

Flamingo

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Status and distribution of the Black Shaheen in Gujarat

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Nirav Bhatt

Introduction

The Black Shaheen (*Falco peregrinus peregrinator*), is a subspecies of the Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*). The adult Black Shaheen usually has a deep rufous wash on the underparts, a more 'hooded' appearance with very small cheek patch, and is dorsally dark gray or blackish. Juveniles are hooded, with dark rufous wash to the streaked underparts and with blackish upperparts. Typical birds are fairly easy to identify in the field. But, there is great variation in the Black Shaheen in the Indian Subcontinent, with birds from Sri Lanka and the Western Ghats generally darker and with dark rufous, unbarred underparts, while northwards, into the Himalayas, individuals are less ashen, bluer and more barred on the back and breast, and less chestnut on the breast (White *et al.* 2013).

The name Shaheen (sometimes spelled 'shahin') is derived from Persian, *Shah* for 'king' and *een* for 'birds', thus meaning the 'king of birds' (White *et al.* 2013). It is referred to as the Black Shaheen, the Indian Peregrine, the Shaheen Falcon or just Shaheen (Naoroji 2006). We prefer the name Black Shaheen, and it is henceforth referred to as the Black Shaheen in this note, as we follow the nomenclature given in White *et al.* (2013), since it is the latest comprehensive reference. This subspecies of the Peregrine Falcon is resident in the Indian Subcontinent, from the Himalayas (usually up to 2400 mts) to the entire Peninsular India, with the exception of the desert and semi-desert areas of western Rajasthan and northern and western Gujarat (Ali & Ripley 2001). The Black Shaheen is normally solitary or seen in pairs, and its habitat is usually steep, rugged hills and rocky pinnacles.

For Gujarat, the status and distribution of the Black Shaheen is uncertain and there is very less data regarding this subspecies. Naoroji (2006) shows it as a resident in the hilly and forest areas from south to northern Gujarat, with one isolated record from Kachchh and one record from Saurashtra, and it is shown as a resident in Mt. Abu, Rajasthan, which is adjoining Gujarat. It is well known that it is resident in Mt. Abu, with many recent sightings and also historical records, and the first author has observed a Black Shaheen hunting a Rose-ringed Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*) at Nakki Lake, Mt Abu, in the winter.

Historically, the Black Shaheen has been recorded in Bhuj, Kachchh (Radcliffe 1905). Ali (1954) does not mention recording the Black Shaheen during surveys in Gujarat. Dharmakumarsinhji (1955) gave it as a resident in Gujarat and Mt. Abu, but stated that it was a rare winter migrant in Saurashtra, and Girnar was the only area where it was seen from time to time, but it straggled to Barda hills (near Porbandar), to the sea coast, and over the Gir hills as a winter migrant, with no evidence of it being a resident in Saurashtra. It is important to note that there are very few published records of the Black Shaheen from Gujarat since the publication of Dharmakumarsinhji (1955). A recent record of a pair from Khadir, Kachchh (Samant *et al.* 1995) is unusual, as it is a desert area, and there are no recent sightings from Kachchh. It is listed as 'resident (breeding) and local migrant, with few sight records from Gujarat' in the latest checklist of the birds of Gujarat (Ganpule 2016).

Here, we present sightings of the Black Shaheen from Gujarat, from 2005 till 2017, and attempt to describe its current status and distribution in the state.

Sightings

Sightings have been collected from 2005 to 2017 from many areas in Gujarat; mainly Girnar hills, Pavagadh hills, and Jessore hills, to name the main places where there have been multiple sightings. Reports from other areas in Saurashtra and Gujarat are also frequent, with images posted on various birding websites from almost all parts of the state, except Kachchh. We also asked birdwatchers from Gujarat regarding the sightings of Black Shaheen in Gujarat and collected information from all over the state, including sightings posted on the social media. Sightings of Black Shaheen from different locations of Gujarat in last few years are given in Table 1. Also, we have collected records of Black Shaheen rescued (injured or sick birds) from a few places. The locations of rescued birds are also included in the table and all sightings and locations are shown in the accompanying map.

Records of Black Shaheen in Gujarat (2005 to 2017)

Sr. No.	Location	Date	No. of Individuals	Observer(s)	Remarks	Source
1	Morbi	22 October 2005	1	Prasad Ganpule	juvenile	Ganpule 2013
2	Bhaskarpara, Dist. Surendranagar	25 September 2009	1	Gulamahmad Vora	-	<i>pers comm.</i>
3	Wadhwan, Dist. Surendranagar	12 December 2009	1	Devvratsinh Mori	rescue	authors sighting
4	Dasada, Little Rann of Kachchh	04 March 2010	1	Gulamahmad Vora	-	<i>pers comm.</i>
5	Jambugoda, Dist. Vadodara	24 May 2012	1	Rahul Bhatt	calling	<i>pers comm.</i> (photo)
6	Girnar hills, Dist. Junagadh	First sighting on 01 October 2012, then 2/10/12, 04/01/13, 15/01/13, 06/12/14, 01/02/15, 11/04/15, 30/08/15, 06/12/15 [many times in 2016 and 2017]	1 or 2 (a pair)	Ankit Shukla	in flight, chasing vultures (<i>Gyps</i> sp.), hunting, mating (adult pair)	<i>pers comm.</i> (photo)
		27 May 2012	1	Anuj Raina	chasing an OHB*	<i>pers comm.</i> (photo)
		14 December 2014	1	Gaurang Bagda	in flight (adult)	eBird, Bagda 2014
		18 February 2017	2	Nirav Bhatt, Ankit Shukla, Meet Vala	a pair mating (adults)	<i>pers comm.</i> (photo)
7	Deesa, Dist. Banaskantha	2013		Dipesh Rakshit	rescue (adult)	<i>pers comm.</i> (photo)
8	Palanpur City, Dist. Banaskantha	December 2012	1	Krutarth Chauhan	adult, perched on electric pole with prey	<i>pers comm.</i> (photo)
9	Pavagadh hills, Dist. Vadodara	04 June 2013	2	Devvratsinh Mori	in flight (adults)	authors sighting
		07 July 2013	2	Anuj Raina	continuously calling from rock top roost (adult and juvenile)	<i>pers comm.</i> (photo)
		20 March 2017	1	Anil Gohil	calling	<i>pers comm.</i> (photo)
10	Junaraj, Dist. Narmada	17 December 2014	1	Arif Theba	rescue	<i>pers comm.</i> (photo)
11	Jessore Sloth Bear Sanctuary, Dist. Banaskantha	24 January 2015	1	Anuj Raina	roosting and flying	<i>pers comm.</i> (photo)
		20 August 2016, 09 October 2016, 26 November 2016	1	Anuj Raina	roosting, preying on insects (cicadas), chasing IV*	<i>pers comm.</i>

Sr. No.	Location	Date	No. of Individuals	Observer(s)	Remarks	Source
		21 May 2017	3	Nirav Bhatt, Kailash Jani, Dhairya Dixit		<i>pers comm.</i>
12	Shetrunji hills, Dist. Bhavnagar	30 November 2015	2	Viral Joshi	chasing vultures	authors sighting
13	Girimal, Dist. Dang	06 January 2016	1	Mukesh Bhatt	in flight	<i>pers comm.</i>
		23 January 2016	1	Mohan Ram Legha	adult	<i>pers comm.</i> (photo)
14	Ratanmahal, Dist. Dahod	27 May 2016	1	Kartik Upadhyay	chasing vultures	<i>pers comm.</i> (photo)
		25 September 2016	2	Viral Joshi	in flight	authors sighting
15	Vadodara City	07 July 2016	1	Kartik Upadhyay	perched on a water tank (adult)	<i>pers comm.</i> (photo)
		17 July 2016	1	Parul Patel	perched on wire	Patel 2016 (same bird as above)
		14 January 2017	1	Kartik Upadhaya	rescue (juvenile)	<i>pers comm.</i> (photo)
16	Madhuban Dam, Vapi, Dist. Valsad	28 July 2016	1	Pragnesh Patel	in flight	<i>pers comm.</i>
17	Vapi city	2017? Exact date not known	1		perched on a building (adult)	posted on Facebook
18	Vasona Outskirts Dadra & Nagar Haveli	07 August 2016	1	Shashwat Mishra	roosting in a tree (adult)	Mishra 2016
19	Shingola Dam, Gir, Dist. Junagadh	11 September 2016	1	Devendra Chauhan	roosting (adult)	<i>pers comm.</i> (photo)
20	Kevdi, Chhota Udepur, Dist. Panchmahal	24 September 2016	1	Anuj Raina	flying in strong winds and rainfall	<i>pers comm.</i> (photo)
21	Ahmedabad	12 January 2017	1	Rushi Pathak & Gopal Jani	rescue	<i>pers comm.</i> (photo)
22	Vadla Dam, Nalsarovar	11 February 2017	1	Vipul Ramanuj	in flight	<i>pers comm.</i>
23	Sembal Pani, Dist. Sabarkantha	May 2017	1	Krutarth Chauhan	in flight (adult)	<i>pers comm.</i> (photo)
24	Don hill station, Dist. Dang	17 August 2015	1	Pranav Vaghasiya	in flight (adult)	<i>pers comm.</i>
25	Polo Forest, Dist. Sabarkantha	09 May 2016	1	Dhairya Dixit	in flight	<i>pers comm.</i> (photo)
26	Indroda Park, Gandhinagar	06 September 2015	1	Gaurang Shukla	perched (adult)	<i>pers comm.</i> (photo)

*OHB: Oriental Honey Buzzard (*Pernis ptilorhynchus*), IV: Indian Vulture (*Gyps indicus*)

Black Shaheen....

We may have missed some sightings which have not been shared by birdwatchers, but we have tried to collect as many sightings as possible from different locations in Gujarat. Details of multiple sightings from a single location have been given only for Girnar hills, and are not included for locations like Pavagadh and Jessore. The sightings from the Girnar hills are by Ankit Shukla. These sightings are of a resident pair, which is seen regularly in the area, and is being observed and monitored by a group of bird watchers from Junagadh. Other sightings from Pavagadh hills and from Jessore Sanctuary are also of a resident pair, which is seen frequently in the surrounding areas. While it is possible that there may be more than one pair in these areas, there is only one observation of three birds seen at a time, at Jessore, in May 2017 (Nirav Bhatt, *pers comm.*). Isolated sightings from south, central and north Gujarat indicate that some individuals could be resident in these areas too. The sightings from the middle of large cities like Vapi and Vadodara are not surprising as it is 'occasionally observed mainly during winter in densely populated metropolises, such as Mumbai and Bangalore, probably attracted by the plentiful Common Pigeons (*Columba livia*)' (Naoroji 2006). However, it is pertinent to note that the sightings in Vadodara were in July, while the sighting from Palanpur was in December. Thus, it is possible that the Black Shaheen may migrate locally to large cities in search of prey. It is also important to note that the juvenile bird rescued from Vadodara was injured during the kite flying festival (*Makar Sankranti*) in January and its wing was cut, resulting in serious injury (Kartik Upadhaya, *pers. comm.*). This individual survived, but is not able to fly. Hence, the Black Shaheen is also susceptible to injury during this festival.

Breeding

Black Shaheen pairs are mostly sedentary, and hold on to their respective territories throughout the year (Naoroji 2006). Khacher (1996) noted it as breeding in the Girnar hills in

Saurashtra and also at Mt. Abu, but did not give any further details. While there are no direct observations recently of eggs or chicks from Gujarat, there is ample circumstantial evidence to suggest that it could be breeding here in at least the following locations:

Girnar hills: A pair is resident and is being observed in the area since October 2012 and seen at the same site throughout the year. It has been seen and photographed while mating, by Nirav Bhatt, Ankit Shukla and Meet Vala on 18 February 2017. The eyrie of this pair is very difficult to observe and does not allow a direct, visual line of sight of the nest. Further, it is quite inaccessible and prolonged observation is not possible (Ankit Shukla, *pers comm.*). It is strongly suspected that the pair breeds at this eyrie, and the observation of mating shows that the pair could have bred this year too.

Pavagadh hills: A fledged juvenile was heard calling and was being fed by one of the parents at Pavagadh hills on 7 July 2013 (Anuj Raina, *pers. comm.*). The juvenile was photographed and its behaviour was typical of a recently fledged juvenile. There are observations of a resident pair seen in this area all round the year. Two adults, along with two juveniles, were seen and photographed here on 10 June 2017 (Nirav Bhatt and Rahul Bhatt, *pers comm.*). Multiple sightings of this pair have been reported by many birdwatchers from Vadodara, and the sightings of juveniles prove that it is breeding here.

Jessore hills: A pair is resident in this area and seen frequently atop a hill, in Jessore Sloth Bear Sanctuary. It is seen throughout the year in this location. However, there are no observations of its nest or juveniles. But it is suspected that it breeds in the Jessore hills. The eyrie of this pair is located above the nesting area of Indian Vultures, atop a hill, and this eyrie is also extremely difficult to observe for prolonged periods. But, there are records of a pair at this eyrie throughout the year.



Dewrat Mori



Nirav Bhatt

It is possible that it breeds in other locations in south, central and north Gujarat too. Based on the sightings of recently fledged juveniles, it can be said that the Black Shaheen is breeding here in Gujarat. But, direct observations of eggs or chicks from these areas are desirable, and will be useful in knowing the breeding biology of the Black Shaheen here.

Conclusion

Looking at various sight records in the last few years, it can be said that the Black Shaheen is an uncommon to rare resident in Gujarat, in the hilly and forested area of Saurashtra (mainly Girnar hills) and also in the forest area from north to south Gujarat. Occasional records from urban areas show that the Black Shaheen could be dispersing in the surrounding areas in search of prey. The sightings from other locations in Saurashtra indicate that it could be a local migrant, especially in the winter. It is surprising that there are no recent records from Kachchh, but it is possible that it could occur in Kachchh too as a local migrant.



Nirav Bhatt

Though most of the sightings are of single birds or of a pair, it is possible that in a specific area, there is more than one resident pair if the habitat is suitable. Further study, especially of the breeding biology of the Black Shaheen is required, and also, population estimation, threats and habitat preferences need to be assessed in our state.

[We thank Nirav Bhatt for a review of the draft manuscript – Eds]

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Masked Shrike near Vyara: an intriguing first record for India

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Hiren Bharti

The Masked Shrike (*Lanius nubicus*) is a small, pied shrike, breeding from southern Europe to western Iran, and wintering in Africa (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). It has a small breeding range, from the eastern Mediterranean, further east till Iran, and probably in southern Turkmenistan and north-east Afghanistan. All populations are migratory, and mainly winter in sub-Saharan Africa, particularly in the eastern part of the continent in Ethiopia, Sudan and eastern Chad, while a small population winters in SW Arabia (Lefranc & Worfolk 1997, Yosef & ISWG 2017).

The Masked Shrike is not known to occur in India, and it is given as 'possible either as a summer visitor or vagrant on migration to extreme NW of region' (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). There are no records of the species from India, and it is not included in the latest checklists of birds of Gujarat (Ganpule 2016), and the birds of India (Praveen *et al.* 2017).

On 18 December 2016, I was bird watching in the Govaldev area (21° 02' N 73° 22' E) of Kaanjan village, near Vyara (Dist: Tapi, south Gujarat). The habitat is a typical forest. Here, I spotted a shrike which I could not recognise. It had white forehead and supercilium, black crown, and black facial mask over the lores, eyes and ear coverts. It had black mantle and wings, but white scapulars. The underparts were white, with rufous flanks. I could get good views of the bird and I took some photos. I tried to identify it but could not do so. I saw the bird in this area 3-4 times in three weeks, with the last sighting on 8 January 2017, and took more than 45 images. Since I could not identify it, I did not realise the importance of this sighting. I sent the images to a few friends for identification. The images were widely circulated, and it was identified much later in one of the birding groups as a Masked Shrike. I was very surprised when the identification was confirmed. It was very exciting for me to see this bird here.

[The photos show all the diagnostic features of the Masked Shrike and there is no doubt that it is indeed a Masked Shrike. It is probably a male based on its plumage, and its sighting in south Gujarat is

very intriguing. However, it should be noted that the species is prone to vagrancy, with vagrants appearing from time to time outside their breeding and wintering areas, or normal migration routes; individuals have been seen as far west as Libya, in France, Spain, and even in Finland and Sweden, and recently in Germany, Holland and UK (Lefranc & Worfolk 1997, Yosef & ISWG 2017). However, vagrants have not been noted towards the east (in Pakistan or India) of its known range. This sighting in late December and early January is indicative of the bird being a vagrant during late autumn passage. It should be noted that there is a recent record of a Woodchat Shrike (*Lanius senator*), a species with a somewhat similar range and migration route, from Maharashtra, in September 2013 (Nandgaonkar 2013), which was also the first record of that species for India.

Since there was no previous record of the Masked Shrike from India, our editorial board decided to verify and confirm the sighting. Jugal Patel, from Bardoli, and Dr. Sunil Moteria, from Rajkot, checked and confirmed the location and the photos of this bird. As stated by the observer, they saw that there were more than 45 images of this individual taken by the observer, and the original images were checked (EXIF data) and confirmed by them. Hence, there remained no doubt regarding the sighting and it was decided to accept this record. This seems to be an extraordinary case of vagrancy, similar to the record of the Woodchat Shrike from Maharashtra.

The Masked Shrike is an addition to the avifauna of Gujarat, and also India, and is the first documented sighting of the species from the Indian Subcontinent.

We are very thankful to Jugal Patel and Dr. Sunil Moteria for all their help – Eds]

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Jouanin's Petrel in Porbandar: a first record for Gujarat

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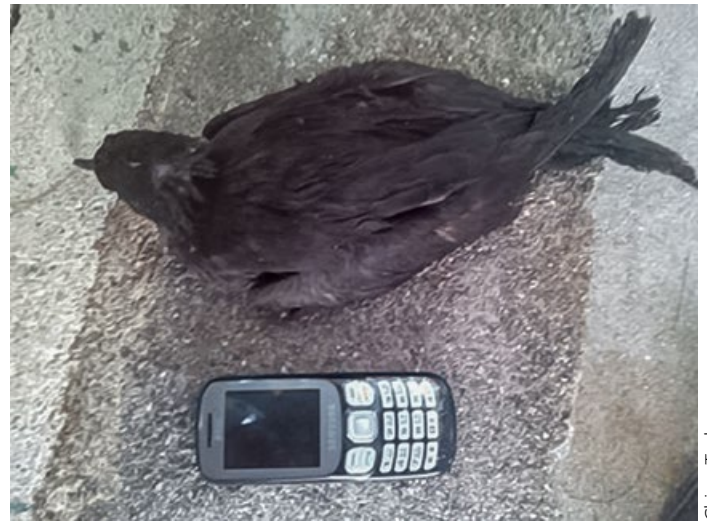
Chirag Tank

The Jouanin's Petrel (*Bulweria fallax*) is a poorly known species of the north-west Indian Ocean, occurring widely offshore in the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Aden and Gulf of Oman, and it is a 'Near Threatened' species due to its moderately small range (BirdLife International 2017). During the summer monsoon (May-September), it congregates off the Socotra archipelago (Yemen), where a breeding colony of at least c.50 pairs was recently discovered, and where c. 3,000 pairs are now estimated to nest locally on mainland cliffs, and also off the Halaaniyaat islands (southern Oman), where too it may nest (BirdLife International 2017). The Jouanin's Petrel is given as a vagrant to Gujarat (Ganpule 2016), and there are a few well documented records from the western and eastern coast of India (Praveen *et al.* 2013).

On 6 October 2014, a petrel was rescued from the Chowpati area (21° 38' 20.61" N, 69° 35' 30.33" E) of Porbandar city by the second author late in the evening. The bird was very lethargic and survived only for an hour. Some bleeding was visible close to the base of the bill and its feathers were faintly oiled. There was no locally strong wind or poor weather to explain its occurrence. The more robust and dipped bill, relatively larger head, paler feathers in the upperwing greater coverts and the attenuated tail helped to identify it as Jouanin's Petrel. We could not tell whether it was a juvenile or an adult.

Regarding the previous record of the Jouanin's Petrel from Gujarat, five individuals were observed together in the Arabian Sea, by Sinclair (1979). This record is treated by Praveen *et al.* (2013) as 'probably not in India but somewhere close to Karachi, Pakistan', while Ganpule (2016) gives it as 'Gulf of Kachchh'. The ship in which the author made the journey, travelled from Mumbai, India, to Karachi, Pakistan, in November 1974, and it seems it did not visit the Gulf of Kachchh, but passed near it, based on the route and daily birding accounts. The above sighting was reported as

'W. of Gulf of Kachchh' (Robertson 1995) and the GPS location reported by Sinclair (1979) is 21° 36' N 63° 47' E, which falls in the Arabian Sea, close to the Murray Ridge, about 300 NM west of the Gulf of Kachchh, en route from Karachi to Mombasa, Kenya. Considering the above details, the current sighting of Jouanin's Petrel in Porbandar is the first record of the species from Gujarat. The earlier record by Sinclair (1979) needs to be removed from the Gujarat list, as the location lies too far away from our coast.



Chirag Tank

Recently, in September 2016, a pelagic birding trip was conducted off the Veraval coast by a team of birders. They sighted one Jouanin's Petrel (along with eight other pelagic bird species), approximately 25 NM in the Arabian Sea (Naik 2016), which was the second record for Gujarat.

[The authors took only three photos of the bird recovered in Porbandar. Unfortunately, they did not measure or preserve the specimen. But, in one of the photos, a mobile phone was kept near the bird to give an indication of the size of the bird. On further inquiry, the authors informed that the mobile phone was a Samsung Metro 313, the dimensions being 112.7 x 46.4 x 13.1 mm. Hence, the length of the phone kept besides the bird was 11.27 cms. Based on this, an indication of the size of the bird could be obtained, which seemed to indicate a bird smaller than a Jouanin's Petrel, with a length of about 26-27 cms and wing 21-22 cms. Hence, we decided to check and confirm the identification of this petrel since the identification of seabirds is difficult and similar 'all dark' petrels needed to be eliminated before this was confirmed as a Jouanin's Petrel.

We sent the images to various experts for their opinion and to confirm the identification of this individual. Michael Brooke, expert on seabirds, stated that wing length seemed to be around 22 cm,

Jouanin's Petrel...

which seemed too long for Bulwer's Petrel (*Bulweria bulwerii*). Also, the pale wing bar was not clearly seen here. Hence, it was difficult to be sure but that it was most probably a Jouanin's Petrel. Nils van Duivendijk stated that this was definitely not a Storm-petrel, but a *Bulweria* sp. and was mostly a Jouanin's Petrel, while Jens Eriksen stated that this was a Jouanin's Petrel.

A detailed reply regarding the identification was received from Robert (Bob) Flood, well known author and sea bird expert. He explained that as pointed out by Hadoram Shirihai (world renowned authority on seabirds), due to the angle of view of the photos, some corrections were necessary regarding the measurements, and with corrections, the total length would be around 30-31 cms and wing 22-23 cms. These measurements fall within the range for a young Jouanin's Petrel. The bill dimensions and the proportionately longer rear end, structure and jizz of head profile, and uniform carpal area were all good for a young Jouanin's Petrel. Thus, this was confirmed as a young Jouanin's Petrel by experts.

Regarding the earlier record from Gujarat by Sinclair (1979), the authors are correct in stating that this record is from the Arabian Sea and does not fall within Indian limits and hence needs to be removed from the Gujarat list. Accordingly, the current record from Porbandar is considered to be the first record of the Jouanin's Petrel for the state.

I thank Robert (Bob) Flood, Michael Brooke, Nils van Duivendijk, Jens Eriksen, Praveen J and Dipu K. for all their help.

I specially thank Hadoram Shirihai, who in spite of his very busy schedule, took the time to help in the identification of this bird and I am very grateful for his help and support – Prasad Ganpule]

Acknowledgements

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Sightings of Bristled Grassbird in South Gujarat

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Jugalkishor Patel

The Bristled Grassbird (*Chaetornis striata*) is a large brown warbler of wet grassland, which is classified as 'Vulnerable' and is endemic to the Indian Subcontinent (BirdLife International 2016). Ali & Ripley (2001) noted it as fairly common in Gujarat, Andhra Pradesh, Bihar and lower Bengal; distributed over most of the Indian Subcontinent as a resident, subject to local movements. Dharmakumarsinhji (1955) also described it as a fairly common and a resident bird, found in grasslands and lakesides in most parts of India and Gujarat. However, Grimmett *et al.* (2011) show only two isolated records for Gujarat.

There were no recent sightings in Gujarat, till it rediscovered after more than 100 years, at Naliya, Kachchh, in 2010 (Bhatt 2010). Thereafter, it was seen and photographed on 24 September 2015 near Amreli (Joshi 2015), and there is a recent record from Rampura grassland, Dahod (Patel & Joshi 2017).

This note describes the recent sightings of the Bristled Grassbird, in south Gujarat, at Untiyadra, Sisodra and Adadara (small villages of Ta: Ankleshwar and Ta: Mangrol of Bharuch District), just about 3 km & 10 km south of Kosamba Railway

Station respectively. The major crops of the entire area, including Untiyadra, are Sugarcane (*Saccharum officinarum*) and Rice (*Oryza sativa*). The area is under the Ukai/Kakrapar irrigation command area.

Details of the Sightings

On 15 July 2015, early in the morning, I visited the area of the pond of my village Untiyadra (21° 30' N, 72° 57' E), in search of the Slaty-breasted Rail (*Gallirallus striata*), which is rare in Gujarat. This place is my favorite and in the past, I have sighted Pied Harrier (*Circus melanoleucos*), Slaty-breasted Rails, Ruddy-breasted Crakes (*Porzana fusca*), Watercocks (*Gallixrex cinerea*), Bitterns (*Ixobrychus* sp.), Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*) etc. here. I waited for more than half an hour for the Rail, but it did not appear. During this time, a noisy and bold bird was constantly calling loudly – a “chwee-chew”, along with a display flight, from a Babool (*Acacia nilotica*) tree nearby. I did not give much attention to the bird, with the impression that it may be a Lark (*Mirafra* sp.), and my main focus was to search for the Rail.

While returning, I took a few photos and recorded a video of this bird from a distance of about 15-20 ft without trying to identify it. The next day, I visited the same place again and successfully saw two Slaty-breasted Rails. Additionally, on that day, the continuously calling bird described above was perched on the same tree and was exhibiting the same behavior. On 22 July 2015, I visited the place again with Yogesh C. Patel and Dr. Pranav Desai for the Rail, and we found the singing bird repeating the same behavior. Pranav Desai took a few photos of this bird.

The following Sunday, I tried to identify this bird on the basis of photographs I had taken. My first impression was that it may possibly be a juvenile Lark. Hence, I checked the photos again, but this bird was slightly bigger than a Lark and also, its bill was thick and black. Thereafter, I checked for Grassbirds, but the map in the field guide shows only one isolated record for South Gujarat (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). Also, Grassbirds are generally skulking, while this bird was very bold. Therefore, without further reference or checking about Grassbirds, I thought this was some common species and forgot about it.

The next year, in 2016, I frequently visited the canal at Sisodra village, about 10 km from Untiyadra, for a survey of Bitterns in our area. On 18 August 2016, I heard the same call of the unidentified bird from the previous year. The call was coming from a grassland near the village. However, I went to search for the Bitterns without stopping to investigate this. Thereafter, I heard the same unidentified bird's call again on 23 August at the same place, and every time, the call reminded me that the bird was yet to be unidentified.

On 28 August, I opened the photographs of this bird from my archives and tried to identify it. The bird seemed to resemble a Bristled Grassbird. However, this species is very rare in Gujarat and not known to occur in south Gujarat. As a result, understanding that further identification would require expert views, I sent the images to Prasad Ganpule and Mukesh Bhatt. Both quickly replied that it was a Bristled Grassbird.

On 3 September, Mukesh Bhatt, Anil Bhardwaj and I visited and spent about half an hour at Sisodra. We could hear the Bristled Grassbird calling continuously but could not see it. Later, I realised that we could not see it as it was calling in flight and the atmosphere that day was cloudy, while we were searching for it in the shrubs and grasses! On the next day, my nephew Moksh Patel, Chinmay Bhatt and I spotted and observed the bird for more than an hour. The bird was continuously giving its characteristic two note call while displaying over the grassland, followed by diving and perching on top of a Neem (*Azadirachta indica*), which was about 20 feet high. I took a few record shots. Anil Bhardwaj, Mukesh Bhatt and I observed the bird in flight and perched on the Neem again on 6 September. On 11 September, two Bristled Grassbirds were seen at the same place. The second bird was 200 mts away from the first bird, with typical territorial flight and call. The bird perched on a Babool every time. The second bird disappeared after two days, while the first was observed up to end of September.

On 15 September, a third bird was sighted at Adadara village of Ankleshwar Taluka. The area was covered with *Desmostachya bipinnata* and was beside an asphalt road. The bird usually perched on *Prosopis juliflora* just 10 ft away from the road. When I visited this place on the morning of 19 September, the ground was flooded up to two feet, due to heavy rain the previous night. Probably its nest/habitat was destroyed due to this flooding and hence, the bird was last seen on this day.

Habitat

The first bird at Untiyadra was found on top of a small Babool. The tree was on a plain grassy ground of approximately five hectare area, with the grass less than one cm high due to daily grazing, barring 2-3 *Prosopis juliflora* and some scattered *Desmostachya bipinnata*, locally called as 'Darbha'. There are Paddy fields behind this and thereafter there is a 'Sim-talavdi' (a small pond) covered with very dense and tall *Typha angustata*. At Sisodra, the bird was found in a 10 hectare uncultivated farm completely covered with 12-15 inch high *Cyperus rotundus* and some patches of *Pennisetum* sp. grass. There were 15-20 medium sized Neem and shrubs forming two boundaries of the farm, and it is surrounded by fish lakes, farms and barren land on which *Prosopis juliflora* grows. At Adadara, the bird was found on a one hectare small ground, covered with 10 inch

Bristled Grassbird...

Desmostachya bipinnata and two *Prosopis juliflora*. The ground was surrounded by a road and sugarcane fields.

Behaviour

The first bird seen at Untiyadra was bold. It was flying in undulating circles for several minutes, emitting its two-note call and then 'parachuting' on top of a Babool, and on a Neem at Sisodra. Its singing continued even when perched atop the tree for a few minutes and then it again started its up-down flight. Probably, it was a territorial and/or display flight. However, at Untiyadra, the Babool is on a plain ground and I have taken photographs of the bird perched on the Babool from a distance of just about 15-20 ft. It did not fly away and continued singing continuously even when I approached near to it. All three birds were flying in undulating circles for several minutes, emitting the two-note call, and then parachute diving on top of the shrub/tree. This typical behavior was observed at all times during the day i.e. in the morning, noon and evening. The birds were bold and did not even get disturbed due to human activity.

Discussion

Earlier this species has been found in Kachchh, Saurashtra and near Dahod, in central Gujarat, in the recent years, and now it has been recorded in south Gujarat. The Bristled Grassbird was seen continuously for three years in Amreli district (Viral Joshi, *pers. comm.*, verbally.) and now for two years in Bharuch district at three different places; hence confirming that it is still widespread in Gujarat. Maybe, it is more common than believed.

The sightings in Kachchh and Saurashtra with nesting material and in Bharuch district in display flight in the monsoon season indicates that the species could be breeding in the state. However, its status as a migrant or a resident is still unclear, because all the sightings were only in the monsoon season. Maybe, it is a resident bird and has remained unrecorded in

other seasons due to its skulking nature. In a study conducted in Nepal, Bristled Grassbirds virtually disappeared from their habitats by the end of October, with no response to call playback from December-March and were not seen in the winter months (Baral *et al.* 2014).

However, for Gujarat, further confirmation is required to ascertain its status as a resident or migrant. These sightings in South Gujarat indicate a wider distribution of this 'Vulnerable' species in our state.

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Eurasian Scops Owl in Bhavnagar district

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Introduction

The Eurasian Scops Owl (*Otus scops*) is a small sized owl. Out of the 16 species of owls recorded in Gujarat, four species are of the genus *Otus*, of which the Indian Scops Owl (*Otus bakkamoena*) and Oriental Scops Owl (*Otus sunia*) are resident, Pallid Scops Owl (*Otus brucei*) is a winter visitor and Eurasian Scops Owl is a vagrant (Ganpule 2016).

There are six races of Eurasian Scops Owl (Holt *et al.* 2017). In India, *O. s. pulchellus* and *O. s. turanicus* are stated as likely to occur, with the species reaching western India during fall (autumn) migration (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). The *pulchellus* race of the Eurasian Scops Owl, which breeds from River Volga, east to Lake Baikal, and south to Altai and Tien Shan mountains, is migratory and winters in Africa, while birds of the race *turanicus*, which breeds up to north-west Pakistan, winter in south Pakistan and probably in western India (Holt *et al.* 2017). For Gujarat, Dharmakumarsinhji (1955) collected a specimen from Bhavnagar, commenting that it is a 'straggler' to Saurashtra, and there is a recent record from Bhavnagar district (Bhil 2016).

Field Characters

The Eurasian Scops Owl is usually greyish in colour (but occurs in grey and brown morphs), with uniform black streaks on crown and mantle, rufous accents on scapulars and over the eyes, and long wings falling over the tail at rest. It is said to be 'not safely distinguishable in the field from Oriental Scops Owl, except by call' (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). In addition to other

features, the Eurasian Scops Owl has 'concentric dark and pale areas at back of head', which could be useful in its separation from the similar Oriental Scops Owl and Pallid Scops Owl (Chandran *et al.* 2016). Its call, a low, short, whistle 'tyew' or 'toow', which is repeated at intervals of every two-three seconds, is diagnostic (Holt *et al.* 2017).



Details of sightings

After being informed by Batuk Bhil about the sighting of an unfamiliar species of owl, we visited the location near Nikol Bandhara (21° 05' N, 71° 51' E), Ta: Mahuva, Dist: Bhavnagar, on 11 October 2016. It is an area with agriculture farms, with scattered trees, and is very near to the sea coast. After an hour's search, we found a small owl roosting on an *Arni* (*Clerodendrum multiflorum*) tree at a height of 10-12 feet. We noted that it was greyish in colour, with notable rufous seen on the scapulars and mantle, which eliminated the possibility of this being a Pallid Scops Owl. It had long wings extending beyond the tail, and the tarsal feathering not extending onto the toes. The underparts were irregularly streaked, with cross barring on the lower belly. During the course of our observations, we heard its call twice - which was a small 'tuuew tuuew'. Thus, we could confidently identify it as a Eurasian Scops Owl, as the call of the Oriental Scops Owl is different. We took many photos, from different angles, to study the plumage of this individual.

As we were aware that there were very few confirmed records of this species in India, and that its status and distribution was still unclear, we made detailed observations, which are given below:

During the day time, it usually roosted in trees at only about 10-12 feet height. Surprisingly, it was not getting disturbed by farmers working nearby, or even by movement of vehicles near it. In one instance, we observed that a tractor passed very close by and shook the whole tree in which it was roosting (due to a gust of wind), but the bird did not get disturbed. After sunset, it used to become active by stretching its wings and preening, and started hunting. Its food mainly consisted of moths and grasshoppers caught in the air and sometimes, small insects caught from tree trunks. It hunted the whole night and in the morning, roosted at the same place. We observed this individual for almost one week, and after that, it was not seen

Recent sightings of Eurasian Scops Owl in Bhavnagar district

No.	Date	Place	No. of birds	Observers
1	20 October 2015	Near Nikol Bandhara, Ta: Mahuva, Dist: Bhavnagar	1	Batuk Bhil (Bhil 2016)
2	11 October 2016	Near Nikol Bandhara, Ta: Mahuva, Dist: Bhavnagar	1	Authors, Batuk Bhil
3	26 October 2016	Near Kalsar village, Ta: Mahuva, Dist: Bhavnagar	2	First author (VJ)

here even after an extensive search. But, we recorded two Eurasian Scops Owls at a new location near Kalsar village, Ta: Mahuva, Dist: Bhavnagar, on 26 October 2016. This location is only about seven kms away from the earlier place. Details of all three recent sightings are given in the table.



Mohan Ram Legha

Discussion

While we are unable to comment on the race seen here, it is pertinent to note that for the consecutive second year, the Eurasian Scops Owl has been recorded at the same place, and during the same period, which suggests that it is possible that Saurashtra falls in its migration route. It spends very few days here during the autumn migration period and so far, no sightings have been reported during the spring migration or at other times (in the winter). We did not record it in these locations later in the winter. Chandran *et al.* (2016) state that the ‘Eurasian Scops Owl, if at all it occurs, may be limited as a rare passage migrant to western India’. While it would not be proper for us to speculate about the distribution of this species in Gujarat based on these three sightings, we can confirm that there is no doubt that it does occur here. It can be said that these sightings indicate that the Eurasian Scops Owl is probably a rare autumn passage migrant in Gujarat and not a winter visitor. But, more data is needed to make any assessment regarding its status here.

The Eurasian Scops Owl might be overlooked due to its similarities with other *Otus* owls. Even though its distinctive call

helps in identification, we observed that it was not very vocal during the time we watched it here. It is possible that during migration, it does not call frequently and is usually silent. This could create problems in correctly identifying it in the field. We request birdwatchers here to look very carefully for this owl in suitable habitat during the autumn migration period.

Acknowledgments

We thank Batuk Bhil for sharing the location of this sighting.

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Indian Blue Robin near Porbandar

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The Indian Blue Robin (*Luscinia brunnea*) {previously known as Indian Blue Chat or Blue Chat (*Erithacus brunneus*) and now also as (*Larvivora brunnea*)} is a small passerine bird that was formerly classified as a member of *Turdidae* (Thrush), but is now considered to be an Old World Flycatcher (*Muscicapidae*). The species has been categorized as Least Concern in the IUCN RedList (BirdLife International 2016). The Indian Blue Robin is a resident and breeds during May-September in the Himalayas, NE India and Myanmar. The Himalayan population winters in south India, around the Western Ghats and Sri Lanka (Grimmett *et al.* 2011).

On the afternoon of 26 November 2016, while birding near Khambhala village (21° 45' N, 69° 47' E) (situated at an elevation 90 mts above sea level), on the outskirts of Barda Wildlife Sanctuary near Porbandar, the first author spotted a bluish bird, similar to a Tickell's Blue Flycatcher (*Cyornis tickelliae*) in the undergrowth of *Prosopis juliflora*. The bird had a distinct white supercilium, which became more visible when the bird came into sunlight, leading to its identification as a male Indian Blue Robin. The bird was observed close to a farm, on the edge of a shallow water habitat. The bird was very active and always on the move, hopping around and digging the soil for insects. The surrounding area was full of human activities but the bird was searching for insects, oblivious of the traffic. We observed the same individual at three different locations in the undergrowth of *P. juliflora* and *Bougainvillea* sp;

two of the locations were very close to the waterhole. The bird remained silent during the observation period. We could not observe it on our second visit at the same place on the next morning. But, a male Indian Blue Robin was reported from Sasan Gir, near Junagadh (about 175 km away from the current location) three days later, on 29 November, by Abhilash Vaja and Dinesh Sadiya while they were on a birding trip (*pers. comm.*).



Distribution of the Indian Blue Robin in Gujarat

Salim Ali did not report the Indian Blue Robin in Gujarat (Ali 1955). The Indian Blue Robin (a female) was first recorded at Hingolghadh in September in the early 1990s (Khachar 1996). The reference books give only one isolated passage migration record for Gujarat (Kazmierczak 2000, Grimmett *et al.* 2011). But, there are several records from Gujarat. The species was sighted at Dang in February 2007, Mandavi – Surat in March 2011, Madhavpur in November 2012 and Junagadh in March & April 2013 (Mashru 2014). There is also a record from Thol, near Ahmedabad, in March 2012 (Trivedi 2012).

It is possible that the species could occur as a spring and autumn passage migrant in Gujarat where there is suitable habitat but, as of now, the Indian Blue Robin is best regarded as a vagrant, until further observations.

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Calling behaviour of Small Buttonquail in breeding season

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Milan Bharad

On 30 August 2015, at around 17:45 hrs, we saw a Small Buttonquail (*Turnix sylvaticus*) giving booming calls in the grassland of Khirasara vidi, near Rajkot. In this species, the females are larger than the males; they are dominant and known to be polyandrous (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). The ordinary call-note is a soft booming sound, which is ventriloquial in character, and usually uttered by the female. It attracts the male, whom she courts, turning and twisting and posturing. The females are very pugnacious and fight amongst themselves fiercely for the possession of the male (Whistler & Kinnear 1949).

While the call of the Small Buttonquail is frequently heard in the grasslands of Saurashtra in the monsoon season, we could not find photographic observations of the female uttering

the call in the wild. We observed that the female fluffed up its body, with a noticeable protuberance of the nape (hindneck), which can be seen from the photograph given here, and gave a series of booming calls, which were repeated. These calls are given during the breeding period of the birds, which is in the monsoon season in Saurashtra. Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) describe that the 'polyandrous female booms with fluffed-out plumage'. This is similar to what we observed here, but the hindneck was visibly more fluffed-out while calling. This raises an interesting question; is the fluffed up nape a subtle visual display or is it a physical requirement for uttering the call? It is well known that in many bird species, the song is often accompanied by a visual display, ranging from simple adjustment of feather posture to complex and dramatic display of plumage. We are not aware whether the fluffed-out nape in the Small Buttonquail is a visual display and this is not described in literature either. Studying songs and calls of birds is very interesting, and is helpful in understanding bird behaviour and ecology.

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Status of Blue-capped Rock Thrush in Girnar Wildlife Sanctuary

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Gaurang Bagda

The Blue-capped Rock Thrush (*Monticola cinclorhynchus*) is a species of the Chat family, which breeds in the Himalayas and winters in the Western Ghats (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). In Gujarat, Ali (1955) collected specimens from the Dang

forest, and found it in small numbers in the area, and stated that it was not recorded in north Gujarat, Saurashtra and Kachchh. It is shown as a winter visitor to south Gujarat, with an isolated record from Saurashtra (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). We present records of the Blue-capped Rock Thrush from Girnar Wildlife Sanctuary (henceforth Girnar WLS) and discuss its status. The Girnar WLS (21° 30' N 70° 32' E) is located in the Junagadh district. It is a sub-tropical forest, with areas of scrub in between. There are a few rivers in the area, some of which are perennial.

On 11 December 2016, during our survey of birds in the southern part of Girnar WLS, we saw and photographed a male Blue-capped Rock Thrush. We have seen this species regularly for the last three years in the sanctuary. We also collected records of the species from the Girnar WLS from birdwatchers. The list of records is presented below in table.

No.	Date	Locations in Girnar WLS	Observer	No. of individuals	Remarks
1	23 March 2014	Fatel Khodiyar	Prasad Ganpule	1	female
2	22 December 2015	Kashmiri bapu Ashram	Naman Doshi	2	male & female
3	26 December 2015	Kashmiri bapu Ashram	Second Author	1	male
4	29 December 2015	Kashmiri bapu Ashram	Naman Doshi	1	male
5	02 January 2016	Kashmiri bapu Ashram	Naman Doshi	2	male & female
6	15 January 2016	Kashmiri bapu Ashram	Second Author	1	male
7	20 January 2016	Kashmiri bapu Ashram	Second Author	1	female
8	24 January 2016	Kashmiri bapu Ashram	Ankit Shukla	1	female
9	24 January 2016	Jatashankar Temple	Viral Joshi	1	female
10	27 January 2016	Kashmiri bapu Ashram	Second Author	1	male
11	10 February 2016	Bordevi Temple	First Author	2	male
12	11 February 2016	Kashmiri bapu Ashram	Second Author	1	female
13	23 February 2016	Kashmiri bapu Ashram	Second Author	2	male & female
14	28 February 2016	Velnath	Naman Doshi	1	male
15	03 March 2016	Asaiba Pir	First Author	1	male
16	11 December 2016	Fatel Khodiyar	First Author	1	male

A few of the sightings are probably of the same individuals, as they were seen in a small area for a few weeks. During our surveys in the foothills of Girnar, the Blue-capped Rock Thrush was always seen in forested areas, near streams or waterholes. It has been recorded in six different locations in Girnar WLS. It is seen in small numbers – with either single individuals or pairs noted. Our observations indicate that the Blue-capped Rock Thrush is seen from early December till late March. Hence, it can be said that the Blue-capped Rock Thrush is an uncommon, but regular, winter visitor to the Girnar WLS.

Acknowledgments

We are thankful to Ankit Shukla for his help during fieldwork and to Prasad Ganpule, Viral Joshi and Naman Doshi for sharing their observations.

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Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher from Surat, South Gujarat

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I am a teacher at the Industrial Training Institute, Majura Gate, Surat, which is situated besides one of the busiest roads in the middle of the city. On 5 November 2016, when I was teaching, some students informed me that an unknown bird had flown into the classroom through the window, and crashed into the fan. Immediately, I went to rescue the bird, but it was dead. As per information received from the students, a Crow (*Corvus* sp.) was attacking the bird and hence it rushed in the classroom. I took some photos and later, it was identified as an Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher (*Ceyx erithaca*) by my friends.

This sighting is the fourth of the species for Gujarat. Earlier, an Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher was recorded at Ahmedabad in June 2013, and at Vansada National Park, in Dang, on 14 June 2014 (Jat 2015). It was seen again in Dang in June 2016 (Vishal Mistri & M. U. Jat, *in print*). All the three previous records were in the monsoon season, while this individual was found in early winter. Hence, it is a significant record. It is possible that the species moves through Gujarat in June, as it disperses northwards during its breeding season in the monsoon and later, returns southwards to its known range in the Western Ghats (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). This sighting of a forest dwelling species like the Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher from the middle of a large city like Surat is very surprising.

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Caspian Plover in Kachchh

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Jaysukh Parekh

The Caspian Plover (*Charadrius asiaticus*) breeds in Central Asia and winters in eastern and southern Africa (Wiersma *et al.* 2017). It is a long distance migrant and there are only a few isolated records of this species from India (Grimmett *et al.* 2011).

On 17 October 2016, I went for birdwatching and photography in Banni area, Kachchh, when I saw a group of 5 to 7 birds, which were new for me. I took photographs and I was sure that I had not seen it earlier. After checking reference books and photographs on the internet, I identified them as Caspian Plovers (*Charadrius asiaticus*). The Caspian Plover can be easily confused with Greater Sand Plover (*Charadrius leschenaultii*) in the field and good photographs and proper views are needed to confirm its identity. The Caspian Plovers were seen from 17 October 2016 till 24 October 2016.

The birds were foraging in an area with very short, dry grass with scattered small plants. The ground was wet in certain parts as there was a lake around one km away from the place where the birds were feeding. They were foraging within a distance of 5 to 10 mtrs. They were seen feeding along with Greater Short-toed Larks (*Calandrella brachydactyla*) and were not concerned by the cattle there. However, when disturbed, the Caspian Plovers flew away with a fast, erratic flight and went far.

I observed the feeding method of these birds. They used the typical stop-run-peck foraging behaviour seen in *Charadrius* plovers, running rapidly and stopping only when prey is located (Wiersma *et al.* 2017). Here, they were observed feeding

on invertebrate prey almost 3-4 inches underground. The birds used to locate the prey and then use their sharp beaks to dig into the ground and catch it. The prey here was probably Snails and also insects. A short video of its feeding behaviour can be seen at: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=q7PcEhk9IR8>.

On 1 March 2017, I went to the same area again with my son Nirav. At around 10:00 hrs, two Caspian Plovers flew in to the area and started to forage. I was surprised to see that one bird was in almost full breeding plumage and the other was in non breeding plumage. I got good photos of the birds. They were foraging in cattle dung, searching for insects. I went to the area again on 2 and 4 March 2017, but was unable to find the birds again.

I had visited this area many times between October 2016 and March 2017, but did not see the Caspian Plovers. So it seems that the birds stayed here only for a few days in October and for a day in March, indicating that the species could be an autumn and spring passage migrant. This was my first sighting of the Caspian Plover in Kachchh, and it was very exciting.

[There are four previous records of the Caspian Plover from Gujarat; from Chhari-Dhandh in Kachchh in February 2007 (Sorensen & Tiwari 2009), Little Rann of Kachchh in January 2008 (Deomurari 2009), Jamnagar in February 2009 (Patel 2009) and Little Rann of Kachchh in November 2014 (Shah Jahan, eBird). The individual in Jamnagar was seen for more than one month at the same location and photographed by many bird watchers. The previous records from Gujarat are from the winter months, while the above records are from the passage migration season. More sightings will help in understanding the status of this species in Gujarat. Hence, birdwatchers are requested to look out for the Caspian Plover here and send their sightings – Eds]

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Sighting of Moustached Warbler, Red-throated Pipit and Grasshopper Warbler in the Little Rann of Kachchh

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I present here sight records of Moustached Warbler (*Acrocephalus melanopogon*), Red-throated Pipit (*Anthus cervinus*) and Grasshopper Warbler (*Locustella naevia*) from the Little Rann of Kachchh. All the above records are from the western part of Little Rann of Kachchh. There is a large area with reeds in this part of the Rann. The reeds have grown due to the leakage of water from the Narmada canal nearby, and have developed in the last ten years. The area with reeds and grasses is now quite large, and covers more than one sq. km. It is located at the edge of the Rann.

Moustached Warbler

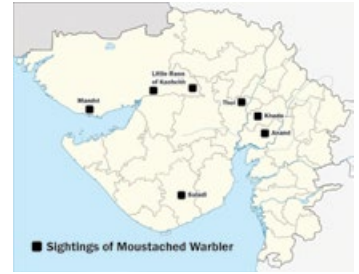
It is mainly a winter visitor to north and northwestern India (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). There are only two isolated records of Moustached Warbler shown for Gujarat in Kazmierczak (2000) and Grimmett *et al.* (2011), while Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) do not show any record for Gujarat. These two previous records are as follows: a record from Sihor, near Bhavnagar by W. Koelz and a record of six birds trapped in Wanoti, near Mandvi, Kachchh by a BNHS/WHO migration study team, and it is stated that 'it is not an uncommon winter visitor to kachchh [=kutch], but escapes notice in the thick reed beds it frequents' (Shivraj Kumar 1961).



Prasad Ganpule

On 14 January 2016, at the edge of the reeds, I saw a Moustached Warbler. It was identified by its broad white supercilium (which is broader behind the eye), long pointed blackish bill, streaked upperparts, blackish sides of crown and by its distinctive habit of cocking its tail. Though seen well, I was able to take only a record photograph, which is given here. It was also calling frequently and its call was a loud 'tchat'.

There have been sightings of Moustached Warbler in Gujarat in the last few years. These sightings are posted on the website 'ebird.org'. A total of six sightings are reported. These are as follows: from Kheda and Anand Districts (Deomurari 2014a, 2015, Dalvi 2015), from Thol Bird Sanctuary (Naik 2014), from Saladi, Dist: Amreli (Deomurari 2014b) and from the Little Rann of Kachchh (Prince 2004). A photograph of a Moustached Warbler from Kheda, taken on 14 January 2015, is posted on the website www.wildart.in. However, there are no photographs of this warbler from Gujarat on popular birding websites like Oriental Bird Images, India nature watch and Internet Bird Collection.



Looking at the records of Moustached Warbler from Gujarat in the past few years, it seems it is not rare. It is possible that since it is shy and skulking, there are very few reports of its sightings/photographs from Gujarat. It is also possible that it is misidentified since it is similar to the Paddyfield Warbler (*Acrocephalus agricola*). Hence this warbler should be looked out for in suitable habitats, like areas with reeds/tamarisk.

Red-throated Pipit



Prasad Ganpule

There are very few records of the Red-throated Pipit from Gujarat, with recent records only from Kachchh (Deomurari 2009, Varu & Varu 2016). On 21 March 2017, a Red-throated Pipit pair was seen and photographed in this part of Little Rann

of Kachchh. The birds were almost in full breeding plumage, with red throat and upper breast, and only few black streaks remaining on the belly. It was surprising to note a pair in late March and almost in full breeding plumage, as the previous records are from early winter.



Prasad Ganpule



Prasad Ganpule

Grasshopper Warbler



Prasad Ganpule

On 26 February 2017, two Grasshopper Warblers were seen and photographed in the reeds. The birds were moving in the reeds and grass, and came out to perch on a dried *Prosopis juliflora* tree for a few seconds. On another trip to the same area on 5 March 2017, three individuals were noted and on

26 March 2017, a total of four individuals were seen. I could get good images and the birds were readily identified based on the typical plumage (streaked upperparts, plain yellowish underparts with streaking confined to the flanks, large bill, and typical *Locustella* structure). It is interesting to note that the birds were seen here for more than one month, and it is possible that these were winter visitors to the area. There have been many recent records of the Grasshopper Warbler from Saurashtra; from Amreli (Joshi 2015), Porbandar (V. Zala, reported in this issue) and near Dwarka (*pers. observation*). It seems that the Grasshopper Warbler is more common than believed and is probably overlooked.

This area in the Little Rann of Kachchh harbours good populations of Graceful Prinia (*Prinia gracilis*), many species of Pipits (*Anthus* sp.) and other birds. Though the reeds were not there earlier and have developed recently, the bird life has definitely become richer. This change in habitat (for this small area) is very interesting and further observations are required to study its long term impact on the bird life here.

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Observation of Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush in Kachchh

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birdwatchers. It was identified as a female Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush.



The Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush (*Monticola saxatilis*), formerly Common Rock Thrush or Rock Thrush, is a Chat belonging to the family Muscicapidae. It was formerly placed in the family Turdidae. It breeds in southern Europe, across Central Asia to northern China. This species is strongly migratory, with all populations wintering in Africa, south of the Sahara (Collar & Bonan 2017).

On 23 September 2015, we went birding near Karaghogha village (22° 57' 1.99" N 69° 41' 14.72" E) of Mundra Taluka, Kachchh, when we saw a bird perched on a tree, at around 11:00 hrs. We initially identified it as a female Blue Rock Thrush (*Monticola solitarius*), but after taking some photos and referring to the field guide (Grimmett *et al.* 2011), we concluded that it was a Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush. We further confirmed its identity by sending the images to senior

We observed this individual for one week, as it remained in the same area. It was seen in a scrub forest, in an area dominated by *Zizyphus nummularia* (locally called as *Bor*). We observed this bird perching on *Acacia nilotica* (locally called as *Baval*) and *Prosopis cineraria* (locally called as *Khijado*). It was continually hunting for insects and made short sallies from its perch. It was not seen after one week and presumably had moved on to its wintering grounds.

The Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush is a passage migrant in India (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). On studying the records of the species from southern, and western India (Balar *et al.* 2016), five recent records are from Kachchh. While all records are from the autumn passage migration season, interestingly, only one record is from February (Mishra 2015), indicating early spring migration. All the records from Gujarat are listed in table.

Records of Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush from Gujarat

No	Observers	Date	Place	Remarks
1	R. D. Jadeja, Kavi Tej	October 1998	Naliya, Kachchh	Jadeja & Shah 2007
2	R. D. Jadeja, Kavi Tej	October 2000	Naliya, Kachchh	Jadeja & Shah 2007
3	R. D. Jadeja, Kavi Tej	October 2002	Naliya, Kachchh	Jadeja & Shah 2007
4	Veer Vaibhav Mishra	4 February 2015	Banni Grassland, Kachchh	Mishra 2015
5	Dilipsinh Chudasama & Akshit Suthar	23 September 2015	Mundra, Kachchh	author's sighting

It was interesting to note that this individual was seen for one week in the same area. It is possible that it may remain in suitable habitat, before resuming its migration. Thus, suitable sites in Kachchh may act as stop-over sites for the species during migration. But, this can only be proved if there are more observations from Kachchh in the future.

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Bar-winged Flycatcher-Shrike in Vansada National Park

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Devvrat Mori

The Bar-winged Flycatcher-Shrike (*Hemipus picatus*) is a resident species, with three races occurring in India and Sri Lanka (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). It is resident in the Himalayas, Western and Eastern Ghats and central India (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). For Gujarat, Ali (1955) and Worah (1991), reported the species from the Dang district, but Singh *et al.* (2000) did not record it from the nearby Vansada National Park. This species was seen only once, on a transect in Bhenskatri range in Purna Wildlife Sanctuary, on 23 June 2002 (Trivedi & Soni 2006). It is given as an uncommon resident in south Gujarat (Ganpule 2016).

On 28 December 2016, during a birding trip in Vansada National Park in Dang district (20° 51' 16" - 21°21' 22" N & 73° 20' 30" - 73° 31' 20"E) we saw and photographed a Bar-winged Flycatcher-Shrike in a Teak (*Tectona grandis*). It was hunting for insects from its perch. We were able to take only one photograph from long distance but saw it very clearly and identified it conclusively.

We asked other birdwatchers regarding the occurrence of the species in Gujarat. We gathered a few records of the Bar-winged Flycatcher-Shrike from Gujarat, which are given in the table.

No.	Place	Date	No. of Birds	Observer	Source
1	Purna WLS, Dist. Dang	23 June 2002	1	Pranav Trivedi & V. C. Soni	Tridevi & Soni (2006)
2	Devsar, Bilimora, Dist. Navsari	26 December 2006	1	Mohammed Jat	<i>pers. comm.</i>
3	Zavda, Vaghai, Dist. Dang	09 December 2011	1	Mukesh Bhatt	<i>pers. obsv.</i>
4	Shoolpaneshwar WLS, Dist. Narmada	09 March 2012	2	Viral Joshi	<i>pers. obsv.</i>
5	Purna WLS, Dist. Dang	06 February 2016	3	Surendra Gohil	<i>eBird</i>
6	Bardipada, Dist. Dang	05 March 2016	2	Nikhil Mori	<i>pers. comm.</i>
7	Vansada National Park, Dist. Dang	26 December 2016	1	first authors' sighting	<i>pers. obsv.</i>

These records show that the Bar-winged Flycatcher-Shrike is not very common and there are only a few records of the species recently from south Gujarat.

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Short Birding Notes



Black-winged Cuckooshrike in Vansada National Park

I visited Vansada National Park, in Dang District, on 27 November 2016, with my friends Anand Patel and Pragnesh Patel. At around 10:00 hrs, we saw and photographed an unfamiliar bird near the first watch tower, which we could not identify. We took some photographs and I shared the photos on social media for identification. It was identified as a Black-winged Cuckooshrike (*Coracina melaschistos*) based on the dark grey head and body, black wings, short stubby bill and dark legs, features which separates it from the similar Grey-bellied Cuckoo (*Cacomantis passerinus*). There is only one previous record of the Black-winged Cuckooshrike from Gujarat; a bird was seen in the Shoolpaneshwar Wildlife Sanctuary in March 2015 (Bhatt *et al.* 2015). Hence, this is the second record for Gujarat.

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Indian Blackbird in Kachchh

On 23 November 2014, I decided to explore Chadva Rakhhal (23°09'08"N, 69°28'36"E), situated around 25 Kms from Bhuj, on the Nakhrana Road, in Kachchh District. I observed a bird, looking like a Common Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*) from a distance, searching for insects on the ground. On a closer look, I noted that it was different. I took some photos and shared them with other birdwatchers for identification. It was identified as an Indian Blackbird (*Turdus merula simillimus*) by senior birdwatchers. This is probably the first record of the species from Kachchh, as it is not shown to occur in Kachchh (Grimmett *et al.* 2011).

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Grey-headed Fish Eagle in Vansada National Park

I visited Vansada National Park, Dang district, on 12 April 2017, with my wife Panchali and friend Devasish Jadia. In the Bharadi area of the park, we saw a large eagle perched on a tree near the water body at around 09:00 hrs. We took a few photos, including flight images. It was identified as an adult Grey-headed Fish Eagle (*Ichthyophaga ichthyæetus*) by its grey-brown head and upperparts and white belly. The diagnostic black sub-terminal tail band was also clearly seen and photographed. The Grey-headed Fish Eagle is a vagrant to Gujarat, with recent sightings from Mandvi, Surat in January 2006 and near Morbi in November 2007 (Ganpule 2007). Thus, this sighting comes after almost 10 years and is an important record for the state.

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Richard's Pipit near Mendarda, Gir

A Richard's Pipit (*Anthus richardi*) was seen and photographed on the outskirts of Mendarda, near Sasan Gir, on 25 March 2017. It was perched on the electric wire and I could get good photos, which showed all the characteristic features of the species; the long hind claw, prominent breast streaking, larger size, thicker (Thursh-like) bill and the bird gave its typical 'scrheep' call when it flew off. The status of Richard's Pipit in Gujarat is uncertain, and it is given as rare or vagrant, with only three sightings reported earlier from Gujarat (Ganpule 2016). This photographic record confirms the presence of the Richard's Pipit in Gir.

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Pallid Scops Owl in Gir

A Pallid Scops Owl (*Otus brucei*) was photographed near Haripur Village, in Sasan Gir, on 28 January 2017 at around 01:00 hrs. It was easily identified as this species due to its pale grey plumage, with finely streaked grey underparts. It was perched, and so I could take good photos. The Pallid Scops Owl is an uncommon to rare winter visitor to Gujarat, with sightings mainly from Kachchh and Saurashtra (Ganpule 2016). This is the first time I had noted the Pallid Scops Owl in Gir.

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Oriental Scops Owl near Dhari, Amreli District

An Oriental Scops Owl (*Otus sunia*) was photographed on the outskirts of Dalkhaniya Village, near Dhari, Amreli District, on 22 November 2015 at around 18:45 hrs. The owl was identified as a rufous morph Oriental Scops Owl, as it had a rufous head and upper breast, and heavily marked underparts. There is a recent record of an Oriental Scops Owl from Bhad Village, in Amreli District, in January 2016 (Bhaliya & Kotadiya 2016), but it is rare in this area.

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Heuglin's Gull preying on Black-winged Stilt's egg in Porbandar

On 3 April 2014, I visited Porbandar Bird Sanctuary. At around 16:00 hrs, I observed an incident of a Heuglin's Gull (*Larus heuglini*) preying on the eggs of a Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*). A Heuglin's Gull came to a small mound in the lake where the Black-winged Stilt had a nest with eggs. The gull picked one egg in its beak, ate it and flew away. The Black-winged Stilt pair attempted mobbing the gull, but failed. This shows the opportunistic feeding behavior of the Heuglin's Gull.

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Sightings of Black-capped Kingfisher at Nalsarovar and Gir

Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary: A Black-capped Kingfisher (*Halcyon pileata*) was seen at Varniya lake of Kayla village, about 3 km from Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary, on 10 April 2014, at around 08:00 hrs. This was my first sighting of this bird in Nalsarovar. I observed that it was catching food in the shallow water of the lake and it was extremely wary. There are previous records from Nalsarovar (Rank & Parasharya 2005), but it is uncommon here.

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Gir National Park: A Black-capped Kingfisher (*Halcyon pileata*) was seen and photographed in Gir National Park, on 15 April 2017. There are no recent records of this species from Gir NP (Rank & Parasharya 2005). But, it has been noted recently in Girnar Wildlife Sanctuary in March 2014 (Shulka & Vadolia 2014), which is not far from Gir NP.

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Bar-winged Flycatcher Shrike in Vansada National Park

I went to Vansda National Park on 5 February 2017 with Pragnesh Patel. We saw and photographed a Bar-winged Flycatcher Shrike (*Hemipus picatus*) in the canopy of a large tree. I managed to take some photos before the bird flew away. The Bar-winged Flycatcher Shrike is rare in Vansda National Park and this sighting was the second sighting from this area recently as one individual was seen in late December 2016 by Devvratsinh Mori and others.

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Grasshopper Warbler near Porbandar

On 4 December 2016, I visited Gosabara wetland (also known as Mokarsagar wetland) near Porbandar. Late in the evening, I saw and photographed a Grasshopper Warbler (*Locustella naevia*) there. It was identified by its typical streaked upperparts and face pattern. The Grasshopper Warbler is generally uncommon here, with recent records near Amreli (Joshi 2015). This was the first time I had noted it in Porbandar. I wish to thank Ashok Mashru for helping with the identification.

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Unusual feeding behaviour of Blue Rock Thrush in Rajkot

In March 2014, a Blue Rock Thrush (*Monticola solitarius*) was observed by me eating 'gathiya' (a deep fried Indian snack made from 'besan' or chickpea flour) offered by people near Raiya road in Rajkot city area regularly. In Gujarat, one can observe many species of birds feeding on *gathiya*. The culture of feeding wild birds is prevalent in many parts of the state and the birds have become habituated to this. The food of the Blue Rock Thrush consists principally of insects and skinks, but fruits, berries and seeds are also eaten (Ali & Ripley 1998). However, this was the first time I had seen this species eating *gathiya* here.

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Jerdon's Leafbird in Ahmedabad

On 15 January 2017, I visited The Serenity Library and Botanical Garden in Ahmedabad city with my niece Zoya and her parents. While walking towards the library building, I saw a green bird which appeared to be a Green Bee-eater (*Merops orientalis*) at first glance, but was different. Two of my birder friends, Haseeb Shaikh and Sagirahmed Khan, who were also present at the premises, photographed the bird. It was identified as a Jerdon's Leafbird (*Chloropsis jerdoni*). It was seen again on 17 January 2017 by Shailesh Patel at the same location. This sighting of Jerdon's Leafbird from central Gujarat is interesting, and this was the first time we had seen it here in Ahmedabad.

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Sightings of Forest Wagtail at Pariej Lake and Jamnagar

I visited Pariej Lake (20° 32' 58" N, 72° 37' 32" E), in Anand District, with Ujjwal Trivedi, Brijesh Parikh & Rajiv Bhatti for birding on 19 February 2017. I reached a little earlier than the others, at around 15:00 hrs. I immediately started birding in a patch full of trees between the main entrance gate and the tents erected at the camp site. I spotted a Forest Wagtail (*Dendronanthus indicus*) moving on the ground and photographed it. It was easily identified due to its distinct plumage. This was the first time we had seen a Forest Wagtail at Pariej Lake.

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On 24 January 2016, between 11:30 to 13:00 hrs, we saw and photographed one Forest Wagtail (*Dendronanthus indicus*) in the Ranjit Sagar Dam area, Jamnagar. This place is on the outskirts of Jamnagar and it is a well wooded area. We saw one bird at that time. The second author visited the same place in the evening at around 17:00 hrs and saw and photographed two individuals. The Forest Wagtail has been recorded in Jamnagar earlier (Varu *et al.* 2005, 2008, Das 2013) but it is rare here.

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Sightings of Lesser Florican in the winter in Velavadar

On 14 January 2014, I was in Velavadar National Park, Bhavnagar District, for bird watching. Along with local guide Ramzan, we saw a bird, which was camouflaged in the grass near a waterhole. On a closer approach, the bird came out of the grass and flew away. I could get a few photos and we were surprised to see that it was a Lesser Florican (*Sypheotides indicus*). A Lesser Florican was photographed again on 26 February 2017 in Velavadar by Niket Chaudhari. Though the Lesser Florican is known to be a regular monsoon migrant to Velavadar, these records in the winter months are interesting and suggest that a few individuals possibly remain in the area throughout the year.

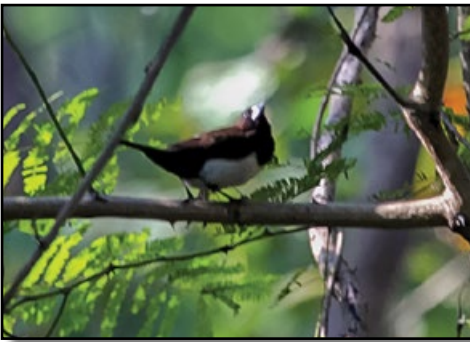
Sunil Moteria : Rajkot. drsunilmoteria@gmail.com



Olive-backed Pipit in Girnar Wildlife sanctuary

On 27 March 2013, while visiting Girnar Wildlife Sanctuary, I was observing birds at around 13:30 hrs, near an artificial water tank, filled up by a windmill installed by the forest department, near Bordevi. The water was overflowing and surrounding area was damp, grassy and having many insects. I photographed a bird walking on the ground. It was identified as an Olive-back Pipit (*Anthus hodgsoni*) on the basis of its greenish plumage and distinctive black & white spots on rear ear coverts. The Olive-backed Pipit is rare in Gujarat, with isolated records from a few places (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). This sighting confirms its presence in the Girnar Wildlife Sanctuary.

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White-rumped Munia in Vansada National Park

On 24 December 2016, I visited Vansada National Park, in Dang district, with my friends Mitul Desai, Raj Desai, and Hemal Desai for birdwatching. While entering the Bharadi area of the national park, I saw four White-rumped Munia (*Lonchura striata*). Due to some disturbance, the birds flew away and we could not take good photographs, but I took a record shot anyway. This was my first sighting of the species from Vansada, though it has been reported from this area earlier by Mukesh Bhatt (Bhatt 2010). But, it is generally uncommon here.

Mohammed Jat : Atul, Dist. Valsad. mohammed796@rediffmail.com

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Book Review

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

Title: Robins and Chats – 688 pp

Author: Peter Clement and Chris Rose

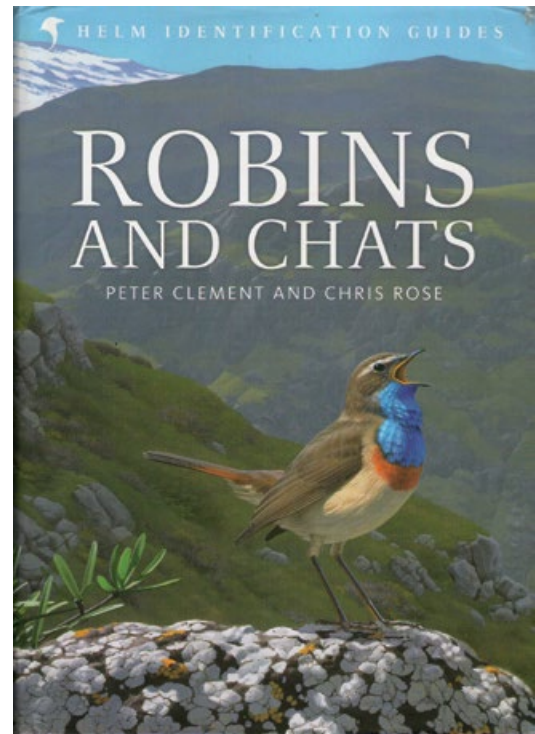
Publisher: Christopher Helm, London. 2015

This is a voluminous book, under the 'Helm Identification Guides' series, on Robins and Chats. The author, Peter Clement, has previously written books under this series like 'Thrushes' (Helm Identification Guides, 2000) and 'Sparrows and Finches' (Helm Identification Guides, 2011). This is the latest in the series by the author and covers a total of 175 species. These species are of interest to many birders and photographers, and include some stunningly beautiful and many sought after and skulking species.

The format of the book is an introduction, followed by a chapter on how to use the book, a detailed chapter on taxonomy and systematics by Per Alström, then 62 stunning colour plates painted by artist Chris Rose, and finally, the detailed species accounts. The chapter on taxonomy explains the advancements made in DNA study in the last few years, resulting in revised classifications. The taxonomic treatment followed in this book is in line with the current understanding for the group, and it is acknowledged that except for a few notable cases, the species level taxonomy is generally stable. However, as explained by the author, the treatment for Common Stonechat is maybe too conservative, as it is retained as a single highly variable species, albeit with three distinct groupings; European, Siberian and African Stonechats. The author acknowledges that comprehensive reviews of the present species limits are required for Oriental Magpie-Robin and White-rumped Shama, which could be of interest for Indian bird watchers in the future.

The detailed species account covers field identification, similar species, voice, habitat, behaviour, breeding, status and distribution, movements, description, geographical variation, moult, measurements and taxonomy. Thus, each species is detailed in this format and it results in a thorough treatment for each species. That this is a very comprehensive work, which is fully referenced, becomes apparent when referring to the bibliography, which is of 23 pages. This includes the latest published data, for ex., the recent records of the Indian Blue Robin from Gujarat (article in *Indian BIRDS* by BCSG member Ashok Mashru) are included in the text for that species.

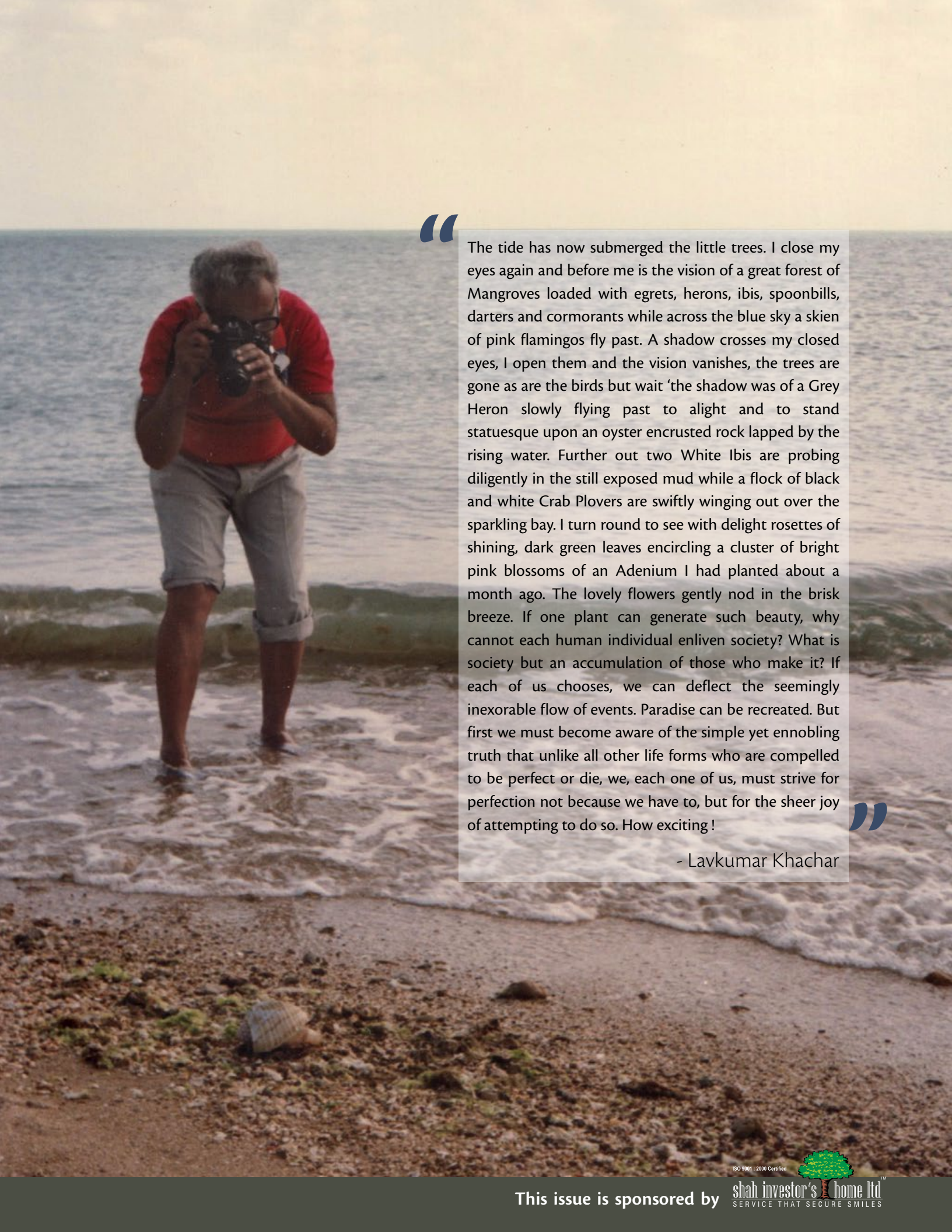
Though the book lists many species which do not occur in India, there is still enough for the Indian bird watcher. Many enigmatic species like Shortwings, Cochoas, Rubythroats, Forktails, etc are beautifully illustrated, have detailed species accounts, and the photographs are also quite good. The many Himalayan species in this book will be of interest for birders



and photographers from India. The illustrations for both the Siberian Rubythroat and the Himalayan Rubythroat are superb. The Bluethroat merits ten illustrations, including one illustration of the adult tail pattern.

Of particular interest for Gujarat are the species accounts of Wheatears. Of the 22 Wheatear species given in the book, six species have been noted in Gujarat, and the field identification of this group is quite challenging. The tail patterns are illustrated for each species and along with the illustrations, photographs are also given. The description for adults (male and female) and juveniles is exhaustive and will certainly help in field identification. The level of detailing in this book can be judged by the fact that an entire plate is given for the Variable Wheatear, with 12 full illustrations and three head illustrations, for a total of 15 illustrations for this species alone. Also of interest for Gujarat are the species accounts of Stoliczka's Bushchat (with inputs by BCSG member Jugal Tiwari and a photo by BCSG member Arpit Deomurari), Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin, Black Redstart etc.

This book is a must have for the serious bird watcher with an interest in Robins and Chats. Though there are some errors in ageing and moult for a few species, these are not very significant and the book will remain as a standard reference for years to come. It is available with online retailers in India at a price of around Rs. 4800/- and will be an important addition to one's literature collection and can be used for identification as well as a reference guide.



“

The tide has now submerged the little trees. I close my eyes again and before me is the vision of a great forest of Mangroves loaded with egrets, herons, ibis, spoonbills, darters and cormorants while across the blue sky a skien of pink flamingos fly past. A shadow crosses my closed eyes, I open them and the vision vanishes, the trees are gone as are the birds but wait ‘the shadow was of a Grey Heron slowly flying past to alight and to stand statuesque upon an oyster encrusted rock lapped by the rising water. Further out two White Ibis are probing diligently in the still exposed mud while a flock of black and white Crab Plovers are swiftly winging out over the sparkling bay. I turn round to see with delight rosettes of shining, dark green leaves encircling a cluster of bright pink blossoms of an Adenium I had planted about a month ago. The lovely flowers gently nod in the brisk breeze. If one plant can generate such beauty, why cannot each human individual enliven society? What is society but an accumulation of those who make it? If each of us chooses, we can deflect the seemingly inexorable flow of events. Paradise can be recreated. But first we must become aware of the simple yet ennobling truth that unlike all other life forms who are compelled to be perfect or die, we, each one of us, must strive for perfection not because we have to, but for the sheer joy of attempting to do so. How exciting!

”

- Lavkumar Khachar

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