

Flamingo

Newsletter of the Bird Conservation Society, Gujarat



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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....

Recently, I had an opportunity to interact with bird-watchers from south Gujarat. One important conclusion at the end of the meeting was the paucity of birding data from the adjacent coastal area. For the participants too, it was a revelation that there was no data on birds from coastal areas of south Gujarat. While remaining by and large focused on the forests, they had ignored the shores.

Subsequent meetings with birders from some districts of Saurashtra re-affirmed this fact that long stretches of our coastline have remained unexplored and most of the data gathered is from oft-visited, traditional birding spots.

The sea-coast of Gujarat - the longest in the country - with its array of complex natural and artificial habitats is quite rich in variety, as well as in the population of water-birds. Of the three gulfs in our country, two are in Gujarat. Being on the Central Asian - Indian Flyway, the Gulf of Kachchh has an added advantage of hosting migrant species.

Many large, medium and small rivers discharge water in to the sea creating estuaries all along the coastline. The embankment dams raised near the emptying points have created sweet-water reservoirs at many places, which have become unofficial sanctuaries for birds. South coast of Gulf of Kachchh was declared as the first ever Marine National Park of the country, and is undisputedly very rich in Marine bio-diversity, including birds.

Uday Vora, a passionate birder and a senior forest official who has made several excursions to the Gulf of Cambay - two of them aerial surveys - submitted that huge congregations of flamingos and other interesting encounters, like a possible Nordmann's Greenshank, and large numbers of Crab-Plovers, raise the hope that if properly explored this area can spring many surprises. J. K. Tiwari, a naturalist from CEDO, Moti Virani, Kachchh, is optimistic about the presence of breeding colonies of Caspian Terns on the islands of the Gulf of Kachchh.

According to most birders, inaccessibility and long distances are the main reasons birders don't visit unknown areas. Getting permissions for reserved areas, army controlled border zones and international waters are the deterrents too to visit some of the high-potential coastal areas and the adjoining deep-sea waters. But once all the doubts and difficulties are surmounted, I am sure a bird-watcher would enjoy the adventure of exploring these areas. There could be many exciting birding surprises in store for birders who would take up the challenge to investigate these unfamiliar expanses. So why not head to the shore for your next birding jaunt!

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

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Trumpeter Finch in Kachchh

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Introduction: Trumpeter Finch (*Bucanetes githagineus*) is a small, passerine bird of the finch family, having a heavy orange bill, short tail, orange-flesh legs and pink plumage. Its song is distinctive: a unique series of spaced buzzes (toy trumpet-like). The call note is a short, rapidly repeated buzzing. The Trumpeter Finch is shown as a winter visitor to entire Kachchh and Saurashtra (Ali & Ripley 2001), which seems erroneous as explained below. Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) show it as a resident up to Sindh, Pakistan (adjoining Kachchh) and state that it straggles/wanders to Gujarat in the winter. For Gujarat, Kazmierczak (2000) shows only one isolated record in Kachchh.

There is very little published information regarding the Trumpeter Finch in Gujarat. Ali (1945) did not meet with it in Kachchh and commented that its inclusion in the Kachchh list (by C. D. Lester) was not justified. But there are records of Trumpeter Finch in Kachchh; Himmatsinhji (1988) recorded it at Rudramata Dam, near Bhuj, for three consecutive years. It is a rare and rather erratic winter visitor in Gujarat, with no records of it outside Kachchh (Ganpule 2016). Thus, the occurrence shown for Saurashtra by Ali & Ripley (2001) is incorrect, since there are no records of this finch from this area. I present here some of my observations of Trumpeter Finch in Kachchh.

Observations: In November 2008, I was passing through an interior road near Bhuj, Kachchh, with my son Nirav, for birdwatching. From a distance near a village, we saw small birds perched on a boundary wall made from uneven stones. Such boundary walls are common in villages here. The place was having a small waterhole in a rocky area, which was filled with water from the monsoon rains. There was a small stream running from the waterhole. We saw that common birds were present and frequently coming down to drink water from the stream. We recorded Crested Bunting (*M. lathamii*) once, which is a rarity in Kachchh. Female Common Rosefinch (*C. erythrinus*) was also seen in this area.

On 15 November 2008, I photographed some birds unfamiliar to me. After returning home, I checked the field guide (Kazmierczak 2000) and was very surprised to identify it as a Trumpeter Finch. I confirmed the identification by referring to images on the Oriental Bird Images website. At that time, there were only 2-3 images of Trumpeter Finch on this website. I was very excited to find this rarity here. From 15 November till about 30 November 2008, I visited the area daily and subsequently visited it almost 450 times in total in the last seven-eight years, out of which I found this finch 25 to 30 times. From a distance, it can be easily confused with a female House



Trumpeter Finch....



Sparrow (*P. domesticus*), Indian Silverbill (*E. malabarica*) or a juvenile Chestnut-shouldered Petronia (*G. xanthocollis*); so it is necessary to obtain good views to identify it. I regularly recorded it from 2008 till 2012. In 2008, between 15 to 23 November, I saw them on four consecutive days. I saw the Trumpeter Finch once or twice in a flock of about 25 birds. I saw them from November till late March. But after 2012 till 2015, there was continuous disturbance in that area and I could not locate the birds. A shortage of rain / water, road repairing work, disturbance by cattle etc. contributed to their absence here. However, it was recorded in Banni (Mishra 2012, Tiwari 2016), where also it was noted in small flocks. It is possible that they may have shifted from this location to the Banni area or chosen a new area. It is also possible that the finch might be present in other suitable sites with water nearby, especially areas around Khari River, near Bhuj, as the habitat is similar to the habitat in which the birds were noted on the outskirts of Bhuj. Further, there is very little disturbance in these areas and it is possible that the birds might be present there. I tried to locate new places around the Khari River area where the Trumpeter Finch might be occurring, but failed to find it there.

Habitat and Behaviour: It was found near or around water; in small puddles formed by rainwater or where there was a small stream present. The habitat in this area near Bhuj is stony scrub, interspersed with short grasses. The soil is probably saline and the water is mildly salty (brackish); which is called '*bhambharu*' in local Kachchhi language. There was salt formation at the edge of stream when the stream dried out.

As per my observations, the presence of Trumpeter Finch was based on the quantity of water in the stream. Even when there was very little water, the birds used to come to drink but were not noted once the stream dried out completely.

The Trumpeter Finch always came to the drinking spot in a group. I noted them mostly around 10:00 hrs in the morning and between 16:00 to 17:00 hrs in the evening, though it could have been occurring at other times. The birds would usually fly around the stream and would land on the ground or perch on small trees. Ali & Ripley (2001) have stated that it avoids perching on bushes but here, they were observed perching on *Prosopis juliflora*, *Salvadora* sp., *Acacia* sp., and *Optunia* sp. Then they would come closer, drink the water and remain together for 15-20 minutes if there was no disturbance.



I observed that their routes of coming and going were always the same i.e. they flew back in the same direction from where they approached. Sometimes, they fed in the dry grass before drinking. As per my observations, it feeds on seeds and other parts of grasses in rocky areas and low shrubs and forages almost wholly on the ground, generally in rocky areas with scattered semi-desert vegetation and moves about on the ground in search of food.

It has a characteristic, undulating flight which is very noticeable and quite different from other birds. When it flies in a flock, the birds do not fly in a close formation like Rosy Starlings (*P. roseus*), but fly in a loose flock. I have observed that from December onwards, the plumage starts changing and in January, they have a noticeable pink colour on the tail, breast and mantle. In late March, they are not yet in full breeding plumage, but are quite pink overall. I have not seen the Trumpeter Finch here after late March.

Conclusion:

The Trumpeter Finch is a rare, but regular winter migrant to at least two locations in Kachchh. It is seen near water streams in suitable habitat, which is usually a rocky area with grasses. It is never seen in large numbers; the maximum I have noted is 25 birds. However, it is not as rare as was believed earlier. My observations for five years from 2008 to 2012 near Bhuj and the continued sightings in Banni in Kachchh in the last few years are thus noteworthy and add to our knowledge of the species in Gujarat.

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Sighting of Black Tern in breeding plumage at Charakla Salt Pans

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discharged, taking a route of 100 to 200 meters. When it caught hold of prey, it flew quite far; often beyond the binocular range. It fed while in flight and did not perch during the time we observed it.



There is one previous record of a first summer Black Tern from Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary (Bhatt *et al.* 2014), but this is the first time that a breeding plumaged bird has been recorded here.

[This sighting is significant since the Black Tern was considered to be a vagrant to India with the sighting from Nalsarovar being the only confirmed record from India (Praveen *et al.* 2014). In addition to this sighting, another sighting of a Black Tern in breeding plumage was recently reported, in July 2016, from Karwar, Karnataka (Jamalabad 2016). The sightings at Nalsarovar were also in mid-May and June. Birdwatchers should look out for this tern in the summer months in Gujarat – Eds]

On 8 May 2016, I was on a birding trip to Charakla Salt Pans (22° 10' N, 69° 09' E), near Jamnagar, with Chirag Solanki and Mehul Bhadania. We were searching for Red-necked Phalarope (*Phalaropus lobatus*) in breeding plumage. I had seen them here as late as mid-May, in the summer of 2013, when they were almost in full breeding plumage.

We were driving along the salt pans, scouting for some bird activity, but saw only a few waders and Greater Flamingos (*Phoenicopterus roseus*). Deep inside the area, we observed that one of the pumps at the end of the pans was operational and filling up the salt pans. This discharge from the pump churned the water and attracted some birds. Through binoculars, we saw a few terns and proceeded towards the spot in the hope of getting some pictures. As we approached the location, Chirag pointed out that one tern was looking really different. We jumped out of the jeep to watch it. We saw a silvery-black tern; with black head, almost fully dark grayish underbody and white underwings. We identified it as a Black Tern (*Chlidonias niger*) in breeding plumage. We confirmed its identification by taking several pictures.

We observed and photographed it for nearly one hour. It foraged in flight, hovering a few meters above the water and then dipping to the surface to pick up small fish and crustaceans. It rarely plunged into the water to catch its prey. It repeatedly flew towards the spot where water was being



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Sighting of Asian Brown Flycatcher at Rampara Wildlife Sanctuary in July

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Ashok Mashru

I visited Rampara Wildlife Sanctuary near Wankaner (Dist. Morbi) for birding with Manoj Finava and Darshak Karia on 18 July 2015. On that evening I photographed a flycatcher which was perched on a branch of a tree for a few moments. Initially I thought it could be a Spotted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa striata*), but the timing seemed too early as it is an autumn passage migrant, usually seen after August. After careful observation and with the help of Prasad Ganpule, who joined us on the next day, it was confirmed as an Asian Brown Flycatcher (*Muscicapa dauurica*). On 19 July 2015, we again saw the bird in the same area and took some photographs. We were surprised by its presence in the monsoon season as normally it is a winter visitor to our region (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Asian Brown Flycatcher breeds in Himalayan foothills and hills of central India and Western Ghats and winters in south, central and east India (Ali & Ripley 1996).

Though it is well known that it is a winter migrant to Gujarat, various authors give different status for breeding of Asian Brown Flycatcher in Gujarat. Ali & Ripley (1996) give it as breeding in the hills of Vindhya Range (around Mhow and Sehore), but breeding in Gujarat is not mentioned. Ali (1955) and Dharmakumarsinhji (1955) give it as 'presumably resident in the Dangs'. Mundkur (1990) observed an adult feeding a fledged young in Gir forest in the last week of May in 1988.

Grimmett *et al.* (2011) and Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) show it to be breeding in Gir forest, with the second authors' remark: 'peninsular breeding range poorly known'.

Based on above references it can be said that the individual observed in Rampara Wildlife Sanctuary might not be a migrant and could be a resident and breeding there. Recently the breeding of this species has been reported from Sitamata Sanctuary, Rajasthan (Sangha *et al.* 2009). This sanctuary is adjoining Sabarkantha district of north Gujarat and this is very much a recent record. But it is surprising that there are no recent observations of its breeding in Gujarat and I have not come across any such records posted on websites or in any publications recently. It is possible that since it is not very conspicuous, it is overlooked. Further observations are required for confirming if Asian Brown Flycatcher does breed here regularly. I request birdwatchers to share observations of its breeding in Gujarat.



[P.S: A single Asian Brown Flycatcher was seen and photographed again at the same place on 17 July 2016 - Ashok Mashru]

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□

Large congregation of Grey Hypocolius in Kachchh

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Jugalkishor Tiwari



The Grey Hypocolius (*Hypocolius ampelinus*) is a regular winter visitor to Kachchh. The regular wintering site is near Fulay Village in the Banni area, where a maximum number of 150 birds was seen on 20

December 1993 (Tiwari *et al.* 1995). In the winter of 2015-2016, a maximum of 40 birds were seen at Fulay (*pers. observation*).

In my earlier observations of Grey Hypocolius in Kachchh, I had noted flocks of 20-25 birds in Fulay area. The maximum count was when I had noted 175 birds on 24 March 2007 – perhaps congregating before their return migration (Tiwari 2008).

On 26 March 2016 & 27 March 2016, at around 08:45 hrs on both days, about 35 km east of Fulay near Palanpur in Banni, We came across over 500 Grey Hypocolius (a very conservative estimate). The actual number could be around 700 birds. We counted the birds and took images of flying, roosting and feeding birds. They were very vocal and seen feeding on *Salvadora persica* berries. The site was full of *Salvadora persica* and *Prosopis juliflora*. In this area, the *Salvadora* bushes were in a single line and over-grown (packed with thorny bushes), so movement in the habitat was difficult. But in 10 minutes, we could count over 100 Hypocolius flying from one side to the other.

Since this was the highest number of Grey Hypocolius ever seen in a single flock (before our sighting the largest congregation

was 400 Grey Hypocolius in Bahrain), we invited birders from Bhuj to see the large number of Grey Hypocolius. (members of Pelican Nature club, Bhuj and members of BCSG : S. N. Varu, N. Bapat, Jaysinh Parmar, Subodh Hathi)

It can be safely concluded that this huge congregation of Grey Hypocolius was a return migration phenomenon. On 8th April, when we visited the site again all the birds had left the site.



Jugalkishor Tiwari

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Sighting of Grey Hypocolius in Rajkot and its records from outside Fulay, Kachchh

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Grey Hypocolius (*Hypocolius ampelinus*) is a winter migrant to Gujarat, mainly to the Banni area in Kachchh. The regular site, at which it is seen, is near Fulay village, Ta: Nakhatrana, Dist: Kachchh, where it is known to occur in the winter (Tiwari 2008).

While birdwatching at Lalpari Lake, outside Rajkot city on morning of 29 December 2015, the first author, along with Shamsher Singh Bhagat Singh and Niraj Jadav, saw and photographed a female Grey Hypocolius sitting on a branch of *Acacia* sp. It flew away after a short time. We were very

surprised to see the Grey Hypocolius in Rajkot outskirts. We visited the area again for the next few days, but could not locate the bird again.

We collected sight records outside the Fulay area - its known wintering site - from bird watchers and found that it has been noted in various places.



Sight records of Grey Hypocolius from areas other than Fulay Village, Kachchh

S.No.	Place	Date	Observers	Source
1	Chhari-Dhandh, Kachchh	28 January 1990, 14 January 2006, 12 March 2006, 28 January 2009, 01 February 2010	Shantibhai Varu & Maulik Varu	Varu (2007) & <i>Pers. comm.</i>
2	Lyja Creek, Mandvi; Greater Rann of Kachchh; Sindhodi Coast, Abdasa	06 February 1994 17 January 1999 02 March 1999	J. K. Tiwari Himmatsinhji Kavi Taej & Ashwin Pomal	Tiwari (2008)
3	Zezari Village, Little Rann of Kachchh	18 December 2003	Chiku Vora, Faruk Chauhan & Vishal Thoriya	<i>Pers. Comm.</i>
4	Dehgam Village, Little Rann of Kachchh	29 October 2005	--- as above ---	Vora <i>et al.</i> (2007)
5	Tundi wetland, Little Rann of Kachchh	04 January 2006	--- as above ---	Chiku Vora, <i>Pers. Comm.</i>
6	Royal Safari Resort Campus, Patadi, Little Rann of Kachchh	22 December 2008	--- as above ---	Chiku Vora, <i>Pers. Comm.</i>
7	On way from Odu to Nava Talav, Little Rann of Kachchh	14 January 2012	--- as above ---	Chiku Vora, <i>Pers. Comm.</i>
8	Narara, Jamnagar	26 February 2015	Kunal Munsif & Noshervan Sethna, Jaypalsinh Jadeja	Jadeja 2015
9	Near Lalpari Lake, Rajkot	29 December 2015	Rajesh Bhalodiya, Shamsher Singh and Niraj Jadav	Present sighting

Above records indicate that the Grey Hypocolius is not restricted to Fulay Village of Kachchh and occurs in other parts of the state as well. It is possible that it is overlooked. It will be interesting to see if there are more records from other parts of the state in the future.

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Forest Owlet in Dang, South Gujarat

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Mukesh Bhatt

After hearing news about the sighting of Forest Owlet (*Heteroglaux blewitti*) in Dang forest, I visited the location (precise location withheld – Eds) with Devavratsinh Mori, Yagnesh Bhatt and Vimalbhai on 22 January 2016. After reaching there, I immediately recognized the call of the Forest Owlet, as I had heard it many times in Melghat Tiger Reserve, Maharashtra. Finally, we were very excited to see one Forest Owlet. We observed it for a while and took a few photos. On 28 January 2016, I again found it in the same area with Anil Bhardwaj and DFO Mohan Ram.

Previously, I had recorded it in Dang forest in the year 2000, 2007 and 2008, but after these sightings, I had not record it in

the last few years. I believed that it was vagrant in Dang. But it has been recorded by Jenis Patel in 2015 in Purna Wildlife Sanctuary (Patel *et al.* 2015) and by DFO Anand Kumar recently in 2016 (*pers. comm.*). I am monitoring it

since last two months in the current location. Hence it seems that either it has become a resident in Dang now or was present previously, but overlooked.

[Forest Owlet is Critically Endangered (BirdLife International 2016), and its continued presence in Dang forest is heartening news towards the conservation of this species. Special efforts should be taken to conserve the habitat here, and any disturbance should be avoided. There are many threats to the continued existence of this species; hence birdwatchers and forest department officials should take extra efforts towards its protection in Gujarat – Eds]

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Isabelline Shrike preying on pipit

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Viral Patel

The Isabelline Shrike (*Lanius isabellinus*) is a passerine bird, and a member of Shrike family (*Laniidae*). We report here an Isabelline Shrike preying on a Pipit (*Anthus sp.*) in Little Rann of Kachchh.

We were on the way back to our vehicle after photographing water birds at Nava-talav, Little Rann of Kachchh on

29 November 2015. We heard a kind of noise; a 'frightened' or 'unpleasant' call of a bird. Soon we located two birds duelling in mid-air. We identified these birds as an Isabelline Shrike and either a Paddyfield Pipit (*Anthus rufulus*) or a Tawny Pipit (*Anthus campestris*). The Isabelline Shrike caught the pipit's neck firmly in its feet, while fiercely twisting and turning through the air. The pipit kept fluttering in the shrike's talons, trying to escape, but it was of no use. The shrike pinned down the pipit to the ground in a small pit. It tried to kill the pipit by repeatedly striking at the back of the pipit's head with its bill, probably using its tomial teeth to disarticulate the cervical vertebrae.

Out of curiosity, we tried to have a closer look. But due to our movements, the shrike hid its prey in the grass and flew away. When we reached the site, we searched and found a dead pipit in the grass. After that, we moved away and waited for the shrike to come back and eat its prey. We waited for a while,

observing the shrike, but it did not go to its prey. From time to time, the shrike raised its head, and occasionally swung its tail. We could observe that some feathers of the pipit were sticking to the Isabelline Shrike's hooked bill. After some time, we finally decided to move on, leaving the shrike to retrieve its prey.

[Isabelline Shrike has been recorded to regularly prey on birds during migration and on its wintering grounds, with wagtails (*Motacilla* sp.) and warblers (*Phylloscopus* sp.) being the most frequent victims (Lefranc & Worfolk 1997). Hence the pipit is an addition to its diet – Eds.]

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Viral Patel

Sighting of Sociable Lapwing in Amreli District

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During our survey of birds in Dhari, Dist. Amreli, on 28 November 2012, we received news about the presence of Bar-headed Geese (*Anser indicus*) in Khodiyar Dam in the outskirts of Dhari town and so we decided to visit it.

Having reached the site at around 14:00 hrs, from the shore of the lake we spotted some Bar-headed Geese grazing on an island. We sat there and saw some more birds - Ruddy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*), Northern Pintail (*Anas acuta*), Greater Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus roseus*) etc. Suddenly on the edge of the water, a little away from us, landed what looked like a flock of lapwings. To our great surprise and excitement, when we looked through the binoculars, we identified it as a group of eight Sociable Lapwings (*Vanellus gregarius*), now sitting quietly near the water. We quickly took some pictures. They seemed to be unperturbed by our presence. After about 20 minutes they took off and landed closer to us! We could

take even better photographs. While some of them were sitting, others stood there - preening. We stayed there for some time, excited about this rare sighting and then quietly made our exit without disturbing them.

Sociable Lapwing is listed as 'Critically Endangered' (BirdLife International 2015). It is a rare winter migrant to Gujarat, so this sighting from Amreli District was significant and added to the list of earlier sightings in the district as well as those in other parts of Gujarat. This observation was also reported on the BirdLife International's Website.

[There are records of Sociable Lapwings from Rajula taluka of Amreli in the past (2008-10) by Pravin Gohil. So it seems that small numbers regularly visit Amreli District - Eds.]

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BirdLife International (2015) Species factsheet: *Vanellus gregarius* Downloaded from <http://www.birdlife.org> on 07/06/2015 □



Viral Joshi

White-browed Bulbul in Rajkot: A first record for Saurashtra

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Bhavesh Trivedi

On 4 March 2016, we saw and photographed three White-browed Bulbul (*Pycnonotus luteolus*) in the premises of Rajkot Zoological Park, also known as Pradyuman Park Zoo, Rajkot. This place is on the outskirts of Rajkot city and is a well wooded area surrounded by Randarda and Lalpari Lakes. We saw three birds at a time. All the three birds were foraging and perching on branches of trees like Neem, Peepal, etc. Since the initial sighting in the first week of March, these birds are regularly seen in the area. The last sighting was on 29 August 2016, at around 09:00 hrs, when one of the birds was calling from a branch of a tree at a very low height of around 3 feet. All the three birds are frequently seen very near to the visitor's path in the zoo.

According to Ali & Ripley (2001), the species is known to occur in peninsular India, south of 23° N, from Ahmedabad to Midnapur (West Bengal). The White-browed Bulbul is known to occur in South and Central Gujarat and a specimen was collected from Vaghjipur in Mehsana District, but is given as 'not noted in Saurashtra and absent in Kachchh' (Ali 1955). Though recorded in Central Gujarat, there is

no previous record of this species from Saurashtra (Dharmakumarsinhji 1955, Raol 1998). The recent field guides, like Grimmett *et al.* (2011), show its occurrence for South and Central Gujarat but do not show its distribution in Saurashtra or Kachchh. Hence this is a significant record for Saurashtra. Though the number of birds seen is less, it is now known that they are being seen in the area for more than three months and are still present.

It is not possible to discuss whether this represents a range extension of this species based on these few observations; further sightings from more areas in Saurashtra could be useful to see if this is the case.



Bhavesh Trivedi

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Sight records of '*fulvescens*' morph Greater Spotted Eagle in Gujarat

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with streaking on breast while others appearing in a fox-red plumage (Forsman 2006). It is said to occur only in juvenile and immature plumages (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), which is contra to Forsman (2006) and Ferguson-Lees & Christie (2001), who state that '*fulvescens*' occurs at all ages, including in adults. Breeding pairs, containing one or both '*fulvescens*' morph birds, have been observed in Russia, where 2 out of 27 (7.4%) pairs had one or both mates of '*fulvescens*' morph in the Altai-Sayan region (Karyakin *et al.* 2014).

The pale and uniformly yellowish buff birds resemble Tawny Eagle (*Aquila rapax*), causing confusion in identification, while some birds with diffuse darker streaking on breast somewhat look like Eastern Imperial Eagle (*Aquila heliaca*) (Forsman 2006). Hence identification is difficult and good views are needed to separate it from Tawny Eagle and Eastern Imperial Eagle.

The status of '*fulvescens*' morph Greater Spotted Eagle in India is unclear. Naoroji (2006) gives it as 'occasionally seen' in the subcontinent, while Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) give this morph as 'rare'. For Gujarat, it is not mentioned either in Ali (1954) or Dharmakumarsinhji (1955).

However, there have been sight records from Gujarat in the past few years. Sightings have been reported from many areas in Gujarat and photos have been posted on birding websites and on the social media. I have tried to collect as many sightings as possible, to get an idea about its occurrence in Gujarat. However, personal records, not posted on the internet or published in journals, may have been overlooked.

Greater Spotted Eagle (*Aquila clanga*) is a winter migrant to Gujarat, usually seen around large lakes, canals, marshes, etc. (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). It is listed as 'Vulnerable' (BirdLife International 2015) with a declining population.

Greater Spotted Eagle is generally dark in colour. But at all ages, it occurs in a rare pale colour morph, called '*fulvescens*', which is said to be more frequent in the eastern part of the species' range, with birds in this morph varying considerably from pale yellowish buff, to a darker sandy yellowish brown

Records of '*fulvescens*' morph Greater Spotted Eagle in Gujarat

Sr. No	Date	Place	Source
1	October 2008	Jamnagar	Sameer Shah, INW*
2	18 February 2009	Surendranagar	Nirav Bhatt, OBI**
3	November 2009	Thol Bird Sanctuary, Ahmedabad	Niraj Mistry, INW
4	March 2011	Thol Bird Sanctuary, Ahmedabad	Tejas Soni, INW
5	January 2012	Thol Bird Sanctuary, Ahmedabad	Yograj Jadeja, INW
6	19 October 2014	Little Rann of Kachchh	Prasad Ganpule, <i>Personal Observation</i>
7	23 November 2014	Little Rann of Kachchh	K Shukla, OBI
8	1 February 2015	Little Rann of Kachchh	V Pawar, OBI
9	27 December 2015 3 January 2016	Little Rann of Kachchh	Prasad Ganpule, <i>Personal Observation</i>

*INW: Website www.indianaturewatch.net, **OBI: website <http://orientalbirdimages.org>

Birds with pale buff / white plumage have been noted more times than darker yellowish brown or fox-red coloured birds. Looking at the records of '*fulvescens*' morph in Gujarat, it seems that this morph is rare. In general, Greater Spotted Eagle is frequently seen in Gujarat, with regular sightings from many places like Little Rann of Kachchh, Thol Bird Sanctuary, Greater

Rann of Kachchh, etc. Hence, the percentage of '*fulvescens*' morph birds seen seems to be very less compared to 'normal' dark coloured birds. In the Altai Region, Southern Siberia, Russia, only 2.4% (11 out of 461) individuals were of this morph (Karyakin *et al.* 2014).

Greater Spotted Eagle...

It is possible that it is overlooked in Gujarat due to identification difficulties. Further records of this rare morph of Greater Spotted Eagle will help in understanding its status in Gujarat.

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Sighting of a juvenile skua at Madhavpur, Porbandar

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Pomarine Skua is shown to be a winter migrant to Pakistan coast (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). There are only few previous records of Skuas from Gujarat. A juvenile Skua (*Stercorarius sp.*) was recorded at Diu (Mundkur *et al.* 2010). Arctic Skua (*Stercorarius parasiticus*) was recorded at Nalsarovar (Trivedi put & Sama 2010) and at Venasar, Little Rann of Kachchh (Ganpule 2011). Hence this is an important record for Gujarat.



Arctic Skua (*Stercorarius parasiticus*) was recorded at Nalsarovar (Trivedi put & Sama 2010) and at Venasar, Little Rann of Kachchh (Ganpule 2011). Hence this is an important record for Gujarat.

Acknowledgements:

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We visited Madhavpur coastal area (Dist: Porbandar) for birding on 30 January 2006 There we saw a gull-like bird sitting on the beach. It had pale brown mask, dark-brown crown, neck, mantle and wing; and greyish bill. One of us (RT) took few photographs. After referring to field guides (Kazmierczak 2000, Grimmett *et al.* 2011), we suspected it to be a juvenile skua (*Stercorarius spp.*). A skua is also sometimes called as a 'jaeger' but it is referred to as a skua here, based on Grimmett *et al.* (2011). Further, a Parasitic Jaeger is also known as Arctic Skua.

We sent the images to various birdwatchers but since other features were not seen in the photos, it was tentatively identified as a juvenile Pomarine Skua (*Stercorarius pomarinus*) (Praveen, J. and Dipu, K., *in litt.*, *pers. comm.*, email dated 7 January 2014)

Slaty-breasted Rail in Gujarat

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Jayesh Joshi

Introduction:

Slaty-breasted Rail (*Gallirallus striata*) is a member of *Rallidae* family. Earlier it was known as Blue-banded Rail. It is sometimes treated as *Lewinia striata* (Taylor 1996), but taxonomy adopted by Grimmett *et al.* (2011) is followed here.

Range and Status in Gujarat:

Ali (1954) and Dharmakumarsinhji (1955) have mentioned two old records from Kachchh, with Ali (1954) stating that "I can trace no record for Gujarat but it must doubtless occur". There seems some confusion amongst various authors about its status in Gujarat. Latest reference texts like Grimmett *et al.* (2011) and Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) do not show any record for Gujarat in the distribution maps while Kazmierczak (2000) shows it as an uncommon resident in whole of Gujarat.

Taylor & van Perlo (1998) have shown its probable range from south Gujarat to peninsular India with the remarks that, the range shown is hypothetical and it may occur in northern parts of its range only in summer. Grewal *et al.* (2002) have shown its possible range from Gujarat to north-east India and southwards to peninsular India, and have described it as scarce but overlooked. Ali & Ripley (1980) have described its status as resident, but with local movements, in Kachchh, Madhya Pradesh, Darjeeling, Jalpaiguri, north-east India and southward through Bangladesh and peninsular India to Kerala.

There is only one recent record of Slaty-breasted Rail from Gujarat. An individual was photographed near Barda Hills, Porbandar on 25 June 2010 by Subhash Das (Das 2010).

This note describes sightings of Slaty-breasted Rail over four years at three different locations in Ankleshwar Tehsil, Bharuch district, with photographic evidence.

Observations:

On 24 June 2012, Sunday, my son Aarsh and myself visited an agricultural pond (locally called 'sim talavadi') behind my village Untiyadra (21°29'48" N, 72°56'40"E), Bharuch district, for bird watching, especially to search for Watercock (*Gallicrex cinerea*) which is seen here in good numbers during monsoon (Patel, 2015). A stream passes near this pond. Both the pond and the stream are always covered with thick vegetation of Lesser Indian Reed Mace (*Typha angustata*) and Marsh Glory (*Ipomoea aquatica*). Surrounding these water bodies are Sugarcane (*Saccharum officinarum*) and Rice (*Oryza sativa*) fields as well as uncultivated land with shrubs, couch grass and other grasses. All the reeds in the stream were flattened due to heavy rains and winds in the previous week. Due to this, all nests of Black-breasted Weaver (*Ploceus benghalensis*) had been destroyed. While returning in the evening at around 19-00 hrs, we saw a crane-like bird beside the stream. The bird immediately ran away towards the reeds, but it was clearly visible due to the flattened reeds. Its beak was bright red; head and nape were chestnut, with grey breast and white spotted upperparts. Later, it was identified as Slaty-breasted Rail with the help of field guides (Kazmierczak 2000; Grimmett *et al.* 2011). Thereafter, it was seen again on 26 June 2012 and 28 June 2012 with Mukesh Bhatt; on 1 July 2012 with Anil Bhatt, Yogesh C. Patel and on the same day at another place with Aarsh. It was last seen on 18 July. From then onward it became very difficult to visit the area because of rain. After monsoon, I regularly visited the area, but did not see the bird again.



Next year, it was spotted in the evening at 19-00 hrs on 25 April 2013 in an open patch of a drying farm pond (locally called as 'khet talavadi'), which was sparsely covered with *Typha angustata*. The bird was bathing and preening in a wet area of the pond. We observed it for 10 minutes and took some record shots in poor light. It was seen once in this place again. After two months, on 7 July 2013, one individual was spotted for a few moments beside the road one km away at around 18-00 hrs in the evening.

In 2014, it was spotted from 6 September to 30 September in grassland surrounded by flooded *Typha angustata* at Sisodra village of Ankleshwar Tehsil on Hansot-Kosamba road. This place is near the village tank of Sisodra and is 8 km away from Untiyadra. Photographs were taken on 28 September 2014. In 2015, it was seen again by Mukesh Bhatt and Anil Bhardwaj on 7 July at the same place where it was first sighted in 2012.

Slaty-breasted Rail....

Discussion:

Marshes with reeds, mangroves, edges of village tanks or flooded paddy-fields are habitats of the Slaty-breasted Rail (Ali & Ripley 1980).

Western part of south Gujarat has good irrigation facilities throughout the year due to Ukai, Madhuvan and other small/medium sized dams. Moreover, average rainfall is 40 to 80 inches in this area. Rice and Sugarcane are the dominant crops. Marshy areas with reeds are very common. All my sightings of the species were in or besides flooded *Typha angustata* near agricultural ponds or tanks. Thus all sightings were in typical habitat described in the reference texts for Slaty-breasted Rail which is common in south Gujarat.

The species is frequently recorded in Thane/Vasai creek, Mumbai, which is near South Gujarat, and images from this area can be seen on the website <http://orientalbirdimages.org>. The birds were seen here between April and September i.e. in Summer/Monsoon for last four years. Taylor & van Perlo (1998) state that it may occur in the northern most parts of its range only in the summer and Gujarat lies in the extreme northern part of the range of this species. It is possible that Slaty-breasted Rail is a summer/monsoon migrant to Gujarat.

Conclusion:

It is quite likely that the Slaty-breasted Rail might be a regular summer/monsoon visitor to South Gujarat, especially between Narmada and Tapi river area, but is overlooked due to its shy and skulking habits, and difficulty in accessing its habitat. These records show that the species does occur here and is fairly regularly seen in South Gujarat.

[Birdwatchers are requested to send their sightings of Slaty-breasted Rail from Gujarat so that its status and distribution can be better known – Eds]

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From 22-7-43 to 24-9-43, 100 male Floricans were banded, out of which two were recovered the next year. One of these was caught in the same district as it was formerly ringed in. A bird banded on 25-8-43, with number BF 68, was found dead three days later in the same area. From 27-7-44 to 8-9-44, 99 male Floricans were caught and banded. In 1945, from 20-7-45 to 1-10-45, 111 males and one female were banded, but none have been recovered. In 1946, 100 Floricans were banded, all of which were males. In this season, four birds were recovered of which two were in the same locality as banded. In 1947, 67 male birds were banded between 25-7-47 to 24-9-47. Nine birds were recovered of which seven were of the previous year, one was of 1944, and one of 1945. Of these, five birds were recovered from the same respective 'vids' where they were first caught. In 1948, there was a famine and no birds were caught although some were seen as passing migrants. In 1949, I managed to catch 11 males out of which two proved to be birds banded in 1945 and 1947. One of these was caught from the same area where it was first ringed two years earlier. Altogether 489 birds were ringed in seven years of which 18 were recovered, giving an average recovery of 3.6 per cent. It is quite possible that some of the banded birds were caught by poachers and useful information thus lost.

Source: Dharmakumarsinhji, R. S. Undated (=1955) *Birds of Saurashtra, India*. Published by the Author, Bhavnagar, Saurashtra.

Observations of White-browed Fantail mobbing birds of prey

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its position while being attacked. After some time, the buzzard flew away from the area. But the fantail continued to chase the buzzard in the air till it flew far off.

The same kind of scene was observed in Jambughoda Wildlife Sanctuary, Vadodara, on 12 April 2014. Here, the White-browed Fantail mobbed a Crested Serpent Eagle (*Spilornis cheela*).

A pair of fantails was mobbing the eagle, which had perched on a tree. Only one fantail actively engaged in attacking the eagle. Rapid and frequent attacks by the fantail made the eagle uncomfortable. The eagle often raised its crest while getting pecked. After a few minutes, the eagle flew away from the tree but the fantails continued chasing it for some distance.

According to Ali & Ripley (2001), the White-browed Fantail breeds from February to August, but chiefly during March to June. These two observations were during its breeding season. So, it is possible that the birds became more aggressive. Ali & Ripley (2001) further state that the species is usually unafraid of man and aggressive in mobbing predators such as cats and crows, trespassing into proximity of nests, and utter harsh, shriek-like 'war-cries'. It is also known to attack intruding crows approaching their nests (Tyabji 1964). Singh (1964) observed that the incubating bird did not leave the nest even when the author tried to push it away from the nest and when he covered the nest with his hand, the bird started attacking and pecking at the hand. There are many photos of fantails mobbing prey birds on birding websites in India (Shetty 2009, Nagendra 2014)

This kind of mobbing of the much larger Oriental Honey-buzzard and Crested Serpent Eagle proves its aggressive behavior during the breeding season.

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Soham Brahmhatt

Soham Brahmhatt

On the morning of 7 July 2013, at Chikodra village (22°33' N, 72°59' E), near Anand, we observed a pair of Oriental Honey-buzzards (*Pernis ptilorhynchus*) soaring in the sky. Sometime later, one of the buzzards perched on a Neem tree. In a few moments, a White-browed Fantail (*Rhipidura aureola*) appeared and started attacking it by pecking the much larger bird. The fantail mostly sat on back of the buzzard and pecked on the nape and head of the buzzard. The fantail attacked frequently and quickly through the air. Sometimes, the fantail tried to get close to the head of the buzzard and attacked it on or near its face. Though it was undisturbed initially, the continued and aggressive pecking made the buzzard uncomfortable.

After a few minutes, the buzzard flew away from the tree. But the fantail chased it and continued attacking again as soon as it settled on a nearby light post. Here, the fantail became more aggressive in the open space, but the buzzard kept on stretching its wings (or opened them partially) to drive away the fantail from its back. Also, the buzzard kept on changing

Unusual prey by waterbirds

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'Waterbirds' is a term used to refer to birds that live on or around wetlands. Since Gujarat has a large number of wetlands and suitable habitats for waterbirds, there is a good population of these birds. Here, I report some observations of unusual prey by waterbirds.

Great White Pelican (*Pelecanus onocrotalus*) preying on Common Pochard (*Aythya ferina*)



Amish Patel

I have observed pelicans usually eating fish, which are available in plenty in Lakhota Lake, Jamnagar. On 11 February 2013, I saw a Great White Pelican feeding on a female Common Pochard at Lakhota Lake.

I observed the bird catching a Common Pochard in its pouch, probably inadvertently. Though the pochard was struggling, the pelican did not let it go. The Common Pochard struggled very hard, but was unable to escape. Other pelicans pursued this pelican to rob its prey, but they were not lucky enough to snatch it. It took the pelican nearly one hour to swallow the prey.

I have witnessed one more incident wherein a Great White Pelican caught a male Tufted Duck (*Aythya fuligula*). However, in the first attempt, the Tufted Duck was lucky enough to slip from its pouch and escape. Though the pelican chased the duck, it was unsuccessful in catching it again.

Purple Swamphen (*Porphyrio porphyrio*) preying on chick of Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*)

The Purple Swamphen usually feed on soft parts of the stems of aquatic vegetation. But on 10 June 2010, I saw that it caught a Black-winged Stilt chick. Usually the Black-winged Stilt is very alert; but it could not prevent the swamphen from catching its chick. The parents tried very hard to save their chick, but were helpless against the Purple Swamphen. The swamphen killed the chick and swallowed it.



Amish Patel

Behaviour of Dalmatian Pelican (*P. crispus*)

I have observed that the behaviour of Dalmatian Pelicans is different from that of Great White Pelicans. Dalmatian Pelicans are less aggressive than Great White Pelicans. But when they are in flocks, they too can be very aggressive.



Amish Patel

I was watching a Blue Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*), which had fallen in the lake near Jamnagar. It was floating in the water and trying to come out. Meanwhile, two Dalmatian Pelicans came close to it and tried to pick up the pigeon twice, but after pecking at it a few times, they did not pick it up or catch it in the pouch. The pelicans seemed reluctant to catch the pigeon and it could escape. It seems Dalmatian Pelicans are not as opportunistic as Great White Pelicans.

Discussion:

Great White Pelican is known to catch birds as prey, and this has been noted at Jamnagar (Soni & Kathad 2014). It is

also known to feed on eggs and chicks of Cape Cormorant (*P. capensis*) in Namibia (Elliott *et al.* 2016). Hence this is not unexpected.

Purple Swamphen is primarily vegetarian, but it is known to be omnivorous. Animal food forms only a small part of its diet, but it is known to feed on eggs and nestlings of birds (Taylor 2016).

These observations add to our knowledge about the diet of these waterbirds.

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Sightings of Stoliczka's Bushchat in Kachchh

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Shivam Tiwari

Introduction

The White-browed Bushchat or Stoliczka's Bushchat (*Saxicola macrorhynchus*) is endemic to the north-west Indian subcontinent. Its historical distribution included Punjab, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Rajasthan and Gujarat in India; adjacent parts of Punjab and Sind in Pakistan (probably now extinct) and Afghanistan (now extinct) (Ali & Ripley 1983). It inhabits dry, semi-deserts and desert plains with low herbs and scattered shrubs. The species is threatened by habitat loss and degradation and is classified as 'Vulnerable' (BirdLife International 2016).

Habitat, Distribution and Ecology

The Stoliczka's Bushchat is mainly distributed in the Banni and Naliya grasslands of Kachchh district (Himmatsinhji 2004, Varu 2007, 2009, 2010, Soni 2015). The Banni grassland is located in Kachchh district, south of the Greater Rann of Kachchh while Naliya grassland is situated in Abdasa Taluka of Kachchh. In Banni, it inhabits dry flatland having *Suaeda fruticosa* along with *Cressa cretica* and *Tamarix* shrubs. In Naliya grasslands, it inhabits grassland having *Aristida*, *Cenchrus*, *Dicanthium*,

other grass spp. and *Capparis* and *Ziziphus* shrubs. The species is probably highly adaptive, considering its presence in the dissimilar habitats present in Banni and Naliya areas, and other distinct habitats in Rajasthan. The habitat in Rajasthan is dominated by *Cenchrus ciliaris* grass and scanty bushes of *Capparis* and *Ziziphus*. Some individuals observed in the Naliya and Banni region, inhabit agricultural land, and adjacent areas.



Shivam Tiwari

Sightings and Behaviour

The Stoliczka's Bushchat is a strictly insectivorous bird (Ali & Ripley 1983). The bird is highly parochial and has high site fidelity, and shows preference to certain favoured bushes or shrubs in their territory (Rahmani 1997). This is mainly due to food niche. The birds observed in both Banni and Naliya habitat are either seen singly or in pairs.

A peculiar behaviour unique to the Stoliczka's Bushchat is the 'Puff and Roll'. In it, the bird puffs up its chest, sways sideways, runs a little distance and again repeats the same. The bird appears to be larger than normal, and the white belly is prominently visible. The head is held slightly back, and the tail

and wing tips touch the ground occasionally. This behaviour has been observed in both Naliya and Banni areas, where it is performed on the open ground amidst vegetation. The

reasons for this behaviour are not known but there are several hypotheses; it could be a threat display, a courtship ritual or a tactic to flush its prey.

Sightings by Jugal Tiwari, Vaibhav Mishra and me in Banni and Naliya areas of Kachchh are given below in Table.

Place	Month	Year	No. of Sightings
Banni	December	2006	1
Banni	March	2007	2
Banni	January	2009	1
Banni	December	2009	3
Banni and Naliya	November-February	2010-2011	13
Banni and Naliya	January-March	2012	7
Banni	November	2012	1
Banni and Naliya	November-January	2013-2014	3
Banni	September	2015	2 (Juvenile)
Banni and Naliya	December-March	2015-2016	7



Shivam Tiwari

We have been observing the Stoliczka's Bushchat from December 2006. The latest sightings are from March 2016. In Banni, it was noted near Kiro hill, near watch-tower no. 2 on the way to Chahlo village, in Baghdadia Thath area, and near Servo Dhandh. In Naliya, it was noted in Bhanada and Kunathiya Don (grassland), near Lala watch-tower and on the edge of agricultural fields. All of the sightings have been between September and March. There have been no sightings in the other months, suggesting either short-range or long-range migration for breeding.

The most notable sightings are those of two separate, first-year juveniles, on 4 September 2015 and 17 September 2015 in Banni. Both the juveniles showed darker brown wings with clear barring, similar to adults, whitish belly, indistinctly brown-mottled throat and breast. The juvenile seen on 4 September also showed a prominently yellow gape, and dark mottling on the head and flanks. It should be noted that nothing is known about the breeding of Stoliczka's Bushchat and an active nest has never been found anywhere yet. Our observations indicate

that it is a winter migrant to Kachchh; from September to March and it is not known to breed in Kachchh, but the sighting of these two fresh juveniles is intriguing.

These sightings show that the Stoliczka's Bushchat is a regular winter migrant to Kachchh.

[Though Stoliczka's Bushchat is a regular winter migrant to Banni and Naliya in Kachchh, there are very few sightings from outside these areas in Gujarat. It has been noted in Velavadar National Park (Rahmani 1997), in Little Rann of Kachchh (photos on the website 'indianaturewatch') and near Positra, Dwarka (Ganpule 2015) in the recent past – Eds]

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Short Birding Notes



Bar-headed Goose in Rajkot

On 15 March 2016, we went for bird watching to Lalpari Lake, on out-skirts of Rajkot city. We saw 10 to 12 Bar-headed Geese (*Anser indicus*) in the farms near the lake. The birds were habituated to the presence of farmers and their vehicles and so we could approach them and take photos from a short distance. They were seen for 15 days in the area, with a maximum of 30 individuals noted. Bar-headed Goose is rare in Rajkot area and has not been noted here in the last few years. It was last seen in Rajkot in March 1996 by Bhavesh Trivedi and Vinod Pandya (*pers. comm.*)

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Crested Hawk Eagle preying on Mottled Wood Owl

During my visit to Gir forest in May 2016 with my friends, we saw a Crested Hawk Eagle (*Nisaetus cirrhatus*) with a Mottled Wood Owl (*Strix ocellata*) kill. Though we did not witness the eagle killing the owl, we saw that it was a fresh kill and that the eagle had just started to feed on the owl. The Crested Hawk Eagle has been recorded taking large birds like Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*), Junglefowls and Pheasants (Naoroji 2006). However, there is no record of it preying on a Mottled Wood Owl, and hence this sighting is significant.

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Himalayan Griffon and Cinereous Vulture in Little Rann of Kachchh

On a visit to Little Rann of Kachchh on 29 November 2015, we (Niyati Kukadia, Pavan Patel, Muzahid Malik and me) visited the Kharaghoda/Dasada area for bird watching. In the evening at around 17:45 hrs, we saw a group of Vultures, consisting of six Himalayan Griffons (*Gyps himalayensis*), eleven Eurasian Griffons (*Gyps fulvus*) and one Cinereous Vulture (*Aegypius monachus*). Himalayan Griffon is vagrant to Gujarat, with a few records from Greater Rann of Kachchh and near Dabhla, Ahmedabad (Varu & Khatri 2015). The Eurasian Griffon and Cinereous Vulture are uncommon / rare winter migrants to Gujarat.

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A ringed Lesser Crested Tern in Jamnagar

On 17 April, 2016, I visited Balachhadi beach, near Jamnagar, with Mehul Bhadania and Chirag Solanki. There we saw and photographed a Lesser Crested Tern (*Thalasseus bengalensis*) with a metal ring on its right leg. Unfortunately, the number / markings on the ring could not be deciphered. But it was interesting to note the ringed Lesser Crested Tern in Jamnagar.

[We sent the images to Brendan Kavanagh and Graham Prole, who have ringed Lesser Crested Terns in Bahrain. They opined that though the markings were not readable, based on the ratio of width to height of the ring, it looked similar to a BTO ring. These rings were used for ringing the terns in Bahrain and it is possible that this individual was ringed in Bahrain. However, the exact ringing details could not be obtained as the ring was not readable – Eds]

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Sighting of aberrant coloured Red-wattled Lapwing in LRK

On 3 January 2016, we visited Little Rann of Kachchh. We were searching for the birds near Zinzuwada area (23019' 05.1"N; 71038' 03.6"E), when we spotted an aberrant coloured Red-wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*) besides a water source. We were surprised to see that the bird had a normal coloured head, but completely white upperparts and underparts. It was identified as an individual with the mutation 'Brown', based on the criteria given by Van Grouw (2013), which is defined as a qualitative reduction of eumelanin. Further details of the mutation 'Brown' are given in this reference. This sighting is an addition to our knowledge of such birds.

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Stoliczka's Bushchat in Little Rann of Kachchh

Stoliczka's or White-browed Bushchat (*Saxicola macrorhynchus*) is a Vulnerable species (BirdLife International 2015). It is scarce and local in dry semi-deserts of Gujarat, with regular sightings in the winter only from the grasslands of Kachchh and Velavadar National Park. On 21 December 2014, I participated in the Wild Ass Census, along with Bhavanisinhji, in the Little Rann of Kachchh. Early in the morning, we saw one Stoliczka's Bushchat, which was catching small insects. We took some photos and confirmed its identity. [There are very few records of this species from the Little Rann of Kachchh and it is rare in this area—Eds]

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White-capped Bunting near Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary

On 1 August 2008, I photographed a White-capped Bunting (*Emberiza stewarti*) at Aniyari village (22°49' N, 72° 05' E), near Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary in central Gujarat. The bird was foraging on ground.

The White-capped Bunting (*Emberiza stewarti*) is a resident bird in mountains of Pakistan and Western Himalayas. It winters in foothills and valleys of Pakistan and North-central India (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). Isolated sight records of this species are shown in Gujarat (Grimmett *et al.* 2011, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). The White-capped Bunting was observed twice at Hingolghadh in Rajkot District (Khacher 1963, Khacher & Mundkur 1988) and recently in Jamnagar, where two pairs were noted (Deomurari 2009). It was also included in the checklist of the birds of Gujarat (Parasharya *et al.* 2004). Here, its occurrence at Aniyari village near Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary in central Gujarat indicates its wider distribution.

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Book Review

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Title: 'Birds of Banni Grassland' - 302 pages

Authors: Mukesh H. Koladiya, Nikunj B. Gajera, A. K. Roy Mahato, V. Vijay Kumar & R. V. Asari : Gujarat Institute of Desert Ecology (GUIDE), Bhuj.

Publisher: Ravi Sankaran Foundation 2016.

The book is a compilation of information and images about the birds of Banni Grassland in Kachchh. The Banni region has always been a hotspot among birdwatchers. Hence, the publication of a book on the birds of this region is obviously fascinating. The book has a good printing quality and an impressive layout, but we are rather disappointed with the status and remarks given for many species, as well as the fact that the photographs given for many species are not correct.

Many birds mentioned in the book have, in fact, never been reported from the Banni area, like Black-crowned Sparrow Lark, Jungle Crow, Sand Lark, Common Raven, Oriental Magpie Robin, Ashy Prinia, and Spot-billed Pelican. Surprisingly, a few species given in the book have never been reported or properly documented from entire Kachchh, like Spotted Dove, Large Grey Babbler, Jungle Babbler and Hen Harrier.

There are many identification errors in the photographs given with the species descriptions. Some examples are given below:

- Green Sandpiper: the image is of a Wood Sandpiper
- Terek Sandpiper: the image is of a Common Greenshank
- Jack Snipe: the image is of a Common Snipe
- Eurasian Hobby: the image is of a Common Kestrel
- Booted Eagle: the image is of an Oriental Honey Buzzard
- Lesser Spotted Eagle: the image is of a Steppe Eagle
- White-rumped Vulture: the image is of an Eurasian Griffon
- Red-collared Dove: the image is of an Eurasian Collared Dove
- Savanna Nightjar: the image is of an Indian Nightjar
- Alpine Swift: the image is of a juvenile Wire-tailed Swallow
- Brown Shrike : the image is of an Isabelline Shrike
- Blyth's Reed Warbler: the image is of a Paddyfield Warbler
- Streak-throated Swallow: the image is of a Red-rumped Swallow
- Marshall's lora: the image is of a Common lora
- Paddyfield pipit: the image is of a Tawny Pipit
- Tawny Pipit: the image is of a Paddyfield Pipit
- Whiskered Tern: the image is out focus and/but it is definitely not a Whiskered Tern.

It seems that the authors did not search the literature thoroughly as they have missed many species that have been

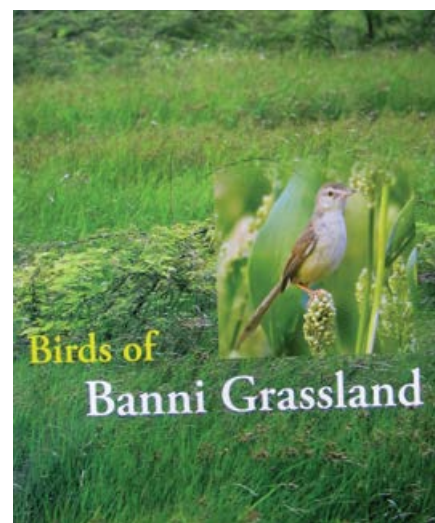
reported from the Banni region, and which are seen here. A list of such species is given below:

Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin, Sykes's Warbler, Red-naped Shaheen, Greater Short-toed Lark, Bimaculated Lark, Blue Rock Thrush, Blue-tailed Bee-eater, Pallid Scops Owl, Broad-billed

Sandpiper, Common Shelduck, Pacific Golden Plover, Oriental Pratincole, Collared Pratincole, Lesser Kestrel, Pale Rock Sparrow, Caspian Plover, Water Pipit, Tree Pipit, Common Rose-finch, Lesser Crested Tern, Greater Sandplover, Sanderling, Sykes's Nightjar, Himalayan Griffon, Red-necked Phalarope, Heuglin's Gull, Common Buzzard, Common Starling, Trumpeter Finch, Sand Martin, Ruddy Turnstone, White-winged Tern, Common Woodshrike, Steppe Grey Shrike, Greenish Warbler, Brown Rock Chat, Ferruginous Duck, White-browed Wagtail and Water Rail.

The authors have mentioned many species to be common in Banni, but in fact, they are very rare or uncommon, like Brahminy Kite, Bonelli's Eagle, Eastern Imperial Eagle, Lesser Spotted Eagle (now Indian Spotted Eagle), Osprey, Watercock, Black-necked Grebe, Singing Bushlark etc. Some specific examples are given below:

- Yellow-wattled Lapwing is mentioned as common but it is in fact rare in Banni. It is a bird of stony gravel area and fallow fields, otherwise common in mainland of Kachchh.
- Red-necked Falcon is mentioned as fairly common in Banni. This bird is getting rare in entire Kachchh and its sightings are very few.
- Black Francolin is mentioned by the authors as a fairly common bird in Banni. It is an uncommon species. It can be seen in the agriculture fields on the fringes of Banni, and that too not commonly.
- Demoiselle Crane is described by the authors as common in Banni, but there are hardly a few records of this species in Banni. However, they are seen commonly in Khadir, Rapar and Mandvi in Kachchh.



Book Review....

- Indian Bushlark is mentioned as common and seen in flocks in *Suaeda* habitat. It is an uncommon bird in Banni and seen in pairs or in small flocks in the scrub area and stony gravel habitat like Kiro hill, and on the fringe of Banni.
- Greylag Goose is mentioned as fairly common and in the remarks it is written 'Recorded in all water bodies in groups of 15–30 individuals'. This is not correct. This species is no more wintering in Kachchh now. Maharao Vijayrajaji had recorded good numbers of this species at Chhari-Dhandh in 1912-13 and there is a single sight record from Chhari-Dhandh by the first author along with a BNHS team in 1991. After that, there is no record of this species from Banni.
- Sykes's Crested Lark is mentioned as common in Banni, which is again not correct. It is a bird found in main land of Kachchh and seen near the villages, exploring the cowdung and cattle shed areas in stony and gravel habitat. There are hardly few records on the fringes of Banni; in the main Banni they are absent.

The authors have mentioned the status of many species as rare, but in fact are commonly seen in Banni, like White Stork, Barn Swallow, Whiskered Tern, Bluethroat, Clamorous Reed Warbler, Chestnut-shouldered Petronia etc. Some specific examples are given below:

- White-tailed Lapwing is mentioned as rare but it can be seen in flocks of 20-45 in Chhari-Dhand, Servo-Dhand, Vakeria-Dhand and other water bodies of Banni in the winter season.
- Black-headed Bunting is given as rare and seen from November to February. The fact is, it is a gregarious species and passes through Kachchh in late March to April when the wheat is harvested. It is not a rare bird in Banni and Kachchh.

The periods of occurrence of many passage migrant species are not described correctly. For Red-backed Shrike, the book states that this species is seen from July to February, which is incorrect. It is a passage migrant in Kachchh from August till October. Similar mistakes are seen in descriptions for other passage migrants, like Eurasian Nightjar, Cuckoo, and also for Spotted Flycatcher.

As per the book, Common Hoopoe, Paddyfield Warbler, Black Redstart, Pied Bushchat, Common Stonechat, Desert Wheatear, Variable Wheatear, Tawny Pipit, and Long-billed Pipit are seen throughout the year in Banni, which is not correct. It is well known fact that they all are winter visitors here. Also Red Collared-Dove is not a resident as mentioned

in the book, but a monsoon breeding visitor to Banni. Some specific examples are given below:

- Alpine Swift is mentioned to occur in Banni throughout the year. This information is incorrect. Alpine swifts are seen from December to February, as a gregarious passage migrant, through the Banni grasslands.
- Black Kite is given as resident and seen round the year. Actually, *Milvus migrans lineatus* (Black-eared Kite), is seen from December to February in Banni. The resident *Milvus migrans govinda* does not occur in Banni.
- Steppe Eagle is mentioned as migratory from November to February and breeding here from December to March. Steppe Eagle is not known to breed in India and no nest has been recorded so far.
- Grey Hypocolius occurring from July to February is incorrect. It is seen from early November till April end based on our study of this species here.
- Stoliczka's Bushchat or White-browed Bushchat is given as a resident. But it is a wintering species in Banni. How can the authors know the clutch size of this species when nobody so far has found a nest and studied it? Further, we do not know where this species breeds.
- Rufous-tailed Wheatear is given as 'from July to February' and its status is given as 'common'. It is seen from October till March end and is a rare winter visitor, seen in rocky and stony areas like 'Pakhi bheet' near Kiro hill.

Sight records of some species are questionable, as there is no photographic proof. These include Long-eared Owl and Habshi Flamingo. There is no confirmed record of Long-eared Owl from Banni. Also, there is no species called 'Habshi Flamingo' – this is a juvenile of Flamingo, which is dark brownish / blackish in colour.

In conclusion, the authors' efforts in bringing out 'Birds of Banni Grassland' are laudable, but it would have been a better publication if attention was given on species identification, status, distribution, selection of photographs and proper referencing of available literature. The main aim of this review is to avoid a possible misunderstanding about the ornithology of Kachchh among birders, researchers, academicians and general readers. □

Erratum

Flamingo 8 (3) - 12 (4) : 5 - under Persian Shearwater, the sentence 'Recent sighting during a pelagic trip in January 2016 (E Munshi, eBird)' should read 'A sighting in RNBWS database in Arabian Sea, about 125 NM west of Kachchh (Observation ID: 1778)'.

Letter to the Editor

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This letter was due for some time but other matters got me preoccupied. It gave me great pleasure to read through the special interim issue of *Flamingo* that carried the 'Status and Distribution of Gujarat Birds' (Ganpule 2016). Having been associated with a couple of similar projects, I can appreciate the time and energy expended to get it right – and I must admit, it has come off very well. My congratulations to Prasad Ganpule and his colleagues in BCSG who made this happen. The photographs used in the inside covers are apt and includes most of the rarities that were photographed recently from the state. I am told that this will be followed up with a field guide and this paper is a precursor for the same. I look forward to see this checklist get used in the field guide.

Checklist creation of this kind comes with its joys and pains. Historical records are full of surprises and the remarkable discoveries one can make while tracking those records are bountiful. One has pick a tiny cross from a field guide and track to its source and evaluate its authenticity, there by learning a lot more than just birds. For example, the details of the sole record of Pin-tailed Sandgrouse (*Pterocles alchata*) from Gujarat is hidden in a small note (Nurse 1902) in the JBNHS by Colonel Charles George Nurse and we soon get to learn about his giant contributions to entomology.

As you would probably know, we recently published an 'India Checklist' (Praveen *et al.* 2016) in *Indian BIRDS* and as Prasad would agree – there are three species which are accepted in Gujarat paper that were not accepted in the 'India Checklist'. Acceptance criteria of any checklist is peculiar to that work and hence, there is probably no necessity to align such a criteria as long as the associated documentation is well-aligned. Eg. Snow Goose (*Anser caerulescens*) may be treated differently in Gujarat and India checklist – but both are congruent in its status that its origins are unknown. Whether to include birds of unknown origin in one's checklist is a decision of the compiler and they may differ. However, I recount an experience where such a decision can impact the future documentation status of species in that region and this experience is quite relevant for another species which Gujarat checklist has accepted - the Rock Martin (*Ptyonoprogne fuligula obsoleta*).

While reviewing species for India checklist, two contentious species that consumed a lot of our time were Black Tern (*Chlidonias niger*) and Nordmann's Greenshank (*Tringa guttifer*). Our review of Black Tern is already published (Praveen *et al.* 2014) while Nordmann's Greenshank is underway. Both species share several characteristics:

- a) Listed for India for a fairly long time (Black Tern since 1950, Nordmann's Greenshank since 1881) without specimens of known provenance.
- b) Long distance migrants that may occur anywhere in winter or during passage.

Identification not straight forward and both species have one or two confusion species; White-winged Tern (*C. leucopterus*) & Whiskered Terns (*C. hybrida*) for Black Tern and Common Greenshank (*T. nebularia*) for Nordmann's Greenshank; there by many of the field reports had suspect identification or sometimes wrong identification.

- c) Presence of similar sounding names that create transcription mistakes. Nordmann's Greenshank used to be more popular by the name 'Spotted Greenshank' and is similar sounding to Spotted Redshank (*T. erythropus*). Similarly, 'White-winged Black Tern' was the more popular name for White-winged Tern there by evoking a nomenclature overlap with Black Tern. During our reviews, we found that observers had confused names while reporting formally.

Our understanding of Indian avifaunal distribution has big gaps and hence it is not always possible to challenge an unusual report based on well-known patterns. As these were listed in country checklists, bird-watchers & ornithologists reported them freely in their own lists, mostly without any supporting evidence which has been the norm in the country for a long time. Black Tern has been reported from Delhi, Gujarat, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Odisha (Praveen *et al.* 2014). Nordmann's Greenshank reports came from Assam, West Bengal, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Rajasthan and Uttarakhand (Praveen *et al.* in prep). Until Rasmussen & Anderton (2005) challenged all records for want to material evidence, both species had a defacto entry into many checklists, papers and books. The situation was not restricted to India but also included Sri Lanka and for the Greenshank, Nepal too. During our reviews, we always made an earnest attempt to prove Rasmussen & Anderton (2005) wrong by sticking to the same high standards but attempting to collect information that they have missed. We succeeded in many cases (e.g. see Delany *et al.* 2014); however we failed for these two cases. Luckily while closing our reviews, Nirav Bhatt & Prasad got an exceptional documentation of Black Tern (Bhatt *et al.* 2014) and hence the species got into the national checklist – however, we are yet to find such an evidence for the Greenshank.

Letter to the Editor...

Back to the context, situation of Rock Martin from Gujarat is very similar. The species entered the Gujarat checklist in the 19thC when Butler (1879) and later Murray (1890) and Ali (1945) listed it for Kachchh/Gujarat and finally Ali & Ripley (1987) included a record citing Ferdinand Stoliczka. Though Stoliczka did indeed visit Gujarat (in 1871-72), neither his writings (Stoliczka 1872a, 1872b) nor any subsequent compilations before Ali & Ripley (1987) included any reference to this record. In fact, Stoliczka reported both Eurasian Crag Martin (*P. rupestris*) and Dusky Crag Martin (*P. concolor*) from Gujarat – all this sounds strange if he did collect it after all. The latest field guides, Kazmierczak (2000) and Grimmett *et al.* (2011), also show an isolated record for Kachchh, with no other record from India. Rasmussen & Anderton (2005, 2012) mention an ‘old record’ from Kachchh, with a comment that it requires substantiation. Neither Butler nor Stoliczka has produced any material evidence in this regard; through preserved specimens in museum or notes on a handled specimen. Now, if this species is listed in a state checklist, it opens up the possibility for resident and visiting birders to ‘tick’ the species without realizing the importance of their record and hence missing on collecting supporting documentation. The species can potentially occur anywhere in Gujarat as it occurs in adjacent Sindh – as a rare winter visitor, on passage or as mere straggler. Hence, it is impossible to refute a sighting purely on range. Identification is not straight forward – it can be confused with both Eurasian Crag Martin and even Dusky Crag Martin in certain plumages and hence mere statements like “I saw it well” or and “I am confident” unfortunately cannot stand an independent assessment. Lastly, there will be nomenclature confusion in the future with Pale Martin [Pale Sand Martin] (*Riparia diluta*) – a completely different genus – just because both species are present in the default state checklist.

I must mention that I am not challenging any particular record of this species, I am only trying to impress upon checklist compilers the greater role they play in bringing clarity (or confusion) to the bird-watchers of a region. It may sound unwieldy that Rasmussen & Anderton (2005) used a golden sword to slash a certain amount of ornithological information from the country; and we as checklist compilers for the country decided to follow the same rigor. However, the thought process for doing that had a strong background rationale and undeniably brought in greater clarity. It enabled future field workers to take a fresh look and then take efforts to provide exemplary documentation for novelties as did Nirav & Prasad for the Black Tern (Bhatt *et al.* 2014).

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Brood Parasitism in Small Owls: 'The Orphan Owlet' by Meet Vala and Naman Doshi. SAEVUS (Aug. 2015). Pp. 74-75

The authors observed and photographed brood parasitism in small owls. The study was carried out between March-May, 2015, in Girnar area, Dist. Junagadh, Gujarat. A Spotted Owlet (*Athene brama*) pair was observed rearing a chick of Indian Scops Owl (*Otus bakkamoena*). Two Spotted Owlet chicks were seen along with a single Indian Scops Owl chick and the Spotted Owlets were raising the chick as their own, with the Indian Scops Owl chick also having strong affinities with the other chicks. All three chicks fledged and were observed till they flew away from the nest. Such interspecific brood parasitism has not been observed in small owls earlier.



Egyptian Vultures at Palanpur: 'Egyptian Vulture' by Parikshit Acharya. Hornbill (Jan-Mar 2015). Pp. 34-35.

In January 2014, a large flock (approximately 300 plus) of Egyptian Vultures (*Neophron percnopterus*) was recorded by the bird watchers of Palanpur in North Gujarat. This was first reported on 17 January 2014 by Suresh Prajapati, who recorded more than 300 birds in Palanpur district (published in The Times of India, 17 January 2014). However the news did not mention the precise location of this observation. On 26 January 2014, along with Kailash Jani, the author observed a flock of 350-400 Egyptian Vultures near Bajothia Mahadev temple (24°15'20.11"N, 72°33'59.81"E), 20 km from Palanpur city, towards Merwada village. This place is a major carcass dumping site with a few large Neem and Banyan trees, as described by the author in his note. As of today the species is listed as 'Endangered' under the IUCN redlist.



Pied Harrier in South Gujarat: 'Pied Harrier in Bharuch' by Jugalkishor Patel, Newsletter for Birdwatchers (2013) Vol 53 (6): 94-95

On the 14 February 2013, Jugalkishor Patel observed a Pied Harrier (*Circus melanoleucos*) near the village pond of Untiyadra of Ankleshwar taluka in Bharuch district of South Gujarat. He observed the bird from 14 to 26 February 2013. In 1984, Dilhas Jaffery had recorded and photographed a Pied Harrier in the month of October at Nalsarovar, which was the only previous record from Gujarat. The earlier observation of this bird was from October, and from central Gujarat, whereas the current observation is from southern Gujarat and in the month of February. This indicates that there is a need to search for this species in potential areas from October till March.



Forest Owlet in South Gujarat: 'New Distribution Record of the Forest Owlet' by Jenis R. Patel et al., Journal of Threatened Taxa, 26th Oct. 2015, 7(12): 7940-7944

The Forest Owlet (*Heteroglaux blewitti*) is endemic to India and listed as 'Critically Endangered' by IUCN. On 14 November 2014, a team of nature lovers from the various areas of Gujarat visited the Purna Wildlife Sanctuary in Dangs. They observed two Forest Owlets at one place, and took photos. One individual was observed a week later in the same area. This was the first confirmed record of the Forest Owlet from Gujarat. It is suggested that the various Teak dominated forest areas of south Gujarat should be explored for the occurrence of this enigmatic species in Gujarat.

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The salt pans on the broad saline flats bordering the Gulf of Kachchh and Khambhat are extremely important bird habitats and are not adequately recognized as such; perhaps the high concentrations of Black-necked Grebes and Slender-billed Gulls, otherwise considered uncommon species should make us hesitate before considering the salt industry as an unmitigating disaster.

Here we have immense possibilities of interacting with industries involved in resource generation to so modulate their operations so as to optimize avifaunal habitats.

Regular monitoring of the bird concentrations in the salt pans should be carried out. Such monitoring would result in an understanding of the importance of these salt pans and those of other salt industries in Saurashtra and Kachchh as habitats for species dependent on saline water systems. Studies will indicate management practices to optimize utilization of similar habitats which seem to be threatened by increase in human demands especially in the Little Rann of Kachchh Sanctuary.

Raising of mud bunds and islands in the middle of the pans by the owners would provide resting sites for many bird-species and also encourage nesting by species like, terns, plovers, pratincoles and stilts. This should also enhance bird-watching opportunities.

Illustrated waysides along the State Highways would help generate a public awareness of the rich avian assemblages taking place in gulf area.

Charakla demonstration would succeed in defusing the often needless confrontations leading to polarization and hardening of pro and anti 'development' attitude.

- Lavkumar Khachar

(Excerpts from 'Survey of Charakla Salt pans', Tata Chemicals Ltd., Mithapur, Dist. Jamnagar; 16 Feb. 1997)

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