

Flamingo

Newsletter of the Bird Conservation Society, Gujarat



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Asian Waterbird Census 2017 to Highlight Coastal Count

Asian Waterbird Census - an international waterbird census programme initiated in by Wetland International in 1987 completed its journey of 30 years in last January. The Asian Waterbird Census (AWC) forms part of the global International Waterbird Census that marked its 50th count in 2016.

Over the last half century, the IWC has evolved into the largest coordinated biodiversity monitoring programme on Earth expanding from a small number of Western Palearctic countries to cover over 100 countries worldwide. All counters and national coordinators can be really proud of what the IWC has helped to achieve. Over five million square kilometres of wetlands have been identified as being internationally important and 1 million square kilometres are designated as Ramsar Sites worldwide. The IWC data has also helped detect population declines in time and triggered adequate management actions both at site and at flyway level. Thus, the IWC is an essential element of the toolbox of waterbird and wetland conservation.

Gujarat is on the top amongst all the participating states in AWC programme with reference to number of wetlands counted, total bird count as well as number of participants. Every year about one hundred sites across the state are covered by the birdwatchers of Gujarat. During all these years, the sites being covered were large fresh water body. Very few coastal sites were covered due to various reasons. This year in January 2017, the emphasis of Asian Waterbird Census is on 'Indian Ocean coastal counts'. The objective is to identify important coastal wetland sites supporting higher number of bird species for conservation purpose. The Bird Conservation Society, Gujarat (BCSG) has planned coastal bird census during upcoming AWC 2017. Members of BCSG are conducting waterbird census since its inception in 1987. Dr. B. M. Parasharya – a State Coordinator of this programme and vice president of the society said that total twenty teams are identified to cover important sites on the entire coastal area of our state. Gujarat has 1650 km long coastal line with some difficult areas to approach. The society aims to cover at least 50 important coastal sites in January 2017. In fact, several coastal sites in Gulf of Khambhat and Gulf of Kachchh qualify as 'Ramsar Site'- a wetland site of International importance. Dr. Bakul Trivedi, Secretary of BCSG said that such important sites can be highlighted only through such special drives.

The recommended dates for the AWC 2017 are Saturday 7 to Sunday 22, January 2017, covering 2 weeks and three weekends, when we should encourage birdwatchers of the state to count waterbirds. These dates are for guidance only and counts from any date in January are very much welcome.

- Bhavbhuti Parasharya

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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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Significant pelagic bird sightings off the Gujarat coast

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Photos: Team WildArt



Bridled Tern

The pelagic bird life off the coast of Gujarat; this is probably the most discussed, oft quoted and a never investigated subject. I have probably been dreaming to delve into this subject of bird watching since the last 3 to 4 years. But for one or the other reason, and because of innumerable hurdles in undertaking a voyage at sea off the coast of Gujarat, it could never turn into reality. The idea had, however, been sown within me to one day explore avian biodiversity occurring in the sea. I have been fortunate to come across friends who shared the same passion, and finally in November 2015, the dream started becoming a reality. A rough sketch was prepared on Google Earth by us to cover as much distance as possible in a four day trip. The brief conversations and rough sketches then started taking shape and the team members started getting in; a few refused and a few others accepted the invitation. Since it was a first ever trip, all were skeptical of the results, but finally twelve people dared to wade in those uncharted waters; Uday Vora, Yashodhan Bhatia, Mustak Mepani, Jumma Chacha, Mital Patel, Manjeet Jadeja, Arpit Deomurari, Vishal Chavda, Urmilus Gameti, Hardik Pala, Esha Munshi and me.

The next big task was to secure a sea-worthy vessel which could carry the team. Mustakbhai then came as the man on a mission and found out a nice passenger vessel ('Al-Khizar'). But then, the real struggle to get permissions started. It was one of the biggest battles to explain to the authorities why it was important to go to the sea to watch birds; officers from various departments were really at a loss to understand why

we wished to go to the sea to watch birds when it's much easier and safer to watch them on land! We faced so many nerve-racking moments that at times we felt that despite all our efforts, we would not secure permissions and won't be able to undertake the journey. In fact, we could get the last permission only 4 hours before actually boarding the vessel. However, there were many other officers who understood us and to whom we shall ever be thankful for their support.

Along with permissions, all of us had been working on the ornithological data to find out the species likely to be encountered. During the course of discussions with birders from India

and around the globe, a disappointing truth was coming forth that the season was completely wrong as the best season to see pelagic birds was during the months of April to October. However, we all were determined to break the ice and undertake the first ever trip to watch pelagic birds. Thus started our first pelagic trip.

First Pelagic Trip:

We started the trip on 14 January 2016, for four days, starting from Jamnagar, through the Gulf of Kachchh, and ending on 17 January 2016 at Porbandar port (Map-1). We spent the first day on Bhaidar Island in Gulf of Kachchh, because it was not possible to hit the open sea by travelling the distance. We came across good numbers of waders, gulls, terns and other birds on Bhaidar Island. List of birds recorded at Bhaidar Island: (Common names are as per Grimmett *et al.* 2011) Caspian Gull, Heuglin's Gull, Steppe Gull, Pallas's Gull, Brown-headed Gull, Black-headed Gull, Slender-billed Gull, Lesser Crested Tern, Caspian Tern, Gull-billed Tern, Lesser Sand Plover, Greater Sand Plover, Kentish Plover, Grey Plover, Eurasian Oystercatcher, Crab-plover, Bar-tailed Godwit, Whimbrel,



Pelagic bird....

Eurasian Curlew, Terek Sandpiper, Curlew Sandpiper, Dunlin, Ruddy Turnstone, Broad-billed Sandpiper, Little Stint, Common Redshank, Great Knot, Sanderling, Dartar, Barn Swallow and Painted Stork.

On the second day, we started early and by late morning, reached into the Arabian Sea. From here onwards, all of us were stretching our eyes out to find the elusive pelagic birds. The earlier apprehensions were coming true as we could not find any pelagic birds on the first day. The whole day passed and we could only see a few terns and gulls. The second day thus came to an end. On the third day, we again started travelling further as we had decided to travel almost up to 45 Nautical Miles. On the third day till mid noon, there was again no activity around and few of us started losing hope. But then, all of a sudden, some of us literally shouted 'pelagic' and thus came the first sighting of a pelagic species, a Swinhoe's Storm-petrel (*Oceanodroma monorhis*). An hour later, another bird flew by and we took pictures. The second of the two species found was Arctic Skua (*Stercorarius parasiticus*). Both were identified based on Onley & Scofield (2007) and Peterson & Harrison (1991). The last species we could see that evening was a Sandwich Tern (*Thalasseus sandvicensis*), identified based on Olsen & Larsson (1995). On the fourth day, we wound up the trip in the afternoon and landed at Porbandar Port. The first pelagic trip thus ended, yielding two pelagic species. The list of birds recorded at high seas is as follows: Caspian Gull, Heuglin's Gull, Steppe Gull, Sandwich Tern, Gull-billed Tern, Arctic Skua and Swinhoe's Storm-petrel.

Second Pelagic Trip:

After the first trip, we decided to make another pelagic trip, but for one or the other reason, the plan could not be executed. In the meanwhile, we had been discussing the topic with a few of our friends and all of them shared the same thought that September would be the best month to make the trip. Shashank Dalvi and Omkar Dharwadkar specially gave a boost to our thoughts to go to sea again and Prasad Ganpule also vouched for it. Uday Vora this time came up with an idea to make a trip from Veraval and accordingly, the second trip was planned for two days off the coast from Veraval. Unfortunately, this time all the members could not participate in the trip and we were also apprehensive to ask others due to less success of the last trip. Thus, for the second trip, the team was made up of six people; Uday Vora, Vishal Chavda, Urmilus Gameti, Dhaivat Andharia, Esha Munshi and me.

On the first day we started around 09:30 hrs off the port of Veraval, heading off the coast into the sea. For this trip, the idea was to search the area within 15-20 NM off the coast. As the season was right, immediately within 2 NM (20° 50'



30.06" N 70° 21' 51.48" E), we sighted a Masked Booby (*Sula dactylatra*), which excited us. Going further, we came across a flock of around 4-5 Bridled Terns (*Onychoprion anaethetus*). These sightings raised our hopes, and by afternoon we came across a couple of Common Terns (*Sterna hirundo*) and Wilson's Storm Petrels (*Oceanites oceanicus*) and the trip was turning out to be a real fruitful one. We thereafter continued sailing and came across different species of terns which turned out to be Bridled Terns, Common Terns, Lesser Crested Terns





Pelagic bird....



and even Gull-billed Terns. By late afternoon, we came across a fishing boat offloading a net. We decided to stay nearby and as the fishermen started dumping the chunks of dead fish into the sea, it attracted a mixed flock of terns numbering around 100-200 birds. After 15-20 minutes, the terns started feeding. A large bird, looking almost like a gull, started harassing the terns. Looking through the binoculars, we could confirm that it was an Arctic Skua. The first day evening thus finished with Arctic Skua, Common Terns, Bridled Terns, Masked Booby and Wilson's Storm Petrels.

On the second day we continued to sail towards the southwestern direction, which took us about 20-25 NM from the coast. As we were waking up, we found a flock of Wilson's Storm Petrels flying close by to the boat and amongst them was a larger, all brown bird which turned out to be a Jouanin's Petrel (*Bulweria fallax*). After a while, we again came across a big flock of Wilson's Storm petrels (around 8-9 birds) feeding on a dead sea turtle. We saw another bird flying low on the water along with a couple of gulls. It was identified as a Persian Shearwater (*Puffinus persicus*). Later on, a bird was photographed at a very long distance. Upon checking up the photographs, it was identified as Flesh-footed Shearwater (*Puffinus carneipes*), which was confirmed by Praveen J. and Dipu K. In the afternoon, we once again came across a huge mixed flock of terns consisting of Bridled Terns, Common Terns and Lesser Crested Terns. Surprisingly, these birds were on the surface of the water, drifting along with the waves. We continued to sail and came across fishing boats in the evening, and based on the previous day's experience, we requested them to throw the fish waste into the sea. To our utter delight, once again the terns came in and started to feed on the dead fish, immediately followed by the appearance of an Arctic Skua that started attempts to rob the terns. What an amazing sight that was!

We were returning in the evening with the setting sun when we came across a gull which looked totally different. The plumage of the bird was definitely that of a juvenile. Later, by referring to reference book (Olsen & Larsson 2004) and confirming with gull expert Klaus Olsen, we came to the conclusion that it was a fresh juvenile Heuglin's Gull.

The number of birds that we found on this trip was beyond our expectations. In-fact, on talking to the fishermen on the boats, we came to know that they have been seeing huge numbers of black colored birds and they thought that they were chicks of the larger birds like gulls. These could be Wilson's or Swinhoe's Storm Petrels. According to them, such birds are found in bigger flocks of 100-200 birds in the month of August, which would be an ideal time to look for pelagic birds. Unfortunately, this time we missed out on Red-billed Tropicbird (*Phaethon aetherus*) and the Brown Noddy (*Anous stolidus*), but this pelagic trip proved to be really fruitful and if such trips are repeated by birdwatchers across the state on regular intervals, and in the right season, they are likely to add more pelagic species in the Gujarat checklist.

[Most of the earlier sightings of pelagic species from Gujarat were of windblown birds rescued near coastal areas. This is the first time that proper pelagic trips were undertaken and the participants are to be congratulated for this endeavour. It has resulted in the addition of Swinhoe's Storm-petrel to the birds of Gujarat, as it was not included in Parasharya et al. (2004). It was included in the latest checklist (Ganpule 2016), as this observation, along with photographs, was put on 'eBird' by the participants earlier. The sighting of Persian Shearwater is also significant, as this is the first photographic record off the Gujarat coast. The earlier record was 125 NM west of Kachchh, in the Arabian Sea (Ganpule 2016) and hence, this can also be considered to be the first confirmed record near the Gujarat coast. Further trips should be made to get a better understanding regarding the distribution of pelagic birds off the Gujarat coast – Eds]

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Sightings of Besra in Polo forest and Shoolpaneshwar WLS

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Introduction:

The Besra (*Accipiter virgatus*) is a forest dwelling raptor, which is not very visible due to its shy/retiring nature and the dense habitat it usually prefers (Naoroji 2006). It is a polytypic species, of which

A. v. kashmirensis (western Himalayas), *A. v. affinis* (eastern Himalayas), *A. v. besra* (Western Ghats and Sri Lanka) and *A. v. abdulalii* (Andaman & Nicobar Islands) occur in India and it is a resident, with altitudinal movements, from Uttarakhand to Assam, Western Ghats (south of Mumbai), Eastern Ghats, Sri Lanka and Andamans (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). The southern race *besra* is resident along the Western Ghats from Mumbai south to Kerala between 600 and 1800 mts (Naoroji 2006).

There are two historical records of the Besra from or near Gujarat; one from near Mt. Abu and another from Kachchh (Butler 1875). Dharmakumarsinhji (1956) reported an individual which had straggled to Bhavnagar, Saurashtra and commented on seeing it in Gujarat (presumably south Gujarat) but not in Saurashtra. Shull (1962) collected a specimen from the Dangs, noting it as very rare in Gujarat. Naoroji (2006) shows isolated records for Gujarat, with the comment 'Straggler recorded from Bhavnagar, Saurashtra indicating occasional northward local migration'.

We report here sightings of the Besra from Polo forest and Shoolpaneshwar WLS, made over a period of three years, from 2014 to 2016.

Study Area:

Polo forest is situated in North Gujarat and forms part of the southern Aravalli range. It is located in Ta: Vijaynagar of Dist: Sabarkantha. The forest is of 400 sq. km. and spans across North Gujarat and Rajasthan. It is a dry deciduous forest, consisting of broad leaved trees. The Harnav River flows between the rocky hills throughout the forest, and is the main source of water. The streams cause dense vegetation in the foothills, where maximum wild life occurs. The Shoolpaneshwar Wildlife Sanctuary is situated in Narmada district and is one of the best forests in Gujarat.

Observations:

The first sighting of a Besra was on 17 August 2014 by the first author. Based on its plumage, it was identified as a very fresh

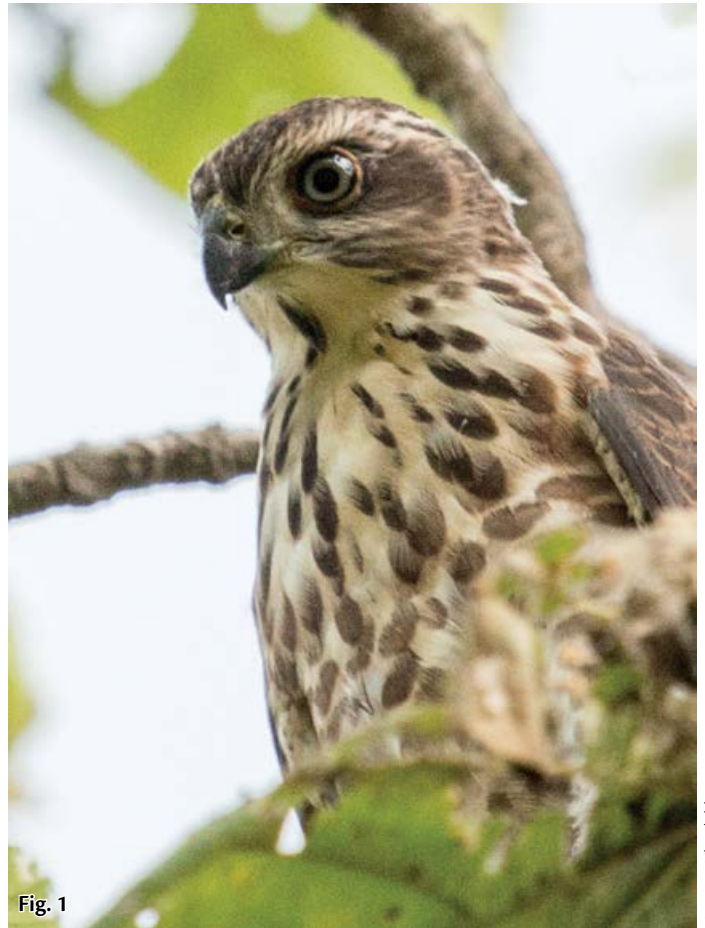


Fig. 1

Aseem Khadakkar

juvenile (Fig 1). It was calling repeatedly, which attracted our attention to it. The call was a high pitched squeal. The bird was not flying long distances, and it flew only in short spurts from one tree to another. It kept itself confined to the same area. It was identified as a juvenile Besra based on the very thin legs, short primary projection and broad tail bands. The tail in a Besra is usually square-ended, which was not seen here. But the other features were indicative of a juvenile Besra. This type of behaviour is typical of fledged juvenile *Accipiters*, who vocalize to call their food-bearing parents.

On 26 August 2014, one fresh juvenile of a Besra was seen perched on a tree by the first author (Fig 2A, 2B). Similar to the earlier observation, we were drawn towards its call. When we came at the same spot as the earlier observation, we saw a perched juvenile. It showed a nice Besra profile, with abruptly decurving beak, good superciliary, and, importantly, few and broad dark tail bands, plus short primary projection. It was identified as a juvenile Besra. Its tail tip was clearly rounded, and not square; but other features matched very well with a Besra. It was probably the same bird seen earlier. This time, it was



Fig. 2A



Fig. 2B

Aseem Khadkhar

more co-operative and stayed at the same perch, preening and calling. After some time, while this bird was calling, we heard a second call from deeper inside the forest. We found another bird with an unidentified bird kill, with more pronounced plumage markings. This bird ate a little from its kill and went to rendezvous with the other juvenile.

On 7 March 2015, a Besra was spotted in Shoolpaneshwar forest, Narmada District. The bird gave very little chance to photograph since it was constantly changing its perch and was very wary. We could take only one image, showing the dorsal side. We could confirm it as a Besra based on the long thin legs, and three broad tail bands.

On 5 June 2016, one juvenile and one adult bird were observed by all of us in Polo forest. It was a very hot and humid day. We saw five Shikra (*Accipiter badius*), seven Oriental Honey-buzzard (*Pernis ptilorhynchus*), one White-eyed Buzzard (*Butastur teesa*), one Crested Hawk Eagle (*Nisaetus cirrhatus*), and one Crested Serpent Eagle (*Spilornis cheela*) at the same water hole throughout the day from 09:00 hrs to 18:00 hrs. At this place, we saw one juvenile Besra (Fig 3A, 3B). It was calling frequently with a single pitch note. It perched in a densely covered branch for a few seconds before coming down to drink some water. This juvenile had started moulting its body feathers. It could be identified as a Besra based on the tail bands, fairly square tail tip, prominent supercilium and profile. We also saw an adult (male?) Besra in flight. It was a very compact looking bird, smaller in size compared to Shikra and the wing beats were very rapid, indicating a slightly different flight pattern than Shikra or Eurasian Sparrowhawk.

The presence of the Besra in Shoolpaneshwar forest was further confirmed by the sighting of an adult bird

on 13 November 2016 by Rajendra Patel, Bharat Raval and Ramesh Sarvani. One individual was photographed in the forest, and it was identified as a Besra, based on the typical thin tarsi, and the plumage. (Fig 4)

Identification:

Since identification of the Besra is difficult, we observed all birds in great detail before confirming them as Besra. The Besra can be confused with Shikra and very good views are required to separate them. It can also be confused with Crested Goswawk (*A. trivirgatus*), but Crested Goshawk has not been documented in Gujarat. Confusion with Eurasian Sparrowhawk (*A. nisus*) is also possible. However, Eurasian Sparrowhawk can be separated by its larger size, prominent

supercilium, absence of gular stripe and contrasting dark eye mask. Some general identification pointers are given below based on Grimmett *et al.* (2011) and Rasmussen & Anderton (2012):

Legs – The Besra has very thin and fine legs and weak tarsi compared to Shikra and Crested Goshawk.

Beak – The Besra has smaller / less powerful beak compared to Shikra and Crested Goshawk.

Primary Projection– primary projection of a Besra is very short. However, this is difficult to confirm from photos and good views, from different angles, would be required to confirm this.

Tail – The Besra has 3 broad, dark tail bands. The tail is evenly barred, unlike Shikra. Besra usually has a square ended tail.

Size – Both in flight and when perched, a Besra looks more compact and is smaller than a Shikra or a Crested Goshawk.

Structure – The Besra has slim body and a smaller head compared to a Shikra and Crested Goshawk.

Supercilium – A juvenile Besra has fine but prominent supercilium.

The following features are indicative, but not very reliable for identification:

Orbital ring – The orbital ring is very prominent in a Besra. This is because a Besra usually has a darker head. On a closer look, one can see that in Shikra too.

Gular stripe – gular stripe can be there in Shikra juveniles and must not be considered as a primary identification pointer. However, the gular stripe usually extends on to the upper

Dhairya Dixit



Fig. 3A



Fig. 3B

breast in a Besra and is broader and more prominent.

Even with the details given above, field identification of a Besra can be very difficult. An example is given below:

The individual in Fig 5 looks similar to a juvenile Besra and has thin legs. But it is not a Besra because of the following identification features described here: it has a larger beak, heavier built, fine bands on under tail coverts, yellow orbital ring is missing, and absence of a fine yet prominent supercilium; which all point to this individual being a juvenile Shikra. Hence, it is always advisable to get detailed views of any individual (like dorsal, ventral, flight view etc.) for a correct identification.

Conclusion:

The presence of Besra is confirmed in Polo forest and Shoolpaneshwar WLS by these sightings. The sightings of fresh juveniles indicate a possibility of nesting of the Besra in Polo forest. More studies are required to confirm nesting in this area. There is also a possibility of its occurrence in other similar forests in Gujarat. Presence of forest dwelling raptors indicates healthiness of forests; hence similar observations in different forests can help us understand the raptor’s ecology and estimate its population.

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Fig. 4

Rajendra Patel



Fig. 5

Jay Solanki

Road kill of Black Bittern near Pariej Tank, Kheda District

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Introduction:

Several studies on the impact of roads on the environment have shown that roads can be a serious threat to the maintenance of biological diversity (Geneletti 2003). If poorly planned and constructed, roads can eliminate and fragment habitats, cause accidental wildlife deaths, affect wildlife distribution and their movement patterns, and destroy wetland habitats (US EPA 1997). An estimate of annual mortality of birds on roads for some European countries varies from 350,000 to 27 million birds (Erritzoe *et al.* 2003). In India, incidences of roadside mortality of wild animals are increasing and being regularly reported (Sunder 2004, Parasharya & Tere 2007, Bhaskaran & Bhoominathan 2010).

The Black Bittern (*Ixobrychus flavicollis*) is a resident species in India with partly migratory behavior. It is crepuscular and inhabits reeds like *Typha*, but its sightings and breeding records in India are few (Kazmierczak 2000, Ali & Ripley 2001, Grimmett *et al.* 2011, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Ali (1954) did not record the Black Bittern in Gujarat. The species was sighted and confirmed breeding around Pariej Tank near Tarapur, Kheda district in 1990 along with Cinnamon Bittern (*Ixobrychus cinnamomeus*) and Yellow Bittern (*Ixobrychus sinensis*) (Khacher 1996, Mukherjee *et al.* 2002). Now it is listed as a resident breeding species in Gujarat, with records from many places (Parasharya *et al.* 2004, Ganpule 2016). However published records about its occurrence in the rest of the country are still scanty. In this paper, we report repeated mortality of the Black Bittern due to vehicular traffic on the road near Pariej Tank and discuss some feasible mitigation measures.

Material and Methods:

Observations reported here were recorded during August to November 2015 (four months) on the state highway No.16 running between Khambhat and Kheda towns of Anand

and Kheda district respectively. The location on which these observations were recorded is approx. 8 km north of Tarapur town- a tehsil headquarter.

Study Site:

Pariej Tank or Pariej Wetland (22°31'N to 22°33'N and 72°36' E to 72°38' E) is the largest wetland of Kheda district in central Gujarat. The tank is spread over 445 ha (4.45 sq. km.), and linked with Mahi Right Bank Canal (MRBC) since 1960. It is a shallow wetland with maximum water depth of four meters and serves the purpose of irrigation as well as drinking water. Seepage from the main tank and extensive canal network has created suitable habitat for several waterbirds, including the Sarus Crane (*Grus antigone*) (Parasharya *et al.* 2000). This wetland was declared as a 'Wetland of National Importance' in 2006 by MoEF, New Delhi. This wetland supports more than 20,000 waterbirds every year and has been identified as a potential Ramsar site (Vijayan *et al.* 2004).



We have been monitoring Pariej Tank and its surroundings since 1987. The State highway between Tarapur and Kheda is having heavy vehicular traffic. Since 2015, travelling on the state highway along Pariej Tank every month has become routine for us. The tank is on the western side of the road. The space between road and the main tank has shallow stagnant water with growth of the *Typha angustata*. The eastern side of the road has growth of *Typha* on the immediate fringe, followed by shallow water (Figure 1). This heavy growth of *Typha* attracts huge number of Baya (*Ploceous philippinus*) and Black-throated Weaver (*Ploceous benghalensis*), along with House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*) for night roosting. Other birds which use this site for roosting are Common Starling (*Sturnus vulgaris*), Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*), Indian Pond

Heron (*Ardeola grayii*), Purple Swampphen (*Porphyrio porphyrio*) and bitterns (*Ixobrychus* spp.). The *Typha* growth also attracts Purple Moorhen, Black-throated Weaver and three species of bitterns for breeding. The bitterns also use this *Typha* for feeding.

Observations:

Following species of birds have been recorded as road kills: Indian Pond Heron, Purple Swampphen, White-breasted Waterhen (*Amaurornis phoenicurus*), Greater Coucal (*Centropus sinensis*), Red-wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*), Yellow Bittern, Cinnamon Bittern, Baya Weaver, Black-throated Weavers, etc. Besides birds, snakes and Flapshell Turtle (*Lissemys punctata*) regularly get killed on this road.

The most important information to be reported here is road kill of three Black Bitterns at the same site from August to November 2015. All the dead bitterns were seen during morning hours (0900 -1100 hr). Body of one of the birds was intact indicating a fresh collision (Photo 1). The other two birds were already crushed by vehicles (Photo 2 & 3); probably they might have died much before they were noticed by us. All the birds were adults. The dates of road kill were as follows: 22 August 2015, 27 August 2015 and 24 November 2015. Coordinates of the collision site were 22° 33'N 72° 37' E.

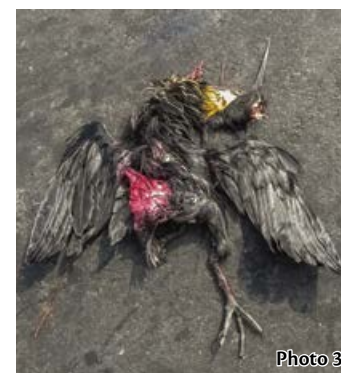
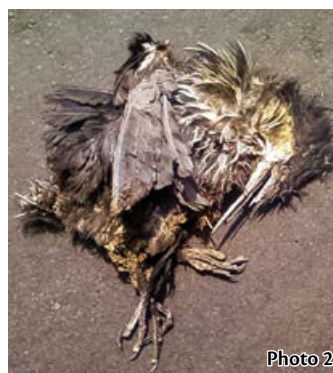
The breeding season of the Black Bittern is during south-west monsoon, mainly from June to September, depending on local conditions (Ali & Ripley 2001). The birds recorded as road kills during August might be breeding birds.

Discussion:

There are two important issues: a) Status of Black Bittern around Pariej Tank and b) Feasible mitigation measures to avoid/minimize road kill of birds at this site.

Status of Black Bittern:

Bitterns are seen easily in the command area of MRBC which covers most parts of Kheda and Anand districts in central Gujarat. We have been recording breeding activity of Yellow, Cinnamon and Black Bitterns in this area since 1990. Extensive network of canals and seepage of water has created marshy areas with *Typha* growth along the canal network – an ideal habitat for bitterns. Moreover, the sighting places are all permanent water bodies or canals. The bitterns are crepuscular and active during dawn and dusk (Ali & Ripley 2001). During day time they sit silently in the *Typha* and are so well camouflaged that they are difficult to detect. This seems to be the main reason for the very few sighting reports. We had seldom seen any Black Bitterns in the *Typha* while travelling on road near Pariej Tank during the day. Nevertheless, three individuals were seen as road kills in the morning hours.



The bitterns might be colliding with fast moving vehicles while crossing the road during early morning or dusk. We do not think that abundance of Black Bittern at this site is higher compared to the other three sides of the tank. Its abundance might be uniform in all *Typha* covered areas of MRBC command area. Here, the bitterns were recorded as they collided with vehicles on road. Had there been no road here, there would not have been any mortality and no bittern sightings too.

As per the field guides, the Black Bittern is rarely seen in Gujarat and is not known to breed here. On the other hand, we saw three dead bitterns on road during their breeding season. This establishes that the species is not rare at this particular site. In fact, its breeding status at Pariej in central Gujarat has already been established (Khacher 1996, Mukherjee *et al.* 2002).

Mitigation measures to avoid road kill of birds:

Pariej Tank is a wetland of national importance. It harbours 115 species of waterbirds and the total number crosses 20,000 birds (Mukherjee *et al.* 2002, Vijayan *et al.* 2004). This wetland is being developed for eco-tourism by the state forest department. Hence, eco-tourism here is dependent on avian diversity and its abundance. If some mitigation measures are taken for reducing road side bird mortality by the government, it will be highly appreciated by the tourists as well as conservation agencies.

Factors leading to road mortalities relate largely to how conducive the roadside conditions are to feeding, resting and nesting for local fauna. Roadside vegetation, fruiting shrubs on median strips, and spilled grains along roadsides are the chief attractants for small mammals and birds. The wildlife's vulnerability varies with age, inherent behaviour and activity patterns of affected species (Rajvanshi *et al.* 2001).

Altering roadside habitat often discourages wildlife crossings. Most often this means cutting away vegetation and reducing roadside cover and potential food sources. Removal of heavy growth of *Typha* from both sides of the road may compel birds to shift to some other area. However, total eradication of *Typha*

Black Bittern....

is almost impossible as the water here is perennial. Removal of *Typha* growth between the bund of the tank and either edges of the road can be managed using multiple approaches, i.e. reclamation, controlling water seepage, use of weedicides, mechanical removal etc. In order to reduce bird mortality, removal of immediate roadside vegetation and planting it further away is recommended by other studies also (Orlowski 2008).

The road as it is today is not safe for the birds, birdwatchers and their parked vehicles. If the road is slightly widened with a separate parking area on the eastern side, it will provide safety to tourists and create bird watching facilities. Placement of warning signs for drivers to slow down in areas of frequently used crossing points is one option for reducing collisions. However placing sign-boards for voluntary speed limit are hardly ever executed in practice. Six highways pass through Gir National Park, of which three are always open to traffic and therefore have a constant flow of vehicles. A large number of wild animals get run over while they attempt to utilize habitats across the highway for feeding and visiting water sources (Rajvanshi *et al.* 2001). When vehicular traffic cannot be controlled in a protected area like Gir NP, it is highly unlikely that it can be done in a non-protected area.

Further, safety to birds and birdwatchers can be provided by placing 'speed breakers' all along the length of the wetland, besides placing sign boards to limit vehicular speed. In winter, a large number of students attend nature education camps arranged by the state forest department. Hence, special measures should be taken to ensure their safety. The park management of Gir NP and Sanctuary in Gujarat is using this approach (Rajvanshi *et al.* 2001). How various mitigation measures can be integrated will depend on the realization of the problem by the local politicians, managers and also on the funds available. The wetland managers (local wetland management committee) as well as the road transport department of Gujarat Government should work together to address this conservation and tourism related issue around Pariej Tank and also in other similar wetlands in the state.

Acknowledgements:

We are grateful to Darshana Rathod for preparation of the map.

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Breeding of Orange-headed Thrush in Gir National Park

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Orange-headed Thrush (*Zosterops citrina*) is a summer migrant to the Himalayas and is resident in northeast, central and western India (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). For Gujarat, Ali (1955) collected only one specimen in Navsari District and remarked that it was not seen elsewhere in Saurashtra and Kachchh. Shull (1962) collected two more specimens from south Gujarat and described it as an uncommon resident in the Dangs. This thrush was found to be common in Rajpipla and recorded breeding in the area (Monga & Naoroji 1983) and is known to be resident in south Gujarat (Ganpule 2016). The subspecies seen in Gujarat is *Z. c. cyanotus*, which has vertical black stripes across the ear coverts and white throat. However, there are no records of this thrush from Saurashtra in the reference books (Grimmett *et al.* 2011) or in recent published literature. We report its sighting and a record of its breeding in Gir National Park.

On 25 July 2015, the first author (AV), who had special permission to visit the park in the monsoon, saw and photographed a fledgling Orange-headed Thrush on the Andhari-Sasan Road (known as route 5-6) in Gir National Park. The fledgling was identified as an Orange-headed Thrush based on its face pattern, which can be seen in the accompanying photo. It could not fly and was seen perched on a branch of a tree. It seemed like it had recently come out of the nest. The adult birds were not seen around even after a fifteen minute wait. It was quite surprising to see this thrush breeding in Gir National Park as there is no previous record of its breeding here.

On 19 June 2016, the second author (PV) saw and photographed an adult Orange-headed Thrush at Kankai Mata Temple, in Gir National Park. It was seen briefly, photographed and was identified as Orange-headed Thrush. This sighting was also in the monsoon season. The birds seen here are of the race

cyanotus, which is resident in south Gujarat. These records of Orange-headed Thrush from Gir are significant and confirm the presence of this thrush in Saurashtra.

[Since Gir NP is closed from 15 June to 15 October every year, it is possible that the occurrence and breeding of Orange-headed Thrush in this area has been overlooked. Another factor is that a very few birdwatchers visit the surrounding area in the rainy season. Thus, there is hardly any data on birds in these months. There are sightings of Orange-headed Thrush from Saurashtra: in Gir, Uday Vora had seen it thrice in January 1987 and once in January 1988, while Ashok Mashru and Mukesh Samani had seen it in March 2009. Bhavesh Trivedi saw it in Girnar on 10-11-2005 as well as Jamvala, Gir on 5-12-2015 and there is a record from Surendranagar also. The Orange-headed Thrush could be breeding in Gir area regularly but these sightings are insufficient to make any comments regarding its status in Gir. It would be worthwhile for birdwatchers to visit the area in the monsoon season to check for its breeding – Eds]



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Sighting of Blue-throated Blue Flycatcher at Porbandar: a second record for Gujarat

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Vijay/Jethva

(21° 38' 10" N 69° 38' 07" E), by the second author. He observed the bird for two consecutive days between 14:00 to 16:00 hrs, and it was active and catching insects. After the recent sighting of Brown-breasted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa muttui*) (*pers. observ.*) here, the sighting of Blue-throated Blue Flycatcher from Porbandar is really exciting, and it is only the second record for Gujarat.



Vijay/Jethva

The Blue-throated Blue Flycatcher (*Cyornis rubeculoides*) is a summer visitor to the Himalayas and is resident in NE India; wintering in Eastern Himalayas and south to Bangladesh, SW India and Sri Lanka (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). The species is believed to be a vagrant to Gujarat, with only one previous record from Morbi, near Rajkot, in 2008 (Ganpule 2009).

A female Blue-throated Blue Flycatcher was seen and photographed on 5 December 2015, in the Porbandar city area

Acknowledgements:

We are thankful to Umar Khan and Nelson George for identifying the bird on 'Ask ID' of 'Indian Birds' FB Group.

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Sighting of a probable Long-tailed Skua in Amreli district

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On 23 August 2016, we were on a birding trip near Savarkundla, Amreli district. Our aim was to search for passage migrants. We saw a gull-like bird flying overhead in sky. It was brownish-black in colour, with white on primaries. It had longer and pointed wings. Its central tail feathers were pointed and extended slightly beyond the tail. The second author managed to take one record photo. We identified it as a juvenile skua (alternative name for skua is jaeger, with Arctic Skua also known as Parasitic Jaeger). We thought that it was either an Arctic Skua (*Stercorarius parasiticus*) or a Long-tailed Skua (*Stercorarius longicaudus*). However, with only a

single poor quality photograph, we could not confirm the identification. This location is almost 80 kms from the coast and it was surprising to find the skua here.

[Even though the photograph is not very clear, it can be seen that the bird in question is a juvenile skua, based on its structure, the long wings and other characteristics. It looked similar to a Long-tailed Skua, due to the longer tail (looking longer than width of arm), narrower arms and the 'hand' looking longer than the arm (Olsen & Larsson 1997).



Since juvenile skuas are very difficult to identify, we decided to send the image to experts. Klaus Malling Olsen and Rob van Bemmelen, who have experience of *Stercorarius* sp., opined that this individual was a juvenile Long-tailed Skua based on the long and slender (slim) wings, the long tail and shape of projecting central tail feathers (which look blunt), and a small white primary patch. Rob van Bemmelen stated that since there is only one image, and that too not very clear, Arctic Skua could not be entirely ruled out, but this individual could be considered as a probable Long-tailed Skua based on the above features (in litt., email dated 25 August 2016). Klaus Malling Olsen unequivocally stated that this individual was a juvenile Long-tailed Skua (in litt., email dated 29 August 2016).

Based on the detailed replies received from the experts and also on speaking with the observers regarding the jizz and flight of this bird, this individual was most probably a Long-tailed Skua. There is no previous record of Long-tailed Skua from Gujarat. But there are records from the western coast of India (Karuthedathu 2014, Moorthy 2015), and it is a vagrant in India.

However, since this individual could not be conclusively identified as a Long-tailed Skua, it is not included in the checklist of birds of Gujarat at present. We decided to treat this record with caution as the photograph is not clear enough. Identification of sea birds is quite difficult, and observers are requested to take as many images as possible for correct identification. We thank Klaus Malling Olsen, Rob van Bemmelen, Praveen J and Dipu K for helping with the identification of this bird – Eds]

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Observation of bait-fishing using insects by Striated Heron

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On 22 July 2016, I saw a Striated Heron (*Butorides striata*) at a road side pond near Nana Liliya village (21°50' N 71°39'E), Amreli District. It was picking up insects and dropping them in the water carefully so as to attract fish present in the water. In my 40 minutes of observations, it succeeded in catching three fish by using insects as bait. I also observed that when the insects moved away in the water due to the wind, it picked up the insect and put it at the original place (within striking distance). In case of failure, it was repeating its efforts by picking up new insects. When no insects were found nearby, it went a few feet away to find them. It changed its location four times, probably to increase the chance of success. Another curious thing I noticed was that when the insect which was used as a bait died in the water, the heron would sometimes eat it. Though I was a little far from the place where the heron was bait fishing, I could see that it was mainly catching Carpenter Ants (*Camponotus* spp.) and other insects like Beetles (*Coleoptera* spp.) for the bait. I was able to record a video of this event. The video can be seen at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r3-xLKULc_A. This was the first time I had seen bait-fishing by a bird and it was fascinating to observe.

[Bait-fishing has been recorded in 17 bird species of which 11 are herons (Réglade et al. 2015). Striated Heron has been recorded bait-fishing and may use either animal or vegetal bait, even if animal bait seems to be more effective (Higuchi 1986). There is one published record of bait-fishing by Striated Heron from India, but the kind of bait used was not known (Bhat 1990). Recent observations of bait-fishing by Indian Pond Heron (*Ardeola grayii*) were reported from Bengaluru and MP, wherein bread and an artificial item (polystyrene) were used as bait (Réglade et al. 2015). This report of Striated Heron using insects as bait qualifies as active bait-fishing behaviour as defined by Ruxton & Hansell (2011) and the observation of the heron eating insects which were used as bait is interesting – Eds]

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Interspecific feeding of Asian Paradise Flycatcher nestlings by Red-vented Bulbul in Hingolghadh

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Pankaj Maheria

[Interspecific feeding of Asian Paradise Flycatcher nestlings by Oriental White Eye (*Zosterops palpebrosus*) was reported earlier from Gujarat (Balar 2009). The various reasons behind this behaviour are explained in detail in the editor's note given in this reference. We request birdwatchers to report such interspecific feeding behaviour – Eds]



Pankaj Maheria

On 12 July 2014, we visited Hingolghadh Nature Education Sanctuary. The Hingolghadh Nature Education Sanctuary is located in Jasdan Taluka of Rajkot District. The Sanctuary is spread over an area of 654 ha. It is mainly a dry deciduous scrub forest. We observed a nest of an Asian Paradise Flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi*) on a bare branch of a tree.

Observations:

We observed the nest at around 10:15 hrs. There were two chicks in the nest and both the male and the female Asian Paradise Flycatchers were feeding their nestlings. The nest was observed from about 10 mtrs so as not to disturb the birds. The feeding frequency was lower down during that time. Then suddenly, we observed that one Red-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*) came and perched on the top the Asian Paradise Flycatcher's nest. The chicks raised their necks with open beaks and were seen begging for food. The Red-vented Bulbul fed the chicks or was seen putting its beak into the mouths of the two nestlings. When the chicks sat down, the Red-vented Bulbul started feeding inside the Asian Paradise Flycatcher's nest. We could not see what it was feeding on. We again observed this nest in the evening at 17:30 hrs. This time, we saw that the bulbul was feeding the chicks. When the bulbul came to feed, the flycatcher would observe this while being perched on a nearby branch. It also happened that many times the bulbul and the flycatcher would arrive together with feed. But the bulbul would feed the chicks first and then the flycatchers would get the chance.

Based on the above observations, we thought that as the Red-vented Bulbul was also nesting, and one of the parents was collecting food for the incubating bird, it was attracted by the begging and thus was feeding the chicks of the flycatcher.



Pankaj Maheria

Acknowledgments:

We thank the Forest Department at Jasdan for helping us. Special thanks to Valkubhai Khachar (Forest Guard) for information about the location of this nest. We also thank Pankaj Maheria for sharing his pictures.

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Waterbird census at Nadabet wetland, Greater Rann of Kachchh

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Bharat Jethva

Introduction:

The Greater Rann of Kachchh area, north of Suigam, near the Indo-Pak border, forms a large seasonal wetland of roughly about 1000 sq km. The fact that this is not known to the public is because of its inaccessible and sensitive location near the Indo-Pak border. People are allowed to visit only up to Nadabet (24° 14' N, 71° 11' E), where there is a famous temple called 'Nadeshwari Temple'. The wetland, which is adjoining Nadabet (towards the eastern and northern side), falls partly in the jurisdiction of Banaskantha Forest Division and also in Kachchh Desert Sanctuary.

Though regularly monitored and protected by the forest department, this wetland was not explored for its biodiversity and bird population until recently. A team of forest officials, along with the second author, visited this site during the winter of 2015-16. The team was surprised by the number of birds present in this seasonal wetland. They instructed the local forest office at Banaskantha Forest Division to carry out systematic documentation of the bird population of this wetland. The Banaskantha Forest Division approached us for assisting them in conducting a waterbird census and to properly document the bird population.

Methods:

We carried out the census in two phases: a preliminary survey on 15-16 January 2016 and a final count from 12 to 14 February 2016. We used standard Asian Waterbird Census (AWC) protocol for total count of waterbirds, using various equipments such as binoculars and high end still and video cameras. Photography and videography was helpful in estimating the number of birds, particularly those in large flocks. The most conservative round figure estimates were taken as final counts. The final figures were cross verified again by the first and second authors.

Our team included a biologist (Virag Vyas), forest officials and local staff (D. S. Solanki and Govindbhai Patel, local foresters & chowkidars), birdwatchers and bird photographers (Kartik Patel, Rupal Vidya, Dhaivat Andhariya, Jubin Asara, Mihir Patel and Tejal Shah).



Map-1: Area covered during bird count

During the census, a total of 60% area of the wetland was covered by water, which was visited by two teams (Map-1) using the border roads network. Apart from the main wetland, we also covered two small wetlands located on Jagmal bet. These wetlands were included because the waterbird populations between these wetlands were interacting.

We covered as much area as possible in a single day, dividing ourselves into two teams. We traversed 25 kms along the international border and another 25 kms between the border and Nadabet using vehicles to cover the maximum area

Nadabet....



Bharat Jethva

of the wetland. Due permissions were obtained from the Forest Department and the Border Security Force office at Gandhinagar.

Observations:

During this survey, we observed a total of 6,36,449 waterbirds in Nadabet main wetland. The two smaller wetlands

accounted for a total of 5,446 and 17,011 waterbirds respectively. The total number of waterbirds was 6,58,906. This is by far one of the largest waterbird count carried out in Gujarat till date. However, it is believed that in the winter of 2011-12, approximately 8,00,000 - 10,00,000 Flamingos (*Phoenicopterus* sp.) were reported near Khadir bet in Greater Rann of Kachchh. Even during the present count, we found that 76% of waterbirds were two species of Flamingo. However, other groups such as waders (5%), Pelicans (4%), Gulls (4%), Ibis & Spoonbill (4%), Ducks & Pochards (3%), and other birds (3%), contributed to the total count.

During our survey, we observed nesting activity of Greater Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus roseus*) in Nadabet wetland. About 500 nests were present there. Several females were seen sitting on the nests. However, follow up on the nesting activity suggested that nesting had completely failed as the nests were built on the edge of the wetland and the water constantly receded, due to which the Flamingos had to leave the nests. The nesting of Greater Flamingo was reported in Nadabet earlier by the second author in the winter of 2012. According to him, the nesting was unsuccessful at that time due to drying up of the wetland.

Species-wise bird count for three wetlands – 12 to 14 February 2016.

No	Species	Main wetland (Nadabet)	Jagmal Bet wetland1	Jagmal Bet wetland 2	Total
1	Great White Pelican	25500			25500
2	Dalmatian Pelican	1475	10	5	1490
3	Lesser Flamingo	200000	200		200200
4	Greater Flamingo	300000	50		300050
5	Black Stork	63			63
6	White Stork	4			4
7	Painted Stork	100	100		200
8	Eurasian Spoonbill	21000	1000	1000	23000
9	Slender-billed Gull	2600			2600
10	Black-headed Gull	5000	150		5150
11	Brown-headed Gull	6300	50		6350
12	Heuglin's Gull	15			
13	Pied Avocet	4100			4100
14	Common Crane	10000	15		10015
15	Eastern Imperial Eagle	12			12
16	Peregrine Falcon	4			4
17	Common Pochard		50	12000	12050
18	Black-winged Stilt	9000	200	500	9700
19	Ruff	6780	250		7030

No	Species	Main wetland (Nadabet)	Jagmal Bet wetland 1	Jagmal Bet wetland 2	Total
20	Red-wattled Lapwing	0	54	9	63
21	Little Stint	450	20		470
22	Common Greenshank	50	2		52
23	Common Redshank	2300	7	1	2308
24	Little Ringed Plover	50			50
25	Grey Heron	1578	16	21	1615
26	Black-tailed Godwit	4750	20		4770
27	Northern Pintail		700	1650	2350
28	Northern Shoveler		800	680	1480
29	Common Teal		500	100	600
30	Gadwall		25	165	190
31	Eurasian Wigeon		50	325	375
32	Indian Spot-billed Duck		10	12	22
33	Garganey		5	50	55
34	Little Grebe		4	7	11
35	Black-headed Ibis		15	5	20
36	Glossy Ibis	500			500
37	Great Cormorant	1000	200		1200
38	Indian Pond Heron		25	15	40
39	Cattle Egret		250	20	270
40	Great Egret	400	100	20	520
41	Intermediate Egret	100	2	3	105
42	Little Egret	500	40	12	552
43	Western Reef Egret	350			350
44	Little Cormorant	2500	150	100	2750
45	Eurasian Marsh Harrier	2	2	6	10
48	Eurasian Curlew	61	1		62
49	Marsh Sandpiper	100	2		102
50	Green Sandpiper		3	4	7
51	Wood Sandpiper		3	2	5
52	Caspian Tern	150	10	2	162
53	Gull-billed Tern	375	30	0	405
54	White Wagtail	200	10	10	220
55	Yellow Wagtail	70	12	15	97
56	Barn Swallow	1000			1000
57	White-throated Kingfisher	10	3	2	15
58	Unidentified Terns	1000			1000
59	Unidentified Gulls	12000	100	120	12220
60	Unidentified Waders	15000	200	150	15350
	Total Birds	636449	5446	17011	658906

(Names are as per Grimmett *et al.* 2011)

Nadabet....

This site should be considered as one of the nationally and globally most important large wetlands as it supports not only large populations of waterbirds, but also 1% population of 11 species; Great White Pelican (*P. onocrotalus*), Dalmatian Pelican (*P. crispus*), Greater Flamingo, Lesser Flamingo (*P. minor*), Painted Stork (*M. leucocephala*), Eurasian Spoonbill (*P. leucorodia*), Slender-billed Gull (*C. genei*), Black-headed Gull (*C. ridibundus*), Brown-headed Gull (*C. brunnicephalus*), Pied Avocet (*R. avosetta*) and Common Crane (*G. grus*). This wetland also qualifies as 'Ramsar' site as it supports more than 20,000 birds and 1% population of 11 species. The site acts as one of the most important stopover and feeding site for large populations of migratory waterbirds on the Central Asian Flyway.

Some of the other important observations include sighting of 63 Black Storks (*C. nigra*). Also we could photograph

Black Stork and White Storks (*C. ciconia*) together. A good population of Eastern Imperial Eagles (*A. heliaca*) and Peregrine Falcons (*F. peregrinus*) was a great sight. This wetland had good number of juveniles of Lesser Flamingo, though it does not breed there. Lastly, spending time with our brave BSF jawans on the border was a memorable event for all the team members.

Acknowledgements:

We are thankful to the Banaskantha Forest Division and the Border Security Force for their support during the survey. We personally thank all enthusiastic team members for their time and contribution during this count.

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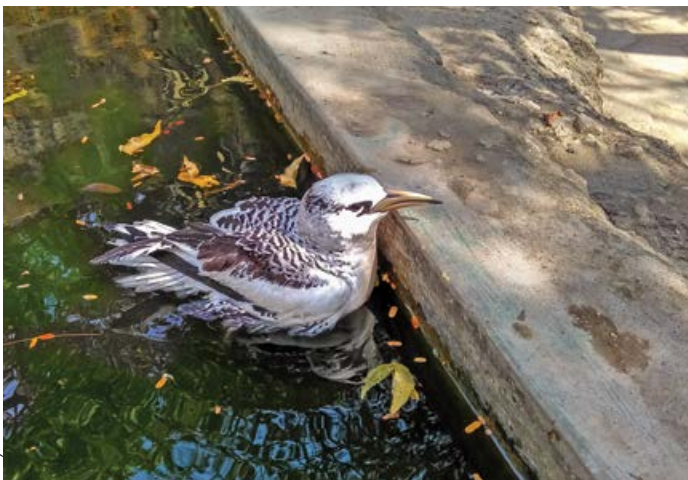
Grimmett, R., Inskipp, C., & Inskipp, T. 2011. *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*. 2nd ed. Christopher Helm & Oxford University Press. London. □

Red-billed Tropicbird in Porbandar

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Yogesh Motivaras : Porbandar.



Nayan Thanki

the nape, and extensive black primaries and primary coverts.

The Red-billed Tropicbird is vagrant to Gujarat. The first sighting of a sub-adult Red-billed Tropicbird was reported 50 kms offshore between Jakhau and Okha (22° 36' N 68° 28' E) in the Gulf of Kachchh on 20 December 2013 (Gandhe 2014). The second sighting was a windblown bird rescued from Punagam, near Surat, in the monsoon season on 25 June 2015 (Patel 2015). Hence, this further sighting of this species is noteworthy.



Acknowledgements:

We are thankful to Chinmay Rahane for identifying the bird on 'Ask ID' of 'Indian Birds' FB Group.

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Sighting of Siberian Thrush in Porbandar: an addition to the avifauna of Gujarat

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Dhaval Vargiya

Gujarat (Ganpule 2016). Therefore, the current sighting of Siberian Thrush in Porbandar is an addition to the avifauna of Gujarat.



Dhaval Vargiya

The Porbandar Bird Sanctuary (21° 38' 8.829" N, 69° 37' 6.348" E), is located in the middle of Porbandar, Gujarat. Spread over an area of 9 ha., this unique area, a water body surrounded by trees, was declared as a sanctuary in 1988. On 22 November 2016, while on a regular birding trip to the sanctuary, the third author observed an odd bird which he had never seen before. He immediately informed the first and second authors, who quickly went to the area. The bird was observed and it was noted that it moved on the dry leaf bed and looked for various insects. It was tentatively identified as a Thrush (*Zoothera* sp.) and photos were taken. Later, the identity was confirmed to be a female/first-winter Siberian Thrush (*Zoothera sibirica*), based on the buff supercilium, dark malar stripe, and scaling on underparts (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). The call was also matched with the one in online database (Gallardy 2014), and it was re-confirmed to be a Siberian Thrush.

The Siberian Thrush is known to breed in Russia, China, South Korea and Japan and it is a winter visitor to Burma, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Singapore and Malaysia; the species is strongly migratory with most of the birds migrating towards south-eastern Asia during the winter (BirdLife International 2016). In India, it is a vagrant and has been photographed twice recently in Sunderban Tiger Reserve, West Bengal, in 2013 (Manna 2013, Baidya 2013; probably the same bird). Isolated records from South Andaman (Abdulali 1965), Narcondam Island (Abdulali 1976), Maharashtra (Abdulali & Unnithan 1991) and Manipur (Choudhury 2009) have been reported.

This is the first record of Siberian Thrush in Gujarat. This species has not been included in the checklist of the birds of

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Sightings of King Quail in the Dang forest

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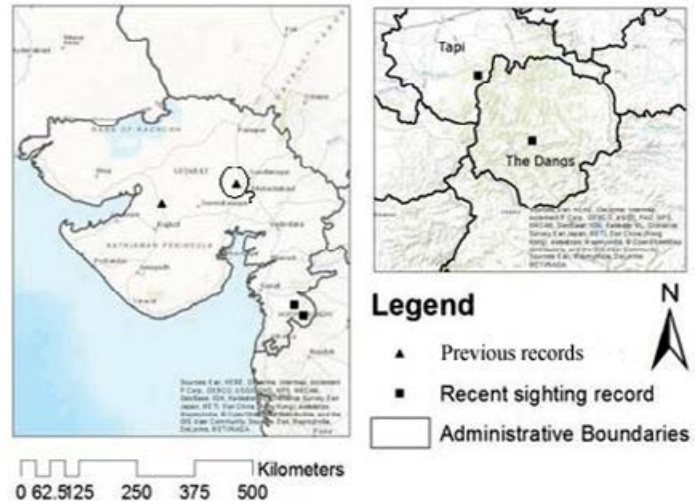
King Quail (*Coturnix chinensis*) is a widespread resident in India, but unrecorded in the north-west (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). There are only two sight records from Gujarat, one from Paneli vidi in Saurashtra region (Ganpule 2005), and the other from Thol Bird Sanctuary in central Gujarat, which was treated as 'needs confirmation' in the editor's note given in the post script (Iyer 2005). But none of the previous studies have reported this species in the Dang forest (Ali 1954, Khacher 1996, Singh *et al.* 2000, Trivedi & Soni 2006, Ganpule 2016). This note presents two sightings of male King Quail in the Dang forest.

On 17 March 2016 at around 15:00 hrs, a King Quail was sighted by the first and second authors in the ghats section of Waghai – Ahwa Road, SH – 14 (20° 45' N, 73° 40' E), at an elevation of about 406 meters above m.s.l. in the Dang district. The bird flew across the road in front of our vehicle. The size of this individual was that of a Buttonquail (*Turnix sp.*). It had dark blue flanks, blue upperparts and yellowish legs. The vegetation on both the sides of the road was mixed deciduous forest with dense undergrowth. With the help of field guide and based on its size and distinct colour, we identified it as a male King Quail. A second male was flushed by the first and third authors on 09 May 2016 at around 13:00 hrs near Ambapani village (20° 57' N, 73° 30' E, elevation – 123 meters above m.s.l.) in the Tapi district. The habitat was Teak (*Tectona grandis*) dominated deciduous forest with dry undergrowth. The individual foraging in this habitat disappeared in the grass after being flushed. Unfortunately, we could not take any photos on both occasions, but could confirm its identity based on its blue colour and small size.

The King Quail is considered as a monsoon vagrant in Gujarat (Ganpule 2016), but both of our sightings suggest its presence in the summer season. More surveys are essential to determine its status and distribution in Gujarat.

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Source : Internet

Short Birding Notes



Ultramarine Flycatcher at Sodam Bandhara, near Diu

On a birding trip to Sodam Bandhara (20° 43' 8.029" N, 70° 48' 45.583" E), a creek in Gir Somnath district near Diu, Bakul Trivedi spotted an Ultramarine Flycatcher (*Ficedula superciliaris*) perched on a Peepal (*Ficus religiosa*) near Sodavmata Temple. We got ample opportunity to watch it and take its pictures. There are isolated records of Ultramarine Flycatcher from Gujarat (Mashru 2012). It was noted in this area for the first time; probably first record of the species from the coasts of Gujarat.

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Photo : Parv Trivedi



Amur Falcons at Velavadar

I visited the Blackbuck National Park, Velavadar on 14 April 2015 with my family. On the road surrounding the park, we saw 5 Amur Falcons (*Falco amurensis*) perched on a wire. When we approached to photograph them, they became alert, and flew away. We noticed that there were a total of 18 birds; five birds were perched on electricity wires plus thirteen other birds flew off from nearby trees. We were very excited to see this species in such numbers here, as it is an uncommon passage migrant in Gujarat (Ganpule 2011).

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Masked Booby near Surat

On 4 July 2016, an unknown pelagic bird was rescued by the volunteers of Nature Club Surat, near Hazira Police Station (40° 42' N, 74° 00' W), Surat, Gujarat. The bird was kept under observation. When we (Mukesh Bhatt, Ashish Chaudhari and I) came to know about it, we approached the Nature Club. We noticed that the bird was responding well to treatment. We were confused between Adult Brown Booby (*Sula leucogaster*) and immature Masked Booby (*Sula dactylatra*), but with the help of field guide (Grimmet *et. al.* 2011), it was identified as an immature Masked Booby. We tried to release the bird at Suvali Beach, Surat, but the attempt was unsuccessful and after three days, the bird perished. There are several previous records of this species from Gujarat, mostly in the monsoon season. More than 10 sightings in Gujarat from various areas like Mithapur, Porbandar, Kachchh have been reported (Ganpule 2016). But this record is from southern inland Gujarat and it is a rarity here.

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Oriental Pratincole in Navsari District

On 13 August 2016, at around 11:45 hrs, the second author saw more than 100 pratincoles scattered in an open field near the sea in Dandi, Navsari District. The area is near to the sea shore, and there is very less disturbance in this area. The birds, based on the features seen and using Driessens & Svensson (2005) were identified as Oriental Pratincoles (*Glareola pratincola*). The flock consisted mainly of immature and juvenile birds. The next day, we again visited the place at around 09:00 hrs and located the birds in the same area.

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Red-backed Shrike in Rajkot & Junagadh

Rajkot: A juvenile Red-backed Shrike (*Lanius collurio*) was seen and photographed in Khirasara Vidi, near Rajkot, on 10 September 2016. It was identified as a juvenile Red-backed Shrike based on the heavy barring, grayish nape and rump and squarer tail.

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Junagadh: A juvenile/first-winter Red-backed Shrike (*Lanius collurio*) was seen and photographed in Girnar, near Junagadh, on 16 October 2016. It was identified as a juvenile Red-backed Shrike.

Ankit Shukla, Junagadh. ankitshukla_junagadh@yahoo.co.in

[Red-backed Shrike is an autumn passage migrant in Gujarat, mainly seen in Kachchh. Records from other regions of Gujarat are scanty. Hence this sightings from Rajkot and Junagadh are noteworthy – Eds]



Red-throated Pipit near Naliya, Kachchh

A first-winter Red-throated Pipit (*Anthus cervinus*) was seen and photographed near Naliya, in Abdasa taluka of Kachchh on 25 October 2016. It was identified as a Red-throated Pipit based on the very heavy streaking on the lower flanks, which was unlike a Tree Pipit (*A. trivialis*).

There are a few records of Red-throated Pipit from Gujarat, with a record from Jakhau, near Kachchh, in November 2007 (Deomorari 2009).

We thank Krys Kazmierczak, Jan van der Woude and Prasad Ganpule for helping with the identification of this individual

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Spotted Flycatcher near Surat

A Spotted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa striata*) was seen and photographed at Dabhari village, near Surat, on 2 October 2016. Spotted Flycatcher is an autumn passage migrant in Gujarat, mainly in Kachchh and Saurashtra (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). It has been noted in other areas of Gujarat (see editor's note in Ganpule 2009), but there are no recent records of this species from south Gujarat as far as I know. It is either rare here or overlooked. [Senior birder Mukesh Bhatt informed that the Spotted Flycatcher has not been recently recorded from Surat area – Eds]

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Sightings of Watercock in Amreli District

On 8 August 2016, a single Watercock (*Gallicrex cinerea*) was seen in grassland near Nana Liliya village, Dist: Amreli. Further sightings on 11 August 2016 of 3 Watercocks and on 17 August 2016 of 5 Watercocks confirmed their presence in the area. During the previous year, on 25 July 2015, a single Watercock was recorded at the same location. These observations are significant and indicate a possibility of a good population of Watercocks in Amreli.

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Sulphur-bellied Warbler in Kachchh

A Sulphur-bellied Warbler (*Phylloscopus griseolus*) was seen at Phot Mahadev, Kachchh, in the first week of November 2015. The bird was seen in a thick thorn forest. The warbler was hopping on the rocks and searching for food. Due to very poor light conditions, I could not photograph the bird. I was accompanied by Alan Pearson, a famous bird illustrator from Malaysia. His illustration of the Sulphur-bellied Warbler is given here. The only previous record of this species that I could find from Kachchh was a bird seen in November 2014 by Gani Khatri (photo on Facebook).

Sulphur-bellied Warbler is not shown to occur in Kachchh in Grimmett *et al.* (2011) and Rasmussen & Anderton (2012). Hence these are confirmed records of the Sulphur-bellied Warbler from Kachchh.

Jugal Tiwari : Kachchh. cedoindia@yahoo.com

Painting by Alan Pearson.



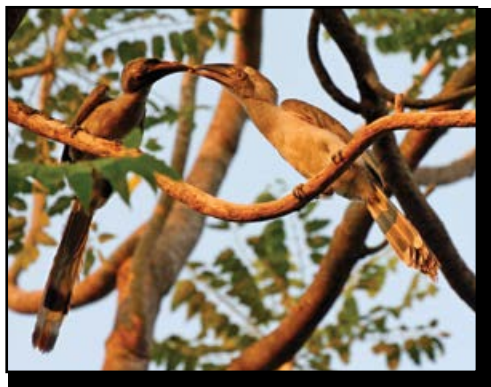
White-winged Tern in Porbandar and Jamnagar

Porbandar: On 17 April 2016, while birdwatching in Porbandar city, we saw five White-winged Terns (*Chlidonias leucopterus*) flying along with a flock of Whiskered Terns (*C. hybrida*). They were almost in full breeding plumage.

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Jamnagar: A single White-winged Tern in breeding plumage was noted at Jamnagar on 24 April, 2016.

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Breeding of Grey Hornbill in Dharmaj, Dist. Anand

On 7 August 2011, we sighted a Grey Hornbill (*Ocyrceros birostris*) for the first time in Dharmaj, Dist. Anand. Since September 2011, we have been regularly observing it in Dharmaj mostly on Peepal and Banyan trees. Bhavesh Manger has been observing it regularly in Petlad, Dist. Anand. On 10 June 2015, he found a nest of a Grey Hornbill at Petlad on Arduso (*Ailanthus excelsa*). On 13 June, a juvenile hornbill was out of the nest and both the parents were seen feeding it. Another chick inside the nest was also being fed. On 14 June, two juveniles were being fed outside the nest, but the adults visited the nest and fed a third chick inside the nest. On 20 June, we saw that both the juvenile hornbills flew about 100 mts and began feeding on berries from large trees. This was the first time we saw a nest in Anand area. The successful breeding of Grey Hornbill in Anand district is noteworthy.

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Book Review

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Title: Flight Identification of Raptors of Europe, North Africa and the Middle East – 544 pp

Author: Dick Forsman

Publisher: Christopher Helm, London. 2016.

Any book on raptors is of great interest to birdwatchers of Gujarat, as the state is considered to be one of the 'hotspots' for raptor watching. Hence, the publication of this new book on raptor identification is a welcome addition for those interested in this subject.

Dick Forsman is one of the leading experts in the field of raptor identification in Europe. The author's previous book, 'The Raptors of Europe and the Middle East' (Poyser, 1999), is a definitive guide to the raptors of the region. Seventeen years later, he has come up with his latest book. It is published under the 'Helm Identification Guides' series. The title is self-suggestive, covering only 'Flight Identification' of raptors; depiction of perched raptors is well detailed in his earlier publication. This new publication is much more than an upgrade from his last one, covering the detailed approach of identifying raptors in flight in fine detail. The introductory sections are covered in brief, which had been covered in sufficient detail in his earlier book, as explained by the author. For anybody interested in the study of diurnal raptors, the introductory section in the first publication is a must read. Two books complement each other very well and hence both are a must have on the book shelves of the serious raptor enthusiast.

The Indian Context:

Although the book is a flight identification guide to raptors recorded in Europe, North Africa and the Middle East, there are quite a few species of interest to Indian readers (Osprey, Oriental Honey Buzzard, Black Kite, Black-eared Kite, White-tailed Eagle, Pallas's Fish Eagle, Gyps and other Vultures, Harriers, Shikra, Eurasian Sparrowhawk, Northern Goshawk, Common Buzzard, Steppe Buzzard, Long-legged Buzzard, Aquila Eagles, Bonelli's Eagle, Booted Eagle and most small and large Falcons) and many identification traits for these can be used successfully in the Indian context. Of particular interest are the moult and ageing sections under each species, the study of which is still in its nascent stage in India. Quality pictures of the different age classes with clear captions are apt and explanatory.

Juvenile, male and female birds of all species covered in the book are represented by good quality pictures from various angles showing the details of plumages very well. Similarly, plumage variations and morphs have been covered wherever required. Another interesting subject that has been covered in the latest publication is 'Hybridization'. The author describes quite a few hybrids (few confirmed and a few unconfirmed individuals) E.g. Oriental x European Honey Buzzard, Montagu's x Pallid Harrier, Greater x Lesser Spotted Eagle, Peregrine x Barbary Falcon, etc.

along with identification pointers, which is very useful for the Indian reader as, at times, there are individuals that do not quite fit the traits of any one species.

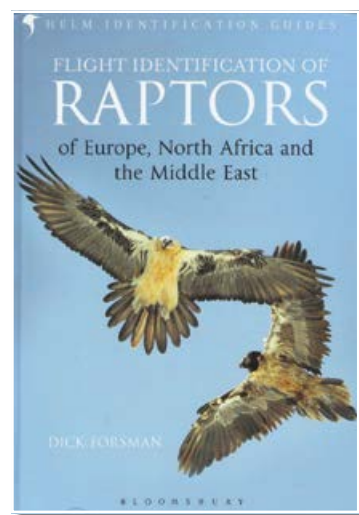
Limitations for Indian readers:

Although the book covers quite a few of raptor species found in India, it somehow fails to connect with the Indian reader, probably due to the slight difference in the general appearance of some species like Shikra, Tawny Eagle, Eurasian Merlin, Peregrine Falcon and Saker Falcon. The geographical variation in plumage and structure of the subspecies found in that region appear a little different and hence some traits cannot be simply applied in the Indian context without checking. While this book covers a lot of raptor species seen in India, several other species (Eg. Besra, Crested Goshawk, Changeable Hawk Eagle, Crested Serpent Eagle, Black Eagle, Indian Spotted Eagle, Grey-headed Fish Eagle, Lesser Fish Eagle, Red-necked Falcon, etc.) are missing because their range is not in the areas covered within the scope of the book.

Another important aspect the Indian reader must keep in mind is that this book deals with raptors in flight and the fact that most of the views (photos) that the reader gets in the book are of birds on migration, taken mainly at migratory sites. This is described in a special chapter in the book, giving the main migration sites in Europe and Israel, which are the congregation points for migrating raptors. Such views are not frequent or easily afforded to the Indian observer in the field here to appreciate the minute details (e.g. finely barred secondaries and molting inner primaries). For this, a different approach might be needed when it comes to identifying raptors in flight.

Conclusion:

To sum up, this book, in combination with the earlier one, complement each other well and having both is a good inclusion to one's literature collection. They will serve anybody interested in raptors for a long to come. The most important aspect to take away from this book is that the art of identifying raptors in flight needs a disciplined approach, which has been provided in this latest publication. Though the price of approximately Rs 3,500 (online retailers in India) seems a bit steep, the book is well worth it. □



BCSG Events

“BIRDING BY EAR” KEVDI ECO CAMP SITE, 24-25 SEPTEMBER 2016

As it is said, " A true birder sees more birds with the ears than with the eyes, as art of hearing can take one to every corner of the forest even during the darkest hours of night. 'Birding by ear', a training programme was organized by BCSG at Kevdi reserved forest - a dry deciduous forest near Ratanmal Sloth Bear Sanctuary in Dahod Dist.- on 24-25 September 2016.

Recognizing birds through their calls is a skill and its fun train one's ears for the same. Viral Joshi from Amreli who has done lot of work in the field of recording, preserving and deciphering bird calls was our resource person. After his audio-visual presentation on the subject, participants were taken on different birding treks. They were instructed to prepare a check-list of birds by listening to their calls. During field visits birders found it very interesting to learn and experience mimicking skills of the Leafbirds.

Presentation was attended and appreciated by DCF in-charge Sh. P. P. Vihol. The programme was nicely executed by Ghanshyam Solanki and Nilam Patel of Sanskar Adventure Club, Dahod.



BIRDING AT TULSISHYAM : 8-10 JULY 2016

Tulsishyam temple, inside Gir National Park, was selected for the BCSG monsoon birding camp held on 8-10 July, 2016. The three day program was witnessed by quintessential rainfall, which had transformed the dry deciduous forest to lustrous green.

The first day's trek started from Tulsishyam temple, going approx 6-7 km from inside the forest region. The trek delighted the bird watchers when they got a chance to see 12 Indian Vultures soaring near the temple top and to hear the continuous calls of Cuckoos. On the second day, participants were awoken by the sound of torrential rains and birds in the vicinity. The day included a trek near Raval Dam, Sarnikhodiyar temple and Nandivela hill base via Kothariya village. For the Kothariya village trek, we were accompanied by ACF in-charge Shri M. M. Muni and Forest guard I. A. Pathan, who shared their knowledge of Gir. The final day's birding trek for Khajuri Ness included a visit to a maldhari abode (cattle herders of Gir Forest).

The show stealer for the program were the Cuckoos, which were sighted in umpteen numbers. Some of the species seen were Asian Koel, Grey-bellied Cuckoo, Drongo Cuckoo, Common Hawk Cuckoo, and Common Cuckoo.

BCSG is indebted to the Forest Department, especially Dr. A. P. Singh, CCF in-charge, Junagadh Wildlife Circle, for his permission and generous support.

Execution of the programme was managed by Bhanubhai Acharya and Ajit Bhatt. □



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"I think, as a matter of course, in a hot country like ours; every road should be in deep shade. If it is broad, then trees on either side of the road and also along the center. If the road is narrow, then smaller trees perhaps alternating on either side. But, there would need to be a proper group of men who prune these trees to keep them within the space available - removing old and dangerous branches, and above all, the huge leaf fall should be carefully collected and sent to centers where high grade humus is produced..... not just being dumped with other solid waste. As for the species of trees to be planted, it is here that we should have public involvement and committees formed by concerned citizens. I have for long been thinking of writing something on replacing the huge lawns down the middle of Gandhinagar with a dense grove of evergreen trees. Similarly replacing all the twiggy deciduous trees along the avenues by great shade trees..."

If there are good surroundings, birds and smaller creatures will be around. The problem is of people and the haphazard use of space. This has to be regulated and the property owners abutting these spaces should be involved. It is simply a matter of having clear concepts specially by those who are in the administration. I would like to draw your attention to the fact that in crowded slum areas, we see more of our indigenous trees because these trees provide shade. It is in the better-class housing areas where we have problems and it is these who need to be made to see the right way: by example, by ridicule, and by very strict punishment!"

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- Lavkumar Khachar

(Source: In conversation with Pranav Trivedi)

