

# Flamingo

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**Editor:** Bakul Trivedi, M.S.  
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**Cover Photo:** 'Red-necked Falcon' by Nirav Bhatt  
**Layout and design:** Pugmark Qmulus Consortium  
**Address for articles:** 19/414, Satyagrah Chhavni, Satellite Road, Ahmedabad-380015,  
Gujarat. flamingo.bcsbg@gmail.com / drbakultrivedi@gmail.com

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## Editorial....

Recently, we learnt from the media that a MoU had been signed between the Gujarat Forest Dept. and BNHS regarding a joint bird-ringing programme in the state, to be conducted over the next five years. It is planned that about five thousand birds are to be ringed every year during this period.

A massive developmental need throughout the Central Asian Flyway has been responsible for the changing agriculture practices and land use. In addition to this, the looming global climate change has made bird-migration studies all the more relevant. The data obtained from this study will go a long way in framing site-specific policy guidelines for conservation measures related to water-birds.

In comparison to 4 million birds ringed in Europe every year, the total of around 5 lac birds ringed by BNHS till date is an extremely low figure. Considering India is a core country falling in the Central Asian Flyway, which covers at least 279 populations of 182 migratory bird species - including 29 which are globally threatened - it is obligatory for us to be more aggressive in pursuing ringing exercises across the country.

Gujarat has always been on the forefront of ornithology in India. The earliest records of bird ringing in Gujarat are from 1943, when K. S. Dharmakumarsinji of Bhavnagar ringed Lesser Frigatebirds to study their movements. The ringing of Lesser Frigatebirds was done from 1943 to 1947, and a total of 489 birds were ringed! The earliest record of a ring recovery from Gujarat is of a Northern Pintail ringed in Russia in 1944, which was shot near Wankaner, in January 1946. Bird ringing programmes were conducted at Kuar Bet, in Kachchh, in March 1960 by BNHS. Dr. Salim Ali conducted many bird ringing camps in Kachchh and Hingolghadh in the 1960s. The BNHS/WHO Bird Migration Study Project was one of the first organised attempts to understand the migration of birds in India. Under this project, many ringing camps were conducted in Kachchh and Saurashtra over the course of a few years, resulting in ring recoveries, which helped in understanding the migration of birds. These camps also had the added advantage of adding a few species to the Gujarat checklist, as these were recorded in Gujarat for the first time.

Geographically, Gujarat is located on all the three flyways; African, Eurasian and Central Asian. This, alongwith variety and volume of wetlands, qualify Gujarat as a preeminent sector for bird-ringing project. There was an unfortunate and unexplainable gap of almost 50 years during which the Gujarat Forest Dept. did not give permission for regular bird-ringing exercises in the state. The recent MoU with BNHS is certainly a welcome step. If permanent bird-ringing stations are established in key locations, this activity could be pursued effectively and effortlessly in the future.

**- Bakul Trivedi**

**Email:** birdcsg@gmail.com

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

# Observations on breeding of Red-necked Falcon near Surendranagar

**Gulamahmad Vora:** Laxmipara, Surendranagar 363001. gavora71@gmail.com

**Faruk Chauhan:** Laxmipara, St No 1, Dudhrej Road, Surendranagar 363001. fdchauhan@gmail.com

**Yogendra Shah:** 'Anand', Jintan Road, Surendranagar 363001. ymshah55@gmail.com

**Vishal Thoria:** 5 Arun Society, Daalmill Road, Surendranagar 363001. vishal\_thoria@hotmail.com

**Shivbhadrasinh Jadeja:** Snehal Park, Opp. T.B. Hospital, Dudhrej Road, Surendranagar 363001. shivjadeja@gmail.com



Nirav Bhatt

## Introduction

The Red-necked Falcon (*Falco chicquera chicquera*) is a widespread resident in the Indian Subcontinent and is widely distributed in Gujarat (Naoroji 2006). It is seen in arid and semi-desert areas, but it is uncommon throughout the state. It is seen in the *vidis* and open habitats with trees in the farmlands of Saurashtra. It is an uncommonly seen species and very little is known about its breeding biology in India. Naoroji (2011) carried out a detailed study on the breeding of this species in Saurashtra, Gujarat. Two nests were studied by him near Jasdan; one nest having one nestling and the other nest with three nestlings. The first nest had a 2-3 day old nestling when observations began, while the other nest had three almost fledged young. Hence, the study on these two nests was carried out after the eggs had hatched, and no data regarding copulation or incubation period is given.

A few details regarding the breeding of Red-necked Falcon in India have been given by Dharmakumarsinhji (1955), Dharap (1974), Ali & Ripley (1978), Gole (1980), Subramanya (1982, 1985) and Ingallahlikar (1988). These studies describe nesting sites, hunting behaviour and feeding habits of this species. But the incubation period of this species is not known (Naoroji 2006). Details regarding copulation and prey are also scanty.

Here, we describe the breeding biology of the Red-necked Falcon – from mating to fledging of chicks, with an emphasis on the prey taken during this period. A brief observation on the mating of the same pair was reported by Shah (2005) earlier. We describe prey taken during breeding, the incubation period and the behaviour of the pair, during this study.

## Study Area

The nest of the Red-necked Falcon was located at Nayka Dam (22° 40' N 71° 28' E), near Surendranagar, Gujarat. The nesting was on a White Fig (*Ficus virens*) tree located adjacent to the state highway. The surrounding area had a few more *Ficus virens*, *Salvadora persica*, *Prosopis cineraria*, *Eucalyptus* sp. trees, along with agricultural fields, mainly growing cotton. The nearest water body was Nayka Dam, located approximately 500 mts from the nest site. The approximate annual rainfall of the area is about 500 mm.

## Methods

The Red-necked Falcon pair was first seen mating on 14 January 2004 and from then on, daily observations were taken from around 07:00 hrs till 19:15 hrs. Observations were made with binoculars (10x50) and the behaviour recorded with the help of a digital camera. The pair was observed from mating till the fledging of their chicks, and the total period of observation was 83 days, for a total of around 990 hrs of observations. The prey was identified visually, with the help of binoculars, and if the prey species was not identifiable, attempts were made to identify the genus. Egg measurements were taken with the help of a Vernier Calipers. To avoid disturbing the adult falcons, this was done when both the birds had left the nest and was completed as quickly as possible. The eggs were weighed with a weighing scale.

## Observations and Results

### Copulation

Copulation was first observed on 14 January 2004, and then on a daily basis till 27 January 2004. Mating ceased once incubation started on 28 January 2004, but was observed once on 6 February 2004. The average daily frequency of mating was 5.4, with a maximum of n=8 copulations per day observed twice. During this period, the male delivered a variety of prey to the female, which consisted of mostly birds. Copulation was recorded for a total of 81 occasions, out of which 67 preceded with a prey delivery by the male. A total of 78 (birds n=70,

## Red-necked Falcon...

mammals n=6, and reptiles n=2) prey deliveries were recorded during the 14 days when mating was observed.

### Egg Laying and Incubation period

The egg laying date was 28 January 2004. This was ascertained by us by visual observation of the nest. The clutch size recorded was four and the details of the eggs are given in Table 1.

**Table 1: Egg dimensions and weight**

Egg No.	Length (in mm)	Width (in mm)	Weight (in gms)
1	43.5	33.0	23
2	46.6	32.8	24
3	45.2	32.8	24
4	44.1	32.9	24

The average egg size noted here was 44.85 x 32.87 mm. Incubation commenced from 28 January 2004 and was noted till 29 February 2004 (n=33 days), but since the exact date of hatching was hard to ascertain, the incubation period is likely to be 32 to 34 days. The male did all the hunting and providing for the female during incubation. The female was not observed hunting at all during this period. During the incubation period, the male used to observe the nest but did not incubate during the entire period of the study. A total of 151 (birds n=136, mammals n=11, and reptiles n=4) prey deliveries were recorded during the 33 day period.



Prey (lark) delivered to female

### Hatching dates and fledging period

The exact date of hatching could not be ascertained. But very young chicks were observed being fed by the female early on 2 March 2004. Thus, the hatching date was 1 March 2004 or 2 March 2004. The brood size at hatching was four. The chicks were fed by the female whenever the male brought prey, but the male rarely used to feed the chicks. During the early nestling stage, hunting and providing for both the female and the chicks was done solely by the male. The female was observed hunting for the first time on 11 March 2004. After

this date, the female used to hunt alone in the nearby areas from the nest site and only occasionally joined the male in hunting.

The fledging period was 36 days (1 March 2004 to 5 April 2004) and all the four chicks fledged successfully. The last observations on the fledged juveniles were made on 5 April; they had moved out of the nest and were seen flying short distances along with the adults. A total of 311 (birds n=285, mammals n=18, and reptiles n=8) prey deliveries were recorded during the nestling period.

A summary of the prey taken during the mating, incubation and fledging period is given in Table 2.

**Table 2: Total and percentage of prey species recorded in the diet of the Red-necked Falcon during copulation, incubation and nestling periods**

No.	Prey species	Copulation		Incubation		Nestling	
		No	% of total diet	No	% of total diet	No	% of total diet
1	Bee-eater sp. ( <i>Merops</i> sp.)	3	3.84	6	3.97	20	6.43
2	Bulbul sp. ( <i>Pycnonotus</i> sp.)	0	0	3	1.99	6	1.93
3	Chat sp.	6	7.69	1	0.66	7	2.25
4	House Sparrow	6	7.69	7	4.63	20	6.43
5	Lark sp.	23	29.48	48	31.78	89	28.62
6	Munia sp.	4	5.12	2	1.32	3	0.96
7	Pipit sp. ( <i>Anthus</i> sp.)	1	1.28	0	0	0	0
8	Red-collared Dove	2	2.56	5	3.31	17	5.47
9	Indian Robin	15	19.23	9	5.96	26	8.36
10	Rosy Starling	1	1.28	6	3.97	18	5.78
11	Swallow sp.	1	1.28	0	0	0	0
12	Unidentified birds	0	0	46	30.46	79	25.38
13	Warbler sp.	6	7.69	0	0	0	0
14	Wader sp.	2	2.56	3	1.99	0	0
15	Bat sp.	2	2.56	0	0	0	0
16	Mouse sp.	4	5.12	11	7.28	18	5.78
17	Lizards	2	2.56	4	2.65	8	2.57
	<b>Total</b>	<b>78</b>		<b>151</b>		<b>311</b>	

### Mating

The prey recorded was mainly Larks, House Sparrow (*P. domesticus*), Pipits, Red-collared Dove (*S. tranquebarica*), Rosy Starling (*P. roseus*), Warblers, Swallows, small Waders, Bee-eaters, Indian Robin (*S. fulicatus*), Bulbuls, Munias and unidentified birds. The mammals recorded were Bat (the species could not be identified) and Mice (*Mus* sp.). Reptiles were taken only twice during this period and were Lizards (*Calotes* sp.)

**Incubation**

The prey was similar to what was recorded during the mating period and mainly consisted of birds, with Larks being the main prey item. Reptiles (Lizards) and mammals (Mice) were also taken.



Nirav Bhatt

Female feeding small chicks



Nirav Bhatt

Three grown-up chicks in the nest

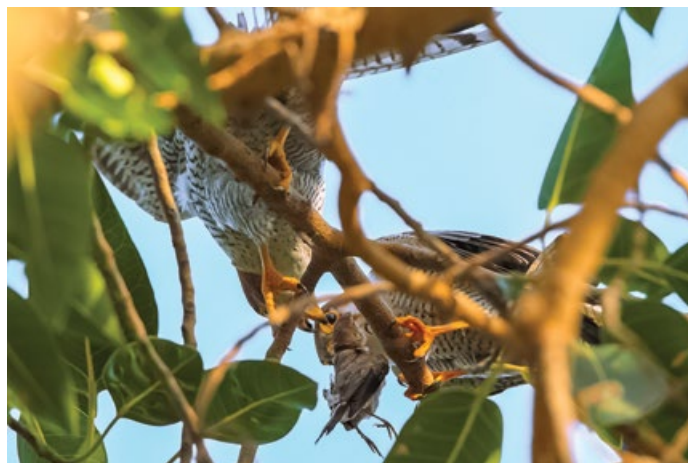
**Nestling**

The prey was regularly delivered to the female and it was observed that the prey was similar, with Larks being the main prey.

**Discussion**

The Red-necked Falcon prefers open habitats, interspersed with trees, cultivation and villages. The habitat here was similar; agricultural area interspersed with trees. The incubation and fledgling period, prey taken during breeding, the composition of prey and preferences and the behaviour of the pair are aspects of breeding which were not known and are reported here.

Dharmakumarsinhji (1955) and Ali & Ripley (1978) mention the nesting season extending from December to March, which is similar to what was observed in our study. Naoroji (2006)



Nirav Bhatt

Prey delivery (silverbill)

mentions the season extending from December to June; Naoroji (2011) recorded a pair nesting in April, with one nest in early nestling and the other having almost fledged young. This gives an indication that the season can be extended and may be variable. A larger sample size of nesting pairs from different parts of India is needed to understand the nesting season of this species. And if the season is extended, what could be the factors influencing certain pairs to nest early and some to nest late? This is an interesting question that needs a thorough study.

From copulation to the early nestling period, the female was not recorded hunting even once. The female started hunting only after the chicks were 10-12 days old, which is slightly earlier compared to 18 days observed by Foysal (2015). Naoroji (2006) also mentions that the female exclusively broods and feeds the chicks, leaving the nest only to snatch prey from the male. This was as observed in our study as well, with the female confined to the nest during the early nestling stage. Possibly, the need for brooding and the fact that the caloric need of the brood is not as high for the female to be hard-pressed to hunt in this period. Does the female go hunting when the chicks no longer need extended brooding or does the female's hunting coincide with the increase in prey demand from the chicks or both? These are another set of questions that will need more data for any reasonable answers. Another interesting aspect to note is that, in addition to the early nestling stage, the female did not participate with the male in hunting during copulation and incubation periods. This is quite an extended period for the small tiercel to go hunting alone, considering that the pair, for most part of the year, hunts in unison.

Naoroji (2006) mentions that the incubation period for the Red-necked Falcon in India is not clearly known. Foysal (2015) records the incubation period as a minimum of four weeks, but the nest was discovered when the female was already incubating and as a result a correct assessment cannot be

## Red-necked Falcon....

made. The incubation period of around 33 days observed in this study is similar to the incubation period recorded for the African subspecies *Falco chicquera ruficollis* (32-35 days) (Naorji 2006). Our estimated incubation period of 32-34 days is similar to the African subspecies, but a bigger sample size from different regions of India is needed to get a better indication. Also, the average egg size noted here is larger than the average of 42.4 x 31.1 mm given in Ali & Ripley (1978).

The fledging period of 36 days recorded in this study correlates with Foyzal (2015), who recorded 37 days and also with the African subspecies (34-40 days). But, Naorji (2011) recorded 45 days in Jasdan, which seems quite extended; he mentions drought like conditions at the time of his study and could this have contributed to the extended fledging period? This could be an odd record and it is likely that the fledging period is around 36 days. The breeding attempt in this study was successful and the adults were able to fledge all the four chicks that hatched. Could this be an uncommon occurrence? Nothing is known about the factors that influence the breeding success of Red-necked Falcon in India; a list of variables that are likely to influence breeding success need to be gathered from a larger sample size and only long term monitoring of the nesting pairs will allow us to make conclusions on aspects such as clutch size, brood size at hatching, brood size at fledging, breeding success and fledging period.

The prey species recorded in this study were mainly birds, and the choice of bird prey was diverse. The frequency of prey deliveries and the total number of prey brought to the nest increased during the nestling period, which clearly shows the increased demand for food due to the chicks. It would be interesting to compare nests with fewer chicks to see if and how the amount of prey and the frequency of prey deliveries vary. In the study done by Naorji (2011), average prey deliveries per day was 4-5 during the nestling period, while here, the average was 8.6 during the same period. Lark species constituted the highest percentage of all the species recorded consistently throughout the nesting season, followed by unidentified birds. Since hunting during most of the breeding season was carried out by the smaller tiercel, the prey sizes delivered is most likely a reflection of this. It is possible that Larks constituted the highest percentage of the prey due to the habitat in which this pair was nesting, with Larks being abundant in the hunting area. It is interesting to note that reptiles and mammals constituted only a small percentage of the diet. Naorji (2011), records exclusively birds at two nest sites in Saurashtra, with only one instance of a mammal (unknown Bat species) brought to one of the nest sites. In comparison, Foyzal (2015), in Bangladesh, records both birds

and Bats of *Pipistrellus* species; the diversity of prey recorded here was higher, with Lizards and Mice also making up a small part of the diet during the breeding season. It seems that the diet of this species is quite diverse, with both mammals and reptiles also featuring in its diet. However, it seems that it is more partial to birds. The choice of prey might vary with habitat and the high diversity of prey featured may be a reflection of a diverse habitat. As with other aspects of the breeding biology, prey preferences and prey availability on the breeding success of the Red-necked falcon needs a thorough study from different regions of India.

The Red-necked Falcon is listed as 'Near Threatened' (BirdLife International 2014) and the African sub-species *Falco chicquera ruficollis* is treated as a separate species (Kemp *et al.* 2016). In Gujarat, this falcon is becoming increasing uncommon; its crepuscular nature makes it a very challenging species to study. A bigger sample size of nest sites should be located from different regions of India and only long-term monitoring of nest sites will help better understand the different aspects of its breeding biology (nest site preferences, nesting season, incubation period, breeding success and its prey preferences). A comparative analysis of data from nesting pairs from different habitats and regions will help better understand its needs and also the threats to this little studied species in India.

The Red-necked Falcon has declined due to habitat degradation and rapid urbanization. The trees on which this pair nested for 3 consecutive years were cut down for road widening. Since then, the pair was seen very rarely in the area. Finding an appropriate nest could also be a problem for these birds because of availability of very few areas similar to the study area. Strong measures should be taken to avoid cutting of trees during road widening. It is important to note that this nest and the nests studied earlier in Saurashtra did not fall in protected areas and were located either near villages or in agricultural areas. Although the exact causes of the decline are not known, but besides habitat destruction, widespread use of pesticides could also be a factor, but this is not proven. The Red-necked Falcon is not persecuted, but it is now very sparsely distributed and requires immediate attention. A first step towards its conservation is to obtain its population estimate in Gujarat. In the short term, nesting sites should be identified and protected. For the long term conservation of this species, suitable habitat should be identified and protected, with an emphasis on educating farmers/locals and involving them in the protection of these birds. Land management and effects of changes in land use (conversion from agricultural to urban) should be studied and the long term impact of this change on the species should be

monitored. Awareness campaigns should also be conducted, to effectively highlight the decline of this species in India.

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Fresh juvenile with kill (Lesser Agama)

Nirav Bhatt

## Sighting of Spotted Sandgrouse in Kachchh

**Bharat Kapdi:** Epicenter Homestay, Lodai, Kachchh.

**Veer Vaibhav Mishra:** Centre for Desert and Ocean, Moti Virani, Kachchh. vvaibhavam2008@gmail.com



Veer Vaibhav Mishra

In north-western India, it is seen in Jaisalmer district. P. M. Laad, a senior retired forest officer, had seen it in January 2002 at Ramgarh, near Jaisalmer (*pers. comm.*). It is still seen at Ramgarh, and photos of the species from this location are posted on the popular website 'Oriental Bird Images'.

According to Ali (1945), the Spotted Sandgrouse is a winter visitor to Kachchh and is particularly abundant in some years. It breeds in Sindh and Baluchistan in Pakistan (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). Ali (1945) stated that there is a high possibility that a small number of Spotted Sandgrouse could breed in Kachchh, as the place is not too far from Sindh. However, there is no record of its breeding in Kachchh.

This present sighting comes after a span of 19 years, and hence is an important record for Kachchh. It shows that the Spotted Sandgrouse is still an erratic winter migrant to the Kachchh region.



Jugal Tiwari

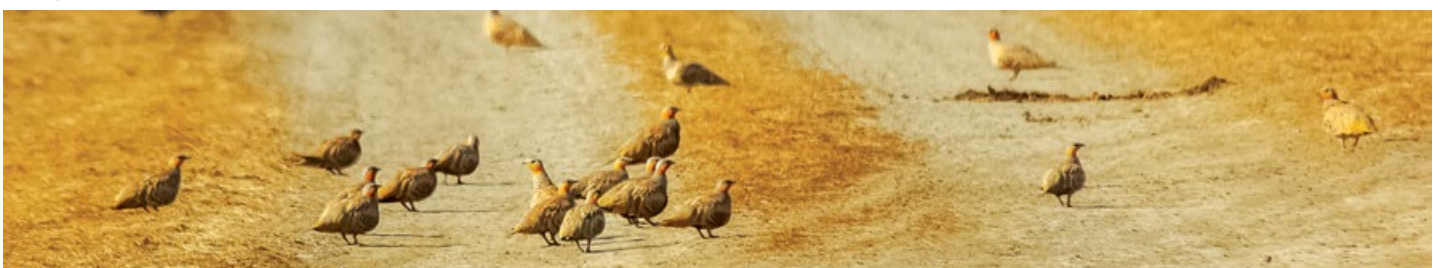
The Spotted Sandgrouse (*Pterocles senegallus*), is a winter migrant to north-west India and Pakistan (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). A flock of fifty birds was seen near Lodai village, in eastern Banni, Kachchh, on 15 November 2016. After this, the sandgrouse were seen again at least five more times in November and till the end of January 2017. There were more than 250 birds seen in small flocks a few times. The birds constantly call in flight, giving a 'waku-waku' call, and hence are locally known as 'waku waku'.

The Spotted Sandgrouse were very shy, keeping a distance from us. The flock was feeding on the exposed tubers of *Cyperus* sp. When a vehicle approached, the birds walked to the brown patches of dried sedges, and got completely camouflaged. It is extremely difficult to locate the birds when the flock settles to roost in the golden yellow to brownish, open flat land, where *Cyperus* sp. (locally called as 'Dhamor') is seen. The birds were very well camouflaged in the habitat.

The previous record of this species from Gujarat was of 90 birds, seen by S. N. Varu on 7 December 1997 in Vekaria Dhandh area, Banni (Varu 2000). In earlier years, he had recorded a big flock of more than 100 birds at Bhirandiara, Banni on 10 February 1980 and Kaswati Dam (23°37'62.24" N 69°90'08.43" E) near Lodai on 20 February 1983 and 15 January 1984, when the birds were arriving for drinking water (Varu 2000).

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Jugal Tiwari



## Recent sightings of Great Knot in Gujarat

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



Devvrat Mori

The Great Knot (*Calidris tenuirostris*) is a regular winter visitor to the coastal areas of Kachchh and Jamnagar (Ganpule *et al.* 2011). The species is now considered as 'Endangered' (IUCN 2016). Here, I give recent sightings of Great Knot in the Gulf of Kachchh. I carried out surveys in different areas in Kachchh and Jamnagar and collected recent records by asking birdwatchers to provide information on the species in Gujarat from 2014 to 2016 to get an idea about its current status here.

### Observations

My sighting of Great Knot, along with those of others during this period, is given in the table.

I went with Dilipsinh Chudasma, Yagnesh Bhatt & Bimal Patel to Modhva beach near Mandvi in Kachchh on 2 February 2016 and saw 20 Great Knots amongst flocks of other waders.

The Great Knot records given in the table show that the species is a regular winter visitor to coastal area of Kachchh and Jamnagar in varying numbers from October to April. A sighting of a flock of 125 birds has been recorded in the salt pans near INS Valsura, Jamnagar (Ganpule *et al.* 2011). Such large flocks show that good numbers have been recorded in Gujarat. There are no published records of Great Knot from coastal areas of southern Gujarat, Gulf of Khambhat and from around the Porbandar coast. It is possible that it may be overlooked due to its similarity to other waders. As there appears to be suitable habitat, there is no reason why it would not occur there; towards this, intensive surveys in

southern Gujarat, and other areas of Saurashtra, are highly recommended.

### Recent sightings of Great Knot in Gujarat

Date	Place	No. of Birds	Observer
22 March 2014	Sachana Beach, Jamnagar	7	Jadeja, R.
26 October 2014	Narara Marine N. P., Jamnagar	4	Munshi, E.
27 December 2014	Salt pans at Valsura, Jamnagar	50	Jeganathan, P.
18 November 2015	Pirotan Island, Jamnagar	8	Solanki, C.
29 November 2015	Narara Marine N. P., Jamnagar	5	Solanki, C.
06 December 2015	Balachhadi Beach, Jamnagar	3	Solanki, C.
19 January 2016	Modhva Beach, Kachchh	9	Sodha, V.
27 January 2016	Modhva Beach, Kachchh	25	Tiwari, J. K.
02 February 2016	Modhva Beach, Kachchh	20	Author's Sighting
08 April 2016	Luni Beach, Kachchh	4	Pomal, N.

### Acknowledgements

I am thankful to Dilipsinh Chudasma for informing me about sighting of this bird. I am also especially thankful to Rajdeepsinh Jadeja, Chirag Solanki, Nirav Pomal, Vikramsinh Sodha and all others who shared their sightings of Great Knot in Kachchh and Jamnagar.

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Devvrat Mori

## Sighting of Rosy Minivet in Vansda National Park: an addition to the avifauna of Gujarat

**Pragnesh R. Patel:** Pramukhvihar Society, Flat no. 307, Silvassa 396230, Dadra and Nagar Haveli. [uniquepathcare@gmail.com](mailto:uniquepathcare@gmail.com)



Pragnesh Patel

I often visit Vansda National Park (henceforth VNP) (20° 45' N, 73° 33' E), in Dang district in South Gujarat, for bird watching. On 15 January 2017, I reached VNP at around 14:30 hrs. I started photographing birds in the area. I observed that a Minivet (*Pericrocotus* sp.) was perched on a branch of a tree. I took two-three photos before the bird flew away. I saw that it had a pinkish wash on the breast and belly, greyish head and a whitish throat.

After coming home, I checked the images on my computer and noted that this individual was different from the Orange

Minivet (*Pericrocotus flammeus*), which is usually seen in the area. With the help of the reference book (Grimmett *et al.* 2011), I identified this as a male Rosy Minivet (*Pericrocotus roseus*). Since the species is not known to occur in Gujarat, I uploaded the image on various birding websites and on the social media, where the identity was confirmed as a Rosy Minivet by senior birdwatchers.

This is the first photographic record of the Rosy Minivet in Gujarat and the sighting was very exciting for me.

[The Rosy Minivet had been reported from VNP earlier in November 2008 by Adesh Shivkar (Praveen 2009). However, the bird could not be photographed. Since it was not documented properly at that time, the species was not included in the checklist of birds of Gujarat (Ganpule 2016). Hence, this is the first confirmed record of the Rosy Minivet from Gujarat and it is an addition to the avifauna of Gujarat – Eds]

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## Sighting of Stoliczka's Bushchat near Vadodara

**Hiren Patel & Geeta Padate:** Division of Avian Biology, Department of Zoology, Faculty of Science, The Maharaja Sayajirao University, Vadodara 390002. [hiren9408@gmail.com](mailto:hiren9408@gmail.com)



Hiren Patel

The Stoliczka's Bushchat or White-browed Bushchat (*Saxicola macrorhynchus*) has gained interest of Indian birdwatchers and

ornithologists, especially in Gujarat and Rajasthan, over the last couple of decades. Being endemic to the Indian Subcontinent, historical data shows its presence only in Pakistan and India (Ripley 1982; Grimmett *et al.* 1998). It is considered as extinct in Pakistan (Roberts 1992), with sightings now only from India, and it is a 'Vulnerable' species (BirdLife International 2016).

The habitat of Stoliczka's Bushchat is semi-arid, desert, semi-desert, scrubland and areas with scattered bushes (Grimmett *et al.* 1998; BirdLife International 2016). We report its presence near a wetland i.e. Timbi irrigation tank (22° 19' N, 73° 17' E), located on the outskirts of Vadodara, in central Gujarat.

On 7 March 2016, at around 11:45 hrs, an unusual bird was photographed near Timbi irrigation tank. The bird was observed on a dry stem of a plant in the shallow and drying waters of the tank. It was having a prominent white supercilium, longer black beak and feet and tail - a characteristic of the Chat family, white underparts and streaked upperparts. The white supercilium and underparts,

along with the longer beak, indicated a possibility that it was a Stoliczka's Bushchat. The habitat where the bird was observed, though near a wetland, is quite similar to a scrub. Literature survey and discussion helped in its identification as a Stoliczka's Bushchat. The photograph was also circulated amongst experienced birdwatchers, where the identity was re-confirmed.

This species has been observed for the first time at Timbi irrigation tank, which is regularly inundated with water from the Narmada canal since last ten years and the canal system is well developed in the area. A dry, seasonal wetland is now almost perennial and is surrounded by *Prosopis juliflora* dominated scrub with scattered *Cassia* sp. and *Calotropis procera* on wetland fringe, which is the habitat favored by Stoliczka's Bushchat. There are records of Stoliczka's Bushchat near wetlands; Rahmani (1993) has reported its occurrence at Sultanpur jheel in Haryana and there are several records of its occurrence around Chhari-Dhandh Conservation Reserve in Kachchh.

We wonder if the species has adapted to the wetland conditions / extended its range to central Gujarat recently or was present earlier and had been overlooked due to the presence of a similar looking species like Common Stonechat (*Saxicola torquata*) in the area.

Since its record in the Velavadar Blackbuck National Park in 1992-1993 (Rahmani 1997) and near Naliya by Raghuvirsinh Jadeja, RFO of Naliya grassland, around the year 2000 (IBCN 2015), interest in Stoliczka's Bushchat has increased and several sightings from different areas have been reported (Himmatsinhji 2004; Varu 2007, 2009, 2010; Ganpule 2014, 2015; Mori 2016; Tiwari 2016). A total of 17 individuals were recorded during a survey in Kachchh in February and March, at six different locations near Naliya (Soni *et al.*, 2016). As per published records, the species has been mainly reported from Banni grassland, Chhari- Dhandh Conservation Reserve and Naliya grassland area in Kachchh, Little Rann of Kachchh, Velavadar Blackbuck National Park and once near Positra, in the Marine National Park i.e. in Kachchh and Saurashtra peninsula of Gujarat. Here, we recorded its presence for the first time in Central Gujarat. However, it is pertinent to note that there is a record of Stoliczka's Bushchat from Akola, in Maharashtra (Deshmukh 2007). Hence, it is possible that a few individuals wander up to Maharashtra. Systematic, intensive, in depth and meticulous surveys for the species are required in the entire state (including behavior, routine activity studies).

The first author (HP) visited Timbi again on 28 October 2016 and the Stoliczka's Bushchat was seen again. It was seen in the same area till the end of February 2017. Strong site fidelity has

been observed in Stoliczka's Bushchat (Rahmani 1997). We wonder if this same spot will be used every year by the bird. We will continue to monitor this area.

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## A White-eyed Buzzard nestling with four legs: Gir National Park

**Bhupatgiri Goswami:** Forest Department, Jamwala Range, Gir National Park, Village: Jamwala, Taluka: Una.



During my routine patrolling on 3 June 2015, at around 09:00 hrs in the Jamwala Range of Gir National Park, I was attracted by alarm calls of different birds. I noticed a disturbed nest, which lay scattered, with a white colored chick shivering on the ground. The chick was identified as a nestling White-eyed Buzzard (*Butastur teesa*). The chick had unusual limbs, which was noticed when taken in the hand. It had an extra limb on each leg (which was found to be non-functional), thus having four legs. The chick was rescued and brought to the Forest Department rescue center. It was fed with raw chicken and proper care was taken to help it survive. Unfortunately, it died within two days of rescue. This was the first time I had noticed a bird with four legs and it was very unusual.

[This condition wherein extra limbs are attached to the skeletal structure is known as *polymelia*. *Polymelia* is a congenital defect associated with extra limbs in humans and animals. Sometimes, twin embryos are formed and one degenerates completely except for the formation of one or more limbs, which end up being attached to the other twin. This causes extra limbs to be attached to the skeletal structure. So etiology would start from twin embryo development or genetic malformation. In this case, the extra limbs were attached to the tibia-tarsus joint. As per studies in cases of *polymelia*, the extra limb is shrunken and/or deformed, but it was not seen in this case. As per the observer, the extra legs looked normal but non-functional. The extra legs lacked a full set of toes and had different number of toes on each leg.

The reasons for *polymelia* in birds are not known and it is linked to genetics or environmental contaminants or a combination of both (Pourlis 2011). Only a few records of *polymelia* in wild birds have been recorded from different parts of world. See Pourlis (2011) for details of such cases. But *polymelia* has been recently reported in domestic chickens more commonly (Ajayi & Mailafia 2011, Abu-Seida 2013, Amatya 2015, Barua et al. 2015).

*Polymelia* in birds of prey is rare. *Polymelia* and *syndactyly* was reported in a Swainson's Hawk (*Buteo swainsoni*) in the USA, where two digits on the right leg and one digit on the left leg extended from the distal tibiotarsus (Rogers et al. 2016). However, the extra legs were not as developed as seen here and were just small appendages. Other reported cases of abnormalities in birds of prey; in Britain, a Peregrine Falcon (*F. peregrinus*) had a duplication of hind digit, while a male Merlin (*F.columbarius*) had two fused digits (Cooper 1984). But these were not cases of *polymelia*.

We asked a few experts about this. Todd Katzner replied that he had never seen such a case. Other birders also replied that this was very rare and very few cases of *polymelia* have been reported in wild birds.

Hans Peeters stated that he had seen only one bird with *polymelia*; an Eagle (*Aquila* sp.), which had an extra leg projecting from the tibia-tarsus joint of one leg. This was reported in a German journal many years ago. He further stated that it was possible that this nestling had other internal physical defects and so it did not survive and also, such cases of entire extra legs are very rare (Hans Peeters, in litt., email dated 16 February 2017).

Hence, this is a unique and a first reported case of bilateral *polymelia* in a White-eyed Buzzard in the wild in India.

We are grateful to Todd Katzner, Jerry Lig and the Cornell Lab for their help. We specially thank Hans Peeters for his inputs. We thank Anuj Raina for helping collect the details from the observer. We thank Dr. Gaurang Bagda for medical inputs – Eds]

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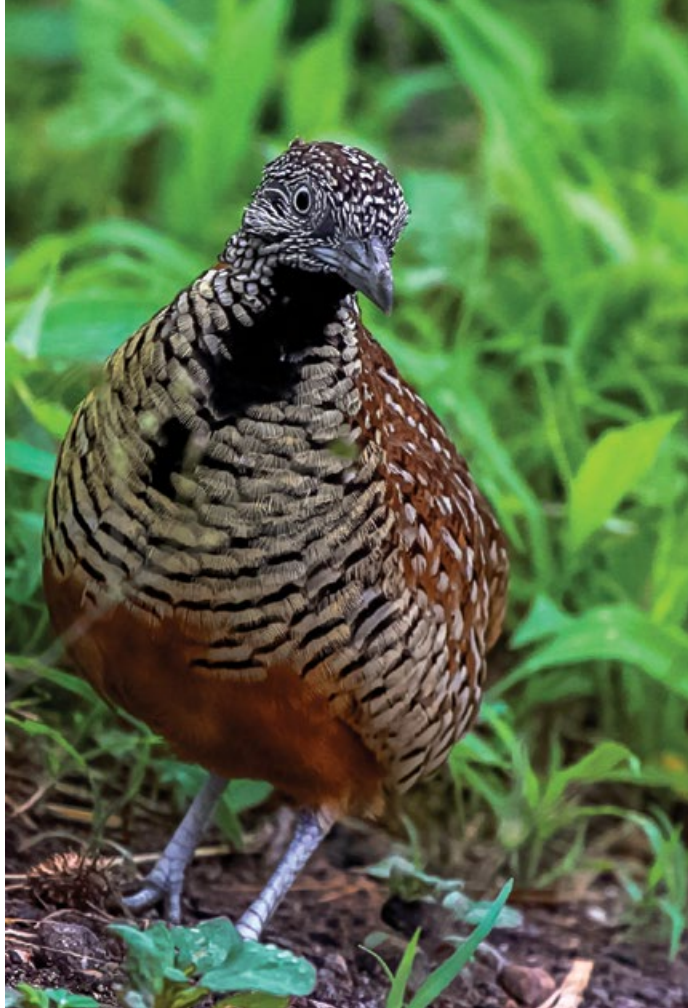
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## Buttonquails around Rajkot city

**Ashok Mashru:** A-7, Alap Heritage, Satya Sai Marg, Kalawad Road, Rajkot 360005. mashruashok@gmail.com

Three species of Buttonquails (*Turnix* sp.) occur in Gujarat; Barred Buttonquail (*Turnix suscitator*), Yellow-legged Buttonquail (*Turnix tanki*) and Small Buttonquail (*Turnix sylvaticus*) (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). They are small, enigmatic, terrestrial birds seen mainly in the monsoon season. All the three Buttonquails were listed in the birds of Hingolghadh (Naik *et al.* 1990), which is near Rajkot. They are seen around Rajkot city and current sightings of these birds are given below:

### Barred Buttonquail



Ashok Mashru

Barred Buttonquail is the commonest amongst the three species of Buttonquails occurring here. It is resident and is usually skulking, but easily found in Rajkot city outskirts. I have noted it around Ishwariya Pond in Rajkot outskirts on 23 July 2015, 05 February 2011 and 18 December 2011. Other location around Rajkot where I have seen it is in Nyari River area on 4 July 2012. It is seen on country roads or in grassland areas, mostly in pairs. It breeds in the entire state (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). Ali (1954) collected specimens from Kachchh, around Baroda and in north Gujarat (Mehsana and Patan). Thus it is fairly widespread species in Gujarat.

### Yellow-legged Buttonquail



Gaurang Bagada

Yellow-legged Buttonquail is a summer/monsoon migrant to Gujarat. Usually shy and skulking, it is difficult to observe. Dharmakumarsinhji (1955) stated that it is rarely seen and fairly secretive. Rainfall seems to affect its movements to a great extent. He has mentioned seeing its nest in a scrub jungle near Wankaner, which is near Rajkot. Kazmierczak (2000) has shown it as a summer visitor in most of Gujarat. Ali (1954) collected specimens from Kachchh and north Gujarat, but does not mention its occurrence in Saurashtra. On 05 August 2015, during a visit to Khirasara *vidi*, a grassland near Rajkot, I was able to observe a Yellow-legged Buttonquail in the area. I could only get a record image. It is worth mentioning that in Gir/Girnar forest area, Gaurang Bagada has recently sighted the bird twice: first on 21 June 2014 near Dalkhania (21° 14' N 70° 55' E) and then on 03 May 2015 near Vadal (21° 36' N 70° 30' E). Sightings have been reported near Amreli (Viral Joshi, *pers. comm.*) and from Paneli *vidi*, near Morbi (Prasad Ganpule, *pers. comm.*). It is generally the rarest Buttonquail here.

### Small Buttonquail



Ravi Ardesana

Small Buttonquail is also a summer/monsoon migrant to Gujarat. Usually shy and skulking, it is difficult to observe. Dharmakumarsinhji (1955) stated that it is seldom seen, but mentioned about sighting its nest many times. It is not uncommon, and is more frequently seen in the *vidis*,

particularly around hilly areas. Kazmierczak (2000) and Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) have shown it as a summer visitor in most parts of Gujarat.

On a visit to Gondal, near Rajkot, on 22 August 2015, we (Manoj Finava, Prasad Ganpule and me) visited three scrub forests/grasslands in the area. We saw Small Buttonquails in two of the scrub forests and grasslands in the area, which was surprising since it is not commonly seen here. We recorded a total of four individuals. After a few days, on 30 August 2015, Ravi Ardesana saw a Small Buttonquail at Khirasara *vidi*, near Rajkot city.

### Conclusion

Though Barred Buttonquail is common around Rajkot, Small Buttonquail and Yellow-legged Buttonquail are uncommon in our area. Grasslands are their preferred habitats and looking at historical observations of their breeding in Saurashtra, a detailed survey in Rajkot district in scrub/grassland areas will help in understanding their current status here.

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## Sighting of Tickell's Leaf Warbler in Little Rann of Kachchh

**Catherine Christian:** 73 Amidhara Society, Part 2, Opp. Gram Panchayat Office, Bopal, Ahmedabad 380058. catherine.christian@gmail.com



Catherine Christian

The Tickell's Leaf Warbler (*Phylloscopus affinis*), breeds in the Himalayas and is a widespread winter migrant in the Peninsula, wintering mainly in the Western Ghats (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). It is a vagrant to Gujarat, with only two previous records, both from Saurashtra (Akhtar & Tiwari 1994, Ganpule 2015).

On consecutive visits to the Little Rann of Kachchh on 23 and 26 December 2015, we visited Vachhraj Bet (23°24' N, 71°26' E), in the Little Rann of Kachchh. There, in the temple premises, I saw a warbler, which I initially thought was a Sulphur-bellied Warbler (*Phylloscopus griseolus*), but it seemed different. I identified it as a Tickell's Leaf Warbler, based on the following features:

- prominent yellow supercilium, of similar colour to the throat, which would be contrasting in Sulphur-bellied Warbler
- greenish brown upperparts
- greenish edges to the wing feathers
- bright yellow underparts

Both Tickell's Leaf Warbler and Sulphur-bellied Warbler can be quite variable. Though the contrast between the throat and the supercilium are said to be important for identification, the greenish edges to the wing feathers and olive-green upperparts are more conclusive (R Jaypal, *in litt.*). Hence, this individual could be identified as a Tickell's Leaf Warbler.

This was found in the temple premises and it was foraging on the ground. Though this behaviour is similar to Sulphur-bellied Warbler, it is possible that this individual, probably in migration, was foraging on the ground for insects. Hence, this was not very unusual.

The sighting of Tickell's Leaf Warbler in the middle of the Rann is quite odd as both the previous records from Gujarat are from Saurashtra, and not from desert areas. This is the third sighting of the species from Gujarat.

### Acknowledgements

I thank Tim Inskipp, Praveen J., R. Jaypal, Dipu K. and Mike Prince for their inputs in the identification of this bird.

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## Sighting of Buff-bellied Pipit in GRK: an addition to the avifauna of Gujarat

**Prasad Ganpule:** C/o Parshuram Pottery Works, Opp. Nazarbaug, Morbi 363642. prasadganpule@gmail.com [PG]

**Gaurang Bagda:** 'Ujash', 22/44, Morarinagar, Laxminagar, Junagadh. gaurangbagda@gmail.com [GB]

**Jaysukh Parekh:** Suman Remedies, C/17 R. T. O Relocation Site, Bhuj 370001, Kachchh. nisusuman@gmail.com [JP]



Jaysukh Parekh

The Buff-bellied Pipit (*Anthus rubescens*) is a polytypic species, with three subspecies (Alström & Mild 2003), while some authorities recognise four subspecies (Tyler & Kirwan 2017). The subspecies *japonicus* is also known as the Siberian Buff-bellied Pipit. It breeds in north-eastern Russia and winters in the northern Indian subcontinent; Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) state that *japonicus* is perhaps better considered as a distinct species. There are a few isolated records of the Siberian Buff-bellied Pipit from northern India (Grimmett *et al.* 2011), with recent records from Tal-Chappar and Ranthambhore in Rajasthan (respectively Poonia *et al.* 2014, Sangha 2015).

On 27 January 2017, we visited a large wetland (23° 35' N 69° 29' E) in Greater Rann of Kachchh. This wetland is situated about 15 kms east of the Chhari-Dhand wetland, which is a very well known bird watching area. The third author (JP) took us to this wetland to show the Water Pipits (*Anthus spinoletta*), which were being regularly seen by him in this area. At around 13:00 hrs, we reached the location and immediately saw a group of Water Pipits. We started photographing these birds. While photographing the Water Pipits in the area, we observed that one individual looked different from the Water Pipits seen there. It had darker and greyer upperparts, a more prominent moustachial stripe and heavily streaked underparts, with the breast and malar looking very dark, with prominent and clean dark and distinct spots on the breast and flanks. We took some photos and thought that it could be a Buff-bellied Pipit, but we could not confirm the identification in the field. We tried to hear/record the call but since it was seen briefly and in a group of Water Pipits, we could not discern the call of this individual.

After coming back, we carefully studied the photos and it was apparent that this bird was different from the Water Pipits seen there. In addition to the features described above, we noted that this individual had a long hind claw, dark reddish

legs and also a slimmer bill, which all pointed to this being a Buff-bellied Pipit of the *japonicus* subspecies. These features matched with the description given for the Siberian Buff-bellied Pipit in the reference books



(Alström & Mild 2003, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012, Tyler & Kirwan 2017) and in identification papers about the species (Alström & Mild 1996, Lee 2000, Lee & Birch 2002). Other *Anthus* sp. were also considered before we confirmed the identification. The similar Red-throated Pipit (*Anthus cervinus*) has very heavily streaked underparts (including flanks), with streaking on the rump and hence could be excluded. The Tree Pipit (*Anthus trivialis*) and Olive-backed Pipit (*Anthus hodgsoni*) have a different face pattern and plumage. Since the identification, and separation, of Buff-bellied Pipit from the Water Pipit is difficult, we sent the images to Brian Small, who has experience of *Anthus* sp. He confirmed that this individual was indeed a Buff-bellied Pipit (Brian Small, *in litt.*, email dated 30 January 2017).

After the identification was confirmed, the third author (JP) realised that he had images of more than one individual and that he had been seeing the species from 9 January 2017 onwards in the same area. He searched and found images of one more individual (but probably two), which could be identified as a Buff-bellied Pipit. Thus, the birds were seen in the area from 9 January onwards by the third author (JP) along with his son Nirav Parekh, though he was unaware of its identity and thought that these were more heavily streaked Water Pipits. Hence, the birds were seen here for almost three weeks. It is interesting to note that in one image of the Buff-bellied Pipit taken by the third author (JP), the legs look dark. This could be due to mud on the legs and so the actual leg colour is not seen. But, dark legs are also not unusual, as Alström & Mild (2003) state that leg colour is 'usually pale but sometimes rather dark'. Hence leg colour is variable.

This is the first record of the Buff-bellied Pipit in Gujarat. This species was not included in the checklist of birds of Gujarat (Parasharya *et al.* 2004, Ganpule 2016). Though Sørensen & Tiwari (2009) speculated that the Buff-bellied Pipit could occur in Gujarat as a potential winter visitor or as a vagrant, there were no sightings of this species here till now. Thus, the Buff-bellied Pipit is an addition to the avifauna of Gujarat.

## Buff-bellied Pipit....

### Acknowledgements

We thank Brian J Small for helping with the identification. We thank Ashok Mashru, Manoj Finava and Ashok Chaudhary for their company.

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## Recent records of Stork-billed Kingfisher in Gujarat

**Rajni Trivedi:** 20/C Mangaldeep Apartment, Jodhpur Gam Road, Satellite, Ahmedabad 380015. [rajnitrivedi1950@gmail.com](mailto:rajnitrivedi1950@gmail.com)



Rajni Trivedi

The Stork-billed Kingfisher (*Pelargopsis capensis*) is a resident and locally common species found in India; east and south of a line from the Gulf of Khambhat to Dehra Dun (Ali & Ripley 1983). Its occurrence in Gujarat is restricted to the forested area on the eastern fringe of north and south Gujarat (Grimmett *et al.* 2011, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Ali (1954) collected nine specimens of the species from the forested area of the eastern fringe of Gujarat. Though the species is listed in the checklist of the birds of Gujarat (Parasharya *et al.* 2004, Ganpule 2016), there is only one published record (Monga &

Naoroji 1984) of the species after Ali (1954). In this paper, I report sightings of the species from three different locations in Gujarat and draw attention towards a published record from north Gujarat.



### Observations

During my exploration of forests and less-explored areas of Gujarat, I saw and photographed the Stork-billed Kingfisher at three locations in the south-eastern fringe of Gujarat from 2008 to 2010.

My first sighting was from Balam forest area of Banaskantha District (24°16'11.64" N, 72°30'30.87" E) on 21 March 2008. The kingfisher was perched on a tree at the edge of the river, near a small temple. The Balam forest is on the extreme north-eastern fringe of state. The other two records are along the Narmada River in south Gujarat. One bird was photographed on 10 November 2009 at Gora village (21°51'35.85" N, 73°40'59.90" E), near Kevadia colony in Narmada District. The third sighting was on 14 October 2010 at Uchedia village (21°42'45.66" N, 73°7'8.07" E) near Jagadia, Bharuch District. At Uchediya village, a small rivulet, locally known as 'Kavri', merges with the Narmada River.



## Discussion

The Stork-billed Kingfisher is very large (38 cm) compared to the common and wide-spread White-throated Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*). It is easily distinguished by its greater size and the enormous blood-red dagger-shaped bill (Ali & Ripley 1983). Every time, these features drew my attention and hence I could take its photographs. However, its plumage is also quite distinct from the White-throated Kingfisher, which made identification easy.

Except the collection of nine specimens by Salim Ali (Ali 1954), there is only one published record of the species from Gujarat. Ali (1954) had collected two specimens from Juna Rajpipla and Dediapada forests around the Narmada River. Monga & Naoroji (1984) suspected its presence in Rajpipla forest based on a call they heard, but its presence was not confirmed visually. The species is not reported from the Shoolpaneshwar Wildlife Sanctuary (Desai *et al.* 1993, Narve *et al.* 1997) and in a study by GEER Foundation (Anon. 2009), it was not found there. Hence, the two present reports along the Narmada River area suggest that the species still exists there.

Ali (1954) had collected one specimen from Balaram area of Banaskantha District. The present report from Balaram confirms the presence of the species there too.

Ali (1954) had collected four specimens from the Dang forest (two from Waghai; one each from Kalibel and Sakalpatal). However, there is no recent sighting of the species from the Vansda National Park or Purna Wildlife Sanctuary in Dang forest by me or others, in spite of the fact that there were several biodiversity studies done in the recent past by GEER Foundation (Anon. 2000, Pandey *et al.* 2004) and others (Trivedi & Soni 2006, Kumar 2015). The species was considered to be locally extinct in Purna Wildlife Sanctuary by Trivedi & Soni (2006). Ganpule (2016) opined that its status is not known in the forested area of south to northern border of Gujarat and that further study was required. It is pertinent to note that there exists one more published record of the species from Polo forest of Aravalli District, in north Gujarat, by Mayur Mistri (Mistri 2008), who observed it for several days in second half of August 2005 and in subsequent years (up 2008 at least) at the same site, from August till February. In fact, there was no recent published record of the species from Gujarat except the sighting by Mistri (2008).

Considering my photographic records and the one recent published record, it appears that the Stork-billed Kingfisher may not be rare in the forest areas on the south and north-eastern fringe of Gujarat.

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## Sighting of tagged Lesser Sand Plover from Kachchh

**Jaysukh Parekh:** Suman Remedies, C/17 R.T.O. Relocation Site, Bhuj 370001, Kachchh. nisusuman@gmail.com



Jaysukh Parekh

I visited Modhava beach, near Mandvi, Kachchh, on 22 May 2016, with my son Nirav. Late in the evening, while returning back, I saw a group of three Lesser Sand Plovers (*Charadrius mongolus*) and photographed them. There was one Lesser Sand Plover with a metal ring on left leg and a white tag with mark 'S6' on right leg. Ringing details were confirmed by Colin Jackson as under:

Species: Lesser Sand Plover

Ring number: F00344 (metal ring on left leg); White flag on right leg with black script: "S6"

Date ringed: 20/1/2013

Time: 01:00 hrs

Location: Mida Creek High Tide Roost, Watamu, Kenya

Coords: 03° 22 S, 39° 58 E

Ringer: Andrew Kinzer (A Rocha Kenya)

Age: 4 (adult)

Wing: 130mm

Weight: 51.6g

Primary Molt: 555555531  
(completing moult)

Time elapsed since ringing: 3 years, four months, one day.

Distance from ringing site: 4308km.

Colin Jackson also informed that this was only the second ever recovery of a Lesser Sand Plover from East Africa - the only other one was a bird ringed in December 1982, also in Mida Creek, by David Pearson and found in Pasni, Baluchistan, Pakistan, two and a half years later in September 1985.

Further comments by the A Rocha International, who conduct the ringing in Kenya, were as follows: 'This is hugely interesting as it shows that the Lesser Sand Plovers we have on the Kenyan coast follow the same route as the Greater Sand Plovers (*Charadrius leschenaultii*) - but trail behind them by 1-2 months. Unlike the Greater Sand Plovers, which breed on more low-lying plains and Steppe, the Lesser Sand Plovers breed in mountain valleys, which presumably only get warm enough for them around May and in early June. They therefore start their breeding season quite a bit later, probably having a faster turnaround in order to be back in Kenya by mid-August or early September'.

It is to be noted that a tagged Greater Sand Plover was seen at the same location for two consecutive years (Tiwari 2016). Hence, this sighting suggests that Kachchh lies on the migration route of Lesser and Greater Sand Plovers from eastern Africa to their breeding grounds.

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## Sighting of Drongo Cuckoo at Hingolghadh, Rajkot Dist.

**Dhaivat Andhariya:** B-4, Rang Tarang Apt., Nr. Aakash Deep Tower, Shreyas Crossing, Ambawadi, Ahmedabad 380015. dhaivat.a@gmail.com

**Mayank Ghedia:** B-61/62, Sharnam-1, Opp. Lotus School, Jodhpur Gam, Satellite, Ahmedabad 380015. mayankghedia@gmail.com

On 28 June 2015, we visited Hingolghadh Nature Education Sanctuary near Jasdan, Rajkot Dist., to watch the Indian Pitta (*Pitta brachyura*). Kamal Shah was also with us. We reached there at around 08:30 and we were greeted with loud and incessant calls of Common Hawk Cuckoo (*Hierococcyx varius*). At around 10:45 hrs, we heard a distinct, Cuckoo like call, which was different from the call of Common Hawk Cuckoo. So we tried to locate the bird. After some searching, we spotted a bird sitting on a branch of a large *Ficus* tree (*Ficus*

*benghalensis*). It looked similar to a Black Drongo (*Dicrurus macrocerus*). I immediately identified it as a Drongo Cuckoo (*Surnicululus lugubris*). None of the field guides (Kazmierczak 2000, Grimmett et al. 2011) I referred have shown the distribution of





Drongo Cuckoo in Gujarat. Later, I found out that Drongo Cuckoo is regularly seen in South Gujarat, and also around Rajpipla forest. There are sporadic records of this bird from Gir National Park, but nonetheless records in Saurashtra are very few. According to Rasmussen & Anderton (2012), the 'Fork-tailed Drongo Cuckoo' (*S.l.dicuroides*) occurs in our region, but taxonomy is not clear.

I was lucky enough to get photographs of the bird, showing key identification features. It was easily identifiable based on the differences from Black Drongo, and also by its very distinct call (the bird was very vocal). At around 14:00 hrs, we again spotted the bird in a different part of the Sanctuary, near the bridge behind the 'Snake House'. At both times, a single bird was observed.

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## Records of Watercock in Gujarat

**Ashok Mashru:** A-7, Alap Heritage, Kalavad Road, Rajkot. mashruashok@gmail.com



The detailed note about Watercock (*Gallicrex cinerea*) sightings in Bharuch District comprising of its behaviour, habitats and threats was published earlier in this journal (Patel 2015). Through this note, I discuss records of Watercock from historical times till the present to show its distribution in Gujarat.

### Historical Records:

The earliest record from Gujarat is from Harni, near Vadodara, in 1890, when a female was shot on 25 September 1890

(Littledale 1890). Barnes (1891) collected a female from Sindh (Pakistan), near Gujarat, but noted that it did not occur elsewhere in western India. Later it was seen in Kachchh by Shri H. H. Rao, who shot a pair of birds and sent them to Lester for identification. Lester (1897) wrote that these were a pair of Watercocks and further stated that he received eggs from Kachchh, presumably belonging to this species. Palin (1904) lists it from Kachchh, but he and Dr. Salim Ali did not meet with this bird during their surveys in Kachchh and Gujarat but both have noted that it is found in well-watered areas throughout India (Ali 1945, 1952). Dharmakumarsinji (1955) collected a Watercock from Victoria Park, Bhavnagar, in June 1948 and again sighted it in 1951 and stated that it is very rare in Saurashtra. Khachar (1963) noted it from Rajkot, with Reeves (1963) commenting that it could be a vagrant in the area. Shivraj Kumar (1966) and Lavkumar (1968) noted it from Saurashtra. Hence there are many historical records from Gujarat.



### Present Status

In the distribution map of the species for Gujarat, Kazmierczak (2000) has shown one record, while Grimmett *et al.* (2011) shows 3 isolated records and gives it as a winter migrant to Gir

## Sightings of Watercock in Gujarat

Sr. No.	Place	Date	Observer	Source/Remarks
1	Victoria Park, Bhavnagar	1970	Bhavbhuti Parasharya	Pers Comm
2	Rajkot outskirts, stream near A. G. Society.	16/07/1985, 18/07/1985	Author's sighting	Sighted by Dr. Taej Munkur, who informed the author
3	Khari river, Bhuj	28/6/1987	S. N. Varu	Pers Comm
4	Nal Sarovar outskirts	Monsoon 1991	Uday Vora	Pers Comm
		9/7/2015	Nirav Bhatt	Pers Comm
		13/7/2015	Bharat Rughani	eBird Website
5	Velavadar National Park	Since 1992 to 2015, every year in August	Indra Gadhavi	Pers Comm; Maximum numbers of 27 were seen in 2007.
		August 1995 then almost every monsoon	Uday Vora	Pers Comm; Nest also observed
		15/7/2000	R. B. Balar	Balar 2000
		10/6/2006	Prasad Ganpule	Pers Comm
		8/7/2011	Maulik Varu	eBird Website
		24/8/2015	David Stanton	eBird Website
		13/7/2013	S.N. Varu	Pers Comm
6	South Gujarat Univesity Campus, Surat	01/06/1999, 02/06/2000, 09/06/2000, 30/07/2000	Mukesh Bhatt	Bhatt 2000
7	Gavier lake, Surat	2/6/2000	Mukesh Bhatt	Pers Comm
8	Kamrej, Surat	11/06/2000, 04/07/2000, 30/07/2000	Mukesh Bhatt	Pers Comm
9	Viroja, behind Pariej lake, Kheda	Monsoon 2004 , Further four sightings	Uday Vora	Pers Comm
10	Gir forest	14/12/2005	Yogendra Shah	Shah 2006
11	Dandi Road, Surat	4/7/2006	Mukesh Bhatt	Bhatt 2007
12	Near Vibhapar, Jamnagar	20/7/2009	Maulik Varu, Kapilsinh Zala	Zala 2009
13	Kumbharvada wetland, Bhavnagar	2010,2011 and 2013	Indra Gadhavi	Pers Comm
		02/08/2012, 07/09/2012	S.N. Varu	Pers Comm
14	Between Rohini village and Padad	Monsoon 2009	Uday Vora	Pers Comm
15	Khijadia Bird Sanctuary	25/11/2010 02/01/2011	P G Akbar, Jay Bhayani	eBird Website
16	Untiyadra, Ta. Ankleshwar, Dist. Bharuch ( Sighted in 10 Villges of Ankleshwar taluka and 9 villages of Hansot taluka)	15/06/2011, then every year in good numbers in the monsoon season. Maximum 23 in a day.	Jugal H. Patel	Patel (2015)
17	Kosamba Ta. Ankleshwar Dist. Bharuch	7/8/2012	Arpit Deomurari	Oriental Bird Images Website
		Jul-15	Minal Patel	Pers Comm
18	Chhapara road, Navsari	Monsoon 2013	Jayesh Joshi	Pers Comm
19	Ahmedabad outskirts	28/10/2014	Pankaj Maheria	Oriental Bird Images
20	Pipalava Talav, Amreli	25/07/2015, 03/08/2015, 05/09/2015, 08/09/2015	Viral Joshi	eBird Website
21	Kheta Khatali, Ta/Dist.Bhavnagar	Jul-15	Bhavbhuti Parasharya	Pers Comm
22	Between Bagodara and Nalsarovar	15/7/2015	Kartik Patel	Pers Comm
23	Gosabara Wetland, Porbandar	28/11/2014	Bharat Rughani	eBird Website
24	Amreli	8/11/2016	Viral Joshi	Joshi & Legha 2016
25	Randarda, Rajkot	11/6/2016	Jignesh Rathod	Pers Comm
		12/6/2016	Ashok Mashru, Manoj Finava	Pers Comm

forest area. Ramussen & Anderton (2012) show it as a summer visitor to an isolated area of Saurashtra, noting it as scarce but wide spread.

The collected records of Watercock are listed in table and locations of same are displayed in the accompanying map. At many places, isolated records of Watercock have been reported, with one or two individuals seen. At Velavadar National Park, where sightings since many years have been noted, a maximum number of 27 birds were seen by Dr. Indra Gadhavi in 2007. Another important place for the occurrence of Watercock is Bharuch District, where it is found in good concentrations. Sightings from villages of Ankleshwar and Hansot taluka (Bharuch District) have been given by Patel (2015), wherein details of these sightings can be obtained and it is fairly common in that area.

The sighting of Watercock in December 2005 (Shah 2006) in Gir is also noteworthy. This is one of the few sightings of the Watercock in the winter months, with other winter sightings from Khijadiya (near Jamnagar) and from Porbandar.

Looking at the sightings of Watercock in Gujarat, it can be said that Watercock visits not only Saurashtra, but also Kachchh, central and south Gujarat mainly in summer- monsoon season. It can be seen from the map that Bhal area in Bhavnagar District and well-watered areas of south Gujarat near the Gulf of Khambhat region are areas where it is regularly seen in good numbers. Elsewhere, isolated records are found, except in the dry regions of North Gujarat; mainly Banaskantha, Mehsana, Sabarkantha, Panchmahal and Dahod districts. It is possible that the Watercock might be occurring in well watered areas in these districts too, but has not been observed due to its shy nature and skulking habits. Surveys in the monsoon season will be useful to know its status there.

### Breeding

There are only two records of its breeding in Gujarat; one is mentioned by Lester (as stated earlier) and second is by Uday Vora in 1995 at Velavadar National Park. These two records are insufficient to know whether the Watercock is a widespread breeding migrant to Gujarat, and more records will be helpful in understanding this. The widespread sightings in the monsoon months indicate that it could be breeding here.

### Conclusion

The Watercock is widely distributed in Gujarat. Though there are sightings since 1890 till the present, it is still not certain whether the Watercock is mainly a breeding migrant to Gujarat or whether it is also a winter visitor. A concentrated study of Watercocks, including satellite tracking, is required to understand its status and migration.

### Acknowledgements

I thank all birdwatchers who shared their sightings of Watercock from Gujarat.

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## Short Birding Notes



### Mistle Thrush in Gir National Park: a second record for Gujarat

On 30 November 2016, during my evening safari as a forest guide at Gir National Park (21° 14' 43.602" N, 70° 33' 10.6668" E), at around 17:00 hrs, I spotted a Thrush (*Turdus* sp.), which was new to me and I could not identify it. The bird was foraging on the forest floor, and then flew and perched on a branch, allowing me to take photographs. It was later identified by my birdwatcher friend Ravi Dave and other senior birdwatchers as a Mistle Thrush (*Turdus viscivorus*). There is only one previous record of Mistle Thrush from Gujarat; an individual was seen and photographed in Banni, Kachchh (Mishra 2015). This is the second record for Gujarat and an addition to the birds of Saurashtra.

**Salim Baloch:** (Forest Guide), At: Sasan, Dist. Junagadh.



### Olive-backed Pipit in Kachchh

An Olive-backed Pipit (*Anthus hodgsoni*) was seen and photographed near Anjar (23° 8' 21.71" N, 69° 54' 55.51" E), in Kachchh, on 4 December 2016. The bird was quite wary and we (S. Vora, D. Chudasama, I. Rathod and me) could get only a few images. It was identified based on its plumage and its striking head pattern; whitish spot and blackish patch on the rear ear coverts. As per senior birders S. N. Varu and J. K. Tiwari, it is not known to occur in Kachchh and this is the first record of the species from Kachchh.

**Darshan Parmar :** Kukma, Dist. Kachchh. darshan.parmar37@gmail.com



### Orange-headed Thrush in Jamnagar

An Orange-headed Thrush (*Zosterops citrina*) was seen and photographed in the Gandhinagar area of Jamnagar on 25 December 2016. It was seen for more than 30 minutes, hunting for insects and other prey in the undergrowth of a small area with water. Though there are recent records of Orange-headed Thrush from Saurashtra (Vaja & Vaghasiya 2016), this was the first time it was noted in Jamnagar.

**Firozkhan Pathan :** Jamnagar. firozkhanbirdssaver@gmail.com



### Brown-breasted Flycatcher in Jamnagar

On 16 December 2016, while birding in the morning near Gandhinagar area, Jamnagar, we saw a flycatcher with a white eye ring, brownish under parts and pale legs. It was catching insects and moving in the bushes. We took photographs and identified it as a Brown-breasted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa muttui*). The identity was further confirmed by senior birder Jaypalsinh Jadeja, who visited the area on 18 December 2016 and saw the bird. This is a new record of the species for Jamnagar city.

[Since it was first recorded in Kachchh (Tiwari & Varu 2010), the Brown-breasted Flycatcher has been recorded in Barda Sancturay, near Porbandar, at Chaduva Rakhal in Kachchh (Varu & Zala 2010) and at Morbi (Ganpule 2014). There are many recent records from Girnar WLS, Rajkot, and Porbandar on the website 'eBird'. Also, photos from Polo forest and Bhuj are posted on the 'Oriental Bird Images' website. Recently, an individual was ringed in Nalsarovar (Uday Vora, pers. comm.). Records from Deesa, in North Gujarat and from Thol, near Ahmedabad, are also known. Hence, this record from Jamnagar indicates a wider distribution of the species in Gujarat – Eds]

**Chetan Sabhaya, Firozkhan Pathan, Rajdeep Jadeja :** Jamnagar. rajdeep94@yahoo.com



### **Sighting of White-capped Bunting near Porbandar**

A White-capped Bunting (*Emberiza stewarti*) was seen in the Ghed region of Porbandar district on 30 October 2016, and this is probably the first record from Porbandar. I was watching birds near Sharma village of Sorathi Ghed. I spotted it at around 11:00 hrs and observed the bird for the next 10 minutes. The bird perched on the electric cable and was seen well and photographed.

There are a few isolated records of White-capped Bunting from Gujarat, with a recent sighting from Nalsarovar (Trivedi 2016). Hence, this sighting adds to our knowledge of the distribution of this species in Gujarat.

**Dhaval Vargiya** : Porbandar. dhaval.mwcc@gmail.com



### **Rusty-tailed Flycatcher in Jamnagar**

While birdwatching in Gandhinagar area of Jamnagar on 13 January 2017, I saw and photographed a flycatcher which was unfamiliar to me. I sent the photos to senior birdwatchers for identification. It was identified as a Rusty-tailed Flycatcher (*Muscicapa ruficauda*) based on its rufous tail, large eye, large bill with entire yellowish lower mandible and dark legs. There are only two previous records of Rusty-tailed Flycatcher from Gujarat (Ganpule 2016), and it is a vagrant here. This sighting in the second week of January is surprising as it is too late for autumn passage and is a sighting in the winter.

**Firozkhan Pathan** : Jamnagar. firozkhanbirdssaver@gmail.com



### **Bristled Grassbird in Rampura grassland, Dahod**

A Bristled Grassbird (*Chaetornis striata*) was seen at Rampura grassland, near Dahod, in the morning on 25 September 2016. The shy bird emerged on top of a small shrub and sang for a few minutes before tumbling back into the grass. Rampura grassland is well known for the sightings of Lesser Florican (*Sypheotides indica*) in the monsoon season but this is the first sighting of the Bristled Grassbird from this area. The Bristled Grassbird is a 'Vulnerable' species (BirdLife International 2017) and this sighting from Dahod is encouraging and confirms its presence in central Gujarat.

**Dr. Nilamkumar Patel** : Dahod. pnilamr@yahoo.co.in

**Viral Joshi** : Saladi (Amreli). virjoshi892@yahoo.com



### **Stoliczka's Bushchat in Rajkot**

A Stoliczka's Bushchat (*Saxicola macrorhynchus*) was seen and photographed on Vagudad Road, Rajkot, on 14 December 2016. On a subsequent visit to the area with senior birder Ashok Mashru, we observed the 'puff and roll' behaviour of this species. The Stoliczka's Bushchat was observed till the end of December. The area in which it was observed is a stony area, with patches of short grass. There are a few small shrubs but otherwise, the area is barren. This is the first record of Stoliczka's Bushchat in Rajkot.

**Raju Karia** : Rajkot. dealwiserajkot@gmail.com



### **Colour aberrant Red Avadavat at Pariej lake**

I visited Pariej lake, in Anand District, with a few friends on 13 November 2016. We went along the banks of the lake for bird watching, when I got a fleeting glimpse of a whitish looking bird. I took a photo, but since it perched only for a short time, I could not get more pictures. Reviewing the photo with Sagir Ahmed, we could identify it as a Red Avadavat (*Amandava amandava*) with aberrant plumage; white upperparts, brownish underparts and a red bill and red rump. It was identified as a bird with the mutation 'brown' as defined by Van Grouw (2013). This was the first time that we had seen a Red Avadavat with aberrant plumage.

**Dr Yasser Rafique** : Ahmedabad. yasser Rafique@yahoo.com



### Re-nesting of Indian Robin in a two wheeler

An Indian Robin (*Saxicoloides fulicatus*) pair nested in the front part of a two wheeler (Hero Pleasure) in my society at Navsari. Two eggs were laid on 25 May 2016 and one more egg on 26 May 2016. On 6 June, the two eggs hatched. One egg remained unhatched. The parent birds were constantly visiting the nest to feed the chicks. However, one chick died on 11 June 2016, which was taken out by one of the parent birds. The remaining chick flew out from the nest on 19 June 2016. This is a second consecutive year of nesting of Indian Robin in a two wheeler, as a nest was reported from the same location last year (Pandya 2015).

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



### Pallid Scops Owl near Bhaskarpara, Surendranagar

On 24 December 2016, in the morning at around 07:30 hrs, while driving to Bhaskarpara wetland, Surendranagar district, I spotted a small owl basking on the road side. On a closer observation, I was able to identify it as a Pallid Scops Owl (*Otus brucei*). The bird was sitting comfortably, and basking in the morning sunlight. It was not getting disturbed with small vehicles and villagers passing by. But later, it flew away due to a gust of wind generated by a speeding truck. This was the first time I had noted the Pallid Scops Owl here.

**Jitendra N. Dave** : Ahmedabad. jeetdave@gmail.com



### Water Pipit of subspecies *cutellii* in Little Rann of Kachchh

A Water Pipit (*Anthus spinoletta*) was seen and photographed near Handi-Bet, in the western side of Little Rann of Kachchh, on 18 December 2016. It had a thin, pointed bill with pale base to lower mandible, grayish upperparts and dark, black legs. Another individual seen on 12 February 2017 had prominent roseate-buffy wash to the breast and belly (lacking any streaking), darkish lores and dark brownish legs, indicating that it was of the *cutellii* subspecies. Though this subspecies is considered occurring here as per Rasmussen & Anderton (2012), they, however, give *blakistoni* as the sole regional race. There were more than 10 individuals in the area and they were seen till the end of February 2017. These individuals too were probably of the *cutellii* subspecies, but as close views could not be obtained, this could not be confirmed. The subspecies *cutellii* may represent a separate species within the Water Pipit complex (Garner et al. 2015), and is sometimes referred to as 'Caucasian Water Pipit', and hence this sighting is significant.

**Prasad Ganpule** : Morbi. prasadganpule@gmail.com



### Indian Grey Hornbill in GNFC Township, Bharuch

I went for bird watching in GNFC Township, Bharuch, on 8 May 2016, at around 17:00 hrs. I chose the area behind trainees' hostel and nursery. I saw two birds in the nursery, perched on a tree stump. They were Indian Grey Hornbill (*Ocyrceros birostris*). I took some photos. It was the first time I was seeing these birds near my home. A pair was seen again on 3 July 2016 and seemed to be in courtship display. On 25 May 2016, one individual was seen near Bhandareswar Temple between Rajpardi and Umalla villages. As far as I am aware, the Indian Grey Hornbill has not been noted in GNFC earlier.

**Hiren Majithiya** : Bharuch. hirenmajithiya@outlook.com





### White-winged Tern at Chhari-Dhandh, Kachchh

We visited Chhari-Dhandh Conservation Reserve in Kachchh on 27 January 2017. At around 17:00 hrs, we saw and photographed a White-winged Tern (*Chlidonias leucopterus*) in non-breeding plumage at the edge of the wetland. It was readily identified by its typical head pattern and smaller bill. The White-winged Tern has been recorded earlier in Kachchh at Devisar Tank, Bhuj (Varu 2004). [Senior birder Jugal Tiwari informed that the White-winged Tern is rare in Chhari-Dhandh – Eds]

**Gaurang Bagda, Prasad Ganpule, Ashok Mashru, & Manoj Finava** : Junagadh.  
gaurangbagda@gmail.com

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## Important Bird Sightings

A compilation of important sightings from around the state

Species	N	Location	Date	Observer/s	Remarks
Cinereous Vulture ( <i>Aegypius monachus</i> )	1	Little Rann of Kachchh	15 December, 2016	Aditya Roy, N. Kukadiya	
Cream-coloured Courser ( <i>Cursorius cursor</i> )	27	Banni, Kachchh	30 November, 2016	Aditya Roy, N. Kukadiya	
Sociable Lapwing ( <i>Vanellus gregarius</i> )	8	Banni, Kachchh	4 December, 2016	Aditya Roy, N. Kukadiya	
Indian Cormorant ( <i>Phalacrocorax fuscicollis</i> )	600+	Charakla Salt Pans, Near Jamnagar	Last week of April 2016	R. B. Balar	Group fishing
Short-eared Owl ( <i>Asio flammeus</i> )	1	Pariej Tank, Anand	12 November, 2016	Anuj Raina	Probably a first for the area
Sociable Lapwing ( <i>Vanellus gregarius</i> )	1	Hansal Village, near Nalsarovar	10 November, 2015	Devvratsinh Mori	
Greater Hoopoe Lark ( <i>Alaemon alaudipes</i> )	1	Udhama, Banni Grassland, Kachchh	6 January, 2015	Jagruti Rathod	
Black Bittern ( <i>Dupetor flavicollis</i> )	1	Surat-Olpad Road, Surat	7 January, 2017	Mukesh Bhatt	Winter record
Short-eared Owl ( <i>Asio flammeus</i> )	1	Timbi Wetland, Vadodara	5 November, 2015	Hiren Patel	
Water Rail ( <i>Rallus aquaticus</i> )	1	Gandhinagar area, Jamnagar	30 November, 2014	Devvratsinh Mori, Amish Patel	A first record for Jamnagar

## Compilation of Popular Publications on Gujarat Birds (2016)

**Hiren B. Soni:** Assistant Professor, P. G. Department of Environmental Science & Technology (EST), Institute of Science & Technology for Advanced Studies & Research (ISTAR), Vallabh Vidhyanagar-388120. drhirensoni@gmail.com

Ali, A. M. S., Kumar, S. R. & Arun, P. R. (2016). Sighting of Greater Scaup (*Aythya marila*) and Pallid Scops-Owl (*Otus brucei*) in eastern Kachchh of Gujarat, India. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society*. 112 (1): 30-32

Badrinarayanan, T. (2016). Note: A response from an ophthalmologist, who is also a birder. *Indian BIRDS*. 11 (3): 84

Chauhan, V. (2016). Spotted Owlet (*Athene brama*) with a cataract in its left eye? *Indian BIRDS*. 11 (3): 84

Chudasama, D. M. (2016). Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush from Kachchh, Gujarat. *Indian BIRDS*. 11 (3): 84A

Ganpule, P. (2016). Observations of probable Taimyr Gulls (*Larus fuscus taimyrensis*) at Okha, Gujarat, India. *Indian BIRDS*. 12 (1): 1-4

Ganpule, P. (2016). Sighting of Common Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita, fulvescens / abietinus*) in Greater Rann of Kachchh, Gujarat, India. *Indian BIRDS*. 12 (1): 21-22

Ganpule, P. (2016). Notes on the Great Grey Shrike (*Lanius excubitor*) complex in north-western India: Variation, identification, and status. *Indian BIRDS*. 11 (1): 1-10

Jackson, C. H. W. (2016). Clues towards the migration route for Greater and Lesser Sand Plovers spending the non-breeding season in Kenya. *Biodiversity Observations*. 7.36: 1-8

Mukherji, M. D. & Mukherji, R. (2016). Impacts of human disturbance on the avifaunal diversity. *International Journal of Recent Advances in Engineering & Technology*. 4 (1): 66-71

Parasharya, D., Teli, J. & Parasharya, B. M. (2016). Striped Keelback in the diet of White-throated Kingfisher. *Zoo's Print*. XXXI (5): 19-20

Sangha, H. S., Ganpule, P. & Raote, S. N. (2016). Wing-tagged Eastern Imperial Eagle (*Aquila heliaca*) in the Little Rann of Kachchh, Gujarat, India. *Indian BIRDS*. 12 (2 & 3): 73

Sethna, N. & Munsiff, K. (2016). Sighting of Grey Hypocolius (*Hypocolius ampelinus*) in Narara Marine National Park, Gujarat, India. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society*. 112 (2): 98-99

Theba, I. N., Theba, N. N. & Patel, H. I. (2016). Sighting of Brown Hawk Owl (*Ninox scutulata*) at Thol Bird Sanctuary, Gujarat. *Indian BIRDS*. 12 (2 & 3): 88

Trivedi, R. (2016). Observations of some colour aberrations in birds seen in Gujarat. *Indian BIRDS*. 12 (2 & 3): 74-75

Trivedi, R. (2016). Rock Bunting (*Emberiza cia*): An addition to the birds of Gujarat. *Indian BIRDS*. 12 (2 & 3): 84-85 □

## Readers' Opinion

Thank you very much for sending six issues of 'Flamingo': Four issues of 2016 and two of 2015. Tomorrow I will send Rs 900/- as my subscription for 2015, 2016 and 2017.

I found the article very interesting and useful. I have old b&w issues of 'Flamingo' in my personal library. It is very good that you have started printing it in colour.

I was actually planning to write to you regarding 'Flamingo'. It is really very good and I enjoyed reading the articles. Congratulations. I am also quite moved to see that you are including late Lavkumarbhai's articles. They are delight to read. So much wisdom and knowledge. I wish young people who pretend to be bird lovers, floating around with long lenses (no binoculars with some) will learn from our old friend and mentor. I hope someday someone will compile Lavkumar's articles and publish them in a book form. Probably many books as he was a prolific writer.

I think he should have been given at least 'Padma Shri', if not 'Padma Bhushan'. His contribution is so much for nature education.

The quality of other articles is also very good - you are doing a good job. I will look forward to future issues of 'Flamingo'.

Best wishes,

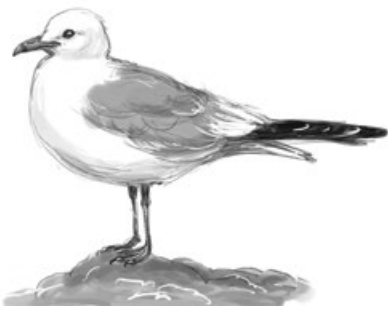
Asad Rehmani □



**Rock Bunting in Gujarat: 'Rock Bunting – an addition to the birds of Gujarat' by Rajni Trivedi. Indian BIRDS 12 (2&3): 84-85**

The author reported three sightings of Rock Bunting (*Emberiza cia*) from Gujarat. One sighting from Kalo Dungar in Kachchh and two sightings from Saurashtra - one from Velavadar National Park and one near Dhari, Amreli district, were reported. The sightings were in 2007, 2008 and 2014, and the birds were seen in January, February and September. The author states that it is possible Rock Bunting is overlooked since it resembles Striolated Bunting (*Fringillaria striolata*), which is common here. These are the first confirmed sightings of Rock Bunting from Gujarat and this species is an addition to the birds of Gujarat.

**Taimyr Gulls in Okha: 'Observations of probable Taimyr Gulls at Okha' by Prasad Ganpule. Indian BIRDS 12 (1): 1-4**



The author carried out a study on probable Taimyr Gulls (*Larus fuscus taimyrensis*) in Okha for three years, from 2014-2014, in the winter. The gulls seen in Okha were identified as probable Taimyr Gulls based on the paler mantle, prominent head streaking and late moult. A few juveniles were also photographed. Some individuals seen there had very prominent head streaking, with blotches on the nape, recalling Vega Gull (*Larus smithsonianus vegae*) and such individuals were kept unidentified until further research, as Vega Gull is not known to occur in India. This was the first such study carried out on these gulls and the presence of such birds in India presents a challenge to gull researchers.

**Tagged Eastern Imperial Eagle in Little Rann of Kachchh: 'Sighting of wing-tagged Eastern Imperial Eagle in Little Rann of Kachchh' by H S Sangha et al., Indian BIRDS 12 (2&3): 73**



The authors report an interesting sighting of a wing-tagged Eastern Imperial Eagle (*Aquila heliaca*) from the Little Rann of Kachchh. A juvenile Eastern Imperial Eagle with a yellow tag on its wing, bearing alpha-numeric code H04, was photographed in late January 2012. The tagging details were as follows: the eagle was tagged in Naurzum State Nature Reserve, in the Kostanay Region of Kazakhstan. The tagged bird travelled a distance of around 3200 kms (in a straight line) from Kazakhstan to Gujarat. This was the first time a tagged Eastern Imperial Eagle from Kazakhstan had been seen in Gujarat.

**Tagged Lesser and Greater Sand Plovers in Kachchh: 'Clues towards migration routes of Lesser and Greater Sand Plovers wintering in Kenya' by C. Jackson., Biodiversity Observations 7.36: 1-8**



The author reports on sightings of tagged Lesser Sand Plovers (*Charadrius mongolus*) and Greater Sand Plover (*Charadrius leschenaultii*) seen at Modhva beach, Kachchh. A Greater Sand Plover was seen for two consecutive years at Modhva beach while a Lesser Sand Plover was seen once at the same place during 2015 and 2016. Both the birds were ringed at Mida Creek, Kenya. The author speculates on the strategy for return migration adopted by both these species, wherein they stop at two sites en route to their breeding ground, one of which is Modhva beach. These stop-over sites are used for fattening up for further migration, but this can only be confirmed by further observations. The author requests birdwatchers in Gujarat to look for tagged sand plovers, particularly at Modhva beach during March-April.

□

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When we approached Man Marudi Island juvenile storks were seen among the overhanging vegetation. From the sea below, the proper estimation cannot be made because of the dense euphorbia and other tangles vegetation on the sides and on the flattop of the island. Those birds crouching or down among the bushes are not visible. I asked for the launch to circle the island to the leeward side since a strong surface breeze had started blowing from the west. This surface wind produces an updraft against the island which I suspect is the main reason for the storks to favour it as a nesting site. Without much effort they rise high to enter the upper air where turbulences are noticeable by the cumulus clouds rising above. The storks rise on these updrafts and then disperse in different directions to feed. Some even cross the Gulf towards Kachhh! The adult storks start arriving in mid September and the last of the late breeders depart by mid December leaving the fully fledged juveniles to themselves and I was fortunate to see these, possibly the later hatchlings departing.

As we were cruising slowly along the length of the island, a flock of around 120 storks, all dark plumaged juveniles took off. They flew into the wind and then turned to take the updrafts off the island to rise above us. I thought they were practicing and would, after a few circles land again. Instead, they quickly rose above the surface wind and into the upper turbulences and began to circle upward toward the dark under surface of a large cumulus cloud. As we watched, the spiralling birds rose higher and higher until they were mere specks. From that great height, they levelled off and began a glide towards the Saurashtra mainland. It was 4.30pm. What I had witnessed was the young storks taking their leap into the future. Not a single adult was any where in sight. Some juveniles, possibly the last to have hatched were still on the island, a few making tentative flights around. In a day or two they too would have to leave to seek their fortunes in the great world beyond, or starve: the rocky sea swept base of the island had no place where a stork could find any food.

On one lucky day, I had witnessed the end of a breeding year even as the start of the next had begun. ”

- Lavkumar Khachar

