout and design:</b>	Pugmark Qmulus Consortium
<b>Cover Photo:</b>	'Eurasian Hobby' by Nirav Bhatt
<b>Address for articles:</b>	19/414, Satyagrah Chhavni, Satellite Road, Ahmedabad-380015, Gujarat. flamingo.bcsbg@gmail.com / drbakultrivedi@gmail.com

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

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**Subscription: Rs. 200 per annum to be paid by Cheque / DD in favour of BCSG payable at Anand.**

**Donations to BCSG are exempt from IT under 80G.**

**Email:** birdcsg@gmail.com

**Web:** www.bcsbg.co.in

## Editorial....

Dear Readers,

Is sustainable development a myth? We all want more luxuries than what a comfortable lifestyle would demand. Analysis of our social psyche reveals that each one of us is indulging in materialistic opulence. Simplicity is no longer considered a virtue nor does it have any recognizable social value attached to it. Conversely there is a bitter race to acquire all that this tangible world has to offer. The irony is that all those who shout loud and high for cleaner environment and greener pastures are the forerunners in this race!

Do we have any solution for escalating population? Do we not want to take the basic facilities for a decent life to the citizen at the bottom who has as much right over natural resources as the more materially fortunate ones? And then arises the question – what should the average voter vote for; the Great Indian Bustard or round the clock electricity?!

So, has collective thought and action so far failed in generating eco-awareness at the grass root level? Have we collectively failed in generating Green Votes? Don't you think each one of us will have to start this lesson of awareness from our own home before taking it to masses? When will we ensure that people vote for GIB or Tiger rather than a political party?

Bending a railway track or lifting a road into a bridge to create green corridors for animals to travel between constricted natural habitats on either side, or declaring a water tank as a sanctuary because migrants are flocking it, which they were doing even otherwise since centuries, might postpone the inevitable for a few more years, but lasting sustainability is possible only if there is a green revolution of a different kind. A green revolution in collective consciousness that arises from the hearts of common men. And this is where we would want to see present day eco-preachers as the forerunners!

This Green vote cannot be created by political gimmicks but only through a genuine deep rooted understanding of every inhabitant of this planet about the intricacies of our coexistence with nature. We need to spread the awareness that we need Nature and its resources and not vice versa. It's time we make our own decisions even as we look at the policy makers for favours. Because this blame-game will take us nowhere, but to an end, the thought of which traumatizes us in the very first place and sustainable development will always remain a myth.

### Bakul Trivedi

Why should a birdwatcher be over-concerned about the species of trees being planted? Surely, if there are plenty of trees birdlife would increase. Unhappily, it is such naivety among moot naturalists and all citizens that has resulted in the near collapse of populations of several of our bird species that were plentiful even a couple of decades ago. Birds are rather sensitive to changes in their habitats and this should not be surprising when we consider that they, as an animal group, have so very high metabolic rates.

In the small sanctuary at Hingolghadh we have two species of minivets, the small and the white-bellied. While the former is more of a generalist and can be found from the edges of evergreen forests right into thorn jungles, the latter is a distinctly open country species preferring stretches of grasslands interspersing copices of thorn and dry deciduous trees. Its distribution is consequently more patchy. It was while photographing the two minivets that the late Durbar Saheb Shivraj Kumar and I noticed the food selection for the nestlings – the Small Minivet brought beakfuls of small insects and soft grubs that are found among foliage of trees while the white-bellied almost exclusively reared their young on slender green grasshoppers that infest stands of fresh grass. At times they brought along slender green caterpillars, again found among the grass. Well preserved grasslands, understandably, are essential for maintaining healthy populations of White-bellied minivets. If the grasslands are overgrazed, even if trees are present, the chances are the species will be lost. At the other extreme of the Small Minivets range in moist deciduous forests, we have the larger brilliantly coloured Scarlet Minivet. This last species disappears if the number of big trees are lost. It is by preference a forest species and no doubt, its food would be insets of moister regions specially infesting large trees. Conceivably then, with the loss of open grassland whether by overgrazing or by trees overgrowing it, we would constrict the White-bellied Minivet's habitat; the removal of tall forest would severely affect the Scarlet's. The generalist Small Minivet would benefit by closing canopy on the drier side of its range and would spread into degraded forest habitat of the Scarlet Minivet.

A very interesting habitat preference for nesting is seen among our various long-tailed (Wren) warblers. The Jungle Long-tailed Warbler builds a loosely woven purse of grass blades among tall clumps of grass. It starts nesting considerably later in the rainy season waiting for the grass to grow, while being more widespread in wetter parts of India it is rather patchy in drier areas preferring taller grasses. The Rufous-fronted Long-tailed Warbler has a predilection to constructing its loosely woven grass nest in short grass, close to the ground among low thorny shrubs. It is a widespread warbler of the more arid



regions nesting almost with the commencement of the rains. The Ashy Long-tailed, and the diminutive Franklin's Long-tailed warblers build woven grass nests as well as stitch broad leaves in the manner of the better known Tailor-bird. Many of the fast growing monsoon weeds have large leaves and so these three species are surprisingly more widespread than might be expected, however, the Ashy has a preference for wetter habitats. In Saurashtra and Kachchh it is rather less common than in mainland Gujarat. According to authoritative books the Streaked Long-tailed Warbler is a denizen of semi desert country with hardly any vegetation. My experience of the species is that, it enjoys clumps of grass on sand dunes on both sides of the Gulf of Kachchh and is also found on islands like Bhydar in the Gulf. The tall grass on Pirotan Island are where this slender little birds with an absurdly long tails should be looked for. The Indian or the Plain Long-tailed Warbler is by preference a bird of reed beds though it finds irrigated millet and sugarcane to its liking and can be found at considerable distances from water. All these resident warblers have been seriously affected by overgrazing, cutting of reed beds and changes in crop patterns. Intensive tilling of land with the destruction of grassy verges around fields along with heavy spraying of pesticides have all contributed to a very alarming decline in number of our warblers along with other species of birds.

The rather thoughtless practice of monoculture plantations often on grasslands has been something we all should have vociferously protested against quite a good many years ago.

During the rainy season all the long-tailed warblers display and call at such frenetic rates as to be intrusive on the least observant, though today one has to make a special effort in finding them! Destruction of habitats by over-grazing and degradation is, to my mind, far less alarming than their alteration by faulty land use and management practices. Degradation is easily understood; changes resulting from management practices take sensitivity and a degree of scientific understanding to recognize. Mass afforestation and other quick-fix schemes call for greater fine tuned planning and execution if they are not to seriously endanger Indian birdlife. □

## Status of Eurasian Hobby in Gujarat

**Nirav Bhatt** : H-52, GIDC Residential Plots, Wadhwan 363035. Gujarat. birdwatchernrb@gmail.com

**Prasad Ganpule** : C/o Parshuram Pottery Works, Nazarbaug, Morbi 363642, Gujarat. prasadganpule@gmail.com

**Jay Solanki** : Opp. Parmar bungalows, Vadipara, Surendranagar 363001, Gujarat. erjaysolanki@gmail.com

Nirav Bhatt



**Introduction:** Eurasian Hobby (*Falco subbuteo*) is a small, migratory falcon breeding mostly in the Himalayas, from Kashmir to at least Nepal and probably Bhutan; it winters mainly in Africa and south-east Asia and is a widespread autumn passage migrant in Gujarat (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). However, it is shown as a winter visitor to Gujarat by Grimmett et al. (2011) and Kazmierczak (2000). Naoroji (2006) also describes it as a winter migrant to Gujarat, stating

that it is more commonly seen in the winter when 'numbers swollen by extralimital migrants from September to March/April'. Ali (1955) noted it in Kachchh in October and March, and remarked that it was not seen in the plains of Gujarat. Dharmakumarsinhji (1955) gives it as a winter migrant with the comment 'migrates south into most parts of India and Saurashtra' and gives its status as 'uncommon but regular migrant'.

We present here observations of Eurasian Hobby in Little Rann of Kachchh and discuss its status in Gujarat.

**Observations:** Eurasian Hobby is uncommon in Little Rann of Kachchh (LRK), with a few sightings in the last 3-4 years. Sightings have been reported by the authors from many areas in Gujarat including Little Rann of Kachchh, Surendranagar, Poshitra, Morbi and Charakla (near Jamnagar). Reports from other areas in Kachchh, Saurashtra and Gujarat are also frequent, with images posted on various birding websites from almost all parts of the state. Sightings of Eurasian Hobby from Gujarat in last few years are given below.

### Eurasian Hobby sightings in Gujarat

Sr. No.	Date	Year	Location	Observer	No. of Individuals	Reference	Remarks
	AUGUST						
1	29	2011	Amreli outskirts	Viral Joshi	1	Pers. Comm.	-
	SEPTEMBER						
1		2007	Kachchh	Jugal Tiwari	1	OBI Website	Adult
2	29	2010	Rodasar, Kachchh	Subhash Das	1	OBI Website	Subadult
3		2011	Kachchh	Manoj Tank	1	INW Website	Adult
4	25	2011	Vekaria Dhand, Kachchh	Ashwin Pomal	1	OBI Website	Adult
5	24	2014	Morbi	Prasad Ganpule	1	Pers. Obs	Adult
	OCTOBER						
1	10	2002	Surendranagar	G. A. Vora	1	Pers. Comm.	-
2	12	2005	Rajkot	RJhala	1		Anon.2007
3	29	2006	Kachchh	S.N.Varu	1		Varu 2009
4	13	2009	Kachchh	Jaysukh Parekh	1	OBI	Subadult
5	31	2009	Kachchh	Vaibhav Mishra	1	OBI	Juv
6		2010	Kachchh	Jaysukh Parekh	1	OBI	
7	21	2010	Banni, Kachchh	Jugal Tiwari	1	OBI Website	Juv
8	24	2010	Positra, Dwarka	Prasad Ganpule	1	Pers. Obs.	Adult
9		2013	Valsad	Dharmesh Patel	1	INW	Adult
10		2013	Ahmedabad	VipulVedi	1	Facebook	Juv
11		2013	Surendranagar	Nirav Bhatt	1	Pers. Obs.	Juv
12	11	2013	Gir National Park	Viral Joshi	6	Pers. Comm.	
13	27	2013	Saldi, Amerli	Viral Joshi	2	Pers. Comm.	Juv
14	11	2014	Kachchh	Yogendra Shah	1	Pers. Comm.	Juv
15	15	2014	Naliya & Jakhau	Manjula Mathur	1	OBI Website	Juv
16	15	2014	Bhavnagar	Shantilal Varu	1	IBC Website	Juv
17	22	2014	Banni, Kachchh	Yash Kothalia	1	OBI Website	Juv

## Status of Eurasian Hobby...

18	28	2014	Surendranagar	Nirav Bhatt	1	Pers. Obs.	Juv
19	29	2014	Gir National Park	Yogendra Shah	1	Ppers. Comm.	Adult
20		2014	Velavadar	Sunil Kini	1	Facebook	Juv
NOVEMBER							
1	06	2002	LRK	G. A. Vora	2	Pers. Comm.	
2	05	2012	Kachchh	Vaibhav Mishra	1	OBI website	Adult
3	08	2012	LRK	Nirav Bhatt	1	Pers. Obs.	Juv
4	02	2013	LRK	Nirav Bhatt	1	Pers. Obs.	Juv
5	05	2013	LRK	Jayesh Joshi	1	Pers. Comm.	-
6	06	2013	Banni, Kachchh	Jugal Tiwari	1	OBI Website	Subadult
7	09	2013	Kachchh	Vaibhav Mishra	1	OBI Birding Group	
8	21	2014	Chhari - Dhand	Pankaj Maheria	1	OBI Website	Juv
9	-	2014	Madhavpur, Porbander	Dhaivat Hathi	1	Pers. Comm.	Juv
10	-	2014	Rajkot	Bhavya Joshi	1	INW	Juv
DECEMBER							
1	24	2006	Kachchh	S.N.Varu	1		Varu 2009
2	12	2009	Velavadar	Devvratsinh Mori	1	Pers Comm.	Adult
3	24	2009	Kachchh	S.N.Varu	1		Varu 2010
4	21	2014	Ahmedabad outskirts	Dhairya Dixit	1	Pers comm.	
JANUARY							
1	15	2011	Kachchh	Vaibhav Mishra	1	OBI	-
2	5	2012	Saldi, Amerli	Viral Joshi	1	Pers. Comm	Adult
3	26	2013	Saldi, Amerli	Viral Joshi	1	Pers. Comm	Adult
4	9	2014	Amreli Outskirts	Viral Joshi	1	Pers. Comm	Adult
FEBRUARY							
1	5	2012	Amerli outskirts	Viral Joshi	1	Pers. Comm	Juv
2	16	2015	LRK	Yogendra Shah	1	Pers. Comm	Adult
APRIL							
1	03	2012	Wadhwan	Devvratsinh Mori	1	Pers. Comm	Juvenile
2	24	2014	Amerli outskirts	Viral Joshi	1	Pers. Comm	Adult
3	12	2015	LRK	Jay Solanki & Dhairya Dixit	1	Pers. Comm	Adult
4	19	2015	Charakla, Jamnagar	Prasad Ganpule	1	Pers. Obs	Adult
5	22	2015	Wadhwan	Devvratsinh Mori	1	Pers. Comm	
MAY							
1	24	2008	Mount Abu	Nirav Bhatt	5	Pers. Obs.	Adults
2	30	2015	Mount Abu	Shwetal Pandya	5	Pers. Comm.	Adults
3	-	2015	LRK	Yogendra Shah	1	Pers. Comm.	Adult
JUNE							
1	2	2015	Girnar	Pranav Vaghashiya	1	Pers. Comm.	



Nirav Bhatt

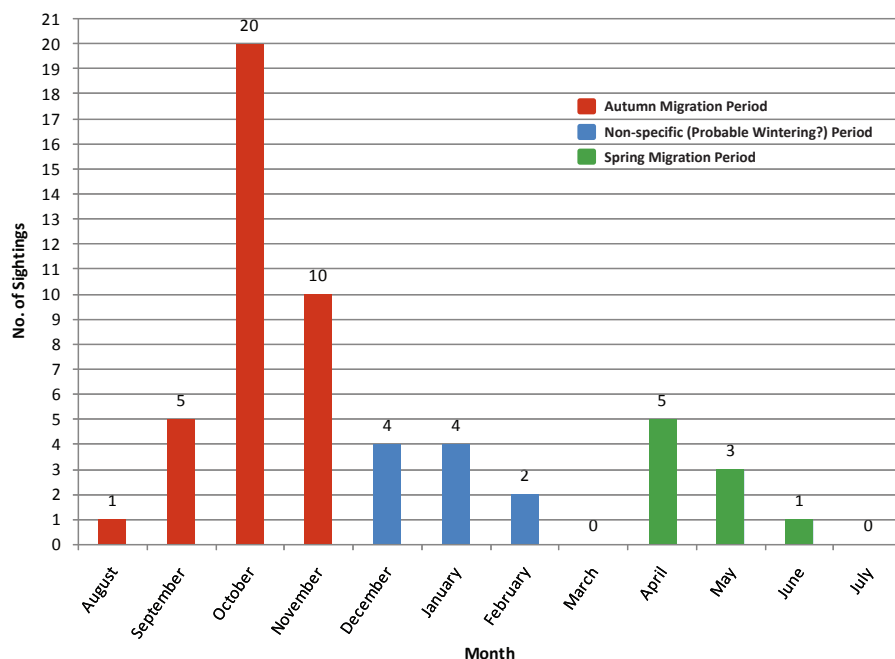
**Discussion:** As can be seen from the above records, Eurasian Hobby is uncommon in the Little Rann of Kachchh, with scattered records from the area. It is fairly easily seen in October in Banni and Naliya in Kachchh, and there are regular reports from almost all parts of Gujarat.

Since there is some confusion about whether it is a passage migrant or a winter visitor to Gujarat, we decided to make a detailed survey of sightings of Eurasian Hobby in Gujarat. To get an idea about its status in Gujarat, we collected monthly sightings from Gujarat, mainly from 2010 till June 2015. We collected the sightings data from three websites – [www.orientalbirdimages.org](http://www.orientalbirdimages.org), [www.indianaturewatch.net](http://www.indianaturewatch.net) and [www.ibc.lynxeds.com](http://www.ibc.lynxeds.com). We also collected data from sightings posted on the social media (mainly on Facebook and other birding groups). We checked and tried to ensure that the data was not duplicated and individual sightings were verified as far as possible. We also contacted birdwatchers for their sightings and tried to collect as many sightings as possible. All the sightings are presented above in Table 1. Of course, it is not possible to collect each and every sighting from Gujarat, hence we might have missed some personal sightings from other

birdwatchers, but this data can give us an idea regarding its status in Gujarat.

The numbers of sightings for each month were counted and a bar graph is prepared to get an idea of its occurrence in Gujarat.

### Month wise sightings of Eurasian Hobby in Gujarat



As can be seen from the graph, majority of the sightings are from October and November. If we consider sightings from August to November as during autumn migration and from March to May as during spring migration season, then 36 out of the 55 (66%) sightings from Gujarat are in the autumn passage migration season. There are only 10 (18%) sightings in the winter months from December to February, while there are only 9 (16%) sightings in spring passage migration. Effectively 82% of sightings are in the autumn and spring migration season. On checking Eurasian Hobby sightings data from 'eBird' website, a similar result was obtained, where in 16 out of 18 (88%) sightings were from the autumn/spring migration season and only 2 sightings in December were reported. This is by no means a scientific study, but is based on empirical evidence, and is used to get an idea regarding the status of Eurasian Hobby in Gujarat.

Hence, it is possible that like the Amur Falcons (*Falco amurensis*) that take a different route for return migration, and which has been proved lately with the help of satellite tagging, the Eurasian Hobby also might be taking a different route during the return migration.

Anecdotal evidence to support the idea that the Eurasian Hobby is mainly a passage migrant in Gujarat is that it is not

seen in the same area for a longer duration. Unlike other wintering raptors like the Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus ssp.*) and Merlin (*F.columbarius*), which are seen in a particular area for the whole season (especially in the Little Rann of Kachchh, for up to 2-3 months, in the winter), Eurasian Hobby is a wandering bird and we have not observed it in the same area for more than 2-3 days. It is not truly a 'wintering' bird. It is mainly a passage migrant here. Thus its status can be given as 'uncommon passage migrant'. Regarding its distribution in Gujarat, as can be seen from the sightings, it is widely distributed with sightings from entire Kachchh and Saurashtra. But it is more common in Kachchh. It is surprising that only one sighting from South Gujarat is reported in last few years.

Another surprising observation is that 5 individuals were seen at Mt. Abu on 28 May 2008 by the first author. Another observation of 5 individuals from the same place at Mt. Abu was made by Shwetal Pandya on 30 May 2015. These sightings are surprising as the birds should be in their breeding area by this time. These sightings are from the border of Gujarat and are worth reporting. Sightings in groups twice from the same area suggest that the birds might be in spring passage migration, returning to their breeding area, probably somewhere in the Himalayas and Mt. Abu might be in their regular passage migration route. Since Mt. Abu is very near to Gujarat, it is possible that such groups might be passing through Gujarat also and birdwatchers should search for Eurasian Hobby in summer. The sighting in June is probably of an individual in very late spring migration. It is worthy to note that besides 2 sightings of groups of 5 in spring migration, 6 individuals were seen together in Gir forest even during autumn migration (by Viral Joshi – *Pers. Comm.*) which is indicative that like Amur Falcons, Eurasian Hobby also sometimes migrates in flocks.



Jay Solanki

### Conclusion:

From the available data presented, it is safe to say that the Eurasian Hobby is mainly a passage migrant (autumn) in Gujarat with a few individuals seen in the winter months and in return (spring) migration season. Further sightings, especially in the winter, will help in understanding its status in Gujarat and with regards to where most of the birds are actually wintering. A detailed study using satellite tagging can throw more light in understanding the migration pattern and route.

### Acknowledgements:

We would like to thank Dr. J. Pranay Rao for the help and guidance in preparation of the manuscript. We would also like to extend sincere thanks to Viral Joshi, Dhairya Dixit, Yogendra Shah, G. A. Vora, Devratsinh Mori, Dhaivat Hathi, Jayesh Joshi, Pranav Vaghashiya, Ankit Shukla & Shwetal Pandya for sharing the sightings along with dates. We would also like to thank Bhavik Shah for helping with graph.

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**James bond** a fictional spy name originated from famous ornithologist's name, an author of book "Birds of West Indies". Ian Fleming the British author created the fictional character in 1953 for his series of spy novel. Ian Fleming himself a keen bird watcher referred the book as a reference guide. Birds of the West Indies is a book containing exhaustive coverage of the 400+ species of birds found in the Caribbean Sea, excluding the ABC islands, and Trinidad and Tobago, which are considered biogeographically as part of South America. Mr. Bond made his first scientific expedition in 1925 when he travelled up the Amazon River. He visited more than 100 Caribbean islands, collected 294 of the 300 bird species living there and wrote more than 100 books and scientific papers on Caribbean birds.

He was the leading authority on birds of the West Indies for more than half a century and is best known among scientists for proving that birds of the Caribbean originated in North America, not South America. The book written by James bond is widely referred in West Indies Island and is still in print by the Peterson field guide company. Bond won the Institute of Jamaica's Musgrave Medal in 1952; the Brewster Medal of the American Ornithologists' Union in 1954; and the Leidy Award of the Academy of Natural Sciences in 1975.

Ian Fleming quotes for The New Yorker magazine in April 1962 – "When I wrote the first one in 1953, I wanted Bond to be an extremely dull, uninteresting man to whom things happened; I wanted him to be a blunt instrument ... when I was casting around for a name for my protagonist I thought by God, 'James Bond' is the dullest name I ever heard." Inside the front cover of his book 'You Only Live Twice' in 1964, Fleming has written: "To the real James Bond from the thief of his identity. Ian Fleming, Feb 5, 1964 (a great day)." The book was given as a present to American ornithologist James Bond, who died shortly after he received the gift. The book with Ian Fleming message was auctioned in Dec 2008 for £ 50,000.



## Sympatric Breeding of Marshall's and Common lora in Hingolghadh, Rajkot Dist.

**Prasad Ganpule** : C/o Parshuram Pottery Works, Nazarbaug, Morbi 363642, Gujarat. prasadganpule@gmail.com

**Introduction:** Marshall's lora (*Aegithina nigrolutea*) is endemic to the Indian Subcontinent. It is uncommon and patchily distributed in Gujarat, occurring in dry scrub forests of Saurashtra, Kachchh and North Gujarat. Common lora (*Aegithina tiphia*) is a polytypic species of which the race *humei* is resident in Gujarat (Ali 1955, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). It occurs in well wooded areas all over the State with exception to Kachchh and some parts of northern Saurashtra.

**Taxonomic Status:** Common lora is polytypic with the nominate, *septentrionalis*, *humei* and *multicolor* subspecies occurring in India (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Marshall's lora was considered a sub-species of Common lora by Ripley (1982), Ali & Ripley (1996) and Grimmett *et al.* (1998) but it is now considered to be a full species (Wells *et al.* 2003, Grimmett *et al.* 2011, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), with Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) noting "specific status is upheld" for Marshall's lora. Currently Marshall's lora is considered to be monotypic.

**Geographical Distribution:** Ranges of Marshall's lora and Common lora overlap greatly in Gujarat. Common lora is absent in Kachchh and in some areas of Northern Saurashtra, but occurs almost everywhere else in Gujarat. Range for Marshall's lora in Gujarat is Kachchh, Central Saurashtra and North Gujarat, in arid scrub forests, which is its preferred habitat. Marshall's lora is thought to be absent in Gir National Park area and South Gujarat with no properly documented sightings. Thus in some regions (central Saurashtra and North Gujarat), both occur together (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). Thus a large area exists wherein ranges of both overlap and hence are sympatric.



Common lora - Male

Common lora prefers well wooded areas with big trees. Since both species prefer different habitats, though being sympatric, I had never seen them together in the same area earlier. I am very familiar with both species; having done a detailed study on Marshall's lora near Morbi (Ganpule 2014) and observing Common lora many times in Gir National Park and in other well wooded areas in Saurashtra.

**Observations of Sympatric Breeding:** We (Ashvin Trivedi, Swadeepsinh Jadeja, Manoj Finava and me) visited Hingolghadh, near Rajkot, on 6 July 2014, to photograph India Pitta (*Pitta brachyura*). While in the area, we saw a male Common lora calling and singing from a small scrub tree. A female, which was present on the same tree, did not respond to the calls of the male. On closer look, we were surprised to see that it was a female Marshall's lora and it was busy searching for insects and feeding, neglecting the calls of the male Common lora. We had never seen both the species together in the same area since, as stated earlier, habitat preferences of both species are different. We observed a female Common lora nearby and then saw the male and female together in a nest on a big *Ficus spp.* tree. The nest had been completed and both the male and female Common lora were seen visiting it. However we could not determine if eggs/young were present.

We also observed the courtship display of Marshall's lora nearby. We saw a female Marshall's lora with nesting material in its beak entering a nearby scrub two-three times, which was indicative of nest building. This was less than 100mts from the nest of the Common lora. We tried to follow the bird and searched the area, but could not find its nest as the dense thorny trees hampered our approach; and we did not want to disturb the birds. However we observed that Marshall's lora was common and could see and hear at least 8 to 10 birds in the same scrub area.

On another visit to Hingolghadh on 11 July 2015, we (Ashok Mashru, Nirav Bhatt, Darshak Karia and Manoj Finava) again saw and observed both the species in the same area. However, this time we saw fledged young of Common lora. We saw the male and female Common lora with the chicks. Marshall's lora were also seen and heard in good numbers (7-8 individuals). It seems Marshall's lora is more common in Hingolghadh than Common lora. Again we tried to search for nests of Marshall's lora in the area, but could not find any nests. We saw two males singing and calling from a small tree, trying to attract a female which was present nearby. Nest building or individuals with nesting material were not seen. It seems that the breeding of Common lora is earlier than Marshall's lora. This apparent

## Sympatric breeding...

difference in breeding timings is intriguing and needs further study.

**Discussion:** Though direct evidence of breeding of both species in the same area was not found, it is more than apparent that both Common lora and Marshall's lora do breed in the same area, perhaps within a distance of less than 100mts between the nests. Hence it can be said that Common lora and Marshall's lora breed sympatrically in Hingolghadh. Direct contact between both species was observed too. It is not known if both were present in this area earlier. Shivraj Kumar (1962) does not mention Common lora while writing about ringing recoveries, while Khachar (1998, 2002) writes about Marshall's lora at Hingolghadh, but does not give details about the occurrence of Common lora. However, both the species have been described as resident at Hingolghadh (Naik *et al.* 1990). Marshall's lora has been described as uncommon in Saurashtra by Dharmakumarsinhji (1955). It seems because of difficulty in differentiating the two species people might have avoided mentioning about Common lora at Hingolghadh as Marshall's lora is common in semi-arid areas of Saurashtra.

Since both the species were seen in such a close proximity to each other, I specifically tried to observe the interaction between both the species. From the behaviour of both species, no interaction between them was observed. Both were seen on the same tree without any competition and tolerated each other's presence.

At Hingolghadh, vocal differences between Marshall's and Common lora were noted and it is the easiest way to separate them. Both species were heard calling regularly here. Plumage differences are not so clear in males of Common and Marshall's lora in breeding plumage (Ganpule 2014). However female Marshall's lora is easily separated from female Common lora based on tail colour in breeding season; female Marshall's lora has a black tail with white tips/edges, which are quite prominent, while female Common lora of the race *humei* always has a green tail without any white in it. Vocal differences remain the best and easiest way to separate the two species. In Gujarat, Ali (1955) was able to separate *nigrolutea* from *tiphia* 'at once' by ear in the field. Identification is usually easy in non-breeding plumages, when both species show characteristic differences. It seems the courtship display in both species is different (but needs further study) and songs also differ markedly.

This observation of sympatric breeding of Marshall's lora and Common lora at Hingolghadh is important and has not been reported earlier. This strengthens species status for Marshall's



Marshall's lora - Female

Prasad Ganpule

lora. Reproductive isolation is one of the hallmarks of Biological Species Concept (BSC), and the fact that Marshall's lora and Common lora breed in close proximity without any kind of interaction is noteworthy. This is important as sympatric, reproductively isolated taxa are treated as separate species under all species concepts – BSC, Phylogenetic Species Concept and Monophyletic Species Concept (Alström & Mild 2004). Vocal differences are also very distinct and both species can be easily separated on the basis of their typical songs and calls. This alone would justify separating Marshall's lora from Common lora.

It is apparent from these observations that in areas where suitable habitat exists, both Common lora and Marshall's lora can occur together and breed sympatrically. Though predominantly a scrub-forest, Hingolghadh has areas with large trees, which fulfills the habitat requirements of both the species. Marshall's lora is more common here but the continued presence of Common lora in the area indicates that it can thrive in well wooded areas in the midst of scrub forests. The successful breeding of Common lora observed in the area confirms this. Though habitat preferences of both species are different, with Marshall's lora preferring arid scrub and Common lora well wooded areas and forests, Hingolghadh supports breeding of both the species.

**Conclusion:** Sympatric breeding of Common lora and Marshall's lora strengthens species status for Marshall's lora. It is possible that both Marshall's lora and Common lora may be occurring in the same area in other parts of Gujarat and elsewhere in India, and birdwatchers should try and search for such areas.

**Acknowledgements:** I thank Ashvin Trivedi, Manoj Finava, S. P. Jadeja, Ashok Mashru, Nirav Bhatt and Darshak Karia for

their company. I thank Dr. B. M.Parasharya and Dr. D. N.Rank for reviewing the draft manuscript.

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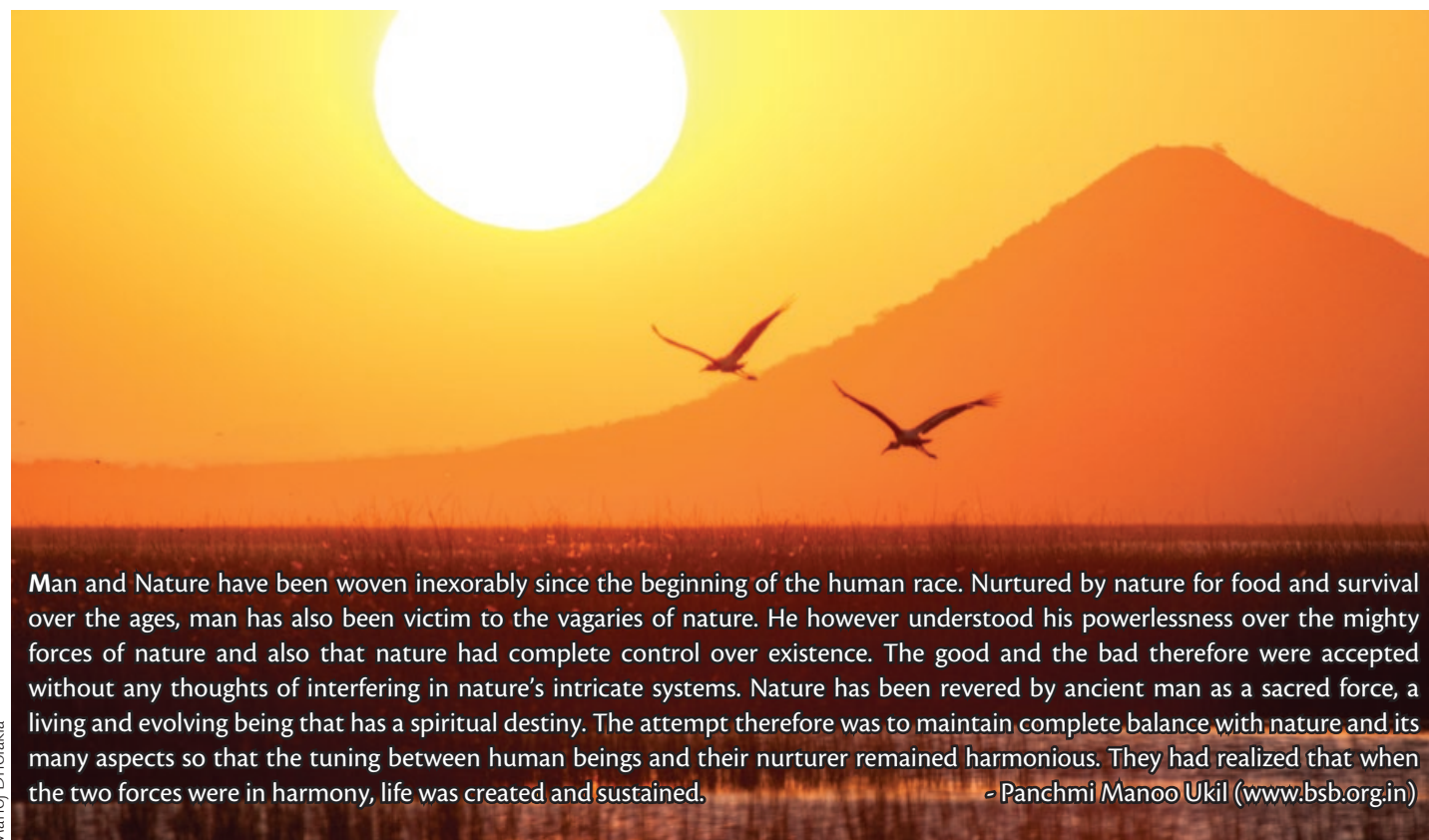
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Man and Nature have been woven inexorably since the beginning of the human race. Nurtured by nature for food and survival over the ages, man has also been victim to the vagaries of nature. He however understood his powerlessness over the mighty forces of nature and also that nature had complete control over existence. The good and the bad therefore were accepted without any thoughts of interfering in nature's intricate systems. Nature has been revered by ancient man as a sacred force, a living and evolving being that has a spiritual destiny. The attempt therefore was to maintain complete balance with nature and its many aspects so that the tuning between human beings and their nurturer remained harmonious. They had realized that when the two forces were in harmony, life was created and sustained.

- Panchmi Manoo Ukil (www.bsb.org.in)

## Sighting of Malabar Whistling Thrush from Ratanmahal Wildlife Sanctuary

**Kartik Upadhyay:** 104, PremSagar Apt., nr. Rameshwar Temple, Elora Park, Vadodara. kartik\_upadhyay35@yahoo.com

**Mittal Patel:** D-199 Girdhar Park Soc., B/h Makarpura Bus Depot, Makarpura, Vadodara. mital.jsp@gmail.com

**Rahul Bhatt:** C-123 Girdhar Park Soc., B/h Makarpura Bus Depot, Makarpura, Vadodara. rbhatt\_sapmc@yahoo.co.in

**Divya Patel:** Dept. of Botany, Faculty of Sci., M. S. University, Vadodara. pateldivya1987@gmail.com

**Reshma Solanki:** Dept. of Zoology, Faculty of Sci., M. S. University, Vadodara. solankireshma46@gmail.com (Corresponding Author)

**Malabar Whistling Thrush** (*Myophonus horsfieldii*) is an endemic bird species of India. It is widely distributed, especially in Western Ghats and in parts of Central India (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). This note comprises of observations of *M. horsfieldii* at the edge of Ratanmahal Wildlife Sanctuary, Gujarat, which lies at the confluence of the Vindhya Range and Malwa Plateau adjoining the state of Madhya Pradesh. It also lies close to the Satpura mountain range which has been regarded as an important pathway for species dispersal between the Himalayas and the Western Ghats in the geological past (Singh *et al.* 2002). It harbors dry deciduous forests dominated by Teak, and some patches of moist deciduous biotopes with very little or no Teak and with abundant bamboo brakes. The habitat is also interspersed with areas of agriculture and semiarid landscapes (Devkar *et al.* 2011). The terrain is undulating, and has good vegetation, leaf litter and presence of big boulders. Two rivers, namely Panam and Orsang, flow adjacent to the sanctuary. Ratanmahal also has prevalence of 'Mahuwa' (*Madhuca indica*) trees (Trivedi & Soni, 2006).

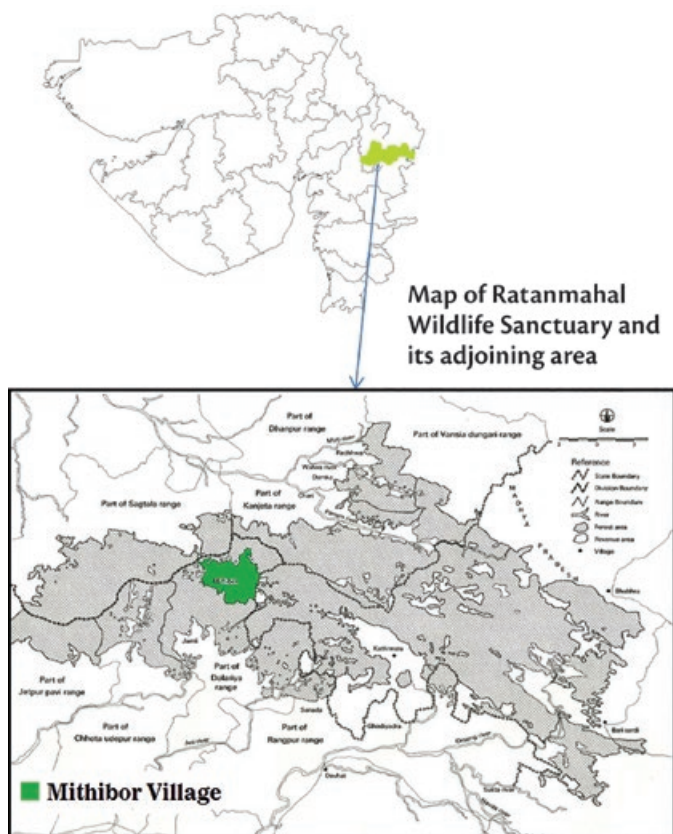
Our first encounter with Malabar Whistling Thrush was completely unexpected. While on a bird watching trip to Ratanmahal Wildlife Sanctuary and its surrounding areas, we happened to visit Mithibor village on 30 May 2015 at 16-00 hours. While moving on the track, suddenly we heard a whistling sound from the surrounding area. At the first instance we thought it might be some local person moving in the area making such whistling calls. To confirm it, we tried to search for it in the surroundings and to our surprise we spotted a black bird with metallic blue shining wings which was giving such whistling calls. We could only take record pictures of the bird, which was later identified by referring the field-guides (Grimmett *et al.* 2011; Kazmierczak, 2000; Ali 2002) and also confirmed by the experts (B.M. Parasharya, Raju Vyas & Uday A. Vora).

On 7 June, 2015 at 09-00 hours we visited the same site again. This time we could spot two birds, frequently jumping from one branch to another in search of small insects, larvae, worms etc to feed upon. They would fly low and fairly fast which made it difficult for us to trace them, but we could keep their track by their calls! They preferred to stay along streams, area expectedly rich in food (insects, crustaceans etc.). Malabar Whistling Thrush is evenly (unspotted) sooty-black or blackish-blue on the head and upper parts except for the shallow 'V' of bright cobalt blue on the forehead extending over the eyes and a patch on lesser coverts; under parts blackish, but tipped metallic blue on the breast, belly & flank (Clement & Hathway, 2010). Sexes are almost alike. Their whistling call has a very human-like tonal quality, which intermittently breaks the silence of the forest. In ancient folktales, the whistling sound of Malabar Whistling Thrush is linked with Lord Krishna's flute playing (Lockwood, 2010).

Apart from reports of Trivedi & Soni (2006) from Purna Wildlife Sanctuary, Dist. Dangs and Vyas (2000) from Gir



Kartik Upadhyay



National Park and Sanctuary, Dist. Junagadh, there are no recent reports on the sightings of Malabar Whistling Thrush from any part of Gujarat. It has been recorded in Surat, Dangs (Ali 1955) and Rajpipla (Monga & Naoroji 1983) in the past. Distribution has been depicted from the hills of Gujarat (Mt. Abu and Himmatnagar) to Surat-Dangs by Ali & Ripley (1998), while it is shown from forest areas of Mt. Abu, south to the Dangs by Grimmett *et al* (2011).

Malabar Whistling Thrush is in the Least Concern (LC) criteria in IUCN 2015 checklist of birds. Scientific reports on the presence or absence of the species in fragmented habitats of western India including Gujarat, are certainly valued.

**Acknowledgements:**

The authors are grateful to Dr. Raju Vyas for providing technical support. Special thanks to Dy. Conservator of Forest, Ratanmahal Wildlife Sanctuary for permission of this study and

work in the sanctuary area. Special thanks to Devendra Solanki and Rassulbhai and his family for their assistance and support in the field.

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

## Nal sarovar Diary...

Niraj Joshi

31, Avadh Apt. 64, Pritamnagar Soc., Ellisbridge,  
Ahmedabad-380006. nirajjos@gmail.com

27-09-2015

Though Rains played truant and were inadequate this year, the canals enroute to Nalsarovar had good water and seemed to have supported a good standing crop of paddy all along the Sanand-Nalsarovar stretch. We found several paddy fields flooded with water attracting some early migrant wader species especially Ruff and Reeves (more than 50) and Black-tailed Godwits (just a couple) to feed upon. Open-bill Storks (more than 30) were spotted quite often this time and near Goraj village on the banks of the canal were a flock of more than 50 Little Cormorants enjoying the morning sun. Significantly a good population of Asian Openbills was active in this stretch indicating a good availability of food along the canal banks! After a few sightings of half a dozen White-breasted Waterhens, one Sarus Crane, about a dozen Glossy Ibis and a solitary Long-tailed Shrike, we reached Nalsarovar at around 8 am and found it to be very quiet in contrast to our June visit...the heronries at the entry gate were no longer active...The Purple Swamphen too were fewer-just a couple were spotted

near the entrance this time. The breeding season seemed to have ended....

Once inside we found the water level in Nal varying from two to four feet in depth, much cleaner and less turbid than June. Indeed at places we could see the lake bottom clearly. Presence of certain species like wagtails, Purple Swamphens, kingfishers, Purple Herons was restricted to the *beyts* [islands] of Gha bajariyo and other emergent aquatic vegetation while the Grey Herons, terns (mainly Whiskered) and Garganey preferred open waters. Overall the density of birds was sparse on the Nal proper at this time of the year. No major duck species except Garganey was spotted. Little Cormorants were present in sizeable numbers though scattered across the water body. Glossy Ibis were found close to the islands like Nani and Moti Chorathali. Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters were seen in small numbers while among the kingfishers only one individual of the Small Blue Kingfisher was spotted. Yellow Wagtails in good numbers were feasting on the abundant dragonflies, water skaters and other insect life. The lake was exploding with dragonflies of all hues!!





11-11-2015

On our second trip on 11th October, the waders had moved into the Nal and colonised the two islands of Siyal *beyt* and Gadhevad *beyt* that we visited. Most common waders such as Ruff, Common Sandpiper, Wood Sandpiper, Little Stints, Kentish Plover, Marsh Sandpiper were busy foraging in good numbers. However, the highlight of the day was Collared Pratincoles (more than 300 on a single *beyt* - Gadhevad), Lesser Golden Plovers (about 10) and a lone Rosy Pelican (most probably). We also saw flock of Garganey and other unidentified ducks in flight. The return journey too was quite eventful with frequent sightings of Asian Openbills (more than 50), on almost every second tree... one Marsh Harrier and a couple of honey buzzards as well as a pair of Sarus Cranes. Eurasian Rollers, White-eared Bulbuls, Long-tailed Shrikes (5), Little Egrets (> 50) gave us company till we reached Sanand...

Vadla (a satellite wetland about 10 km from Nal): Anuj Raina and Jitendra Dave who visited Vadla in the late afternoon were witness to an astounding aerial display of courting Black winged kites! The courting pair displayed amazing aerial feats



Golden Plover

enough to embarrass a self-respecting air force squadron first by interlocking their talons in mid air, then going into a downward spiral and the female then flipping upside down during descent. The locked talons were then disengaged before



reaching ground zero. Variants of this aerial display continued for almost 45 minutes before the courting pair landed finally exhausted on a tree. Furthermore, there was another surprise in store that afternoon when they found Demoiselle Cranes in thousands flying in towards Vadla wetland. With their characteristic loud trumpeting call, almost five thousand of these beautiful visitors descended on the neighbouring farmlands to forage. A gregarious group of Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters and Barn Swallows too were seen all the way on electric lines and finally, when it was time to call it a day they were rewarded with flocks of Northern Shovelers, Northern Pintails and Garganey all coming to roost for the night at Vadla. □

## Sighting of Ruddy-breasted Crake in Nalsarovar area

**Nirav Bhatt** : H-52, GIDC Residential Plots, Wadhwan -363035, Gujarat. Email: birdwatchernrb@gmail.com

Ruddy-breasted Crake (*Porzana fusca*) is resident in India, mainly occurring in the Western Ghats and in the base of Himalayas and the Gangetic plains, with scattered records from elsewhere in India (Grimmett *et al.* 2011, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

Its status in Gujarat is unclear; Grimmett *et al.* (2011) give 'isolated record(s)-exact location uncertain', while Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) do not show its occurrence for Gujarat. It is included in the Checklist of Birds of Gujarat (Parasharya *et al.* 2004).



Nirav Bhatt

On 10 July 2014, in the outskirts of Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary (Co-ordinates not available), I saw and photographed two Ruddy-breasted Crakes in the reeds. The sighting was surprising, as this is not known to occur here. Also the sighting in the monsoon season is interesting, as it is possible that it might be breeding in the surrounding areas.

It is also possible that the bird is a monsoon migrant to areas of suitable habitat in Gujarat. I request birdwatchers to be on the lookout for the Ruddy-breasted Crake in reeds/wetland areas.

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## Greater Spotted Eagle preying on Montagu's Harrier in LRK, Gujarat

**Yogendra Shah** : "Anand", Opp. Amrutkunj Society, Jintan Road, Surendranagar- 363001, Gujarat. ymshah55@yahoo.com

Greater Spotted Eagle (*Aquila clanga*) is a winter migrant to Gujarat. It is listed as 'vulnerable' based on its declining population (Birdlife International 2015). It is sometimes treated as *Clanga clanga*, however Naoroji (2006) treats it as *Aquila clanga* and the same is followed here. It is regularly seen in small numbers in Little Rann of Kachchh, Gujarat, where it is usually seen around water bodies from November till April.

It is a generalist feeder taking a variety of food: frogs, fishes, reptiles, small birds, young ones of herons & storks and other waterfowls. It has been recorded taking Long-eared Owl (*Asio otus*), Short-eared Owl (*A. flammeus*), and Black Kite (*Milvus*



Yogendra Shah

*migrans*) as prey items (Naoroji 2006). It has also been recorded feeding on Greater Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus roseus*) and Lesser Flamingo (*P. minor*) at Little Rann (*pers. observation*).

While on a bird-watching trip to Little Rann of Kachchh, I observed a Greater Spotted Eagle in possession of a Montagu's Harrier (*Circus pygarrus*). The eagle then flew away with the bird in its talons. I was able to take an image of this too.

Greater Spotted Eagle is not known to prey on harriers. Thus this is an addition to the already varied diet of this eagle.

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## Asian Openbill nesting at Sisva, near Vadodara

**Jagruti Rathod, Amita Sankhwal, Nisha Singh and Deepa Gavali** : Gujarat Ecology Society, Synergy house, Subhanpura, Vadodara, Gujarat. rathod21@gmail.com, ami.sankhwal@gmail.com, nishanicky1210@gmail.com, deepa.gavali@gmail.com

There are nineteen species of storks in the world, of which nine species are found in India (Ali & Ripley 1987, del Hoyo *et al.* 1994). Asian Openbill (*Anastomus oscitans*) is the smallest of all and a resident species of India (Ali & Ripley 1987). This species nests colonially along with other species viz. egrets, herons, other storks and generally displays spatio-temporal clumping of nests (Burger 1981, Ali & Ripley 1987, Krebs 1987, Gopi & Pandav 2007, Pramanik *et al.* 2009). The breeding period of Asian Openbill is from June to November. It prefers large trees near wetlands for nesting (Ali & Ripley 1987, Urfi 1993).

A large colony of 75 nests of Asian Openbill was observed at Sisva village (22° 23' 807" N; 73° 10' 755" E) about 15 km north of Vadodara, on 17<sup>th</sup> June, 2014. All the nests were built on a single Banyan tree (*Ficus benghalensis*) with the canopy of about 15 meter circumference, located on the edge of a village pond. The nests were made of sticks and green twigs collected from surrounding trees such as Neem (*Azadirachta indica*), Babul (*Acacia nilotica*) and Banyan. Nests were at the height of about 30-35 ft from the ground. The colony included nests at different stages of breeding cycle. Juveniles of various plumages were noticed in majority of the nests along with the hatchlings. In some nests the adult birds were incubating the eggs. An active nest of a House Crow (*Corvus splendens*) on the same tree was an interesting observation.

Asian Openbill is one of the 'Least concerned' species (IUCN 2015). One of the known threats to its nesting sites is disturbances due to human interference (Datta & Pal 1993). However, no such human disturbance was found at Sisva. A couple of Neem and Babul in the surrounding area bore nests of other birds such as Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) (12-15 nests on 2-3 trees), Black Ibis (*Pseudibis papillosa*) (one nest)



and Indian Pond Heron (*Ardeola grayii*) (2-3 nests). This site is located 5 km away from the industrial zone of Vadodara. Asian Openbills nesting at industrial zone of Koyali, near GSFC, Vadodara has been reported earlier (Gavali *et al.*, 2006). Sisva village with a relatively low human population of 2799 (2011 census) and little disturbance through human activities might have facilitated nesting of Openbills on a large scale. Gujarat is a state dotted with thousands of villages and a significant number of adjoining small wetlands with large trees in the neighbourhood. There is a need to explore such sites to document and subsequently conserve nesting of wetland birds.

\* Special thanks to Mrs. Anika Tere PhD for her help in editing this article. -Eds

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## Red-billed Tropicbird in Surat

**Chitra Patel:** 182-183, Suyognagar Soc., nr. Althan tenaments, Bhatar rd., Surat 395007. chitrapatel42@gmail.com



On 25 June 2015, an unidentified bird was rescued by a local NGO of Surat at Punagam (21°12' N, 72°52' E) Surat, Gujarat. When we (Ashish Chaudhari and Chitra Patel) got the news, we approached the NGO but unfortunately the bird perished before any treatment could be provided. On seeing the photographs, we got confused between Caspian Tern (*Hydroprogne caspia*) and Tropicbird (*Phaethon* spp.), but with the help of field guides (Kazmierczak 2000, Grimmett *et al.* 2011), and from the presence of tail streamers, we could easily eliminate Caspian Tern. Thereafter, we got the identification confirmed from Mukesh Bhatt, Dr. Sarita Subramaniam and Prasad Ganpule as Red-billed Tropicbird (*Phaethon aethereus*) of the races, which occurs in the Persian Gulf and Arabian Sea. It was probably an immature or sub-adult bird.

Red-billed Tropicbird is Pelagic and is usually seen off western coasts, from Mekran Coast (SW Pakistan) to SW coast of Sri Lanka (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). It nests mainly on oceanic and offshore islands and is usually solitary, but may congregate with flocks of feeding Terns. It mainly feeds on fish and squids. Red-billed Tropicbird can be identified by its

red bill, white tail-streamers, black barring on mantle and scapulars, and has much black on primaries.

This individual could have been blown towards the coast because of the monsoon winds or due to the cyclonic

disturbance which was present at the time and would have reached the coastal region of south Gujarat. There is only one previous record of Red-billed Tropicbird from Gujarat; a sub-adult bird was photographed 50 km from the Gulf of Kachchh, in the sea (Gandhe 2014). Hence this record from inland Gujarat is significant and noteworthy. This bird is not listed in the 'Checklist of the Birds of Gujarat' (Parasharya *et al.* 2004) and hence needs to be added.



### Acknowledgements:

I am very thankful to Mukesh Bhatt, Dr. Sarita Subramaniam and Prasad Ganpule for helping me with identification of this bird.

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**“My chief interest in bird study has always been its ecology, its life history under natural conditions and not in a laboratory under a microscope. By travelling to these remote, uninhabited places, I could study the birds as they lived and behaved in their habitats.” – Dr. Salim Ali.**

## Sighting of Brown Noddy near Mundra Port, Gulf of Kachchh

**Aneesh B. R.:** Sithara, Manjakala P O, Kunnicothu, Kollam, Kerala 691508. aneeshbr2551985@gmail.com



Brown Noddy (*Anous stolidus*) is a pelagic bird, occurring as a winter migrant in the Arabian Sea and Indian Ocean, and breeds in Lakshadweep and Maldives (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

On 15 July 2015, our ship was stationed at the outer anchorage point of Mundra Port, near Mundra, in the Gulf of Kachchh. The outer anchorage point is around 12-14 Nm off the coast (approximately 20 km from Mundra Port). A Brownish bird with a whitish forehead was seen on the ship. I photographed the bird and posted it for identification on the 'Birdwatchers of Kerala' Facebook page. It was identified as a Brown Noddy.

Though there is a record shown for Pakistan coast, there are no records shown for Gujarat in Grimmett *et al.* (2011). This record is from Mekran Coast, Pakistan. It is normally said to occur well offshore (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Hence this sighting is significant and worth reporting.



### Acknowledgements:

I thank Dipu Karthendathu and Praveen Jayadevan for helping in identification.

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## Successful nesting of Indian Robin in a Scooter

**Gaurav Pandya:** Dept. of Animal Genetics and Breeding, College of Veterinary Sci. and Animal Husbandry, Navsari, Guj. gmp2004@gmail.com

An Indian Robin (*Saxicoloides fulicatus*) had built its nest in the front side of a Honda Activa scooter in a housing society near Agricultural University campus at Navsari. In this model of scooter, there is a gap below the steering bar in which a small bird like the Indian Robin can enter the front part of the vehicle. During the period 12 to 30 May 2015, the family owning the vehicle was out of station and the vehicle was lying idle. When the family came back, they saw an Indian Robin going inside the vehicle. When they brought the vehicle out, the bird got agitated and was seen moving around the parking space restlessly. On investigation, we observed a nest built inside the body of the scooter and found two chicks. It was not possible to photograph the nest with the chicks inside due to its odd location.

Indian Robin usually nests in holes in walls, down open wells, earth banks or trees, under boulders or in rock crevices, and occasionally inside buildings in a variety of situations like shelves, etc. or sometimes in derelict tin cans or earthen water pots (Ali & Ripley 2001). Nesting inside fuse boxes in buildings (Naik 1963) and even under wind turbines has been reported

(Kumar *et al.* 2014). But this nest inside a scooter was unusual and worth reporting.

[This nesting inside a scooter affirms the adaptation of Indian Robin to its urban surroundings. We welcome more observations of birds nesting in unusual locations in urban areas – Eds]

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## Sight Record of Bristled Grassbird in Saurashtra

**Viral Joshi:** At Post. Saladi, Ta. Liliya, Dist. Amreli, Gujarat 365535. virjoshi892@yahoo.com

**Divyaraj Shah:** Torry's Bungalow, Near Mahakali Temple, Vil. Kalipat, Dist. Rajkot, Gujarat. divyarajshah@yahoo.com



Nirav Bhatt



On 26 Sept. 2014, one of us (VJ), along with Gulam Ahmed Vora, Vishal Thoria, Nirav Bhatt and Jay Solanki visited a grassland on the outskirts of Amreli (21.49N 71.31E) in search of an elusive and endangered Lesser Florican (*Sypheotides indica*). It is a

pure grassland area of 0.5 sq. km., with *Sorghum halepense* (local name: 'baru'), the dominant grass species. After a few hours of birding, we finally saw at some distance one male displaying. On the way back we suddenly spotted one Pipit-like bird flying with nesting material in its beak and going deep into the grassland. We waited for it to return in order to make a positive identification. To our pleasure, it turned out to be a Bristled Grassbird (*Chaetornis striatus*). Bristled Grassbird has streaked upper parts and some fine streaking on lower throat. It has a shorter and stouter bill and less prominent supercilium than Striated Grassbird (*Megalurus palustris*). On observing it through the binoculars, we could clearly see the bristles on both sides of the beak. Its call is a typical, double note "chick chivik". We took some photographs of the bird and observed its behaviour. The bird was displaying- flying over the grass while calling, perching on grass-strands and occasionally entering the dense grass. The courtship display, along with carrying of nesting material, led us to believe that it could be breeding in this grassland.

Bristled Grassbird is now treated as 'Vulnerable' due to rapidly declining population and loss of its grassland habitat (Birdlife International 2015). It is endemic to the Indian Subcontinent, where it is patchily and locally distributed (Grimmett *et al.* 1998). It has been sighted previously at Deesa, north Gujarat by Butler in 1876 (Ali 1955). It was considered as resident in Gujarat, with a nest found near Baroda (Dharmakumarsinhji 1955). Formerly described as common in at least Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh and West Bengal, it is now rapidly declining owing to loss of its grassland habitat (Birdlife International 2015). Recently it was spotted by Nirav Bhatt in Kachchh (Bhatt 2010) after more

than 100 years since its last sighting in Gujarat.

This sighting is significant and is probably the first sight record for Saurashtra and shows that Bristled Grassbird might be occurring in areas of suitable habitat and possibly breeding too. Detailed surveys should be carried out in the whole of Gujarat, especially in grassland areas during August-September, when it is more vocal and visible, to know about the status of this enigmatic bird.

### Acknowledgements:

We are thankful to Nirav Bhatt for the photographs and for reviewing this note.

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## Sighting of Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin near Khijadiya Bird Sanctuary, Jamnagar

**Ashvin Trivedi:** Jalani Jar, Bajaria Fali, Near Pancheshwar Tower, Jamnagar 361001. snapchaserashvintrivedi@yahoo.com



Ashvin Trivedi



**Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin** (*Cercotrichas galactotes*) is an autumn passage migrant in Gujarat (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). It is mainly seen in late August and September, but is not very common and is usually seen in the grassland areas of

Kachchh during passage migration season (Ali 1955).

On 13 September 2013, I went for bird watching near Khijadiya Bird Sanctuary, Jamnagar, with fellow birder Nirav Bhatt. Since it was the passage migration season, we were expecting to see Blue-cheeked Bee-eater (*Merops persicus*) and Spotted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa striata*). Early winter migrants, mainly waders, were also seen in the area. There, we came across a bird which was unfamiliar to me but Nirav immediately recognized it as a Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin, due to its distinctive rufous tail, structure, face markings and its habits. We photographed it.

Though it occurs in Saurashtra (Dharmakumarsinhji 1955, Naik *et al.* 1990), it has not been recently reported from Jamnagar area. Reported earlier from Dwarka and Jasdan (Ali & Ripley 2001), it is said to be common in Kachchh (Ali 1955). All recent images of Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin on the Oriental Bird Images website (<http://orientalbirdimages.org>) from Gujarat are from Kachchh and Varu (2014) has reported 26 sightings from Kachchh during last 24 years period. It seems it is rare in other parts of Gujarat, or is overlooked. Khijadiya Bird Sanctuary lies south of Kachchh, across the Gulf, so this could be on its passage migration route.

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It is true that I despise purposeless killing, and regard it as an act of vandalism, deserving the severest condemnation. But my love for birds is not of the sentimental variety. It is essentially aesthetic and scientific, and in some cases may even be pragmatic. For a scientific approach to bird study, it is often necessary to sacrifice a few, ... (and) I have no doubt that but for the methodical collecting of specimens in my earlier years – several thousands, alas – it would have been impossible to advance our taxonomical knowledge of Indian birds ... nor indeed of their geographic distribution, ecology, and bionomics.

- Dr. Salim Ali

## Short Birding Notes



### Pied Avocet near Surat

A flock of 20-25 Pied Avocets (*Recurvirostra avosetta*) were seen at Umra Ovara, Piplod, Surat on 5 June 2015 and 15 June 2015. Pied Avocet is uncommon in this part of the State and thought to be a local migrant depending on availability of water in the region.

**Ashish Chaudhari**, Surat. Email: ecashish6@gmail.com



### Red-tailed Shrike in Kachchh

An adult Red-tailed Shrike (*Lanius phoenicuroides*) was seen on 9 Sept. 2012 near Dayapar, Kachchh. It is an autumn passage migrant and small numbers are said to migrate through NW India (Grimmett *et al.* 2011).

**Prashant Tewari**, Kachchh, pkt1958@gmail.com

[Red-tailed Shrike (also known as Rufous Shrike) was recently split from Isabelline Shrike (*Lanius isabellinus*) and is now considered as a separate species (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Its status in Gujarat is unclear. This record is significant, as it is one of the very few documented records of Red-tailed Shrike from Gujarat - Eds]



### Common Terns near Somnath

A small flock of Common Terns (*Sterna hirundo*) was seen near Somnath, Veraval on 25 June 2015. Common Tern is a winter migrant to Gujarat coast (Grimmett *et al.* 2011) and this sighting in late June was surprising. It is possible that these individuals were either in passage or were over-wintering.

**R. B. Balar**, Ahmedabad, drbbalar@yahoo.co.in



### Ultramarine Flycatcher in Kachchh

An adult Ultramarine Flycatcher (*Ficedula superciliaris*) was seen at Karimori Lake, Madhapar, Bhuj in Kachchh on 30 November 2014. It is a less common winter migrant to Kachchh, with a previous sighting by Jugal Tiwari from Pingleshwar. (Mashru 2012).

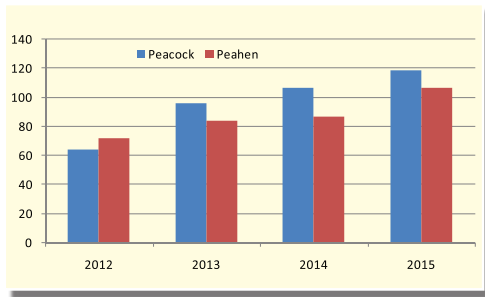
**Manoj Tank & Kartik Pomal**, Kachchh, pomalkartik@gmail.com



### Masked Booby at Datardi, Mahuva, Dist. Bhavnagar

A Masked Booby (*Sula dactylatra*) was found in a farm near Datardi village, Tal. Mahuva, Dist. Bhavnagar on 10 August 2014. It was taken to a rescue centre for treatment, but the bird succumbed to its injuries the next day. There are many previous records of Masked Booby from Gujarat (Trivedi 2003, Munjpara *et al.* 2009, Tiwari 2010, Bambhaniya 2014). Storm blown Masked Booby are frequently seen in the coastal regions of Gujarat in the monsoon season.

**Manoj Sangadhiya**, At Datardi, Tal. Rajula, Dist. Amreli.  
Email: Msangadhiya@yahoo.com



### Indian Peafowl census in Narmadanagar, Bharuch

Bharuch Nature Conservation Society & Narmadanagar Community Science Center had jointly organized Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*) census at Narmadanagar Township on 14 June 2015. They have been doing this activity since 2012. Total of 226 Indian Peafowl were recorded, up from 194 recorded in 2014. The lush green environment of Narmadanagar provides an ideal habitat for Indian Peafowl. <https://bharuchnature.wordpress.com/2015/06/19/4th-indian-peafowl-census/>



### Indian Blackbird in Sasan, Gir National Park

Three Indian Blackbirds (*Turdus simillimus nigropileus*) were noted at Sasan Gir Railway Station on 24 February 2014. It was seen four more times in the same area in the next two weeks. Indian Blackbird is shown as a winter migrant to Gir area (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012) but its status here is unclear. Further sightings will help in understanding its status in Gir / Girnar area.

**Ravi B. Dave**, Bhojde (Sasan). Email: ravidave85@gmail.com



### Eurasian Griffon Vulture scavenging on Wild Ass in Little Rann of Kachchh

A Eurasian Griffon Vulture (*Gyps fulvus*) was seen scavenging on an Indian Wild Ass (*Equus hemionus khur*) in the Sami sub-zone, near Khodda Environmental Centre, Little Rann of Kachchh on 21 December 2014. This was noted during the Wild Ass Census organized by the Forest Department. Eurasian Griffon Vulture is generally uncommon in Little Rann of Kachchh, and is rarely seen on a Wild Ass carcass.

**Bhautik R. Desai**, Vadodara. Email: wildlife1411@gmail.com



### Scaly-breasted Munia nests in Navsari

More than 30 nests of Scaly-breasted Munia (*Lonchura punctulata*) were noted at Veterinary College, Navsari Agricultural University, Navsari in July 2013. The nests were at 20 different sites and were built during monsoon season. Most of the sites were at internet points, tube lights, on sides of windows and on wires. However nests on wires were not noted next year after the wiring was redone.

**Gaurav Pandya**, Navsari. Email: gmp2004@gmail.com

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## “I knew ‘Him’ too....”

### A series of tributes to Sh. Lavkumar Khachar

I was born and brought up in a goldsmith (soni) family in Rajkot. Being brought up in a humble ambience, it was believed since childhood that we too shall take up the family profession and work in small shops as entrepreneurs.

Destiny had something else in store for me...In 1978, when I was in class 7<sup>th</sup>, we went for a Nature Camp at Hingolghadh from our school. It was arranged by the World Wildlife Fund, India (WWF-India). The journey by a state transport bus was spent in excitement and anticipation of reaching Hingolghadh.

After we reached there, soon we gathered and sat under a tamarind tree and the camp director, Shri Lavkumar saheb started giving us a brief about what we shall be doing in this camp. His presence was so powerful and seemed far more important than the activities that we were going to do! He formed various groups and directed us to go and climb the hills around and explore around. That was the beginning of my fascination and respect for Lavkumar saheb.

Fortunately, I got to participate in various other nature camps like marine camps at Pirotan island in the Gulf of Kachchh, forest camps at Sasan Gir and Himalayan camps at Vashishtha (Manali) in Himachal Pradesh. Gradually, I started enjoying and actively participating by going in the advance party, which was involved in preparations for the camps under the leadership of Lavkumar saheb. Later, he accepted my request for being a volunteer in his camp at Manali with an aim to train myself for fitness under stringent rules.

In the year 1984, my school friend Manoj Davda and I went to meet Lavkumar saheb with a wish to do something different and out of routine. He then drew a map and said that across the Rohatang pass, run to Lahaul-Spiti valley to reach Keylong (Capital of Lahaul). His order was a challenge that we took up with inner faith, knowing well that we would not be able to take any lift from any vehicle.

He gave us Rs. 100/- for bearing the expenses and necessary luggage for our Marathon. We were so excited! We started running under his guidance along with a letter he had given us for H. H. Maharaja of Keylong to bring his signature as a proof. We did manage to reach Keylong in a joyful and tired state and returned to Vashisth on the 5<sup>th</sup>

day covering 230 km in this trans-Himalayan marathon. We thought we had achieved so much by doing this.

When we reached Vashishtha camp-site, Saheb was addressing a group from Ahmedabad. Because of being so excited, we broke the protocol and entered with full energy and expanded chest. Saheb made a sign to sit aside which was a little insulting. Later he called us and introduced us to the group. To my surprise, he addressed me as ‘Khadmankdo’ (a very thin person resembling a stick insect!). He challenged the group that if these boys can cross the valley and run a ‘marathon’ this way, you can also do it. He praised us but I took it negatively as I was addressed as a “Khadmankdo” in front of a group. I became very unhappy, but saheb was already preparing something else for me.

Being unhappy with negative ‘praises’, I told sir that I have to go back to Rajkot. (My inner thinking was I am being told “Khadmankdo” because of my slim and lanky appearance, but I would come back to this Man only after becoming ‘somebody!’)

As I didn’t have money, I went to him, requested to leave the camp, he honored my request and gave me money also.

I had to come back to the camp as I’d forgotten my sweater. He saw me and asked me to stand under the Horse chestnut tree. He made me sit there and said, **“Beta, you have a determination and willpower in your mind, keep it alive.....”**. At that moment, whatever he said was all, just a lecture for me. I had decided to go back to Rajkot and







only return to meet him with a stronger and better looking physique, so that no one calls me a “khadmankdo”! Now when I look back, I think this was the turning point in my life.

After reaching Rajkot, I joined an ‘AKHADA’ (Indian parallel of a Gym) and started exercising with strong discipline. For one year, I denied to attend any camps, as I had a burning desire to erase my image as “khadmankdo”...

In the next monsoon Hingolghadh camp, our teacher Shri Dholakiya saheb requested Lavkumar Saheb to allow and bless two students (Girish Adesara and Manoj Davda) by marathon run to Hingolghadh from Rajkot.

We reached Hingolghadh in the August of 1985 in full rains at 10 p.m. Lavkumar Saheb was sitting there in the Gadh (Fort) and enjoying the rains. As a personal teacher, he would always be waiting for us, as and when we were to reach there. He told us to meet after having dinner. He personally made sure that we are given khichdi, milk and bajri-roti (*rotlo*).

After dinner, upon meeting him, he immediately recognized Manoj Davda (very fit and National swimming champion), but asked me, who are you? I replied that I am the same “khadmankdo”, who had met you in Vashisth. He was surprised. Then he asked how I made my body so fit? (I was not a student from his Rajkumar College). I told him that by his encouragement under that Horse Chesnut tree and with my passion, I had started exercising in *Akhada*. Daily at 4:30 in the morning, I did 1,000 squats and 20 rounds of running at the Rajkot Race course ground! Much to my surprise, he replied differently, “I am a teacher and a scientist. Let’s meet

tomorrow morning at 5. I would personally like to count your 1,000 squats.” That time, I again felt very dejected thinking that instead of letting me sleep after running from Rajkot, he wants to test me!

Nevertheless, next day sharp at 5 a.m., he started counting my squats holding my hand. When I reached 999, I could barely stand. But I finished 1,000 with his help. This was my first encounter with him as Master-Disciple (GURU-CHELO). This memorable episode transformed into a long journey, which still continues, though he is not with us anymore, he continues to live in my heart.

I can feel him holding my hand even today to give me that extra push to achieve what I would have otherwise thought impossible. I can say that all that I am today is because of him. He is alive in me. I am not sad that he will not be reading this episode, as I know he is right beside me while I am penning this down.

I chose to write this episode amongst so many incidents in my life because it shows how a student can take challenge from a teacher to make a decision for transforming his life. Such transformation is possible when the Guru is like Lavkumar Saheb – who was a great teacher and when the *chela* always tries his best to become a dedicated student.

We all know that he has touched the lives of so many students. And I hope that every student is fortunate to get this fire of inspiration ignited by a great teacher like Lavkumar Saheb.

- Girish Adesara  
brighuvashisth@yahoo.co.in

## News on Wings

### New Zealand Hunters Cull and Shoot a Wrong Endangered Species : Takahe



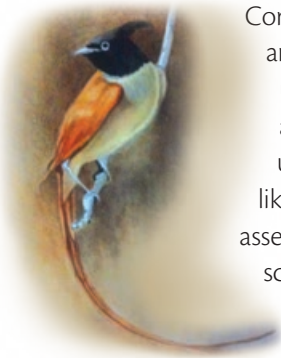
Local hunters in New Zealand were permitted to cull Pukeko birds on Motutapu Island by New Zealand's Department of Conservation which considers it as pest species. But four takahe birds were instead shot dead by hunter's shotgun pellets. The Takahe bird is critically endangered species. Even though the hunters were "carefully briefed" differentiation between the two species, they failed to cull and shoot the right species.

Takahe is twice the size of Pukeko, but they have similar colouring. The Takehe bird were presumed extinct in the early 20th century but were rediscovered in South Island in 1948. There are now only 300 Takehe birds left in New Zealand. The loss of the four birds amounts to a 5% decline in the wild population of this species.

<http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-34013537>

<http://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/aug/26/conservationists-appalled-at-illegal-killing-of-25m-birds-a-year-in-the-mediterranean>

### Reclassification of Indian Bird Species



Cornell Lab of ornithology has taken the responsibility of maintaining bird's species list, the subspecies list and their respective English names which are changed by Taxonomists every year. Changes are brought under molecular taxonomic study, which defines different species or split in species through DNA analysis. The renaming of birds and associated changes are inevitable as new techniques and better understanding of taxonomy cause a rearrangement — even in a relatively well-studied group of creatures like birds," according to eBird India, an online platform of ornithologists and birders. New taxonomic assessment has assigned Asian Paradise Flycatcher a new name as Indian Paradise Flycatcher with same scientific name *Terpsiphone paradisi*, i.e parent species. The Nicobar Island species has been rechristened as Blyth's Paradise Flycatcher with scientific name *Terpsiphone affinis nicobarica*.

Purple Swamphen originally called as Purple Moorhen has been reclassified as Grey-headed Swamphen (*Porhyrio poliocephalus* - poliocephalus means grey-headed). The Himalayan species of Common Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*) will now be known as Himalayan Buzzard (*Buteo buteo burmanicus*). Scaly Thrush has been split into four species : "Two of the new species are found in India, the Nilgiri Thrush (*Zoothera neilgherriensis*) of the Western Ghats and the Scaly Thrush (*Zoothera dauma*) of central, northern and north-eastern India. A close neighbour is the Sri Lanka Thrush (*Zoothera imbricata*), which is endemic to Sri Lanka,"

<http://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/energy-and-environment/taxonomists-reclassify-indian-bird-species/article7569248.ece>

### Babbler use Primitive Language



Researchers from University of Exeter and Zurich discovered that Chestnut-crowned Babbler found in Australia is able to string together sounds and mix them in order to communicate different meanings.

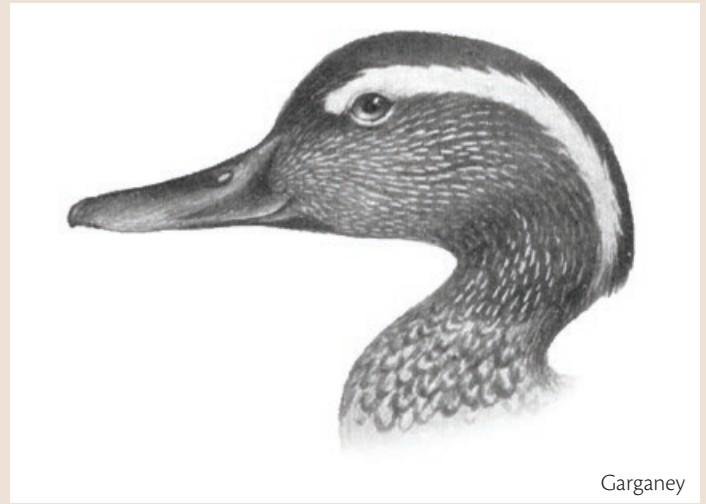
This bird communication is reminiscent of the way humans form meaningful words.

Lead author Sabrina Engesser from the University of Zurich said: "Although previous studies indicate that animals, particularly birds, are capable of stringing different sounds together as part of a complex song, these songs generally lack a specific meaning and changing the arrangement of sounds within a song does not seem to alter its overall message. But the babbler bird does not sing, instead its extensive vocal repertoire is characterized by discrete calls made up of smaller acoustically distinct individual sounds". She explained, "for instance, two sounds that scientists named 'A' and 'B' were combined for a flight call ('AB') and for a feeding call ('BAB'). When the researchers played the sounds back, birds showed different reactions - such as looking at their nests when they heard a feeding prompt call and by looking out for incoming birds when they heard a flight call". Researchers said, their findings reveal a potential early step in the emergence of the elaborate language systems we use today.

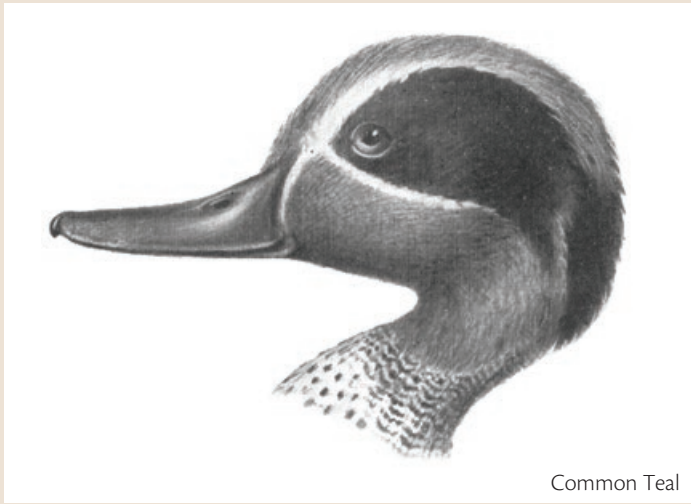
Source:[www.independent.co.uk/news/science/chestnutcrowned-babbler-australian-bird-first-known-nonhuman-species-to-communicate-using-language-10353537.html](http://www.independent.co.uk/news/science/chestnutcrowned-babbler-australian-bird-first-known-nonhuman-species-to-communicate-using-language-10353537.html)



Northern Pintail



Garganey



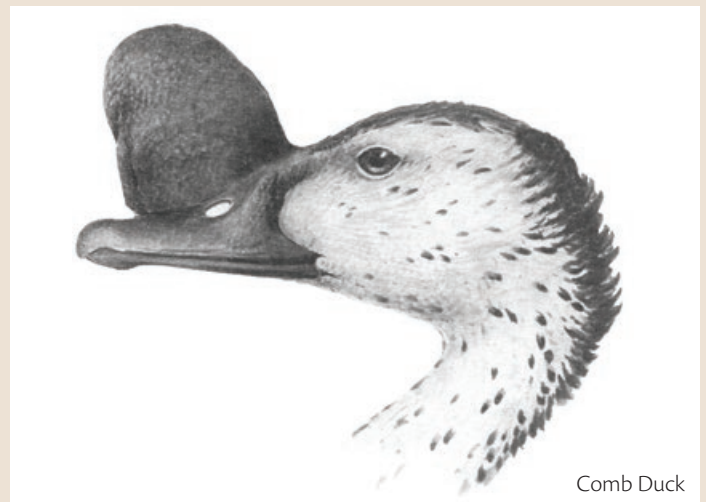
Common Teal



Northern Shoveler



Eurasian Wigeon



Comb Duck

Source: 'The Water Fowl of India and Asia' by Frank Finn

Printed by : Thacker, Spink and Co., Calcutta, 1909

These drawings are taken from a book which was a revised edition of the original work 'How to know the Indian Ducks'. It was supposed to help as a wild fowl guide to the sportsmen East and West of an Indian Empire as well as Anglo-Indians. To make it more user friendly for the beginners, drawings of heads of the commoner ducks (those most likely to fall to the gun in ordinary Indian shooting) by the most accurate artist of those times **Mr. H. Gronvold**, were added to this newer version.

“

How can a collective destiny be realized if we fail to have clarity for our own individual destinies? Individual destinies have build up into the collective destiny. We who are fortunate (or unfortunate) enough to have developed a feeling and a concern for the environment must concern ourselves in how best we can, not only advance our own programs and ambitions, but in doing so come closer and closer together to generate a force that provides direction to what is a popular will. If we fail to achieve, speaking in a physicist's jargon, critical mass, all this awareness will be swept away before the strong gales of selfish avarice, exploitations for personal gains, which are influencing democratic compulsions appearing as they do the popular wish.

Over the long years, I have come to realize that we all will have to work out ways and means to generate a strong unity. We just cannot hope to save anything against what would seem is a mindless force which by its mindlessness has the power to overwhelm everything in its path. Individuals, howsoever influential just cannot stand against its constant pressures for long. This force which seems mindless, many would like to consider it evil, is biological and as much a part of Nature as everything else. Individuals have necessarily to worry about daily needs. We all are concerned about the immediate security of our families. How can then, declining numbers of insects or of vultures take any precedence over human needs? What meaning does bird watching have in a highly competitive world? Are any of us able to provide clear answers? I regret the conservation groups have totally failed to provide reasonable answers. Nor, for that matter, have we been able to evolve demonstrable models proving that our concerns are, not esoteric but highly pragmatic.

”

- Lavkumar Khachar



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