

Flamingo

Newsletter of the Bird Conservation Society, Gujarat



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Habitat Concerns....

Coral reefs need serious attention

Gujarat has 1600 km plus coastline with adjoining coastal habitats, such as intertidal mudflats, mangroves, salt pans, coral reefs etc. Coral reefs are considered to be the rain forests of the oceans. Such an adjective is due to the rich biodiversity hidden beneath the blue waters. These reefs provide for plentiful feeding, as well as breeding grounds, for variety of micro-organisms, worms, fishes, crabs, mollusks and many other aquatic life forms. India is blessed with four major coral reefs and Gujarat is lucky to have one out of these. The coral reef here is on the fringes of southern shore of the Gulf of Kachchh. The area falls on the central-Asian migratory fly-way for the birds and acts as an entry point for the birds in Gujarat as well as India.

Coral reefs are a great source of food for these water birds. Species such as Crab-plover (*Dromas ardeola*), Eurasian Oystercatcher (*Haematopus ostralegus*), Darter (*Anhinga melanogaster*), Pacific Golden Plover (*Pluvialis fulva*), Western Reef Egret (*Egretta gularis*) and many more species are observed in good numbers in this patch. The area is also a haven for the shorebirds. The avifaunal diversity of this area is well documented with more than 200 species of birds. The area was declared as Marine Protected Area (MPA), in the early 1980s.

However in the last 20 years, industrial development has progressed enormously in and around this part of Jamnagar Dist. Two huge refineries have come up in the precincts of this ecosystem. Constant ship traffic, containing tons of crude oil, is a routine feature in this tract. Dredging to maintain the ship's navigational channels patent, dumps tons of sedimentation over the reefs. Damaging and degradation of these pristine coral reefs would not only ravage the affluent aquatic biodiversity of this part of the ocean but rob the birds of their rich feeding source. Dumping of waste from ships as well as industrial and domestic sewage is increasing pollution level in the reef zone. The possibilities of accidental oil spills too cannot be ignored. Being eco-geographically at a crucial junction, the vulnerable coral reefs of the Gulf of Kachchh need serious attention. Conservation of such biodiversity-rich habitat will surely help, maintain good socio-economic balance also. Let us act now before it is too late.

- Dishant Parasharya

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

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

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Editorial....

Gujarat has a distinction of being endowed with a variety of bird habitats. These include areas as diverse as flats of the Greater Rann of Kachchh, to subtropical forests of Dang, and inundated paddy fields of south Gujarat, to the grass lands of Saurashtra. This is one reason why it boasts of a hefty, ever-increasing checklist of about 525 bird species. There are some unique habitats like Gulf of Kachchh, with its mangrove-fringed coast-line, intertidal mudflats, coral reefs and clusters of tiny islands surrounding the tip of Saurashtra peninsula, all together sheltering many water-dependent bird species and even providing breeding sites to many of them. Continuing, unabated development along the coast would prove to be an ecological disaster in long run, aptly spelled out in 'Habitat concerns'.

The third title page carries a picture of Late Maharao Vijayarajji of Kachchh Province with his morning's bag of hares and geese shot down for sport. Paradoxically, Greylag Geese, which used to visit this land in thousands about 100 years ago, are no more marking their presence here since last at least half a century. At the same time, these geese are sighted in increasing numbers in central Gujarat and Saurashtra in the last 15-20 years. Many alterations are happening with regard to distribution and density of avian species. Rising number of small and big dams and the growing irrigation network through canals, especially the 'Sardar Sarovar Yojana' with its complex grid of water channels, have downright transformed the wetland scenario of the State. Are we in cognition to what is happening to our birdlife with this transformation?

The other day, I had an opportunity to participate in the bird-census event at Nal Sarovar, the only Ramsar site of Gujarat. During the discussions, I was surprised to know that 'Ramsar' tag, except for offering a 'Status', would hardly accord more benefits to the site, either financially or indirectly through imposition of more stringent regulations. Nal sarovar too has been victimised by unchecked inundation through Narmada run offs. Would it not be obligatory for all of us now to regularly monitor important wetlands, beyond making bird-counts, and ensure their natural character which has been responsible for attracting birds since ages!?

Lastly, on behalf of BCSG, I congratulate Viral Joshi, our member and contributor for this magazine, for winning the Sanctuary Asia 'Young Naturalist Award'. We wish him all the success for the future.

- **Bakul Trivedi, M.S.**

When we talk of biodiversity, we tend to think of only the mix of different species. No one ever gives a thought to the fact that within a species, especially one that has a very wide distribution there is a variation in its genetical make up which should not be overlooked, It is this wide adaptive capacity which, while making the species so successful also provides possibilities of high specialisation. Plant and animal breeders have been aware of this for long and we have subspecific recognition by systemic biologists. The underlying awareness of the existence of a great variability within a species has been made the fullest use of by plant and animal breeders; witness the different breeds of dogs, pigeons and other domesticated animals. The genetical diversity within a species taken the fullest advantage of to produce fancy breeds, many bordering on the bizarre, others exhibiting great beauty of form and still others bred for their high utility.

Unhappily, in mass programmes the need for high degree of awareness of the immense variability in a species is given the go by. The result is the inducing of conformity as stultifying and in the long run, as self- defeating as any programme depending on monocultures. Not only is biodiversity eroded, but the underlying versatility, and hence great adaptability, of a species is lost. Perhaps, the best example I can give is that

of our common and widespread tree the 'Desi Babool', *Acacia nilotica*. This remarkably useful tree is found growing wild over much of North West India and as its scientific name indicates, it extends far to the West into Egypt and from there South onto the Savannas of East Africa. Over this very wide range, "babools" have, down the ages, developed high adaptation both in external form and in their internal make up to thrive over such a wide range. This variability can be superficially seen in the Acacias of Africa and India. Based on the external appearances, earlier botanists had recognised a number of species of 'babool'. It is only after specimens were collected and studied from across the entire range that an integration was seen and so the Indian Acacia was first grouped with the Arabian one and later, the Arabian with the Egyptian. In India alone, the babool growing in central Gujarat is totally dissimilar to trees found in rocky, windswept Saurashtra to the west or rooted in the black cotton soil to the east on the Malwa plateau. The Gujarat babool is a fine tree, with finer thorns growing as it does in a deep sandy loam with an easy availability of water, while the Saurashtra and the Malwa babools are gnarled, with dense crowns and very large thorns, signs of water shortages and strong winds induced high rate of transpiration. To the north of Gujarat in Marwar we have a



singularly graceful form with a narrow, tall growth resembling the cyprus and poplars of temperate regions! While one form integrates into the other, each variety has developed high evolutionary adaptations to make the extreme form best suited to the conditions in its specific habitat. By not giving any thought to this fact, Forest Departments and other organisations taking on themselves the task of wide spread afforestation have had singularly poor results to show for all the effort and expenditure of precious funds.

Today, in Dehra Dun there is a plethora of bulk seed suppliers who can provide you sack loads of seeds of most of the tree species commonly used in mass afforestation programmes. These suppliers procure the seeds from poor people and one wonders whether they ever bother to find out the origin of their supplies. The whole exercise is one of a crass commercial nature lacking in the sort of high quality of specificity necessary in biological work which mass afforestation most certainly requires. So, I procure an 'x' load of babool seeds, from one of the suppliers without concerning myself about the origin and I happily plant them. Results in central Gujarat will be great since growth conditions are favourable but results in western Kachchh would be disappointing and well may they be since conditions of climate and soil are demanding to the extreme. We then have such comments as Kachchh being a "refractory" area! Had seeds for afforestation been collected in Abdasa taluka of Kachchh the outcome would conceivably have been spectacular.

When we are attempting afforestation on so immense a scale as India demands, casualness cannot be accepted. This is precisely why we presumably have a highly qualified Forest

Service. The Forest Departments should concentrate on developing seed banks in different regions and should develop the capacity to guarantee the supply of highly site-specific seeds. I am not sure that any such work has been done in the country since the Forest Departments themselves purchase seeds from bulk suppliers.

Further, is there any concept of how recreated forests should look? A naturally regenerated forest has a mix of vegetation, both herbaceous and woody, while a plantation is lacking in diversity. One hopes that in the new century there will be a very clear set of guidelines developed that will demand greater emphasis being laid on "protection" as against "planting" of areas to be revegetated. There is enough rootstock remaining for a rapid comeback. Money and effort should be diverted to developing regional seed banks and guidelines for sowing and care of the resultant saplings. To overcome the tendency for monocultures from developing, recommendations should be provided for the mixture of species for given locations. The Twenty First Century thus is, as I see it, the century of the sensitive forester and the years ahead promise to be exhilarating for young people who would want to make forestry their profession. To make a total break from the past, we may consider renaming the Forest Departments as the "Aranya" or Wilderness Departments. The compulsions of tilling the soil, planting in lines and all the labour intensive and hence money absorbing activities will be curbed. Instead, a good forest man would develop systems demanding maximum protection and minimum interference stimulating a high degree of Natural History. □



"Ornithologist Pamela Rasmussen felt both panic and elation one morning in 1997 when she gazed, only half trusting her eyes, at a long-lost species of bird perched in a bare tree in western India. Panic because, the Forest Owlet (*Anthene blewitti*) that Rasmussen had sought for two weeks from one side of India to the other, might fly off before it could be positively identified and captured on film. Elation because the chunky, 9-inch-long owl that she was staring at was a species that had gone unseen by any scientist for 113 years. Seven stuffed skins in a handful of museums were all that seemed to remain of a species that several experts had crossed off as extinct.

Fortunately, the forest owlet was not only alive, but 'absurdly cooperative,' says Rasmussen, a museum specialist in the Division of Birds at the National Museum of Natural History. 'It just sat there,' she says, while she and a colleague videotaped it for half an hour before another bird finally chased it off."

- Michael Lipske

Source: *The Smithsonian*, 1999

Eventually, Forest Owlet is regularly being sighted in Dang district, Gujarat in recent months. - Eds.

Photo Essay: Hunting Methods and Feeding tactics of Great White Pelican

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Great White Pelican (*Pelecanus onocrotalus*) is a migrant to Gujarat, seen in large water bodies. It is also regularly seen in Ranmal Lake (Lakhota Lake), Jamnagar where large groups of up to 200 birds are regularly observed in winter months. Observations of hunting methods and feeding behaviour of this bird seen in Ranmal Lake are given below in a series of photographs, rarely documented photographically.

Great White Pelican feeds in a group, known as 'cooperative feeding'. The monsoon rainfall in Jamnagar in 2013 was scanty,

and hence this winter (13-14) the water level in Ranmal lake was low. This provided a chance to these birds to catch large sized fishes from the lake, not possible otherwise when the water depth is more. It was a great opportunity for me to observe the feeding behaviour of pelicans. I concluded after the photography session that Great White Pelicans may be cooperative feeders but many times they attempt to rob the food from their colleagues.



Fig 1: A group of Great White Pelicans in the early morning sunlight.

Fig 2: Pelicans forming a circle and dipping their beaks together, creating a circle of open pouches, thereby trying to trap any fish in the area. A Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax* spp.) intrudes in the circle and tries to catch/steal fish from the besieged waters.



Fig 3: A pelican is successful in catching a large fish, and tries to run away from other birds of the group to avoid food piracy. Other individuals will pursue the lucky bird.



Fig 4: A pelican pulls the pouch with a fish inside and tries to rob the fish. This act stretches the pouch but the possessor closes its beak and tries to prevent the hard earned prey from being robbed. Onlookers waiting expectantly for a possible free meal!



Fig 5: Desperate measures!! Another Pelican becomes even more aggressive and catches the neck of the owner in a desperate attempt to burgle its prey. The Pelican with the fish is equally determined and keeps its beak closed to avoid food piracy. After 15 minutes of trying other individuals give up.





Fig 6: Pelican alone with a large fish, trying to swallow it.



Fig 7: The fish is quite large and difficult to swallow. The Pelican extends the pouch for almost five minutes to align the fish and position it in such a way that it would be easier to gulp.



Fig 8: Sometimes more measures are needed. Pelican lowers the pouch and takes little water. The pouch with fish and water will become heavy and get extended. Pelican then flaps its wings to get a good position to guzzle the fish.



Fig 9: The pouch can also be made funnel shaped to facilitate swallowing of a larger fish.



Fig 10: Success at last. The Pelican is able to swallow the fish and then basking after having enjoyed its hard earned meal.

□

Sighting of Long-toed Stint in Jamnagar

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The Long-toed Stint (*Calidris subminuta*) is a small wader. It looks like a miniature Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*) from a distance, but is the size of a Temminck's Stint (*Calidris temminckii*), to which it is very similar. It could also be confused with Little Stint (*C. minuta*), but the Long-toed Stint has yellowish-green legs and long toes. The long toes are diagnostic in identification, but not very useful in the field as they are many times not seen.



Chirag Solanki

Senior birder Adesh Shivkar was the first to spot a solitary Long-toed Stint in a marshy area on the outskirts of Jamnagar, in the last week of January 2016. He was sure about his finding but could not take pictures of the bird as he did not carry a camera at that time. Following this, Chirag Solanki and Kunal Joshi observed and re-confirmed it on the evening of 3 February 2016. While scanning the area suggested by Adesh, they were able to get some photographs. The first author went there for the next three days continuously to search for it and eventually was able to take some good photographs.

We found the Long-toed Stint in a brackish, swampy area consisting of soft mud and rich in grasses/small shrubs. It favours this habitat, as the small vegetation and the shallow depressions and small mounds provide ample hiding places in the area. The location in which Long-toed Stint was found surprisingly was full of human activities; people going around for morning chores, children playing cricket and flying kites around the area and women washing clothes. Due to a local garbage disposal site, House Crows (*Corvus splendens*) and Black Kites (*Milvus migrans*) were also present there. We observed that it avoided House Crows and Black Kites and flew away as they came nearer to it, and returned again when they were not around. It was feeding rapidly and was a non-stop eater. It probed the ground hastily, searching for insects, and stopping at intervals to inspect the area and hiding in the depressions in the muck and vegetation. Apparently, it was concerned about human presence. But once it got disturbed and flew away, it

took a lot of time to come back to the same patch. In the end, it flew away to a distant area consisting of mangroves.

Long-toed Stint is a vagrant in Gujarat. It is seldom seen in western India (Grimmett *et al.* 2011) and is a rarity for

the birders here. I suppose, that it might be overlooked as it is difficult to distinguish it from other waders. While searching for past records if any, we came across one by Kunan Naik (Pers. comm.) who had seen it in salt pans at Charakla (Dist. Jamnagar) in 2009. He had found a lone bird trailing behind the flock of dunlins and curlew sandpipers.



Yashodhan Bhatia

[There are five isolated records of Long-toed Stint given for Gujarat in Kazmierczak (2000), and this species is also included in the checklist of birds of Gujarat (Parasharya *et al.* 2004). However Grimmett *et al.* (2011) put a question mark regarding its occurrence here, while Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) considers it an autumn and spring passage migrant in Gujarat. The photographic documentation of this species for Gujarat is thus important – Eds]

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Rubber bands in regurgitated pellets of Cattle Egret, Pond Heron and Intermediate Egret

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Vishal Mistri

I recollect my studying some fifteen years ago in a primary school close to our village pond – known as *Vadutalav* at Vaso, Kheda District. There were several *Eucalyptus* in the school campus and two huge Banyan (*Ficus benghalensis*) at the edge of the pond, which were regular roosting sites of Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*), Intermediate Egret (*Mesophoyx intermedia*) and Pond Heron (*Ardeola grayii*). Numerically, the Cattle Egrets were most dominant.

My friends and I used to skip the classes and wander around, particularly looking for discarded rubber bands to play with. By experience, we knew that rubber bands were likely to be found on the ground just below the trees on which these birds used to roost. We used to get rubber bands -intact or broken, more frequently of red colour than others. These rubber bands were often entangled in the regurgitated pellets. The other rubber items found in the pellets were baby milk-feeding nipples and condoms. Amongst the condoms, pink coloured were most frequent. But at that time our interest was only in the rubber bands and we never knew the significance of this observation.

Recovery of rubber bands from the pellets of egrets is still a common phenomenon at Vaso. Recently we have taken photographs of these pellets containing rubber bands, both red and tri-coloured. At Vaso, the egrets regularly feed in the drainage canal bringing sewage from towns in the upstream, in which sewage of our town also gets mixed. It is quite likely that the rubber being very soft and pliable might have been picked up as a food source by egrets. It is not very clear why the frequency of red coloured bands and pink condoms was high compared with other colours. It is possible that the red coloured thread-like rubber bands look like earthworms and other related species of aquatic environment, which are natural food source of these birds. Even the larvae of Chironomid Fly

(*Chironomidae*) which develops in marshy area are long (1 to 1.5 cm) and blood-red in colour, which is similar to rubber bands.

In the recent past, I have checked some more roosting and breeding sites of egrets in the interior rural areas of Kheda district, away from the drainage canal. Surprisingly, I could not find any rubber bands or condoms. This supports the hypothesis that the source of the rubber was drainage canal and the material was the waste from urban areas.

Cattle Egret consumes a large variety of invertebrates as well as vertebrates, including reptiles and mammals (Jenni, 1973, Sodhi 1992) but it is not known to consume rubber bands or any other non-living material. Amongst other birds, White Stork (*Ciconia ciconia*) was recently reported consuming rubber bands. Foraging and ingestion of rubber bands by White Storks in a garbage dump area was considered to be dangerous for the life of the Storks, with seven deaths reported due to stomach occlusion between 2000 to 2004 (Pierre-Yves *et al.* 2011). In our area, the Cattle Egrets forage mainly in the drainage canal, sewage tanks as well as in carcass dumps. A study should be carried out at Vaso or any appropriate urban area to see if there are any deaths in these birds due to ingestion of rubber bands and other rubber items.



Vishal Mistri

[These observations show that if rubber and plastic waste is not disposed off properly, it may be harmful to birds. There have been many reports of rubber bands being consumed by birds, and causing death (Jackson 1954, Hocken 1960, Gómez-Tejedor *et al.* 1994). Ingestion of plastic and rubber debris in the oceans is particularly a serious problem in Seabirds and it has been extensively studied and widely documented. Rubber band ingestion in birds has also been documented in India (Venkatratnam 2013). However ingestion of rubber nipples

...Rubber Band

and condoms has not been reported earlier and could present a serious and bigger health hazard to the birds. A proper method of disposal of rubber and plastic items needs to be implemented at the earliest – Eds]

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Sighting of Black-crowned Sparrow Lark in Kachchh

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Mayank Ghedia

has noted it twice in Kachchh, from Kuawar Bet (in 1960) and more recently (in 2003) in Naliya. Outside of Kachchh, Raol (2005) has sighted it at Vadsar, near Ahmedabad. Pandya & Vachhrajani (2010) report it from Mahi River



estuary and give it as resident, but do not list the more common Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark for the area. Parasharya et al (2004) give it as a resident species in Gujarat. Jugalkishor Tiwari informed, there is only one record when the bird was ringed in GRK at Kunwer Beyt, in 1992 by BNHS Bird-migration Team whose part he was (verbal comm.).

It is possible that it is overlooked. Readers are requested to send their sightings of Black-crowned Sparrow Lark from Gujarat so that its status here can be better known - Eds]

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On 26 December 2014, I visited Naliya grassland with Dr. Bharat Jethva, Dhavit Andhariya, Virag Vyas, Dhruvi Ghedia, Pooja Vyas and Alpa Jethva. There we saw a flock of about 15 larks foraging in the grass. We initially ignored them, considering them as Ashy-crowned Sparrow Larks (*Eremopterix griseus*), but when we rechecked, we were surprised to see that they were Black-crowned Sparrow Larks (*Eremopterix nigriceps*).

We checked the oriental bird images website for sight records from Gujarat, but most of the sightings were from Rajasthan, mainly from Jaisalmer and Tal Chhpar area. There is only one photo record of Black-crowned Sparrow Lark from little Rann of Kachchh, by Otto Pfister, in November 2002 on this website. Thus it was a very unusual and uncommon sighting of this species in Kachchh.

[There are isolated records of Black-crowned Sparrow Lark from Gujarat given in Grimmett et al. (2011), while Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) show its occurrence in the entire state. Various recently published records from Gujarat are as follows; Varu (2006)

Sighting of Tickell's Thrush in Girnar Wildlife Sanctuary

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Gaurang Bagda

I visited Girnar Wildlife Sanctuary, Dist. Junagadh, on 10 January 2015. Around 3 km away from Bhavanath Temple, there is a place called Kashmiribapu's Ashram and Temple (21°30'55" N, 70°30'23" E). I went there with my wife for birding. It is a dense deciduous jungle with dark shady areas. We have seen Brown-breasted Flycatcher (*M. muttui*), Asian Paradise-Flycatcher (*T. paradisi*), Tickell's Blue Flycatcher (*C. tickelliae*), Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher (*C. ceylonensis*), Black-naped Monarch (*H. azurea*), Common lora (*A. tiphia*) and many other common birds in this area in the course of previous visits to this place.

In a muddy area filled with garbage, near the temple, I saw a bird feeding on the ground. It was probably feeding on insects/worms in the garbage. It was a grayish bird with yellow bill. I took some images. Initially I thought, it was an Indian Blackbird (*T. merula nigropileus*). Sometime later I saw the same bird perched on a branch of a tree. This time I could observe it in detail and take good photographs. It had a yellow bill, light yellow eye ring, with grey wing coverts, head and wings slightly darker grayish, whitish vent and pale legs. After some time I saw another similar bird with yellow bill and legs, and grayish, buffy streaked breast on another nearby tree. I took photos of that bird also.



Gaurang Bagda

After comparing the images with illustrations in the field guides (Kazmierczak 2000, Grimmett et al. 2011); consulting Maulik Varu, Prasad Ganpule and Ashok Mashru and referring to Oriental Bird Images and other websites, I concluded that it was a Tickell's Thrush (*Turdus unicolor*).



Tickell's Thrush was seen again this winter (2015-2016) in the same area on 8 December 2015, when an adult pair was photographed. Further sightings of a female on 23 December 2015 (Image 2) and a male on 15 January 2016 were made, suggesting that it was a winter visitor to this area.

Tickell's Thrush is not shown to occur in Gujarat as per Kazmierczak (2000) and Grimmett *et al.* (2011). Records of Tickell's Thrush from Gujarat are given below:

Date	Place	Remarks
December 2010 January 2013	Ratanmahal Sanctuary	Trivedi 2015
January 2011	Ratanmahal Sanctuary	Deomurari 2012
March 2013	Vansda National Park	Kshitish Barada, personal comm.
March 2, 2014	Sagai, Shoolpaneshwar Sanctuary, Rajpipla	Bakul Trivedi, personal comm.
November 7, 2014	Sharad Baug, Bhuj, Kachchh	Gani Khatri, personal comm.

Thus there are a few records of Tickell's Thrush from Gujarat. It seems to be a rare winter migrant in Gujarat with scattered records from different regions in the state.

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Faecal sac ingestion in birds: An observation in Red-vented Bulbul, Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark and Jungle Babbler

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On 19 July 2015, while birding in Hingolghadh Nature Education Sanctuary, Dist. Rajkot, I came across a nest of Red-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*) in a Neem (*Azadirachta indica*) approx. 8 feet above the ground. Two nestlings were visible in the nest and both the parents were busy feeding them. When one parent bird came to the nest, one of the nestlings changed its position by lowering its head and protruding its back to the nest-rim. The chick pushed a whitish faecal sac from its cloaca, which was immediately picked up by the parent and to my surprise, swallowed it whole rather than dropping it away. I managed to take photos and video of this event. Previously I had also observed and videographed faecal sac ingestion in Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark (*Eremopterix griseus*) on 5 October 2010 near Vibhapar, Dist. Jamnagar and Jungle Babbler (*Turdoides striata*) on 6 April 2010 in Medical College Campus, Jamnagar.



Maulik Varu



Maulik Varu

Many species of birds, especially passerines consume the faecal sacs produced by their nestlings during first few days (Blair & Tucker 1941). This is presumably to aid in concealing the young from predators (Weatherhead 1984), in addition to serving a sanitary function. Two alternate hypotheses have been proposed to explain this phenomenon:

Parental nutrition hypothesis (Gluck 1988, McGowan *et al.* 1995, Giacomo *et al.* 1998)

Before the nestlings are a few days old, their inefficient digestive processes leave significant amounts of nutrients behind. Eating it allows the parents to recycle water and nutrients, making the 'best of a bad job' during periods of high energetic requirements. In addition, it may be an alternative strategy to delay hunger and to facilitate the allocation of food to the offspring. After a few days, decrease in faecal sac consumption can be explained by increase in the size and decrease in the nutritive value of the faecal sacs which may prove costly to parent's digestive tract.

The economic disposal hypothesis (Hurd *et al.* 1991)

The benefits of consuming and not carrying a faecal sac from the nest may be that parents can remain at the nest longer for other purposes (e.g., brooding) and that they avoid the transportation costs associated with its disposal. However as the nestlings get older, the need for brooding diminishes and the feeding rate increases, so parents would need to spend less time at the nest and hence decrease faecal sac consumption.

In addition to above hypotheses, a possible explanation for the decrease of faeces ingestion after few days may be increasing intensity of begging by the nestlings. Begging may lead to reluctance on the part of the parent to stay at the nest in the presence of active young. (McCarty 1996, Giacomo *et al.* 1998)

It is also possible that parents use the contents of faecal sacs to assess the physiological condition of nestlings (McGowan *et al.* 1995).

Acknowledgement

I thank Prasad Ganpule for helping me with the references.

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Black-necked Stork in Jamnagar: Notes on breeding and behaviour

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Observations on Nesting and Breeding Behaviour of Black-necked Stork:

Total 15 Black-necked Storks (approx. figure gathered from the bird watchers) were recorded in the coastal area of Jamnagar in the year 2000. However,



nesting was recorded for the first time in 2001 and that was in Khijadiya. After that first nesting record, my friend (Manish Trivedi) and I started visiting Khijadiya and other wetland areas to locate nesting and roosting places of Black-necked Storks with the help from officials of Gujarat Forest Department, Jamnagar. In 2015, number of Black-necked Storks in the coastal area of Jamnagar had reached 35 individuals (approx figure derived from observations during the mid-winter census by volunteers and FD staff).

Breeding of Black-necked Stork has been extensively studied in Jamnagar by Patel (2002) and Bhatt (2006) and elsewhere in India by Sunder (2003) and Ishtiaq *et al.* (2004). Here, I present some of my observations on nesting and breeding behaviour that were made in Khijadiya Bird Sanctuary mainly in 2013.

It was observed by me (and my birdwatcher friends) that at Khijadiya Bird Sanctuary, Black-necked Stork usually built its nest at the height of 8-10 feet on the trees surrounded by freshwater and therefore human disturbance was unlikely. [However, it may be noted here that in Jodiya, a nest exists on a tree in the center of a farm for the past few years and it is very near to the house of the farmer. In 2010, in Vibhapar, a nest was built very near to the road and it was built at quite a lower height too, but these can be considered as exceptions.] Sticks and branches of *Prosopis juliflora*, *Suaeda nudiflora*, *Tamarix dioica* and *Avicenna marina* constituted the nesting material. The stork used different types of dry branches available from different trees (mentioned above), but also used some green branches alongwith grass and mud to fix the nest tightly. It was observed that in constructing its nest, initially the bird used big branches and then collected branches of varying size according to the requirement of the nest. It usually built a 35-40 cm thick platform as the nest and put branches of *Prosopis juliflora* within. After making a layer of *Prosopis juliflora*, the upper layer was usually made from green branches of *Vicinnia marina* to protect the eggs and chicks. I think, Black-necked Storks under my observation were very keen in selection of branches for the nest. They repaired the nest whenever necessary, even after the eggs have hatched.

Introduction: Khijadiya Bird Sanctuary (22° 30' 51" N, 70° 09' 14" E) is one of the small (6.05 sq.km) yet well-known bird sanctuaries of Gujarat state. It is situated 12 km north-east of Jamnagar and represents a unique wetland ecosystem complex consisting of two seasonal and well-separated freshwater ponds (conventionally called 'lakes'), marshes, mangroves, saltpans and scrub (Pandey and Teli 2005, Anonymous 2010). Apart from gaining the status of Wildlife (Bird) Sanctuary under the Wildlife (Protection) Act, 1972 in 1981-82, the Khijadiya wetlands are also designated as an Important Bird Area (IBA) from Gujarat (Islam and Rahmani 2004). Moreover, it is also one of the eight nationally important wetlands from Gujarat identified under National Wetland Conservation Programme, Ministry of Environment, Forests and Climate Change, New Delhi (Anonymous 2009). The sanctuary is important from the view-point of high bird species richness as about 200 bird species, including 117 water-bird species have been recorded here (Pandey and Teli 2005). Black-necked Stork (*Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*) is one of the nine globally 'Near Threatened' water-bird species recorded in the wetlands of Khijadiya Bird Sanctuary (Anonymous 2010). This stork has a special place in the waterfowl profile of Khijadiya wetlands, as probably it is only here in the state that 2-3 pairs breed every year (Anonymous 2010). As Black-necked Stork is a 'Near Threatened' species (Birdlife International 2012) that breeds regularly in this Protected Area, efforts for its conservation should be given due importance. Based on this premise, as a part of conservation efforts, its nesting data and information on its breeding behaviour have been collected by me and my friend Manish Trivedi in cooperation with the Forest Department, Jamnagar. This data/information collection work has been carried out from the first nesting record of Black-necked Stork in 2001 in Khijadiya wetlands till recently.

...Black-necked Stork



Manish Trivedi

Mating took place on the nest once the nest construction was completed. As a part of courtship behavior, the male Black-necked Stork displayed by spreading its wings and producing calls. In 2013, mating was observed for the first time on 11th February. Subsequently, mating was seen several times in the month of February upto mid-March. In April 2013, a female was observed incubating her eggs in the nest. The chicks hatched in the late April – early May and approximately two months after hatching (in July), the young fledged and took flight. [My observations made in 2013 differed from those recorded in the previous studies conducted in India. In Uttar Pradesh and Bharatpur, breeding season was September – December during which, egg laying occurred from early September (Sunder (2003), Ishtiaq *et al.*(2004)). Grimmett *et al.* (1998) too have mentioned September–December time-frame as the breeding season of the Black-necked Stork in India. Bhatt (2006) recorded freshly fledged juveniles in December-end at Jodiya, indicating egg laying in September and hatching in October, which is in consonance with previous observations in U.P. and Bharatpur mentioned earlier. The factors responsible for difference in nesting time-frame between Khijadiya in 2013 and elsewhere need to be studied. It would be interesting to see if this is repeated in the future.]

It was observed that the male and female equally shared the responsibility of incubating eggs. The incubation period is about 25- 30 days as per my observation. It is observed that during the period of incubation, one of the parent birds would always be present on the nest. When the temperature is high, either male or female would fetch water in its beak and pour it on the eggs, presumably to regulate the temperature. Parent bird would also pour water on the chicks to protect them from higher temperatures. It is observed that Black-necked Storks catch fish, garden lizard, snakes, frogs and toads as food. It stores some food in its nest too. This is the most aggressive stork amongst all the stork species and does not nest in a colony. Other water-dependent birds like herons, egrets and

other storks do not nest near the nest of the Black-necked Stork. Even raptors refrain from intrusion!!

Conclusion: Increasing numbers of Black-necked Storks and their nests in Jamnagar costal area can be attributed to the dedicated efforts from the Forest Department as well as individual wild-lifers and NGOs from Jamnagar, since 2000. Looking to the number of Black-necked Storks (i.e., 35 individuals) in 2015 in Jamnagar costal area, one may rightly think that nesting of this largest stork of India could be occurring in other areas around Jamnagar too and demands continuation of committed efforts from all of us to explore more.

Nesting data on Black-necked Stork in Jamnagar

(Info. compiled from observations by the volunteers and FD staff jointly)

No.	Place of Nesting in Jamnagar District	Nesting Year	No. of Nests
1.	Dhunvav part, Khijadia Bird Sanctuary	2000	0
2.	Dhunvav part, Khijadia Bird Sanctuary	2001	1
3.	Dhunvav part, Khijadia Bird Sanctuary	2002	1
4.	Dhunvav part, Khijadia Bird Sanctuary	2003	1
5.	Dhunvav part, Khijadia Bird Sanctuary	2004	1
6.	Dhunvav part, Khijadia Bird Sanctuary	2005	1
7.	Dhunvav part, Khijadia Bird Sanctuary	2006	1
8.	Dhunvav part, Khijadia Bird Sanctuary Jambuda part, Khijadia Bird Sanctuary Jodiya coast (60 km from Jamnagar)	2007	3
9.	Dhunvav part, Khijadia Bird Sanctuary Jambuda part, Khijadia Bird Sanctuary Jodiya coast (60 km from Jamnagar)	2008	3
10.	Dhunvav part, Khijadia Bird Sanctuary Jambuda part, Khijadia Bird Sanctuary Jodiya coast (60 km from Jamnagar)	2009	3
11.	Vibhapar near Khijadia Bird Sanctuary Jambuda part, Khijadia Bird Sanctuary Jodiya coast (60 km from Jamnagar)	2010	4
12.	Dhunvav part, Khijadia Bird Sanctuary Jambuda part, Khijadia Bird Sanctuary Jodiya coast (60 km from Jamnagar)	2011	4
13.	Dhunvav part, Khijadia Bird Sanctuary Jambuda part, Khijadia Bird Sanctuary Jodiya coast (60 km from Jamnagar)	2012	4
14.	Dhunvav part, Khijadia Bird Sanctuary Jambuda part, Khijadia Bird Sanctuary Jodiya coast (60 km from Jamnagar)	2013	4
15.	Dhunvav part, Khijadia Bird Sanctuary Jambuda part, Khijadia Bird Sanctuary Jodiya coast (60 km from Jamnagar)	2014	3

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White-throated Kingfisher preying on chicks of Pheasant-tailed Jacana

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On 17 August 2015, I visited Ranjitsagar Dam (22° 23' N, 70° 06' E), near Jamnagar, with my father Jaypalsinh Jadeja. In this area, we saw a Pheasant-tailed Jacana (*Hydrophasianus chirurgus*) strolling on the white water-lilies (*Nymphaea lotus*)



have caught a fish, a frog or an insect, but we were shocked to see a chick of the jacana in its beak. I quickly turned on my camera and started photographing those moments. The kingfisher held the chick in its beak, twisted it and to our surprise, swallowed it whole. After a few minutes, the kingfisher again hovered on the lilies, suddenly dived in and caught the second chick. It then perched on a wire, held the chick in its beak, twisted it and finally swallowed it. The parent bird managed to hide its last chick in the lilies and could avert predation. The kingfisher failed to locate the chick and flew away after some time.

White-throated Kingfisher has been recorded hunting large crustaceans, insects, earthworms, rodents, snakes, fish and frogs. Predation of small birds such as an adult Oriental White Eye (*Zosterops palpebrosus*), chick of Red-wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*), fledgling sparrows and munias has been reported earlier (Ali & Ripley 2001). But it has not been reported hunting the chicks of Pheasant-tailed Jacana to my knowledge. I think it is a rare event that we saw and photographed.

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with three chicks. A White-throated Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*) was flying above the lilies and after some time, it dived in and caught something in its beak. We thought it must

Shearwater in Porbandar

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A team working for wildlife conservation in Porbandar district, called 'Prakruti The Youth Society', received a call in the evening on 13 July 2015, stating that an injured bird had been found near the 'Khapat Area' of Porbandar. The members of the team rushed to the place and found a sea-bird in an extremely dehydrated condition. Unfortunately, in spite of their efforts, the bird died.

It was later identified as either a Persian Shearwater (*Puffinus persicus*) or a Tropical Shearwater (*Puffinus bailloni*). Since detailed measurements and photos of underwings were not taken, it could not be identified conclusively. As far as I am aware, no Shearwater species has been noted in Porbandar earlier.



Lahar Jhala

[Two subspecies are recognised for Persian Shearwater; nominate *P.p.persicus* in the Arabian Sea and *P.p.temptator* in Comoros Islands. Taxonomy of Tropical Shearwater is complex and not well understood. For the Indian Ocean area relevant to India, we follow taxonomy given in Onley & Scofield (2007), who give two subspecies; *P.b.bailloni*, from Réunion and Europa Islands in the Mozambique channel and *P.b.dichrous* in Seychelles, Maldives, Chagos and Aldabra. Onley & Scofield (2007) mostly follow the molecular phylogeny suggested by Austin et al. (2004), who state that the subspecies *nicolae*, *colstoni* and *atrodorsalis* are probably not valid, and are included in *P.b.dichrous*.

Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) state that Tropical Shearwater {given as Audubon's Shearwater *Puffinus lherminieri* in Grimmett et al. (2011)} is sharply pied (black above and white below), sides of breast have large black patches, black cap extends well below the eyes, axillaries and wing linings are white while Persian Shearwater is paler brown above, with much less contrast between face and throat, axillaries are darker but primary coverts and many of secondary coverts are pale. There is no confirmed record of Tropical Shearwater from India (Grimmett et al. 2011) (it is said to be a vagrant to Sri Lanka) while Persian Shearwater, of the race *persicus*, is known to occur in the Arabian Sea, with many photos posted on the Oriental Bird Images website from pelagic birding trips off the western coast of India. The race *temptator* is resident in the Comoros Islands (Mohéli)

and is not known to occur in India.

Regarding identification of this bird, adult nominate *persicus* could be ruled out based on the dark, blackish upperparts – *persicus* shows brown/blackish-brown/chocolate-brown rather than black upperparts

(Onley & Scofield 2007) – and the moult timing (*P.persicus* moults from November to January and will show at least some brown and bleached feathers in July – which was not seen in this individual). Though some *persicus* are darker, the brownish wash on upperparts is apparent and the dark cap does not extend below the eyes, which is shown by Tropical Shearwater (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). The race *temptator* is similar to *persicus*, with adults showing pale brownish plumage while fresh (recently fledged) juvenile *temptator* is darker with a brownish wash (Shirihai & Bretagnolle 2015). However there are some images on the internet of juvenile *persicus*, which look similar to this individual in having darker upperparts, and hence could cause confusion with Tropical Shearwater. However these juvenile birds, though darker, are never as black dorsally as Tropical Shearwaters.

Since some juvenile *persicus* are darker, it is difficult to conclusively rule it out here. But another factor in this individual probably not being a juvenile *persicus* is that *persicus* breeds from May-September (Onley & Scofield 2007) and since this sighting was in July, it is quite improbable for it to be a recently fledged juvenile. However a photo of a dark, probable juvenile/immature *persicus* from Fujairah, in the UAE (Al Dhaheri 2014) taken on 15 July 2014, shows almost blackish head and nape (with a faint brownish tinge) but the dark on head does not extend below the eyes. Looking at the rather dark and black upperparts (without any brownish tinge), extensive black cap reaching below the eye, all black bill, pink tarsus with bluish feet and the general pied appearance, it can be said with reasonable certainty that this is a Tropical Shearwater (Audubon's Shearwater).

However it is extremely difficult to identify it to subspecies level. Tropical Shearwaters from islands in the Indian Ocean show a lot of variation and are considered as different sub-species by various authorities – for example Le Corre (2000) – who uses *P.lherminieri* based taxonomy. According to Table 1 given in this reference, two sub-species of Tropical Shearwater, *nicolae* and *colstoni*, show pink tarsus and brown undertail coverts (which were seen in this individual). Birds from Chagos Archipelago are treated as *nicolae* and in breeding plumage have stumpy, thick based bill with light blue colouration to base of lower mandible (Peter Carr, email dated 21 October 2015), which was not seen in this individual. Birds from Seychelles, also currently treated as *nicolae*, are dark sooty brown



and not as sharply black (Adrian Skerrett, email dated 23 October 2015). We have no information of the Maldives population of *nicolae*, which is believed to be close to the Chagos birds. It is also possible that this individual was of the subspecies *colstoni*, which is known to occur on Aldabra Island. However without detailed morphometric measurements, photographs of underwings and upperwings, and photos of bare parts, it is not possible to conclusively identify it to subspecies level.

Albeit a very small possibility exists that it could be a Persian Shearwater, this individual can be treated as Tropical Shearwater *Puffinus bailloni* (Audubon's Shearwater *Puffinus lherminieri*), without going into subspecific identification or describing its origins.

Hence birdwatchers are requested to always try and photograph wind blown sea-birds from all sides, taking photos showing the upperwings and underwings, and try and take measurements of such specimens to help in conclusive identification. It is also requested that if the bird dies, then the specimen should be preserved and sent to collections in BNHS or ZSI, where further molecular work can be carried out.

We are very grateful to Praveen J. for all his help. We would also like to sincerely thank Dipu Karuthedathu, Peter Carr, William Bourne, Adrian Skerrett, Vincent Bretagnolle, Oscar Campbell and Tim Inskipp for their input – Eds]

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Sighting of Red-necked Phalarope in South Gujarat

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On 27 August 2015, we visited Tena village (20.23 N, 72.66 E), approx. 20 km west of Surat. While we were observing waders in the village pond, we found a small bird which appeared to be little different. Having seen through binoculars and taking pictures, we confirmed that it was a Red-necked Phalarope (*Phalaropus lobatus*) (Photo 1). We observed its activities for some time.

We visited the same place on 30 August 2015 and to our surprise, the Red-necked Phalarope was still there. On 13 September 2015, the pond had dried out and there were no birds.

There are a few published records of Red-necked Phalarope from Kachchh, Saurashtra and Central Gujarat (Raol 1991, Soni & Joshua 2012, Soni and Varu 2013). Raol (1991) observed it near Ahmedabad in 1987, which is unusual. Tejas Soni had seen it in Thol Bird Sanctuary near Ahmedabad on 6-5-2010. However we could not find any published records from South Gujarat and it seems that it is rare here.



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Eurasian Scops Owl at Mahuva, Bhavnagar

Batuk Bhil : At Naip, Ta: Mahuva, Dist. Bhavnagar 364290. batukbhil@gmail.com

On 20 October 2015 at around 07:45 hours, I saw a small owl roosting on a branch of a 'Gundi' (*Cordia gharaf*) in a farm. The area (21° 05' N, 71° 51' E) is approximately 600 m from the coast and located south of Naip village near Nikol 'Bandhara' (Tidal regulator), Ta. Mahuva, Dist. Bhavnagar. I captured a few images but I did not hear its call. I forwarded the images to Viral Joshi for identification. It was tentatively identified as Eurasian Scops Owl (*Otus scops*).

There are very few records of this species from Gujarat. Hence this sighting was worth recording.

[Eurasian Scops Owl occurs in grey and brown morphs and it is very difficult to separate Eurasian Scops Owl from Pallid Scops Owl (*Otus brucei*) and Oriental Scops Owl (*Otus sunia*), with Grimmett et al. (2011) stating that it is 'not safely distinguishable in the field from Oriental Scops Owl, except by call'.

Eurasian Scops Owl is vagrant here and Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) state that it reaches western India in fall migration. For Gujarat, Dharmakumarsinhji (1955) collected only one specimen from Bhavnagar, commenting that it is a 'straggler' to Saurashtra. Recent records from Gujarat include a sighting from Surendranagar (Shah et al. 2005), but identification details are not discussed in detail and only the 'pristine long ears' is stated as an identification mark. A photo of a purported Eurasian Scops Owl is posted on the Oriental Bird Images website (Bhatt 2008), with remarks 'uncertain ID'.



Batuk Bhil

For this individual, due to the excellent photos showing the dorsal and ventral sides, it could be conclusively identified as Eurasian Scops Owl based on the fine horizontal barring on the lower

underparts, uniform black streaks on crown and mantle (Oriental Scops Owl lacks streaking on lower mantle), irregular white spotting on mantle, some rufous on scapulars (Pallid Scops Owl lacks any rufous in plumage), and long wings falling over the tail. It is difficult to identify it to the sub-species level, as both the northerly *pulchellus* and *turanicus* (resident in NW Pakistan) could occur in western India during fall migration (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).



We would like to thank Heimo Mikkola for helping with the identification of this bird – Eds]



Batuk Bhil

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Field notes on Sociable Lapwing in Kachchh

J. K. Tiwari : Centre for Desert and Ocean (CEDO), Village: Moti Virani, Tal. Nakhatrana, Kachchh. cedointia@yahoo.com

Sociable Lapwing (*Vanellus gregarius*), also known as Sociable Plover, is a critically endangered species (Birdlife International 2015). A few wintering sites were known in India. For ex. Little Rann of Kachchh, Tal Chappar (Rajasthan) and a few other non-reliable locations like Bharatpur, Rajasthan. For Kachchh, Ali (1945) stated that 'Lester notes it as a common cold weather visitor' but failed to find any during his surveys of Kachchh in 1943-1944. However in recent years, there are many records from various locations in Gujarat. Kachchh is a favoured area for this bird (Tiwari 2010). I present here my field notes regarding observations of Sociable Lapwings from winter of 2008 onwards in Kachchh:



J. K. Tiwari

Winter of 2008-2009

30 Sociable Lapwings were seen in Great Rann of Kachchh on 17 November 2008, at 13.00 hrs. The habitat was a fallow field, near the salt-encrusted areas, with much *Cressa cretica* vegetation. The birds were quite bold and remained undisturbed, as they were seen close to areas where some labourers were working.

Winter of 2009-2010

On 16 December 2009, a total of 57 Sociable Lapwings were seen in Banni area and on the same day about 6 km away near Chhari-Dhandh, 3 more individuals were seen. So a total of 60 Sociable Lapwings were seen by me on that day. This was probably the single largest flock from India in recent times. These birds stayed till 15 February 2010. RSPB Scientist Peter Ekers visited the site with me and observed the flock. Some observations made during this period are given below:

Sociable Lapwings feed in open grassland with *Cressa cretica* dominated short halophyte vegetation. They roost on the ground during the day. They may venture for feeding in *Suaeda fruticosa* bushes or scanty *Prosopis juliflora* areas with *Suaeda* and *Cressa* growing nearby. Roosting at night is in open areas of Banni and the Great Rann of Kachchh, similar to roosting grounds of Greater Short-toed Larks (*Calandrella brachydactyla*). Feeding was at a maximum in the evening, just before sunset at 18.30 hrs, when a flock of over 30 birds was seen actively chasing insects in the *Suaeda*, *Cressa*, and *Prosopis* mixed area of Banni on the edge of the Great Rann of Kachchh. On 16 January 2010, 50 Sociable Lapwings were seen over an area of some 2 acres, feeding in loose groups of 4-8 birds. First seen on 16 December 2009 and last seen on 15 February 2010.

Winter of 2010-2011

On 11 November 2010, I saw 20 Sociable Lapwings. This was the third consecutive year that I saw Sociable Lapwings in Kachchh. This year the birds were in a different and remote location. When I went in search of the site where I saw them last year, I could not locate any. But while searching for the birds, I lost my orientation in the Banni desert (3847 km² area!!) and reached an unknown location where I saw 20 individuals.

My feeling is that the vast expanses of Banni offer the right habitat for wintering Sociable Lapwings, and it is very possible that there may be some unknown populations of this critically endangered bird wintering in Kachchh. On 13 January 2011, the Sociable Lapwings were seen in two flocks. Unlike last year, the distance between the two flocks' feeding ranges was 20 km. There were 20 individuals in one flock and 18 in the other.

Winter of 2012-2013

On 20 November 2012, Six Sociable Lapwings were seen in Banni area. I checked for colour tags and PTTs on the birds, but none of the six birds had any.

Winter of 2013-2014

On 3 December 2013, 11 Sociable Lapwings were seen. None of them had any tags, flags or PTTs attached. A total of 19 Sociable Lapwings were seen in Banni this winter from November till January. The 19 Sociable Lapwings were first seen in Banni area on 2 January 2014. They were showing strong site fidelity to their foraging grounds, and were generally seen in one area for 20 days or so and then moving on to habitats which were 3-4 km away or just few hundred meters away. They forage on insects and can scrape the ground, by rubbing the ground with one foot, and moving their body like a see-saw. They were seen with a mixed flock of Pacific Golden Plovers (*Pluvialis fulva*) and Kentish Plovers (*Charadrius alexandrinus*).

Winter of 2014-2015

No Sociable Lapwings were seen in 2014-2015 season i.e. from January till March 2015.

Winter of 2015-2016

I saw 6 Sociable Lapwings on 27 December 2015.

Data collected over the past few years shows that the Banni area in Great Rann of Kachchh is an important wintering ground for this critically endangered bird. Further surveys are needed in this vast area to see if there are more individuals wintering here.

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Short Birding Notes



Indian Skimmer in Nalsarovar

A juvenile/immature Indian Skimmer (*Rynchops albicollis*) was seen in Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary on 12 September 2015. It was seen foraging and even resting with River Terns (*Strena aurantia*) and Pacific Golden Plovers (*Pluvialis fulva*) in the area. Several Red-wattled Lapwings (*Vanellus indicus*) were constantly mobbing it when it was in flight. A shrill screaming “kap...kap” call was heard from the Skimmer, particularly when in flight.

Viral J. Patel & Pankaj B. Maheria. Patan. Email: drpankajmaheria@gmail.com



Laggar Falcon at Charakala Salt Pans

A Laggar Falcon (*Falco jugger*) was seen at Charakala Salt Pans, near Dwarka, on 31 October 2015 at around 1700 hrs. Though wide-spread, it is uncommon in Gujarat and has not been recently photographed outside Greater and Little Rann of Kachchh (Oriental Bird Images Website). Hence this sighting in Jamnagar district and in an unusual habitat of salt pans is noteworthy.

Manoj Finava, Rajkot. Email: mp9588@gmail.com



Indian Spotted Eagles in Positra

Two Indian Spotted Eagles (*Aquila hastata*) were seen in flight near Positra, Dwarka on 1 November 2015. The Eagles were seen in flight near the sea shore and looked to be juvenile/first winter birds. Indian Spotted Eagle is Globally Threatened (Grimmett *et al.* 2011) and is presumed to be a rare resident in Gujarat by Naoroji (2006), who has suggested it as a ‘raptor to watch’. Its status in Gujarat is unclear with very few recent documented records.

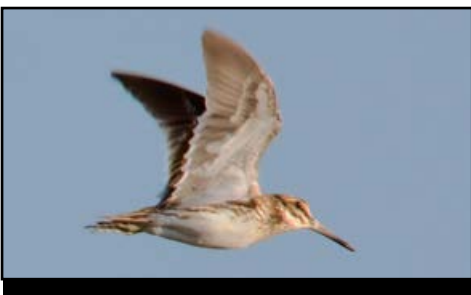
Maulik Varu, Bhavnagar. Email: drmaulikvaru@yahoo.com



Murmuration of Rosy Starlings at Porbandar

Flock of Starlings is called a ‘Murmuration’, and this flocking is colloquially known here as ‘acrobatics’. Rosy Starlings (*Pastor roseus*) flock in large numbers at Jamnagar, Ahmedabad and Porbandar, and it is known to occur in many other places in Gujarat. In Porbandar, murmuration is seen at Subhashnagar area at sunset, which has a 4-5 km long mangrove stretch. At a conservative estimate, many times the flock contains more than 10,000 individuals, and it is an extraordinary spectacle.

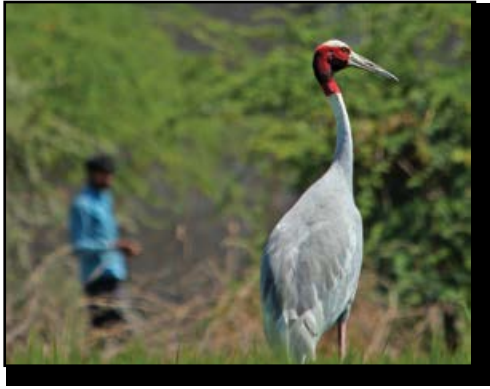
Dhaval Vargiya, Porbandar. Email: dhaval.mwcc@gmail.com



Jack Snipe in Little Rann of Kachchh

Two Jack Snipes (*Lymnocyptes minimus*) were photographed on 19 December, 2015 in the western side of Little Rann of Kachchh. Jack Snipe is a winter migrant to Gujarat, and is said to be ‘scarce and local’ (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Due to its skulking habits, it is rarely photographed.

Prasad Ganpule, Morbi, Gujarat. Email: prasadganpule@gmail.com



Sarus Crane at Mokarsagar Wetland, near Porbandar

Four adult Sarus (*Grus antigone*) were seen at Mokarsagar wetland (also locally known as Gosabara), near Porbandar. This was my first sighting of Sarus in 3 years and it is uncommon and erratically seen in Porbandar area. Listed as 'Vulnerable' (Birdlife International 2015) because of rapid population decline, this sighting in Porbandar is encouraging and there is an urgent need to conserve its habitat here.

Dhaval Vargiya, Porbandar. Email: dhaval.mwcc@gmail.com



European Nightjars in Kachchh

A total of 50 European Nightjars (*Caprimulgus europaeus*) were seen in Banni region of Kachchh from 25 September 2015 to 4 October 2015. They perch on dead stumps and on the tops of bushes. European Nightjar breeds in Eurasia, and winters in Africa, and is a fall passage migrant in Kachchh (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). There are very few recent records from Gujarat.

Jugal Tiwari, Moti Virani, Kachchh. Email: cedoindia@yahoo.com



Red-tailed Wheaters near Indo-Pak border in Kachchh

Red-tailed Wheatear (*Oenanthe chrysopygia*) is a winter migrant to Gujarat, mainly wintering in Kachchh (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). It is uncommon and reliably seen in very small numbers only in Banni area. 14 Red-tailed Wheatears were seen on the road from India Bridge to Vighakot, near the Indo-Pak border on 25 December, 2015. Red-tailed Wheatears were common in the area and were seen perched on small rocks by the side of the road.

Prasad Ganpule, Morbi. Email: prasadganpule@gmail.com



Longevity of a ringed River Tern in Rajkot

In December, 2013, I had photographed a ringed River Tern (*Sterna aurantia*) at Aji dam area near Rajkot (an aluminum ring on its left leg). I posted the images of this individual on the internet to find out the ringing details. Dr. Taej Mundkur replied that this individual was ringed in Rajkot in 1989 as a part of a project to ring River Terns and several individuals were ringed in their nests as fledglings. It meant that this individual was 24 years old and still alive! There are several records of Terns living more than 20 years in Europe, with a Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*) living for more than 30 years (Fransson *et al.* 2010). This record is the first documented record of longevity in a River Tern in India.

Raju Karia, Rajkot. Email: dealwiserajkot@gmail.com

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BCSG Events

HERONRY WATCH 2015



A one-day program on “Sarus and Heronry Watch” in Matar-Tarapur area was organized on 6 August 2015, aimed at understanding nesting behavior of colonial nesters and Sarus Crane.

More than 50 participants attended the event, which started with morning tea and a briefing by Dr. B. M. Parsharya. Each participant was given data sheets to record data related to

nesting birds. The form included number of nests counted, species name and other observations. Participants were taken to Limbasi, Vastana, Chanor and Pariej. The trip ended at Pariej, where everyone enjoyed lunch and shared their experiences.

Post-lunch session included a talk by Dr. Parasharya, who discussed the importance of heronries in ecology, and behavior and nesting pattern of resident water birds. He also talked briefly about Sarus and the threats faced by it in recent years in Gujarat. He introduced the students to Dr. K. S. Gopi Sundar, Scientist, Crane and Wetlands, and a member of International Crane Foundation. Dr. Gopi shared details on Sarus distribution in India and major threats to Crane species across the world.

A talk on Vultures by Anil Patel of Kadi, and Kartik Shastri of Ahmedabad, added to the event. An hour long talk about Vultures by Anil Patel highlighted the challenges faced in conservation activities and how one could handle them. Anil Patel and Kartik Shastri shared their past experiences with the participants. The session ended with certificate distribution and by giving flyers on vulture conservation.

BIRDING IN KUTCH – PASSAGE MIGRANT WATCH



The event was organized on 11-13 September 2015, with the aim of introducing the participants to the avian diversity of Kachchh, which supports varied habitats, and to get a rare view of the passage migrants occurring here, which are seen only for a period of a month or so. Center for Desert and Ocean, Moti-Virani, near Nakhatrana, led by eminent ecologist Jugal Kishor Tiwari, and prominent birdwatcher Shantilal Varu played host to the event.

Places visited during the program were – Jethavera forest, Kiro hill, Chhari dhand, Banni grassland, Phot mahadev, Pat river bed, Naliya grassland, Pingleshwar, Modhva (Mandvi) beach.

Some special birds seen during program were: Spotted Flycatcher, Red-backed Shrike, Lesser and Greater White-throat, Variable Wheater, Isabelline Wheater, Marshall's Iora, Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin, Red-tailed Wheatear, Striolated Bunting, Eurasian Wryneck, Indian Eagle Owl, Grey-necked Bunting, Laggar Falcon, Booted Eagle (pale morph), Black-necked Stork, Eurasian Curlew, Ruddy Turnstone, various Sandpipers, Pallas's Gull, Black Francolin and Greater Flamingo.

The 3 day session made participants understand the rich diversity of Kachchh, and conservation issues prevailing in recent times. BCSG intends to re-organise such events at Kachchh.



HARRIER COUNT 2015



Manoj Dholakia

The much awaited bird census – Harrier count 2015, was conducted on 7-8 October 2015, at Velavadar Blackbuck National Park, considered as the World's largest roosting site of harriers. The harrier count was organized by Gujarat Forest Department in collaboration with BCSG, and witnessed participants from different corners of the state (participation was limited to 30 seats, on first cum first serve basis).

Attending participants were briefed about counting techniques by Dr Indra Gadhvi and the in-charge RFO. The harrier count was divided into two phases i.e. an evening count on 7 Oct. and a morning count on 8 Oct. A Total of 24 teams were positioned at 24 points, covering the circumference of the national park. Each team, consisting of 2 members, was instructed to count harriers entering the grassland area from their right side.



Harrier species sighted during counting included Marsh Harrier, Montagu's Harrier and Pallid Harrier. Other raptors observed during the two day event were Eurasian hobby, Greater Spotted Eagle, White-eyed Buzzard, Shikra, Common Kestrel, Short-toed Snake Eagle, Black-winged kite, and Steppe Eagle. The 'Endangered' Lesser Florican was also sighted during the 2 day count by 5 teams. The harrier count gave an opportunity to the participants to learn how to identify harriers and also to understand their behavior, migration pattern, and habitat preferences. □

Compilation of Popular Publications on Gujarat Birds (2015)

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

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3. Balar, Raghavji. 2015. Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*) at Gomti Ghat, near Somnath temple, Gujarat, India. *Jalaplavit*. 6 (2): 85-86.
4. Bhatt, Nirav; Ganpule, Prasad. 2015. Common Kestrel *Falco tinnunculus* with unusual symmetrically pale claws. *Indian Birds*. 10 (5): 128-129.
5. Collar, N.J.; Patil, Pramod S.; Bhardwaj, G.S. 2015. What can save the Great Indian Bustard *Ardeotis nigriceps*? *Birding ASIA*. 23 (June): 15-26.
6. Ganpule, Prasad. 2015. Marshall's Iora *Aegithina nigrolutea* in India and Sri Lanka. *Indian Birds*. 10 (6): 167.
7. Ganpule, Prasad. 2015. Status of Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans* in India. *Indian Birds*. 10 (6): 152-154.
8. Ganpule, Prasad; Varu, Maulik; Zala, Kapilsinh V.; Trivedi, Ashvin. 2015. Status and distribution of Broad-billed Sandpiper *Calidris falcinellus* in Gujarat, India. *Indian Birds*. 10 (6): 147-149.
9. Jat, M.U. 2015. A record of Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher *Ceyx erithaca* from Vansda National Park, Gujarat. *Indian Birds*. 10 (6): 159-160.
10. Jat, M.U.; Parasharya, B.M. 2015. A record of Sooty Tern *Onychoprion fuscatus* from Gujarat, India. *Indian Birds*. 10 (1): 22-23.
11. Mishra, Veer Vaibhav. 2015. A Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus* from Banni Grasslands, Gujarat, India. *Indian Birds*. 10 (6): 161.
12. Patel, Niyati S.; Vasava, Anirudh G.; Patel, Jenis. 2015. Observation of sunning by Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus* in Blackbuck National Park, Velavadar, Gujarat. *Indian Birds*. 10 (6): 164-165.
13. Soni, Hiren B. 2015. Stoliczka's Bushchat in Kachchh. *Hornbill*. 1: 22.
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15. Trivedi, Rajni. 2015. Some important photographic records from Gujarat. *Indian Birds*. 10 (3 & 4): 108-110.
16. Vyas, Raju; Upadhyay, Kartik. 2015. Notes on breeding of Ashy Prinia *Prinia socialis* in Gujarat, India. *Indian Birds*. 10 (5): 118-121.
17. Vyas, Raju; Upadhyay, Kartik. 2015. Some notes on the breeding of Ashy Wood Swallow *Artamus fuscus* in Gujarat, India. *Indian Birds*. 10 (1): 19-21.

Readers' Views

I just returned from a Gujarat trip with Carol and Tim Inskipp, where we chanced upon your newsletter FLAMINGO.

My congratulations to the team for a great publication about the birds in Gujarat, much needed. Some very informative articles. I was also very impressed with the paper and printing quality.

When I got home, there was a FLAMINGO in the post for me - what a pleasant surprise.

- **Nikhil Devasar**

Haryana

Congratulations!! for bringing out yet another excellent volume of 'Flamingo'. I very much share the sentiments in your opening editorial as well as closing quote of Mr. Khachar. At the same time, I compliment your entire editorial team lead

by you for bringing out scientific, fact based observations in a lucid language.

It has been a great learning experience to read your news letter for me personally. Your articles on mass plantation, report on GIB and notes on Nalsarovar are of great value for keen ecologist and field managers. I am sure that future management will be more sensitive of such issues. I also strongly support painstaking effort to ensure scientific pattern of writing and correct citation.

I only hope that this news letter becomes a platform to bring together like-minded people who care and feel the majesty, beauty and intricacies of Mother Nature.

- **Pradeep Singh, IFS**
DCF, Surendranagar



H. H. Maharao Shri Vijayarajji with a morning's bag

'Goose-shooting in Kutch'

(Reproduced from the Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society, Vol. XXI, Pp.678-9, March 31, 1912)

"In Kutch, goose-shooting is to be had at only one place. The place is on the Rann of Kutch between the Banni peninsula and the mainland, N-W of Bhuj. The Greylag Geese come by thousands to this place.

They are very difficult to get at. Most of them, very early in the morning, long before daybreak, leave the marsh which the natives call the 'Dhandh', in different directions and the shikaris have only got to find out in what places they settle down to pick up gravel and to sun themselves.

The geese begin their flight very punctually and regularly. As the light begins to grow stronger in the East, the sportsmen's eyes get fixed towards the long dim black line of the horizon which lies stretched out flat and monotonous for miles across one's front. Far away in the distance, you see a flight of birds low down over the horizon in a meagre line advancing steadily towards you; and as they draw close, you can see their wings flapping pretty fast and can hear them making the familiar noise "*krouk-krouk*" so dear to a sportsman who has one before had this experience."

- Maharajkumar Shri Vijayarajji

“How does one watch birds? Well, one just looks at them, starts taking notice of their presence. It is as simple as that. To the question “Why I watch birds?” my response is “I enjoy doing it.” As to when I started birdwatching, all I can say is that I always did so. Birds are an integral part of human environment drawing attention to them by the vivacity, the flight and their calls. The point is why there are not very many more birdwatchers. How can anyone not notice birds? Infact, we may try considering the time each individual stopped taking interest in birds, or like so much in life, when did we start taking birds for granted as indeed so many of us do the marvels of Nature all around us. Every child is a birdwatcher as indeed it is an entemologist or a geologist. Take a small child out into a jungle and notice how it will pointout some tiny worm or collect the smallest of coloured grit. Being scaled down human beings, they are more aware of the smaller things and here in lies the paradox. Though their bodies are small, we are told by scientists that a child is born with the allmost full complement of brain cells! As we grow older, we tend to loose them. Children then are far more curious of things around them - they notice movement, colour and sparkle. The tragedy is that parents and then teachers start blocking interests, strait jacketing curiosities and inclination and the end product is what we see all around us.

”

- Lavkumar Khachar

