

FLAMINGO *Gujarat*

Bulletin of Gujarat Birds



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Editorial

While we're buckled down by one more resurgence of corona, some vigorous birding can help set us free from the confinement! However unkind and harsh the summer may be, it has plenty in store to amuse and inspire us!

From a splash of rufous on the shorebirds to play and display of songsters, from amazing calls, colors and charisma of monsoon migrants to the loud symphony of colonial nesters, there is a spectrum of ornithological extravagance in the coming months!

I'm sure you know this and will make the most out of it.

So, the call is... be ubiquitous and not let any Slender-billed Gull nest go annihilated! We are part of the habitat and when we observe what is present, we should brood on what's missing. While preparing the checklists, check out on events and stories worth telling to larger audiences and which will etch on the collective psyche of community. And above all, be careful and take adequate precautions while birding!

- Bakul Trivedi

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Breeding of Woolly-necked Stork *Ciconia episcopus* at Dhaniyavi, near Vadodara

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Introduction

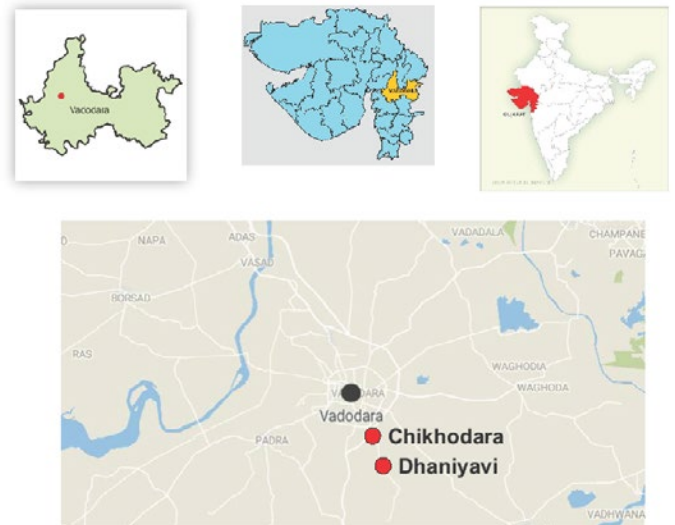
The Woolly-necked Stork or White-necked Stork (*Ciconia episcopus*) is a widespread tropical species, which breeds in Africa and in Asia, from India to Indonesia (Ali & Ripley 1987). It is a common resident bird of Gujarat (Parasharya *et al.* 2004, Ganpule 2016, 2020). It inhabits variety of wetlands and agricultural landscapes and feeds on fish, amphibians, reptiles and invertebrates (Ali 1996, Sundar 2006, Pande *et al.* 2007, Grimmett *et al.* 2011, Katuwal *et al.* 2020, Sundar 2020, Tiwary 2020). It is one of the least studied stork species with a vast majority of information on its ecology constituting of anecdotal observations (BirdLife International 2020, Sundar 2020). It is a Schedule IV species, protected under the Wildlife Protection Act, 1972 and included in the *Agreement on the Conservation of African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbirds* (AEWA) (Nanda 2006, Ganpule 2020). Their population was considered comparatively low and a total 462 birds were recorded from India in a census conducted in 1989 (Hancock *et al.* 1992). Recently, their population across South Asia and Southeast Asia is estimated to be 25,000 (Wetlands International 2020). However, Kittur & Sundar (2020) estimate their population to be much more ($2,38,685 \pm 1,24,471$) in South and Southeast Asia. The species faces threats such as habitat loss and poaching of adults, chicks and eggs in Southeast Asia. Due to the threats it faces and lower population estimated earlier, it has been categorized as 'Vulnerable' by IUCN in 2017 (BirdLife International 2020).

The Woolly-necked Stork breeds in India between July and September in southern India, and December to March in northern parts of the country (Ali & Ripley 1987, Ishtiaq *et al.* 2004, Vyas & Tomar 2007). The breeding season varies within its range, from India to Indonesia in July– September, in December–March throughout Africa, and in February–May and August–November in Southeast Asia, where they probably breed all the year round (del Hoyo 1992, BirdLife International 2020). The nest is a large platform of sticks of 10–30 cm and occasionally, the nest is of about 50 cm diameter with a slight depression in the middle, usually built on branches of tall trees. The nests have been recorded on trees such as saman (*A. saman*), silk cotton (*Bombax ceiba*), north Indian rosewood (*Dalbergia sissoo*), *Eucalyptus sp.*, fig (*Ficus religiosa*), banyan (*F. bengalensis*), mango (*Mangifera indica*), *Salmalia sp.*, and tamarind (*Tamarindus indica*) (Hume 1890, Ali & Ripley 1987, Banerjee 2017, Choudhary *et al.* 2013, Greeshma *et al.* 2018, Ishtiaq *et al.* 2004, Kularatne & Udagedara 2017, Maduranga 2002).

I present here observations at a nest of Woolly-necked Stork near Vadodara.

Study Area

Dhaniyavi Village (22° 12' 38.4" N, 73° 13' 47.68" E) is located in Vadodara Tehsil of Vadodara District in Gujarat, India. It is situated 13 km southeast from Vadodara City on Vadodara-Kayavarohan Road. It has a semi-arid climate with three distinct seasons viz. summer, monsoon and winter. The average maximum and minimum temperatures during summer and winter are about 45°C and 15°C respectively. The average rainfall is about 93 cm. Chikhodara Village (22° 14' 9.9" N, 73° 13' 51.62" E) is located 11 km southeast from Vadodara City and 2-3 km from Dhaniyavi Village on same road (Map 1).



Map 1: Study Area

Methods

The area between Vadodara and Kayavarohan was surveyed regularly to study terrestrial and aquatic avifauna of this rural area during the monsoon season since the past two years. Frequent visits to the site were done after spotting an adult Woolly-necked Stork with nest material in its beak. All the observations were taken during morning hours between 09.30 hrs to 11.30 hrs. The birds and the nest were observed by using binoculars (10X50) and photographs were taken by using DSLR cameras (Canon 1100D with 50-250mm lens and Sony HX 400). As the nest was built on a tower, the observations were done from about 50 mts away from the ground at an angle of 45°. The data of height was taken directly from an information board mounted at the base of the tower. GPS locations were taken from mobile phones and Sony HX400 camera. Interactions with the local people were done to get

Woolly-necked Stork....



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information about the presence and nesting activities of the storks in the study area.

Results

A pair of Woolly-necked Storks was observed near Chikodara Village on 23 August 2020 in an agricultural farm. The male and female were identified by their unequal size. On 16 September 2020, a single bird was observed collecting branches of Nilgiri (*Eucalyptus globulus*) tree at Dhaniyavi. The bird frequently collected small branches attached with leaves and rearranged them to the pre-built nest made of dried sticks. The nest was built on the top of a mobile/communication tower. The tower was more than 40 mts high and located at the edge of a road leading to Kayavarohan. There was a small open ground on one side of the road and village houses on the other sides. Tall trees such as neem, banyan, peepal etc. were surrounding the tower. Questioning the people of the village revealed that the bird was seen regularly in the agricultural farms but was recorded nesting on the tower for the first time. One bird was found sitting on the nest when the site was visited on 1 October 2020. Two chicks were found in the nest on 11 October 2020 while observing through binoculars. However, due to the height of the tower it was not possible to view the entire nest. A Jungle Crow (*Corvus macrorhynchos*) was spotted perching below the nest on the same tower. The site was visited again on 21 December 2020 and the nest was found deserted. However, I could not find the adult birds or the chicks in or around the village. Weekly visits of the site were not possible due to the Corona pandemic.

Discussion

According to Legge (1880), Woolly-necked Stork prefers to nest in remote parts of dry zone forests of Ceylon with minimum disturbances. In the present study, the birds were recorded nesting in very close proximity of human settlements. Vaghela *et al.* (2015) also reported Woolly-necked Stork nesting in densely populated area of Dattavadi in Pune. In the present study, the storks used the communication tower for nesting despite the availability of many tall trees. It seems that the birds took advantage of the height of the tower. Hence, nesting on the tower might have provided stability and protection as it was about 40 mts from the ground. Nesting on communication tower by the Woolly-necked Stork was also reported at Chekhla, near Vayala, at Sanand, in 2020 (D. K. Das, *pers. comm.*). Adapting to the tower and nesting in or near human settlements suggests their adaptation to urban areas and supports previous studies (Vaghela *et al.* 2015, Banerjee 2017). Successful nesting of storks

on man-made towers can help sustain their population. However, the effect of radiation of towers, if any, needs to be studied in the future. This species is also recorded nesting on rock cliffs and using the abandoned nest of a Grey Heron (Rahmani *et al.* 1996, Banerjee 2017). Use of trees, towers, rock cliffs, abandoned nests of other species and utility towers by Woolly-necked Stork shows its rapid adaptability to the changing environment and taking advantage of available resources.

The height at which nests are built is around 20–30 mts in northern India (Ali & Ripley 1987). The maximum height of nest on a tree, from the ground, was recorded to be 47 mts by Kularatne & Udagedara (2017). The maximum height of a nesting tower reported earlier was 25 mts (Vaghela *et al.* 2015). In the present study, the nest was built at 40 mts, which is the maximum height of tower reported till date.

The Woolly-necked Stork is a frequently sighted species in wetlands and agricultural fields of Gujarat. However, there are very few published records of this species nesting in the state. Dharmakumarsinhji (1955) stated that the Woolly-necked Stork was resident in Gujarat and not uncommon but 'nesting only where conditions are favourable'. Ali (1954) stated that he had observed the species in Gujarat and noted it as 'not uncommon but sparse and local'.

However, there are records of its nesting here; a pair was regularly observed nesting on top branches of a tamarind tree near Vatarak Bridge in Kheda District from 2001 to 2003 (*pers. observations*). One pair was observed nesting for two successive years, from 1987 to 1988, at Vatarak Dam, near Satarada (Dr. P. S. Thakker, *pers. comm.*). A pair was observed nesting at Thol Bird Sanctuary by Viral Prajapati and Pankaj Maheria in 2014 (Prajapati & Maheria 2014). In 2020, the species was found nesting at Sanand, near Ahmedabad (Dr. Bakul Trivedi, *pers. comm.*), in Balaram-Ambaji Sanctuary, Banaskantha, by Anand Varde (Varde 2020) and at different sites from Vadodara District (Kartik Upadhyay & Neel Solanki, *pers. comm.*).

Though the Woolly-necked Stork has been recorded breeding in different location in Gujarat, there is a paucity of information regarding its breeding biology. There is an urgent need of documenting the nesting of Woolly-necked Stork to better understand their breeding biology in India.

Acknowledgments

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Sighting of Red-breasted Goose *Branta ruficollis* at Nalsarovar: An addition to the avifauna of Gujarat

Akbar Alvani & Mehmud Multani: At – Nalsarovar.



Akbar Alvani



Akbar Alvani

On 5 January 2021, at around 10:15 hrs, we were birding in Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary. It was a foggy morning and we had gone to see the Red-naped Shaheen (*Falco pelegrinoides babylonicus*) and the Greater White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons*) which were being seen in the area. At around 10:30 hrs, we were scanning a flock of Greylag Geese (*Anser anser*) looking for the Greater White-fronted Goose. We did not find it. While scanning in the area, we saw a different goose, feeding along with the Greylag Geese in a dry paddy field. We took some record photographs and there was only one bird with this plumage in this flock. It was clearly smaller in size compared with the other geese.

Since we could not identify this goose and were seeing it for the first time, we sent the photos to Vijay Shastri, who identified it as a Red-breasted Goose (*Branta ruficollis*) and informed us that it is a vagrant to India and a first record for Gujarat. We kept a watch on the goose and it was seen almost daily for over one month in this area. Bird watchers from all across India came to Nalsarovar to see this rarity. We noted

that this Red-breasted Goose was seen in and around Nalsarovar in locations like Nalsarovar-Bavla Road, near Aniyari Village and also at Vadla Dam. Each time, this Red-breasted Goose was seen with flocks of Bar-headed Goose (*Anser indicus*) and Greylag Goose. It kept changing its location in and around Nalsarovar and was always seen with other goose species.

The Red-breasted Goose is a vagrant to India. Praveen *et al.* (2014) assessed the historical and published records of this species from India. The historical sight records from Assam were considered to be doubtful and the species was included in the Indian Checklist based on a photographic record from Bijnor, Uttar Pradesh in March 2014 (Panwar & Panwar 2014). After this record from Uttar Pradesh, this species was again seen in December 2014 at Pong Lake, Himachal Pradesh (Abhinav *et al.* 2018). There is no record for India after this sighting from Himachal Pradesh and this record from Nalsarovar was made after six years in our country.

For Gujarat, the Red-breasted Goose was not included in the recently published checklist of the birds of Gujarat (Ganpule 2020) and this species had not been recorded in the state. Thus, the Red-breasted Goose is an addition to the avifauna of Gujarat and an important record for the country.

[A Red-breasted Goose, most likely the same individual, was seen in Thol Bird Sanctuary in March 2021, the photos of which were posted on the social media. This suggests that this individual from Nalsarovar moved to Thol. It also shows that the bird remained here till March 2021 – spending more than two months in the state – Eds]

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□

Colour aberrant Indian Cormorant *Phalacrocorax fuscicollis* in Kachchh

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Nirav Solanki

On 12 August 2020, I was birding near Nilpar Village, near Rapar, in Kachchh. It was evening and I saw a white bird from a distance. I approached near to it and saw that it was a 'white' cormorant, perched besides a normal plumaged bird. I identified it as an Indian Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*) based on the size, bill shape, and other features. Since it was perched besides a normal plumaged bird, the identification was easy. The cormorant was entirely white, except for a few blackish feathers on the mantle and a blackish spot on the ear-coverts. I could not identify the correct mutation in this aberrant plumaged cormorant. There have been recent reports of colour aberrant cormorants from Gujarat (Vaghshiya 2016, Joshi & Trivedi 2018) but this is the first time I had seen such a bird here.

[We sent the photo of the aberrant plumaged Indian Cormorant to Hein van Grouw, who stated that 'This aberration results in a plumage without melanin to start with but gradually, over the years, the melanin comes back! It often returns first in the skin (bill and feet) whilst the plumage is still mainly without. The Cormorant appears to be that mutation as its bill and feet are almost fully melanised whilst in the plumage, only a few minor spots are present (because of the coloured skin, it cannot be Leucism, and is not likely to be Progressive Greying either). The 'pinkish' colour is, in my opinion, not pigment but external staining. There is not yet a proper name for mutations in which melanin returns (it is, in fact, the opposite of Progressive Greying). I am still doing research on this type of colour aberration. It would be good if the Cormorant, if still present (and stays present) in the same place, could be observed for a longer period (including several moult cycles) to see whether it will gain more melanin pigment'.

Hence, the author is requested to follow up with the sighting and keep visiting the area to check if this colour aberrant cormorant is still present. If present, then it should be regularly photographed to see if there is any change in its plumage over a several moult cycles and to report back the details to us.

We are very grateful to Hein van Grouw for helping us identify the correct colour mutation in this cormorant – Eds]

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Bill grappling, clashing and courtship behaviour of Indian Grey Hornbill *Ocyrceros birostris* at Manipur Lake, Ahmedabad

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A habitat without biodiversity sounds impossible. Human habitats or urbanization is a major alter in biodiversity due to strong, permanent, and self-centred human efforts (McKinney 2006, Fontana *et al.* 2011). Urban ecosystems can be of high value for a wide variety of organisms, especially avifauna, and the example Indian Grey Hornbill (*Ocyrceros birostris*) can be given. It is the only hornbill species that can be seen and successfully breeds in an urban area also (Kasambe *et al.* 2011).

The Indian Grey Hornbill is widely distributed across India (Grimmett *et al.* 2011) but being sensitive to habitat alteration, it is heading towards local extinction in some areas (Trivedi & Soni 2016). It is a silvery-grey and white bird with a long-graduated tail; its bill is a blackish or greyish with a casque, which is seen in the *Bucerotidae* family, extending up to the point of the inflexion in the bill. They are mostly found in open forest and wooded areas with fruiting trees. Some species of

hornbills may play an important role in seed dissemination and regeneration of trees, and so, their absence would significantly affect several other avian species and can gradually impair the ecosystem (Savard *et al.* 1999, Santhoshkumar *et al.* 2011).

The observations presented here are from the Manipur Lake (23° 02' 04" N, 72° 25' 27" E), which is situated at the edge of Manipur Village in Sanand Taluka of Ahmedabad, Gujarat. It is a deep-water reservoir situated about 6.2 kms away from Sardar Patel Ring Road, Bopal, Ahmedabad. Three-fourths of the region around Manipur Lake is surrounded by crop fields and one-fourth of the area by houses. The lake area is encircled by many trees, like *Ficus benghalensis* (Banyan), *Syzygium cumini* (Jaambu), *Azadirachta indica* (Neem), *Ficus religiosa* (Peepal) and *Salvadora persica* (Piludi) which were habitually utilised by fruit-eating birds, whereas *Acacia nilotica* (Baval), *Cassia fistula* (Garmala), *Eucalyptus globulus* (Nilgiri), *Zizyphus jujube* (Bor) are important for activities like nesting by birds.



We have been observing many locations to look into the natural surroundings for an urban biodiversity study. On 4 February 2020, we set forth at Manipur Lake and we were very happy to see the Indian Grey Hornbills there. We found that all the hornbills were using only two trees; Peepal and Neem. They came to eat figs which are heavily consumed by hornbills and other frugivores (Kannan *et al.* 1999). After some time, a pair came flying and perched on the Peepal tree. But shortly after that, a second male hornbill came and drove the sitting male away. For a few minutes, they fed on fruits and then flew to rest on an open branch of the Neem tree (Photo 1). The male jumped on and tried to grasp the female with its bill

(Photo 2). The behaviour was photographed. For the first time, we observed the behaviour of bill grappling and bill clashing or kissing, that continued for 2 to 3 minutes and it seemed to be a part of courtship ritual. After half an hour, they flew away and left the lake area. We recorded a total of seven hornbills (4 males and 3 females) in that area. Nesting activity was not observed, nor did we find any nest nearby. As a part of our routine bird watching, we also saw hornbills on 12 February, 25 February and on 1 March at the same site.



According to Kasambe *et al.* (2011), who have extensively studied the Indian Grey Hornbill, bill grappling suggests social play in non-breeders and courtship ritual in breeding pairs. Bill grappling also occurs between two males as agnostic behaviour, but it is intense and almost like a fight. Kasambe (2011) had also observed this behaviour and found that in courtship behaviour, bill-touching between the pairs has been observed. Previously, this species was spotted in this area by Vipul Trivedi in 2017. He remarked that he had found this species after two years of searching at this site. Indian Grey Hornbills have been seen many times in the area of Ahmedabad city. Moreover, at this site, and around this area, we recorded a total of 109 species, including some uncommon species like Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*). That is what makes the site special. There is an urgent need for further study of the biodiversity of such habitats.

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An incidence of brood parasitism: Observations of a juvenile Common Cuckoo *Cuculus canorus* in Bhavnagar

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On 1 September 2020, in the morning at around 09:45 hrs, I was passing through Malnath Hills, Bhavnagar. I noticed one juvenile cuckoo (*Cuculus* sp.) perched on a tree branch, begging continuously for food. Since cuckoos are brood parasites, I waited to confirm the foster or host parent species. There were no other birds around it but about after 30 minutes, one Long-tailed Shrike (*Lanius schach*) appeared with some insect prey and fed the young cuckoo. I watched and photographed the cuckoo and the shrike for around two and a half hours, during which it was fed for a total of six times in different locations, ranging from bushes just two feet off the ground to in trees at about 20 ft height. Once, between a long interval in feeding by the parent, the juvenile cuckoo caught a caterpillar on its own. I took many photographs and tentatively identified the cuckoo as a juvenile Common Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*), also known as the Eurasian Cuckoo.

After reviewing the photographs at home, I confirmed the identification as a juvenile of the Common Cuckoo and one of its known host/foster parents is the Long-tailed Shrike. The identification of the cuckoo was confirmed by the yellow eye ring, dark eyes, white nuchal or nape patch and white tips to feathers of upperparts and rump.

I would also like to share two other interesting observations: At one point, the juvenile cuckoo was mobbed by Red-vented Bulbuls (*Pycnonotus cafer*) and instead of being frightened and

flying away, the cuckoo was calling and begging for food from the bulbuls with open gape and fluttering wings! It eventually flew away when it was pecked at by the bulbuls.

The other observation was that I could see two shrikes at most times, one feeding and the other within the vicinity but I was surprised to see that the shrikes had an active nest. They were observed around three to four times carrying food to the nest but I was unable to hear any calls of the chicks neither could I see whether the nest was occupied since it was at a height of more than 15 ft. This raises an interesting question; was there a second brood of the shrike pair? It is possible that the eggs of the first brood were destroyed by the cuckoo. After the cuckoo had left the nest (fledged), the shrike pair could have started nesting again. This would probably be due to favorable conditions due to a heavy monsoon this year. However, the exact reasons for this are not known. But, it is interesting to note that the cuckoo was being fed while the host parents were probably feeding the chicks of the second brood. Unfortunately, since the nest could not be observed, I could not confirm these observations.

Dharmakumarsinghi (1955) had stated that he had no authentic records of the Common Cuckoo breeding in Saurashtra but the species was seen in fairly large numbers post the monsoon season. In Grimmett *et al.* (2011), the Common Cuckoo is shown to be an isolated summer visitor to Kachchh, North Gujarat and South Gujarat. However, Ganpule (2016) gave it as an autumn passage migrant and monsoon

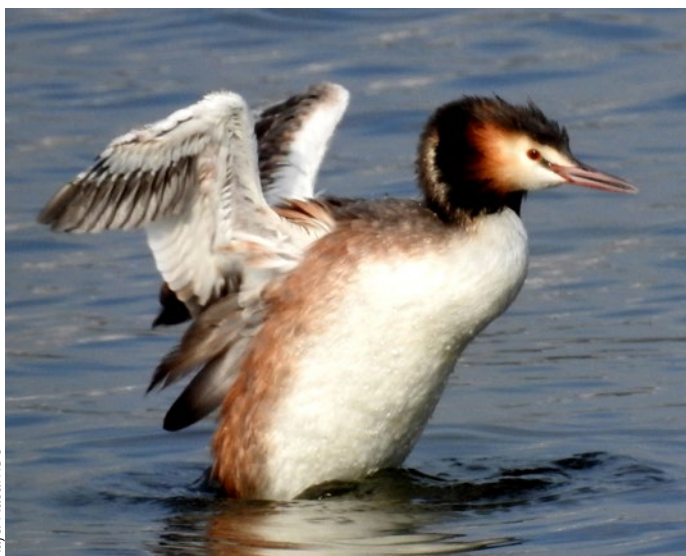
breeding migrant to Gujarat. In the latest checklist of the birds of Gujarat (Ganpule 2020), the Common Cuckoo is given as a monsoon breeding migrant. Hence, the Common Cuckoo does breed here and this observation is further evidence of its breeding in Saurashtra. Praveen & Lowther (2020) give a list of host species for Common Cuckoo and the Long-tailed Shrike is a well documented host species; the breeding of Common Cuckoo in the Indian Subcontinent, away from the Himalayas, is referred to, with confirmed breeding records from Rajasthan and Maharashtra. Gujarat is not listed in this work and this sighting further confirms that the Common Cuckoo breeds in Gujarat too. There are very few records of the Common Cuckoo breeding in Gujarat and this is probably the first record or the first direct observation for Bhavnagar area.

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Photographic record of simultaneous moult of flight feathers in Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus* from Jamnagar

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I visited Jamnagar, Gujarat, during 14–16 December 2017, for a field trip of the Basic Course in Ornithology which is conducted by the Bombay Natural History Society, Mumbai. As a part of this course, various bird habitats are visited.

I, along with the participants, stayed at Jamnagar and visited nearby areas including the famous Lakhota Lake in Jamnagar to understand the diversity of birds there. I visited Lakhota Lake on 14 and 15 December 2017. On 15 December I saw three Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*) swimming and diving in the lake waters. I observed them for a few hours and noted that they swam across the lake but did not resort to flying, at which they are good. I tried to take videos and pictures of the bird in the hope to get an image showing them flapping their wings.

Great Crested Grebe....

Finally, I succeeded in getting an image in which the moulting of flight feathers can be clearly seen. This image clearly shows the flight feathers (remiges, viz., primaries and secondaries) are in moult and almost all of the primaries have grown but are yet to gain full length. This clearly explained why the grebe was flightless or reluctant to fly. Unfortunately, the image does not show the tail feathers and it is difficult to comment on the moult of the rectrices or tail feathers (which also should be in moult).

In the Netherlands, where this species breeds, these grebes undergo simultaneous moult of flight feathers in the months of August to first half of October (Piersma 1988). It was observed that the growth of secondaries perfectly parallels that of the primaries. Thus, the two tracts are completed (regrown) at the same time. It was also observed that the upper wing coverts are moulted slightly earlier than the underwing coverts.

The Great Crested Grebe is known to breed sporadically in Gujarat (Bulkley 1891); at Khijadiya Bird Sanctuary (Mundkur & Pravez 1986; Himmatsinhji *et. al.* 1992) and at Diu (Chaoji 2010). Recently it has been reported breeding in Srikakulam District, Andhra Pradesh (Sraavan Kumar *et. al.* 2014.) and at Ranjeet Sagar and Menar wetlands (Tripathi & Koli 2020) in Rajasthan. However, now it is known that it breeds fairly commonly around Jamnagar and Kachchh in Gujarat and there are a large number of photographs of adults on nests/

with juveniles on the 'Oriental Bird Images' website (<http://orientalbirdimages.org/>).

Thus, the Great Crested Grebe is a breeding resident species for these parts in India and hence, must be going through a complete moult as many other grebes and geese do in their respective breeding areas. This could be the first photographic record of the Great Crested Grebe going through simultaneous moult of flight feathers in India.

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Distribution of Indian Grey Hornbill *Ocyrceros birostris* in Mehsana District

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Introduction

The Indian Grey Hornbill (*Ocyrceros birostris*) is my bird of interest since the beginning of my bird watching days due to its unique looks and nesting style. The Indian Grey Hornbill is a very common hornbill found throughout the Indian Subcontinent and is widely distributed (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). It is mostly arboreal and seldom descends to the ground, except to pick up fallen fruits, dust bathe or to collect mud pellets during the nesting period to seal its nest. It is one the very few hornbill species found in urban area in many cities. Mostly, they use large, tall and old trees to make their nest.

Observations

During my regular field work and based on my past records, it was observed that Indian Grey Hornbill was regularly seen in Polo forest area of Sabarkantha District. First time, it was



Parikshit Acharya

sighted and photographed by Kailash Jani and myself at Jessore Sloth Bear Sanctuary, Banaskantha District, in June 2012. After that, a number of sightings have been reported by many bird

Sightings of Indian Hornbill in Mehsana District

Sr. No	Date	Location	No. of Individuals	Remarks
1	13 December 2016	Behind Arbuda Temple, Mehsana-Visnagar Highway	1	Sub Adult
2	28 May 2016	Khandosan Village, Visnagar Taluka	1	Adult
3	19 April 2017	Near Hotel Amrit, Nr. Chhatral	1	Adult
4	4 October 2017	Sundhiya Village, Visnagar Taluka	1	Adult
5	24 June 2018	Near Pilvai Village, Mehsana-Vijpur Highway	1	Adult
6	28 August 2018	Near ICICI Bank, Mehsana City	1	Adult
7	1 September 2018	Author's Home	1	Adult
8	8 September 2018	Author's Home	2	Adult
9	19 September 2018	Circuit House, Mehsana	1	Juvenile
10	30 September 2018	Vadnagar	3	Adult

watchers in the same region, including Balaram Sanctuary and at Dantiwada Dam. A successful nesting was observed by Kailash Jani in Palanpur City on 20 June 2018. My first sighting of Indian Grey Hornbill in Mehsana was on 13 February 2016. Then onwards, the number of sightings, with photographs, noted by me in Mehsana City and District are given here.

Conclusion

Earlier, this species was mainly seen in the jungle area only but now, the numbers of sightings noted in urban areas have

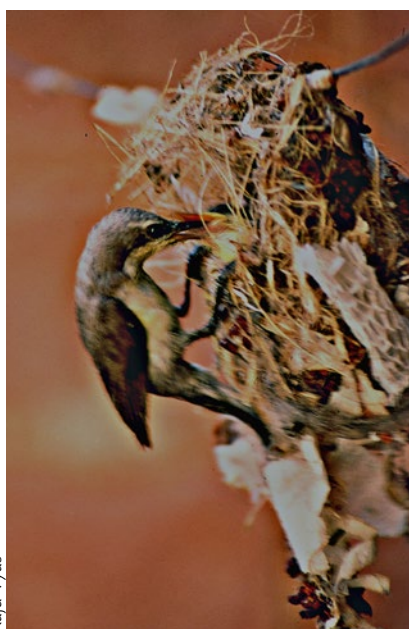
increased. It has been known and observed that the hornbills have increased their distribution and have slowly adapted to urban areas. In most of my sightings, I have observed them on large and tall trees where they may easily and safely make their nest. As now hornbills are frequently appearing in city area, it is our duty to protect and maintain their habitat.

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Purple Sunbird *Nectarinia asiatica* using snake's moult as nesting material

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Raju Vyas

The Purple Sunbird (*Nectarinia asiatica*) is a small, nectar-eating species belonging to the family *Nectariniidae*, and is widely distributed across the Indian subcontinent and Southeast Asia (Ali & Ripley 1983). This is the most common sunbird species in Gujarat (Ganpule 2016) and India too (Grimmett *et al.* 1998). The breeding season of the Purple Sunbird

broods in succession and often uses the same nest for breeding (Mishra 2014). This species constructs the nest as an oblong-shaped purse type pocket, using soft grass twigs, plant fibre, small leaves and bark cobweb. The outer surface of the nest is usually covered with pieces of bark, caterpillar droppings, bits of paper, strings and other rubbish material (George 1958, Tayade *et al.* 2014). A typical nest has a porch-like projection over the entrance hole. This species occurs abundantly in and around human habitation, and as a result, one can find other synthetic materials in a sunbird's nest including polythene shreds, and thermocol junk (Mishra 2014). Use of such synthetic materials due to their lightweight property and easy availability can also be interpreted as an urban adaptation by the species in anthropogenic habitats. The species is known to include many unnatural (man-made) items for nest construction, similar to other common bird species (Khacher 2000, Solanki *et al.* 2018).

varies from place to place, generally coinciding with months when flowering is abundant (Gharidian *et al.* 2008). While breeding, the female Purple Sunbird builds a hanging nest and lays 2 to 3 eggs (Terence 1991). The sunbird rears at least two

In February 2020, a pair of Purple Sunbirds was observed, regularly visiting the backyard garden at my residence in Vadodara, Gujarat. This pair then selected an unused metal

Purple Sunbird....

wire in a relatively undisturbed corner as its nesting site. By the end of February, the pair (male and female) was seen actively constructing an oblong-shaped suspended nest on the wire. Upon closer examination of the nest, I was able to spot a variety of nesting materials, including cobwebs, soft grass twigs, plant fibres, bits of paper and tiny patches of snake moult (See photo). The outer covering of the nest was unusually decorated with such nesting materials.

The nesting habitat influences the nest design and also the material used in making it (Mainwaring *et al.* 2014). Interestingly, how sunbirds select their nest-building material is not well known. However, based on certain studies, the birds choose their nesting material based on the following criteria: (a) structural properties which can bind materials together to form a stable platform (Hansell 2005); (b) structural properties which can function for camouflaging the nest or eggs (Solis & De Lope 1995, Hansell 1996, Schuetz 2005), attracting mates (Brouwer & Komdeur 2004), reducing parasites and bacteria (Lafuma *et al.* 2001, Gwinner & Berger 2005), (c) optimizing the health of the nestlings (Gwinner *et al.* 2000), or a combination of all the above. Some birds also consider the colour of the material as an indicator of its function while preparing the nest (Muth & Healy 2011).

The use of bird feathers as a nest-building material is fairly usual but the use of snake slough is quite rare and remarkable. Snake slough, commonly addressed as snake moults, are not as abundant or easily traceable in the environment, indicating how some birds specifically search to incorporate it as a nest-building material

There is a hypothesis for the use of snake slough as a nest-building material; that it might be an anti-predatory tactic, avoiding predation of eggs and hatchlings inside the nest. Early accounts involving the use of snake slough are merely anecdotal and speculative (Bolles 1890, Strecker 1926, Suthard 1927). None of the prior experimental studies addressed the presumed antipredatory benefit of this particular behaviour, until the study of Medlin & Risch (2006). This hypothesis was first tested and proven, by the experimental use of snake skin / moults as nesting materials to avoiding predation (Medlin & Risch 2006). The use of snakeskin in bird nests is widely cited for few species and was noted in some earlier scientific literature. Strecker (1926) noted the earliest observation of William Winston in 1887, making him the first observer who noticed snakeskin in the nest of a Gray-tailed Cardinal (*Cardinalis cardinalis canicaudus*) being used as nesting material in the city of Waco, Texas, USA. Strecker (1926) listed about fourteen bird species from seven families, which used snake

sloughs as nesting materials. In the context of Indian birds, there are few records of snakeskin being used as nesting materials; by Indian Robin (*Saxicoloides fulicatus*), Bank Myna (*Acridotheres gingianus*) and Common Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*) (Strecker 1926, Dhandukia & Patel 2012). In addition to these, the present study describes the use of snake slough as nesting material in Purple Sunbird.

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Occurrence of Grey-bellied Cuckoo *Cacomantis passerinus* in Vadodara District and its distribution in Central Gujarat

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Introduction

The Grey-bellied Cuckoo (*Cacomantis passerinus*) is a summer visitor to hills of North Pakistan, and Himalayas; a widespread resident species in Central India, Western and Eastern Ghats; wintering further south in India and Sri Lanka (Kazmierczak 2000; Grimmett *et al.* 2011; Ali 2012, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). It is a summer visitor in eastern parts of Gujarat (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). Though found in most of Peninsular India, it is not common in drier north-western parts of the country (Payne 2005).

The species has been listed as a ‘Least Concern’ species in The IUCN Red List of Threatened Species owing to its extremely large range and stable population trend (Birdlife International 2016). This fairly common, slim, arboreal bird is found in scrubland and open wooded country, frequently flying to different vantage points and calling from tree tops (Grimmett *et al.* 2011, Ali 2012, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). The adult male and grey morph female are greyish with white vent and undertail-coverts, while female is distinguishable by barred whitish abdomen and more barred rectrices (Erritzøe *et al.* 2012). The hepatic female is bright rufous above and barred dark-brown with unbarred rufous tail (Grimmett *et al.* 2011, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012, Erritzøe *et al.* 2012). We report here occurrence of this species in Central Gujarat.

Observations

On 17 June 2017, a hepatic female of Grey-bellied Cuckoo was observed in the scrub around Jawla Irrigation Reservoir, north of Vadodara. This being a new species to the area, an extensive search of the species was initiated the following year and literature as well as eBird data for the area were surveyed. Finally, on the morning of 27 May 2018, while birding at Timbi

Table 1: Records of Grey-bellied Cuckoo in Central Gujarat

District	Date	No.	Location	Observer	Remarks
Vadodara	14/02/21	1	TIR	AJ, BV, VV, HJ, NV	
	12/12/20	1	Sindhrot Nature Education Park	AJ, BV, VV, HJ, NV	
	29/09/20	2	Chanakyapuri Society	VB	
	28/09/20	1	Chanakyapuri Society	VB	
	26/09/20	1	Chanakyapuri Society	VB	
	17/09/20	1	Vasundhara Park Society	JP	
	12/09/20	2	Vasundhara Park Society	JP	
	11/08/20	2	Ishwardarshan Society	SA	
	13/07/20	1	Ankodiya Road	MAK	
	26/07/20	1	Club life Road	MAK	
	20/07/20	1	Club life Road	MAK	
	27/06/20	1	Jambughoda Wildlife Sanctuary	TS, DS, KS	
	24/05/20	1	Club life Road	MAK	
	23/01/20	1	Club life Road	MAK	
	20/01/20	2	TIR	MAK	
	24/12/19	1	Vadhvana Outskirts	KA, AM	
	08/10/19	1	Club life Road	MAK	
	25/08/19	4	Targol	TT	
	14/10/18	1	TIR	ST	Hepatic female perched on a wire
	24/09/18	1	TIR	KEP	
	19/09/18	1	Vadhvana	HP, MM	Male perched on a wire
	16/09/18	1	Farmhouse, near Sakarda	JP	
	15/09/18	1	TIR	HP, KN	
	13/09/18	2	TIR	KEP	
	09/09/18	2	TIR	HP, KN	Two males perched on the same branch of <i>Prosopis juliflora</i>
	08/09/18	1	TIR	HP, HA, KP, KN	
	28/08/18	1	TIR	HP, MM	Male perched on a wire
	13/08/18	1	M.S.U Campus	KEP	
	12/08/18	1	TIR	HP, KN	
	11/08/18	1	TIR	HP, KN	
	09/08/18	1	TIR	HP, KN	First the call was heard and then we spotted it
	29/07/18	2	TIR	HA, KN	Two individuals (males) were chasing each other
27/05/18	1	TIR	HP, KP, MM	Hepatic female was seen perched on an <i>Ipomoea fistulosa</i>	
17/06/17	1	Jawla	HP	Hepatic female flew away from a shrub	
22/04/17	1	Vadhwana	AC, TS, DS, KS	Perched on electric wire	
Anand	17/01/20	1	Vadtal Road	AN	Hepatic female was seen
	14/03/18	1	Mahi River	PN	Hepatic female was seen
	23/10/16	1	Pepariya Talav	BM	Male was seen
	21/10/16	2	Pepariya Talav	BM	One immature and one adult were seen
	20/10/16	1	Pepariya Talav	BM	One female was seen
Dahod	18/01/20	1	Unnamed Road	VP	Hepatic female was seen
Panchmahal	06/10/19	2	Vavkuva Haldari mata Temple	TT	
	22/09/18	1	Shivrajpur	HA, KP, MM	Male perched on wire
Kheda	22/08/20	2	Pariej Lake	DAS	
	01/02/20	1	Heranj Lake	VM	

Abbreviations for Table 1:

TIR- Timbi Irrigation Reservoir
 AC- Anup Chavda, AJ- Akshay Jethi, AM- Aamir Matli,
 AN- Abhishek Nena, BM- Bhavesh Mengar, BV- Bharat Vyas,
 DAS- Dakshina Sudhir, DS- Dhyey Shah, HA- Hitesh Ameta,
 HJ- Heli Jethi, HP- Hiren Patel, JP- Jigu Patel, KA- Kandarp
 Andharia, KS- Ketan Shah, KEP- Keval Paliya, KN- Keyur
 Naria, KP- Kirnalee Patel, MAK- Mohammad Anesh Khira,
 MM- Meera Makwana, NV- Navya Vyas, PN- Pratik
 Nagrecha, SA- Seema Abhale, ST- Sujata Talegaonkar, TS-
 Trupti Shah, TT- Tushar Tripathi, VB- Vyomkesh Buch, VM-
 Vishal Mistry, VP- Viral Pankaj, VV- Vyom Vyas.

Irrigation Reservoir (henceforth TIR) at 08:30 hrs, two of our team members spotted this rufous-coloured bird with paler white underparts, perched on the outer edge of a thick cover of morning glory (*Ipomoea fistulosa*). Looking upon the position of its perch, i.e. above water, it was first perceived to be a crane (*Porzana* sp.). While we tried to get a better look at the mysterious looking bird, it flew and shifted its location to a dried shrub nearby. Being out of range, photographs could not be taken but we were able to get a clear view of the species through binoculars. Closer observation through binoculars revealed its bright rufous colour with prominent bars on white paler underparts; based on its size and further referring to the field guides, it was identified as a Grey-bellied Cuckoo.

Later, on 29 July 2018, while birding at the Shirpor Village, which lies adjacent to the TIR, a bird was seen sitting on top of an electric pole. It being a cloudy day, only the silhouette of the bird was visible. Being intrigued by the uncommon looking silhouette, photographs were taken to identify the bird. It was identified to be a male Grey-bellied Cuckoo. After a few minutes, one more male was sighted chasing the first one. An effort was made to follow them but they disappeared fast and could not be traced again that day. This species was then regularly observed at TIR as well as few other places around Vadodara. The details of our observations and those reported by others, including eBird (2021), are given in Table 1.

Discussion

The species has been listed as resident and breeding in the checklist of birds of Gujarat (Parasharya *et al.* 2004). Bagda *et al.* (2015) have shown its presence in the forests of South Gujarat, Saurashtra and Kachchh but not in central Gujarat. Recent sighting records during monsoon are mainly from Sabarkantha and Gir National Park, along with some scattered records from Saurashtra and Kachchh (Bagda *et al.* 2015, Ganpule 2016). It has been recorded as resident in Gujarat, a monsoon migrant

and resident in forests of South Gujarat (Ganpule 2016). The species has also been reported at Hasnapur Dam in Girnar Wildlife Sanctuary (Bagda *et al.* 2015). Padate *et al.* (2001) show no record of the species from Vadodara. The occurrence of Grey-bellied Cuckoo in Central Gujarat was not reported till 2016. Dharmakumarsinhji (1955) stated that it is found in wooded areas of Gujarat.

In Anand District, adult male, female and an immature have been sighted on different occasions in 2016 while a hepatic female was sighted in 2018 (Nagrecha 2018) and in 2020. Narmada District shows a four-year-old record of the species along with two recent records in 2018 (eBird 2018). We could gather records from Pachmahal District as well, during our own-field survey.

In Vadodara previously, a single male of the species was recorded a year ago at Vadhwana Irrigation Reservoir (eBird 2018). Though the species has been sighted frequently this year, there are only two previous records of the species from Vadodara, and its occurrence in this region is considered as uncommon. This species is known to occur in secondary forest, brush, gardens, towns and villages, grassy plains and swamps (Ali & Ripley 1969, Becking 1981, Zacharias & Gaston 1983). In Vadodara District, we have observed it in scrub land in Vadhwana and TIR and in habitats in The M. S. University of Baroda Arboretum.

Along with previously published records and records from eBird (2018), various regions of Vadodara were extensively surveyed for compilation of this report. Among the locations surveyed, Ajwa Reservoir on eastern side and Sindhrot on western side of the city showed no presence of the Grey-bellied Cuckoo. It was noted that these locations showed an active presence of the Common Hawk Cuckoo (*Hierococcyx varius*). The Common Hawk Cuckoo is a brood parasite, laying its eggs in the nests of larger passerines, while Grey-bellied Cuckoo prefers laying eggs in the nests of smaller passerines like Common Tailorbird (*Orthotomus sutorius*), Plain Prinia (*Prinia inornata*), Ashy Prinia (*Prinia socialis*), Zitting Cisticola (*Cisticola juncidis*), Black-headed Cuckooshrike (*Lalage melanoptera*), House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), as well as two species of Sunbirds (*Leptocoma* sp.) (Becking 1981, Payne 2005, del Hoyo *et al.* 2020, Praveen & Lowther 2020, Trivedi *et al.* 2020). A survey of host species at the two places indicated that the population of the host species for Grey-bellied Cuckoo is low in the said areas. It may be inferred that because of low populations of host species in the area, Grey-bellied Cuckoo was absent. Another reason could be that locations which showed presence of the Common Hawk Cuckoo do not

Grey-bellied Cuckoo....

harbour Grey-bellied Cuckoo, probably due to greater competition and limited availability of nests for brood parasitism. The statement is further supported by the fact that the locations where we were able to sight Grey-bellied Cuckoo showed no presence of Common Hawk Cuckoo. However, the data we have is insufficient to make any conclusions.

It will not be proper to discuss the distribution of species in the whole of Central Gujarat based on this gathered data. In Central Gujarat, Grey-bellied Cuckoo is mainly recorded in scrubland around reservoirs as well as in forested patches. The change in the habitat around wetlands due to Narmada Canal has probably attracted the species to Central Gujarat. Nevertheless, it is clear that the species has now been recorded in the region a number of times.

Through extensive field as well as literature surveys, we could gather sight records from five districts of Central Gujarat. However, distribution data from other districts, i.e. Ahmedabad and Chhota Udaipur, is lacking. We request birdwatchers of Central Gujarat to report their sightings of Grey-bellied Cuckoo for a better understanding of its distribution in the state. We need to assess the impact of Narmada Canal system on the distribution of this species in this region.

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Important bird sightings from Vadhavana Wetland, Vadodara District

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Vadhavana (22° 9' 43" N, 73° 29' 1" E, also referred as Wadhvana) is an irrigation tank, located about 50 km south-east of Vadodara City. It was built by Maharaja Sir Sayajirao Gaekwad in the year 1909-1910. It is spread over an area of 1430 ha. The wetland has been declared as a nationally important site in 2005. There were 76 species of water birds recorded in 2002 in this wetland (Padate *et al.* 2007). Since decades, Vadhavana Wetland has been a home to thousands of birds, both resident and migratory. A change in hydrology of the peripheral area has also created lots of reeds in the dam outskirts, which has shaped the habitats for munias, jacanas, rails, crakes and bitterns outside the dam. Out of 348 bird species reported on eBird for Vadodara District, 277 bird species are recorded in Vadhavana, which is remarkably 80% (eBird 2020).

Bird Conservation Society, Gujarat, had planned an executive committee meeting at Maharaja Sayajirao University, Vadodara, on 25 November 2018. To participate in the meeting with Ashok Mashru, I reached there a day before for birding at Vadhavana. Kartik Upadhyay was kind enough to host us for birding. We reached Vadhavana at around 16:30 hrs. There were approximately 10000 Greylag Geese (*Anser anser*). We recorded a total of 132 bird species in and around Vadhavana (Vargiya 2018), out of which three species are important and mentioned here.

I saw and photographed one adult male Rock Bush Quail (*Perdica argoondah*) next to an agricultural patch where the land was dry and few grassy patches were present in the



Dhaval Vargiya

scrubland. This species is a common resident bird of arid and scrub forest of Saurashtra and Kachchh but is rarer in North, Central and South Gujarat. It is often seen in pairs or flocks of several individuals in grasslands of Saurashtra (Ganpule 2016). Since it is somewhat uncommon to rare in Central Gujarat,

this sighting is important. Prior to this, there were only two checklists mentioning this species in Vadodara and none with a photo (eBird 2020). Surprisingly, Salim Ali collected a specimen from Dabka village on 22 November 1945, situated on the banks of Mahi River, about 73 kms away from Vadhavana (Dutta 2000).

Next to an irrigation pipeline where water goes to agricultural fields, there was a Watercock (*Gallicrex cinerea*), which quickly disappeared in the reeds. The Watercock is an uncommon to



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rare monsoon migrant in Gujarat, with sightings from few locations of Saurashtra, Nalsarovar and predominantly from South Gujarat; it is rare in Kachchh. There are many historical records, from almost all parts of the state, and a few winter records too, but its status in winter is not clear and more data is needed (Ganpule 2016). The species was first recorded from Harni Village, Vadodara (47 km from Vadhavana) in 1890 (Littledale 1890). Lester (1897) mentioned a pair shot by the Rao of Kachchh and eggs were also collected by Lester's *shikaris* from Kachchh. A maximum of 27 birds were seen by Dr. Indra Gadhavi in 2007 at Velavadar National Park, Bhavnagar (Mashru 2017). Mashru (2017) did not mention any other sighting from Vadodara District. Prior to this sighting, two adult males were recorded in July 2017 by Chavda *et al.* (2017) and later, an adult male was recorded by Shah (2019), both at Timbi Lake of Vadodara District. This individual could be a female or a male in non-breeding plumage. There are very few winter records of this species and hence, this sighting is interesting. Mashru (2017) gives winter records of Watercock from Gir, Khijadiya (near Jamnagar), Porbandar and Amreli. This is another winter record from Vadodara.

Opposite to a watch tower where birders generally stop to spot ducks and geese, there was one Great Bittern (*Botaurus stellaris*), very well camouflaged in the reeds. The bird remained

Bird sightings....



Dhaval Vargiya

idle until a Eurasian Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*) flew over. The bittern did not fly but, very slowly, moved inside the reeds while keeping the beak and eyes up, watching the flight of the harrier. The Great Bittern is a rare winter visitor to Gujarat, with some sightings from Nalsarovar, Junagadh, Mokarsagar Wetlands of Porbandar and many historical records from North and Central Gujarat (Ganpule 2016). Ali (1954) did not come across any bittern in his surveys but, he mentioned an old *shikar* record of Butler. Butler (1876) collected specimens from Deesa region of North Gujarat.

Conclusion

All these sightings were on the west side of the wetland, which is also on the left side of the dam catchment area, where the water is very shallow and reeds are abundant. The Rock Bush Quail and Great Bittern are recorded for the first time in Vadhavana Wetland and we also recorded Brown Crake (*Zapornia akool*), which is a second record for the Vadhavana Wetland (Dhyey Shah, *verbally*, 27 November 2018). Hence, all

three sightings are important photographic records from Vadhavana Wetland.

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Probable poaching of Crested Serpent Eagle *Spilornis cheela* in Shoolpaneshwar Wildlife Sanctuary

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trail known as the Dr. Shailendra Sinha trail. On reaching Ninai, we decided to return back to the Sagai campsite and explore the trail. Right outside the entrance of the trail and on the tar road, there was an adult Crested Serpent Eagle (*Spilornis cheela*) lying dead on the road. While going to Ninai, this dead bird was not present on the road and so, in the interval of about 15-20 minutes, this bird had appeared there. We initially thought it was a road kill but noted the following: ants were crawling all over the body, its eyes were taken out, its talons were cut and the legs were disoriented.

Based on these observations, we concluded that it was not a fresh road kill but rather, someone might have killed the bird and then put it on the road to trick people into believing that it was a road kill. In this area, we noted some kids with *gulel* (slingshot), which can be used to throw stones at birds and animals. On seeing us, the kids ran away. We tried to lodge a complaint about this incident but there was no authorised person available. On speaking with locals, they denied that any hunting was taking place in this area. However, it is possible that the locals do hunt wild birds and animals. This incident highlights the need to be vigilant regarding poaching in this area. □

On 18 October 2020, I, along with my father Ketan Shah, visited the Shoolpaneshwar Wildlife Sanctuary, near Rajpipla. We were on a birding trip to the Sagai range of the sanctuary. We went from Sagai to Ninai Waterfall. In between, there is a

Indian Blue Robin *Larvivora brunnea* revisits Barda Hills, Porbandar

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male was sighted again at Kileshwar Temple of Barda Hills on 29 October 2017 by my wife Divya and I. It was observed from 15 ft distance under the shade of a large banyan tree (known as Ravan Vruksh locally), perched on a huge stone and looking for insects. The bird was observed for five minutes and then flew away. It is pertinent to note that during both sightings, the birds were observed close to a puddle during the afternoon, hopping and pecking on the ground, turning leaves and looking for insects.

The bright chestnut underparts contrasting with blue upperparts, short tail with white vent were unmistakable and its identification as a male of Indian Blue Robin was confirmed beyond doubt. As seen in the photo, the chestnut on primaries and 'not well developed' - distinct white supercilium suggests, the bird is not an adult but perhaps an immature or a first-winter male.

With reference to my previous sighting of Indian Blue Robin (*Larvivora brunnea*) (previously known as Indian Blue Chat *Erithacus brunneus*) in November 2016 from Barda Hills (Vargiya & Legha 2017), it is interesting to record that one

Indian Blue Robin....

Status in Gujarat

The status of the Indian Blue Robin in Gujarat is not clear. Ganpule (2016) mentioned it as a vagrant or rare passage migrant. The species was first mentioned by Khachar (1996) in his article on the birds of Gujarat; he mentioned that he had sighted a female Indian Blue Robin after a thunderstorm in late September (year unknown) at Hingolghadh with Salim Ali himself. He wrote 'it's a storm tossed migrant blown off its normal epic flight', non-stop from the Himalayas to South India. Later, Mashru (2014) compiled five more sightings from 2007-2013, out of which three are from Saurashtra and two are from South Gujarat. There are six more sightings on eBird with photos, all from Saurashtra region (eBird 2020). Hence, it is clear that the Indian Blue Robin has been noted more in the forests of Barda, Girnar-Gir and others (n=10) compared to South Gujarat (n=2).

Out of these 12 sightings of Indian Blue Robin from Gujarat, ten sightings are between the months of October–November and March–April. It supports the species being a passage

migrant, visiting Gujarat during the southward and return leg of its journey. The only two sightings from September and February (one each) are also close to the passage migration period. Hence, I agree with Mashru (2014) that the species is most likely to be a passage migrant to Gujarat.

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Sighting of Pallid Scops Owl *Otus brucei* in Junagadh City

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Ravi Patel

On 9 November 2018 in the morning at about 11:00 hrs, our neighbour called us and informed that a small, baby owl was injured and present on his terrace. We immediately went to his place and on the way, discussed that it could be a Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*) or a Spotted Owlet (*Athene brama*) because both these species were present in our urban area. We looked for the bird, which our neighbour said had hidden behind a steel cot, From a safe distance we checked if it was injured. We took a photo from our mobile phone and observed two pellets lying near the owl. After a few minutes, we observed that the owl behaved angrily, making a threatening display,

moving its horns (ear tufts) and its face. As we tried to go closer, it flew and perched on the terrace wall. We came back and concluded that the owl was normal and healthy and informed our neighbours that it was not injured and also not a baby! Based on its grey plumage with streaks on the underparts, along with other features, and studying the field guides, we confirmed its identification as a Pallid Scops Owl (*Otus brucei*). Without any disturbance, we observed it from 35-40 feet distance. The owl came back and was seen roosting behind the steel cot.

This was an unexpected sighting because the Pallid Scops Owl is generally found in semi-desert and scrubland area while this sighting was in the middle of the city, in Vishnu Colony-2, Junagadh (21° 31' 27.5" N, 70° 26' 47.8" E). Around 20:30 hrs, the owl drank some water from a bird water feeder kept on the terrace. This water bowl is kept for birds in our area like House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), House Crow (*Corvus splendens*), Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*), Indian Silverbill (*Euodice malabarica*) etc. but we never expected that a Pallid Scops Owl would drink from this bowl. At 21:05 hrs, it flew away towards the east. On the next day, 10 November 2018, we were curious about the pellets; we had seen two pellets the previous day. We went back and saw that the Pallid Scops Owl was roosting behind the cot. We continued watching it and

observed that it was hiding behind the steel cot, probably for the whole day. It became active at around 20:10 hrs, drank some water and again flew away towards the east.

We waited till 23:30 hrs, and then we checked every two hours during the night. On 11 November, after 16:00 hrs, we found that it was again roosting at the same place. We noticed that there were four pellets present around the owl. On this day, the owl was active at 17:40 hrs, drank some water, stretched its wings and flew towards the east at 18:10 hrs. Because the stored pellets partially blocked the digestive system of the owl, new prey could not be swallowed until the pellets are ejected. Regurgitation often signifies that an owl is ready to eat again. We observed this owl here for the last four days. It is known that since November is generally the migration time for Pallid Scops Owl, the short time this owl spent in the city would have helped it in its onward migration. This type of rest in a city area is unusual for this species because it is usually found in stony foothills in semi-desert area and it spends the day in a crevice, tree hole or thick foliage (Grimmett *et al.* 2011).

The Pallid Scops Owl is not a well studied species within the Indian Subcontinent (Ali & Ripley 1981). Its distribution in

Pakistan is that of a scarce resident and local migrant, summering in the hills, with a few winter records from the plains (Roberts 1991). For Gujarat, the Pallid Scops Owl is known to be an uncommon winter visitor, with sightings from Saurashtra and Kachchh, and isolated records from other parts of Gujarat (Ganpule 2016). This sighting from the middle of a city like Junagadh is interesting and suggests that the Pallid Scops Owl could be seen in other urban areas with trees, in our state.

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Vocalisation of Greater Painted-snipe *Rostratula benghalensis*

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Introduction

The Greater Painted Snipe (*Rostratula benghalensis*) belongs to the genus *Rostratula*, and it is the only resident snipe in India (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). It is a small, quail-sized bird, found around paddy, marshes, and reeds. This species is polyandrous and sexually dimorphic; the female is brighter in colour than the male. It breeds in the monsoon. The female mates with multiple partners in her territory, and leaves the nest after laying eggs. The male performs the incubation and parental role. During the breeding season, females start getting vocal to challenge rival females. The song of the female is deeper and stronger than the male due to the longer trachea. The female utters a 'ook' sound, like blowing in a bottle (Ali & Ripley 1980); the female uttering the call with fluffed out neck while calling from the ground (Mashru 2017), which can be audible as far as one km away (Kirwan 2020). If accidentally flushed, it makes 'kek...kek' calls in flight. So far, there is very little information available about the vocalisation of this crepuscular species, specifically about male vocalizations. I have observed the male making a hissing call, with wing display, when the chicks are around; probably a call made in threat or self-defence.

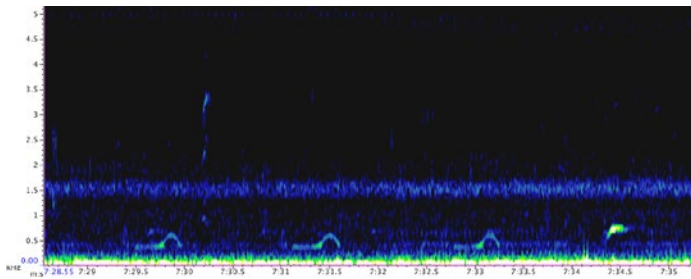
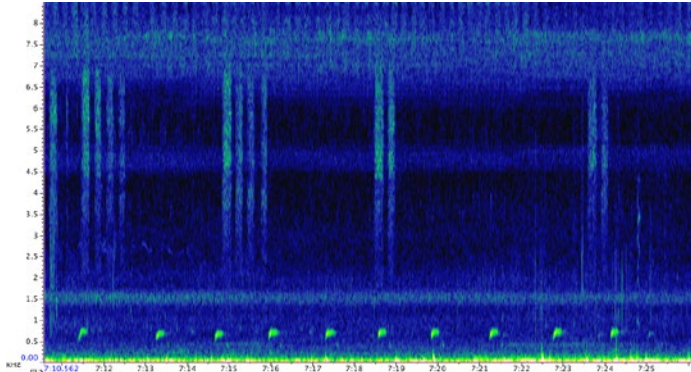
Observations

On 9 September 2020, at around 18:45 hrs, while birding at Saldi Talav (21° 34' 30.18" N, 71° 19' 24.7794" E), near Amreli, I heard a 'ook' call, coming from the marsh area. I immediately recognized the call as that given by the Greater Painted Snipe since I had recorded this call in 2011 for the first time and I am also familiar with other species' calls in this area. There were three-four birds based on sounds heard. I tried to approach closer after a few recordings and I flushed one female, which settled in the marsh a few meters away from me. I recorded calls using a Sennheiser ME66 Microphone paired with Zoom H4N digital recorder on a 44 khz 16-bit .wav format. I was able to record 15-minute recordings. Meanwhile, I noticed a very unfamiliar response to the 'ook' call. It was a very low, 'woohoo', coming from two directions where two other individuals were also calling. During the 15-minute observation, a total of 22 bouts of 'ook' (type A) and 16 bouts of 'woohoo' (type B) calls were recorded. It was noted that call-type B overlapped with A type call 11 times.

I generated spectrograms of both calls and also noted the characteristics. The details are given in table.

Spectrographic parameters of both types of calls

Call type	Low freq (Hz)	High freq (Hz)	Centre freq (Hz)	Time (s)	Note interval (s)
ook	540	808	730	0.22	1
woohoo	346	581	421	0.44	1



Discussion

Polyandrous species have a complex breeding system. Male birds are mostly known as good singers and in many species, female song has also been observed (Odem *et al.* 2014). In Greater Painted Snipe, the female sings to attract the male and also to probably warn rival females. In this observation, I did not understand the function of the B type call. None of the reference works (Grimmett *et al.* 2011, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012) have mentioned this B type vocalization for this species. Could it be a male response to the female call/song? Or could it be a duet? However, duet songs have never been observed in Greater Painted Snipes. With my limited observations, it was difficult to understand this unknown vocal response. We know little about the polyandrous breeding system in Greater Painted Snipes. What is the role of the female song in sexual

selection? Also, male response for female song is not known. This observation has provided a bit more additional information about the different vocalisations in this species. A more systematic study would help understand in more detail about the vocal repertoire of the Greater Painted Snipe.

I have uploaded my recordings on Macaulay Library – see ML262630291 and ML 262630411 for details of both types of calls.

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Letter to the Editor

Dear Editor,

I recently read the paper on the gulls of Gujarat by Prasad Ganpule (Ganpule 2019). On the top right of page 7, I was surprised to see a photograph labelled as 'Mew Gull' (*Larus canus*), and even more surprised to read that it was confirmed by some very knowledgeable people!

I feel sure that, if Klaus Olsen and Kjeld Pedersen take a second look at this picture, they will agree with me that the photograph actually shows a (2nd-cycle) Pallas's Gull (*Ichthyaetus ichthyaetus*), and not a Mew/Common Gull. The long, sloping forehead is an immediate giveaway, and so are the stronger bill and much shorter primary projection. In addition, the bill pattern is wrong for (2nd-cycle and adult) Common Gull, which does not show such a big difference in the amount of black between the upper and lower mandible. In 2nd-cycle Common Gull, black is rather evenly distributed across both mandibles, while in this Indian bird, it is clearly more extensive on the lower mandible. Other features that point to Pallas's Gull are the brown ear coverts, white eyelids and, if you zoom in, a hint of the characteristic small, rounded, black spots on the upper mantle.

I double-checked my ideas about this bird with Chris Gibbins, who fully agrees that it is a Pallas's Gull. Perhaps it would be good to rectify the identification in a forthcoming issue of *Flamingo*?

Peter Adriaens: UK.
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Reply from Prasad Ganpule

Dear Editor,

A reply was received from Kjeld T. Pedersen who wrote that 'I can't agree or disagree against those identification features from the actual picture. If you want to change or make comments on this picture/ID in future articles, then make the ID as "unsure" (Kjeld T. Pedersen, *in litt*, email dated 18 March 2021)'.

In view of the detailed identification features explained by Peter Adriaens and concurred with by Chris Gibbins, this record of Mew Gull from Little Rann of Kachchh stands withdrawn (and is rectified). Thus, there remain only two confirmed (photographic) records of Mew Gull from Gujarat; by Eaton (2013) from Bhuj and Olsen (2019) from Una District.

I am thankful to Peter Adriaens for explaining the identification of this bird in detail.

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Short Birding Notes



White-tailed Eagle *Haliaeetus albicilla* near Nalsarovar

On 28 November 2020, near Vithalgadh, on the periphery of Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary, I observed an eagle sitting in an agricultural field and stopped to identify it. I was rewarded when the bird flew overhead, allowing me to capture some photos that could help with the identification. The eagle looked much larger and bulkier than a Steppe Eagle (*Aquila nipalensis*). It had a dark beak, mottled chest (with white feathers), and showed white feathers on back and wings. The tail feathers were whitish, with dark brown edges. I checked my photographs with the field guides and noted that it was a White-tailed Eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*). It was an immature/juvenile bird. This was the first time I had observed this eagle here. There is a recent record from Velavadar NP (Bhatt 2018) but the White-tailed Eagle is a vagrant to Gujarat and thus, this is an important sighting for the state.

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Orange-headed Thrush *Geokichla citrina* in Kachchh

On 16 February 2020, I visited Chadva Rakhal, in Taluka: Bhuj, with my friend Lalit Tank. The area is quite small but well wooded and includes a fresh water lake. There, we saw and photographed an Orange-headed Thrush (*Geokichla citrina*). The bird was easily identified by its distinct plumage. We saw it for some time and took good photographs. As per senior birders, there is no previous record of this species from Kachchh. Hence, we were very much excited after finding this rarity. Though apart from forests of S. Gujarat, there are records of this species from well wooded areas of Saurashtra and northern Gujarat, the sighting of the Orange-headed Thrush in Kachchh is quite unusual and is probably the first photographic record for Kachchh.

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Blyth's Starling *Sturnia blythii* in South Gujarat

On 27 September 2020, at around 08:00 hrs, we were on the way to the wetland area at Sultanpur, Navasari, for bird photography. Unfortunately, sudden heavy rain started when we reached at the destination. We waited for 30 minutes but the rain did not stop and finally, we decided to do a round of the area. We saw a group of starlings moving ahead of the car, and identified these as a small flock of Chestnut-tailed Starlings (*Sturnia malabarica*). They were in three groups, consisting of 15-20 birds in each group. Out of all birds, 4-5 starlings looked quite different, with bright white head and deep orange-red underparts. We took photos and uploaded them on Facebook, where these birds were identified as Blyth's Starlings (*Sturnia blythii*), also known as Malabar Starling. We were seeing it here for the first time and later came to know that it could be the first photographic record from Gujarat. Ganpule (2016) has given it as a rare resident in South Gujarat forests, with isolated records from other parts of the state but as far as we are aware, there are no recent records from Gujarat.

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Sighting of Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo* at Kadod Village, Surat District

On 7 October 2017, I visited Kadod Village outskirts area (on Kosadi Road), in Bardoli Taluka, Surat. I reached there at around 18:00 hrs and started bird watching. I saw a small falcon perched on an electric pole. I took some pictures but I could not identify the bird in the field. I asked my friend Saswat Mishra and he informed me that this was a Eurasian Hobby (*Falco subbuteo*). The Eurasian Hobby is a widespread autumn passage migrant in Gujarat. There are records from South Gujarat but this was the first time I had seen this bird here. The timing of the sighting suggests that it was an autumn passage migrant here. I did not see the bird again in the area. I am grateful to Saswat Mishra for his help in the identification of this bird.

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First record of White-capped Bunting *Emberiza stewarti* from Kachchh

On 16 December 2020, I visited Tapkeshwari area, about 7 kms from Bhuj, with Bhanubhai Adhvaryu. The area has hilly terrain with scattered scrub and rocks. There, we saw White-naped Tit (*Machlolophus nuchalis*) and White-bellied Minivet (*Pericrocotus erythropygus*), and took good photos. At a small pond, a few birds were busy drinking water. Among them, one bird was looking slightly different. So I took a few record photos. I sent the photos to Prasad Ganpule. He replied that this was a male White-capped Bunting (*Emberiza stewarti*). We revisited the same location on 19 December 2020. After a wait of one and half hours, a female White-capped Bunting came and perched on a *Prosopis juliflora* tree. I got a chance to take a few photos before it went away in two minutes. I came to know from senior birders Shantilal Varu and Jugal Kishore Tiwari that there is no previous record of this species from Kachchh. Hence, this is the first record of this species from Kachchh.

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Sighting of Brown Fish-Owl *Ketupa zeylonensis* in Malnath Hills, Bhavnagar

On 10 November 2020, while birding in the Malnath Hills area, Bhavnagar, at around 10:45 hrs, a large bird flew out from a mango tree. I was approaching near the tree and saw that it settled in another tree close by. Alarm calls were raised by smaller birds and on locating the large bird, I were thrilled to see that it was a Brown Fish-Owl (*Ketupa zeylonensis*). I observed and photographed the owl for some time and it seemed quite comfortable with my presence after the initial disturbance. After 13:00 hrs, Kandarp Andharia and Prashant Andharia joined me and took some good photographs of the owl. I followed up the next day to check on its presence but it was not seen there. The Brown Fish Owl has been recorded frequently from Gir Forest and Junagadh area but this is the first photographic record from Bhavnagar District. It seems that this owl could be a vagrant to other nearby districts and needs to be looked out for well wooded areas outside Gir-Girnar/Junagadh.

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Colour aberrant Crested Lark *Galerida cristata* in Little Rann of Kachchh

On 23 December 2020, I was with Vaneet Daniel, C. Modhwadia and guide Becharbhai Rabari and we went for bird watching at Little Rann of Kachchh, near Dasada. After finishing our morning birding session, we were coming out from near the last patch of a water body of the sanctuary. We spotted a few Crested Larks (*Galerida cristata*) in which one bird was a colour aberrant bird. As per our guide Becharbhai, last year also it was sighted by another guide Gopalbhai around the same place. We took some photos. The lark looked entirely white but on a closer look, a few brownish patches could be seen on the head and around the wings. We identified the colour mutation as either progressive greying or dilution, but it was difficult to be sure of the correct colour mutation. This is another record of a colour aberrant bird from Gujarat.

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Egyptian Vultures *Neophron percnopterus* at Vasna Barrage, Ahmedabad

On 23 February 2020, a Sunday, at around 18:00 hrs, I was bird watching at Vasna Barrage on the Riverfront side, Ahmedabad, when I saw a group of around seven Egyptian Vultures (*Neophron percnopterus*) on a large electric pole. The group included mainly adult birds. There are records of this vulture near Panjarpol dumping site (at Sanand) (see 'birds of Gujarat' website: http://birdsofgujarat.co.in/bird_detail.php?id=12660) but there are no recent records from the city area. The Egyptian Vulture is resident in Gujarat and it is now a threatened species. This is the first time I had seen this rare species in the middle of a large city like Ahmedabad. It is possible that small groups may still be visiting Ahmedabad area. Bird watchers are requested to be on the lookout for this species in Ahmedabad area.

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Forest Owlet *Heteroglaux blewitti* in Dadra & Nagar Haveli

On 7 January 2021, a Thursday, we decided to explore the jungles of Dadra & Nagar Haveli. We were with Bhoya Divyesh and Aniket Patel. At around 14:30 hrs, we were exploring a new area and hence, the second author was not carrying a camera. We went almost seven km inside the forest and we saw one Rufous Woodpecker (*Micropternus brachyurus*) in flight and then we began tracking it. The second author stopped and listened to a call and informed me that it was the call of a Forest Owlet (*Heteroglaux blewitti*). We waited for more than two hours. We saw the Forest Owlet and got good photographs. While the Forest Owlet has been reported from the Dang Forest area, it was our dream to find it here in Dadra & Nagar Haveli and we were very happy that we could get it here. The habitat here is not different from other habitats seen in Dangs and its occurrence here is not unusual, but, this is the first confirmed record from this area.

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Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris* at Bhavnagar coastal area

On 25 December 2020, at 14:30 hrs, I was with my friend Raj Vala and we went for birding at Hathab coastal area, Bhavnagar. After watching many common waders, I saw one different bird in a group of Ruddy Turnstones (*Arenaria interpres*) and Common Redshanks (*Tringa totanus*). I photographed it and identified it as a Great Knot (*Calidris tenuirostris*). We saw two individuals in this area. Earlier, I had seen two individuals at Gopnath Beach, near Bhavnagar, in 2019, with my parents. Though seen in Gulf of Kachchh area fairly regularly, the Great Knot is not very common around Bhavnagar area.

Kandarp Andharia: Bhavnagar. kandarpandharia053@gmail.com



Greater White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons* in Nalsarovar

On 16 December 2020, we were birding in Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary. At around 12:05 hrs, we were watching flocks of Greylag Goose (*Anser anser*) and other ducks. In this flock, we saw two different geese, which were in the middle of the flock. We took some photographs and noted that they had orange legs, lacked pale grey forewing of Greylag Goose and had dark markings on underparts. Based on these features, we identified these birds as Greater White-fronted Goose (*Anser albifrons*). Over the next one to two months, more than six to seven birds were seen in the area. The Greater White-fronted Goose is a vagrant to Gujarat, with sightings from Little Rann of Kachchh and Thol Bird Sanctuary (Ganpule 2016). It was the first time we had seen this species here in Nalsarovar.

Latif Alvani & Kamruddin: Nalsarovar.



Indian Skimmer *Rynchops albicollis* in Navsari

On 1 December 2020, in the morning at 08:00 hrs, I was at Sultanpur Wetland, Navsari, for bird photography. I saw a few River Terns (*Sterna aurantia*), perched just 20 ft nearby. In this flock of River Terns, one bird was looking quite different, with black plumage. But, its head was tucked in its body and it was difficult to identify it. After ten minutes, it changed its position and I was surprised and elated to see that it was an Indian Skimmer (*Rynchops albicollis*). After that, I took some photos and called my friend Dipak Patel. We spent more than three hours with the skimmer, taking good photos. We saw a total of three Indian Skimmers here over the next three or four days. According to Ganpule (2016), the Indian Skimmer is an uncommon to rare migrant, seen in the late monsoon and winter months – it is more frequently seen in Jamnagar and Nalsarovar, with scattered records from other parts of Saurashtra. It is rare in South Gujarat and hence, this is an important sighting for our area.

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White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis* preying on Common Stonechat *Saxicola torquatus*

On 16 January 2021, I went to Nalsarovar outskirts area along with my photographer friends Chirag Palkar, Dhananjay Joshi and local guide Shabbir Belim. At around 10:00 hrs, we noticed a White-breasted Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*) with kill, and decided to have a closer look. With surprise, we observed that the kill was a Common Stonechat (*Saxicola torquatus*), which is not the usual food of a White-breasted Kingfisher. Though this species is known to prey on chicks and adults of different birds, this observation of the Common Stonechat being the prey of the White-throated Kingfisher is unusual.

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Lutino Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri* near Nalsarovar

While birding near Ranagadh Village, in the Nalsarovar area, on 13 January 2021, we were observing birds in a *Salvadora persica* tree, locally known as *piludi* or *pilu* tree. We observed a colour aberrant Rose-ringed Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*). The bird was lemon-yellow in colour. The beak appeared lighter red and some green was visible on primary coverts. In flight, we saw that there was some green present in the wings. We identified it as a lutino Rose-ringed Parakeet. Birds with this aberration are popular in the pet trade and it is possible that this was an escapee. However, the behaviour of this bird was like that of a wild bird, its plumage was good, it did not have any lost feathers and it was feeding on a *Salvadora persica*. Further, this sighting was far from a city area. This led us to believe that it could be a colour aberrant wild bird. There is a recent sighting of a lutino Plum-headed Parakeet (*Psittacula cynocephala*) from Corbett National Park (Shroff 2016). This was the first time we had seen such a bird here.

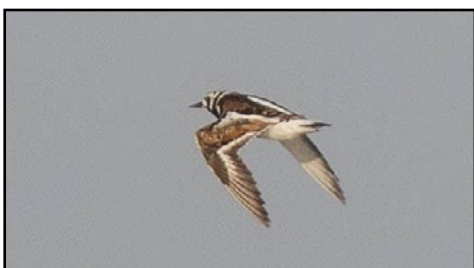
Urmilus Gameti & Vishal Chavda: urmilus@gmail.com



A male Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis* at Nalsarovar

On 15 January 2021, it was the second day of *Uttarayan* and instead of flying kites, my friend Nandini Mehta and I headed to Nalsarovar to get a glimpse of the Red-breasted Goose (*Branta ruficollis*) which was seen there. We reached Nalsarovar just before sunrise. We waited for flocks of geese and cranes to settle down in the fields. But that day, we could hardly see any flocks of geese flying around. Thinking it was a bit early, we headed to the other side in Ranchhodpura. We took an unknown road, with our eyes on the field. Just a few meters onto a lane, a grey, slender bird with a long, pointed tail caught my attention. It looked like a dove and had black feathers on its face, throat and breast. I identified it as a male Namaqua Dove (*Oena capensis*). It was perched on a bush just about one foot above the ground. It was sitting calmly and was lethargic as the sun was just coming up and it was quite cold. I took a few photos from the car itself. There are recent records of Namaqua Dove from Nalsarovar and near Bhavnagar (Belim & Multani 2020, Bhil & Bhil 2020). The earlier sighting from Nalsarovar was of a female/juvenile and this was the first time a male had been seen here.

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Sighting of Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* at Nyari-I Dam, Rajkot

On 19 May 2020, we visited Nyari-I Dam in the evening just to relax from the lockdown. We heard some different call and presumed it to be of some different wader since we had heard the call before in our coastal birding trips. The first author was trying to record the call with his mobile phone when the wader appeared in flight. We managed to see it well and took photos. It was a Ruddy Turnstone (*Arenaria interpres*). We were surprised to see this coastal bird in an inland fresh water reservoir and that too this late (in May). We assumed that it may have landed while in return migration. The second author had observed two Eurasian Oystercatchers (*Haematopus ostralegus*) years back, at same place, on 29 March 1998. It seems this large freshwater reservoir attracts waders during migration.

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Sighting of Western Crowned Warbler *Phylloscopus occipitalis* in Rajpipla

On 18 October 2020, I, along with my father Ketan Shah, went to a birding trip to Sagai range of Shoolpaneshwar Wildlife Sanctuary. On reaching Sagai, we found a small stream. Along the stream, there was a hunting party which consisted of birds such as Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*), Red-breasted Flycatcher (*Ficedula parva*), Indian Paradise Flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi*), Sulphur-bellied Warbler (*Phylloscopus griseolus*) etc. We saw a *Phylloscopus* warbler there, having a large beak with an orange-yellow colored lower mandible. The sides of the crown were dusky-olive colored, contrasting with the supercilium and it had a dark eye-stripe. The plumage was quite worn out as the double wing bars were not prominent. Based on the large bill, the head pattern and the plumage, we identified it as a Western Crowned Warbler (*Phylloscopus occipitalis*). The Western Crowned Warbler is uncommon here and this sighting adds to the sightings of this species from Gujarat.

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Sykes's Short-toed Lark *Calandrella dukhunensis* in Greater Rann of Kachchh

On 15 February 2019, I visited the eastern part of Banni in Greater Rann of Kachchh, near Lodai, with Manoj Finava, Subhash Das and Kapilsinh Zala. At about 08:30 hrs, we came across a flock of about 15-20 Greater Short-toed Larks (*Calandrella brachydactyla*) feeding in the dry grass. One bird in this flock looked very different, with rufous tinged face, nape and breast sides, heavily streaked upperparts, black streaking on breast sides and a prominent black lateral crown stripe. The bill was horn coloured with black culmen and tip. The crown was not strongly streaked. The bird was photographed by us and we observed that though it associated with Greater Short-toed Larks, it was often chased away when it approached closer to the birds. It was identified as a Sykes's Short-toed Lark (*Calandrella dukhunensis*), also known as Mongolian Short-toed Lark, by its rufous-tinged face and breast side, bill with dark culmen and tip and strongly streaked upperparts. The black lateral crown stripe was an unusual feature seen in this individual. The Sykes's Short-toed Lark is believed to be a rare winter migrant or winter vagrant to Gujarat; there are few records from South Gujarat and Little Rann of Kachchh (Ganpule 2018). This is another record of the species from our state.

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Feather frame

The courtship behaviour of Black-shouldered Kite *Elanus caeruleus*

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It was a tranquil, almost windless predawn of 8 June 2017, with a few minutes for the sun to rise over the horizon. While driving along the countryside some 35 km away from Jamnagar, strong, shrill squeals of a raptor drew my attention. I was witnessing two Black-shouldered Kites (*Elanus caeruleus*) in the air; one chasing the other. For a moment it appeared to be a chase, but to my curiosity, one of the kites acrobatically twisted itself and regained normal flight position as the upper one flew near it. I took no time to realize that this was a courtship display of the Black-shouldered Kite, a small and graceful raptor of the Indian countryside, which is also known as the Black-winged Kite. While witnessing this wonderful natural history event for the first time, I recalled that I had read during my early years, in one of Dr. Salim Ali's books, that in raptors, females are slightly larger than their males.

I observed that this couple flew from a distant low perch, and soon gained some height. Suddenly, the female, who was flying

slightly below the male, rolled up-side down and displayed her talons to the male soaring slightly above her. But the male passed by without any reaction. It seemed that he was flying as if lost in his own thoughts. The female, however, rolled back to her normal flying position. Again she sped up, caught up with her mate, overtook him slightly, and rolled over yet again to present her talons. Again the male did not display any interest. However, the female repeated the same maneuver a third time by speeding up and catching up with him and rolling herself mid-air to present the talons. This time, the male responded by dangling his legs straight.

An almost monotonous, scream-like, thin, high-pitched whistle *pee-o* was repeated over and over with very short intervals. Now, the male rose to about 100 meters in the sky with the female following him. This time they came in close proximity. The female, below, was in normal flying position, stretching her neck to almost touch him. Abruptly they dropped down, to just about 20 meters above the ground, before gaining height again. Both the birds were watching each others' maneuvers continually. At one time, I observed the male descending sharply from a significant height with wings held back and tail folded. The female circling at a lower altitude suddenly turned herself upside with the talons towards the sky as if receiving him. As they reached closer, male extended his legs, almost touching her. Once again, they gained height together, and as the male took a slight lead, the female tried to come closer to fly below him.

This spectacular courtship display involving undulating flights along with wild, twisting chases and whistling screeches was repeated a few times. All this was happening swiftly and in about 500 meters' radius but at varying altitude. Also, twice the couple flew very close to us. Display of talons was performed at almost all heights. They both came close to touching the talons but never interlocked or cart-wheeled. The female initiated the act, every time, by extending her legs and clearly presenting the talons, but the male reciprocated to this gesture only a few times. I was with my birder friend Dr. Mehul Bhadania, and we witnessed this event for about 20 minutes before the couple flew far away where they were unapproachable. □