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Contents:

Cover Photo: 'Common Cuckoo' by Pranjal J. Saikia

Editor's note:

Please accept greetings from BCSG. We are back with a new issue after a hiatus. The news is, we are transforming to 'online' from this issue onwards.

There were two reasons for this delay. The initial delay was because we took time in contemplating a switchover to a soft copy version. Later, the gap in publishing this issue was prolonged due to the lockdown.

We intend to publish one more combined online issue in the next 3 months. This will maintain the chronological order of the volume numbers.

The online version has some obvious advantages. Not only will it be financially more viable, it will help us reach a wider readership. Of course, it is also an environment friendly option. We also aim to acquire the ISSN number sooner with this shift.

Looking forward to enrich you more with Gujarat Ornithological News through our bird bulletin.

- Editor

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Probable Himalayan/Oriental Cuckoo *Cuculus saturatus/optatus* near Mahuva, with notes on identification of hepatic morph cuckoos in Gujarat

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Batuk Bhil

Probable Himalayan/Oriental Cuckoo - Note rufous head with barring and beak with yellow lower mandible and black tip. The underparts are white with broad and prominent barring, including on vent and undertail coverts. Mahuva, Gujarat.

On 13 October 2019, Vivek Upadhyay and Kandarp Andhariya had visited Mahuva, Bhavnagar District, for photographing the India Blue Robin (*Luscinia brunnea*) and Blue-capped Rock Thrush (*Monticola cinclorhynchus*) which were seen in the area. While birding there, we came across a cuckoo (*Cuculus* sp.), perched on a neem tree, which looked different. It seemed to be of hepatic morph, with rufous on head and mantle. It was smaller in size than a Common Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*). The first author took many photographs, from different angles, showing all the features and observed it well till the evening at this place. There were two individuals but we could get photos of only one bird; both bird seemed to be of hepatic morph. This bird was seen by the first author again on 15 October 2019 in the evening at the same place and 18 October 2019 early in the morning.

It was initially identified it as a Lesser Cuckoo (*Cuculus poliocephalus*). However, being unfamiliar with cuckoos in general, the images were shared with senior bird watchers here. It was later identified as a possible Himalayan/Oriental Cuckoo (*Cuculus saturatus/optatus*). This could be the first record of the Himalayan/Oriental Cuckoo for Gujarat as it is not mentioned in the Gujarat checklist (Ganpule 2016, 2017). However, the criteria for identification of hepatic juveniles of Common Cuckoo, Lesser Cuckoo and Himalayan / Oriental Cuckoo (*Cuculus optatus*) are still not well established and the details are given in the identification note. Till the identification in this group is clarified further, this record is treated as a probable Himalayan/Oriental Cuckoo.

Batuk Bhil

Probable Himalayan/Oriental Cuckoo - Note dull rufous upperparts with broad black barring. Note regularly barred black rump, with fine white edges to few feathers. Black-and-white barred tail. White fringes to upperpart feathers indicates juvenile plumage. Mahuva, Gujarat.

[*The observers took many good photos of this cuckoo. As can be seen in the photos, this individual had dull rufous upperparts with*

black barring; whitish edges to black barring were visible on the wings and lower mantle, suggesting a juvenile/first-winter bird. The rump was distinctly and broadly barred with black barring, and had very fine whitish edges to few black bars on the lower rump, suggesting that some feathers had moulted to adult-type. The tail had black-and-white barring. The head was dull rufous, with black barring on nape. The upper mandible was black and the lower mandible was yellow with black tip. The chin and throat were unevenly barred blackish; underparts were whitish, broadly and prominently barred black; vent and undertail coverts were broadly and distinctly barred black and white. The observer stated that it was much smaller in size than a Common Cuckoo. It was tentatively identified as a Himalayan/Oriental Cuckoo. I discuss here the identification and separation of hepatic morph cuckoos seen in Gujarat. The Indian Cuckoo (Cuculus micropterus) occurs in Gujarat but is not covered here since there is no female hepatic morph in this species. It is pertinent to note that only females occur in hepatic morph in all these cuckoo species and the discussion here is regarding only hepatic morph birds. The identification and separation of males and females of the common grey morph of these species is beyond the scope of this work.

Pranjal J. Saikia

Common Cuckoo - Note thin underpart barring. Rump is sparsely barred with white tips to few rump feathers. Bill is black with yellowish base to lower mandible. Whitish tips to remnants of few rump feathers indicates a juvenile in post juvenile moult - other plain feathers on rump are adult-type. Rajasthan.

The Oriental Cuckoo and the Himalayan Cuckoo are now treated as separate species but treatment differs in various works; Payne & Kirwan (2020) treat optatus as a subspecies of C. saturatus. The Oriental Cuckoo breeds in N Eurasia while the Himalayan Cuckoo breeds in the Himalayas, from Kashmir through to Assam, Myanmar, Thailand and S China; the Himalayan Cuckoo is said to winter in Thailand, Malaysia, Philippines, Lesser Sundas and New Guinea (Payne & Kirwan 2020). The Oriental/Himalayan Cuckoo are very similar morphologically and are difficult to separate unless calls are heard and it is not possible to separate these two based only on photographs. There are no known differences in the plumage or bare parts between saturatus and optatus (King 2005, Payne 2005). However, Lindohm & Lindén (2007) suggest that the 'amount of yellow on the lower mandible may be more extensive and the yellow area more clear-cut in saturatus than in optatus. This character warrants closer investigation'. The measurements of flattened and straightened wing length are helpful in separating optatus and saturatus but this feature is useful only when the birds are trapped and measured (Lindohm & Lindén 2007). Thus, it is not possible to separate optatus and saturatus in the field from photographs. Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) stated that reports of optatus as a rare migrant through South Asia have not been verified and may be of saturatus, which averages larger in the western Himalayas; optatus is treated as hypothetical for our region by these authors. Grimmett et al. (2011) give isolated records of Himalayan Cuckoo from the plains of India from Rajasthan, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Maharashtra & Assam.

Prasad Ganpule

Grey-bellied Cuckoo - Note the sparsely barred upperparts and plain tail with blackish sub-terminal spots. The lack of yellow eye-ring and red iris is important for identification. Gujarat.

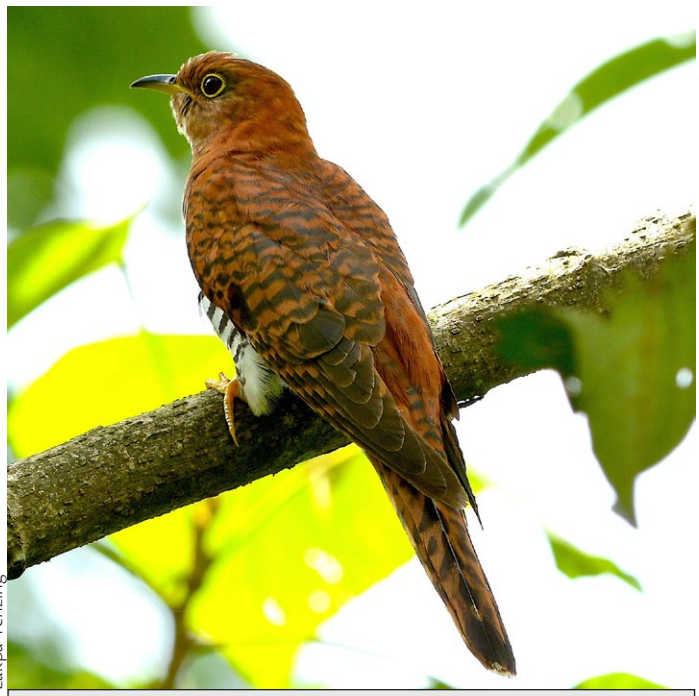
The identification and separation of hepatic morph Himalayan/Oriental Cuckoo from hepatic morph Common Cuckoo, Grey-bellied Cuckoo (Cacomantis passerinus) and Lesser Cuckoo is challenging. In hepatic morph adults of both Common Cuckoo and Lesser Cuckoo, the rump and uppertail-coverts are plain rufous and unmarked unlike in Himalayan/Oriental Cuckoo, where the rump and uppertial-coverts are rufous with dark barring (Payne & Kirwan 2020). However, in hepatic juvenile Common Cuckoo, the rump is unbarred or slightly (sparsely) barred dark brown and tipped white while uppertail-coverts are invariably barred dark brown and tipped white (Mann 2014); the author states that there is some degree of variation in this feature. Photos on OBI website of hepatic juvenile Common Cuckoos do show distinct, but uneven, barring on rump with each feather having prominent and broad white tips; many birds, by September, start showing plain areas

Summary of identification features of hepatic morph adult Oriental / Himalayan Cuckoo, Common Cuckoo and Lesser Cuckoo

Feature	Himalayan / Oriental Cuckoo	Common Cuckoo	Lesser Cuckoo	Remarks
Size	32-33 cm[1]	32-36 cm	22-27 cm	Lesser Cuckoo is smallest among these species
Underparts	White with broad black barring	White with thinner black barring	White with broad black barring	Black bars broader and more widely spaced in Himalayan/Oriental Cuckoo when compared with Common Cuckoo
Upperparts	Dark barred rufous	Dark barred rufous	Dark barred bright rufous	Lesser Cuckoo has richer rufous upperparts
Rump	Distinctly barred black-and-rufous	Unbarred rufous	Unbarred bright rufous	Oriental / Himalayan Cuckoo has barred rump in adult plumage
Bill Colour	Black with yellow, orange-yellow to greenish-yellow base	Black with yellow base	Black with yellow base	Similar in all these species
Nape	Barred rufous and brown	Barred rufous and brown	Usually unbarred bright rufous	Lesser Cuckoo has unbarred bright rufous nape
Voice	'hoop-hoop-hoop' or 'hoop-hoop'	Loud 'cuck-oo'	'chi-chi-chik-chee-cheee-cheee-k'	Voice, if heard, is the best feature for identification

[1]*Measurements taken from Payne & Kirwan (2020)*

on rump with adult-type feathers. However, in this individual from Mahuva, the barring on the rump was more regular (evenly barred) and broader than in a Common Cuckoo. Further, the ventral barring (especially on belly, undertail coverts and vent) was much broader and prominent here than what is usually seen in a Common Cuckoo. The smaller size was also indicative and further supported separation from a Common Cuckoo.



Lakpa Tenzing

Lesser Cuckoo - Note the overall bright rufous plumage. Note the plain nape and unbarred rump. Sparse barring on uppertail coverts is visible. Underpart barring is very prominent. Lack of white tips in plumage indicates adult. Sikkim.

Sumesh PB

Lesser Cuckoo juvenile. Note the barred rump with rump feathers showing prominent white tips. Note bright rufous head and nape, which is typical of Lesser Cuckoo. The larger looking head is quite apparent here. Neat white fringes to mantle indicates juvenile plumage. Kerala.

Separation from hepatic morph Grey-bellied Cuckoo is relatively straightforward; adult hepatic Grey-bellied Cuckoo is bright rufous

above, with sparse, scattered chevrons on mantle and unmarked rufous tail (sometimes with black shaft-streaks and some dark sub-terminal spots or band) and rump is unbarred. Underpart barring is somewhat variable, and is sometimes thin and in some individuals, quite broad and prominent. Hepatic juvenile Grey-bellied Cuckoo is variable, with heavy barring on upperparts, but tail is usually unmarked or very sparsely marked. If seen closely, the iris colour is red and it lacks the prominent yellow eye-ring, which is different from the three Cuculus sp. cuckoos discussed here.

S. N. Varu

Common Cuckoo immature. Note that the rump is sparsely barred, with mix of few plain adult-type feathers and retained barred juvenile type feathers. Note broad black and rufous barred mantle, which has adult-type feathers with only 2-3 retained juvenile feathers, showing white tips. Wings are juvenile and show white tips. Underpart barring note visible. An immature Common Cuckoo as rump shows plain adult type feathers and it lacks the bright rufous of Lesser Cuckoo. Kachchh, Gujarat.

Separation from hepatic Lesser Cuckoo is more problematic. Unless calls are heard, it is very difficult to separate hepatic Himalayan/ Oriental Cuckoo from Lesser Cuckoo. In general, in adult hepatic Lesser Cuckoo, the rufous on head is brighter and nape is unbarred; the overall plumage is brighter. While the adult hepatic Lesser Cuckoo is said to have unbarred rump and uppertail-coverts ['barring often lacking on crown and rump' as per Rasmussen & Anderton (2012)], the variation shown by juvenile hepatic Lesser Cuckoo is not well known. A close scrutiny of photographs of hepatic Lesser Cuckoo and Himalayan/Oriental Cuckoo posted on the OBI website shows that the rump and uppertail-coverts are distinctly barred in adult Himalayan/Oriental Cuckoo while in adult hepatic Lesser Cuckoo, these are either unbarred or only very faintly/sparsely barred and are bright rufous. Thus, separation of adult Lesser Cuckoo from Himalayan/Oriental Cuckoo is easier if rump/nape is seen well.

Hepatic juvenile Lesser Cuckoo shows barring on rump, but the extent of barring is probably variable and this feature has not been well studied. A hepatic Lesser Cuckoo from Maharashtra, depicted in Vartak & Shenai (2018), shows an individual with very sparse barring on rump (which is bright rufous) and it has a bright rufous, plain nape with some white spots, indicating it as a juvenile/first-winter bird moulting into adult plumage. There are a few photographs, posted as Lesser Cuckoo on the OBI website and on eBird, where the rump is barred and the plumage looks somewhat 'muted' with only a few adult-type bright rufous feathers while in a few other photos, the plumage looks bright rufous on the head but the rump is barred – in all these birds, each rump and uppertail-covert feather shows prominent and broad white tips (somewhat similar to juvenile Common Cuckoo), and also white tips to mantle and wing feathers, indicating these as juveniles. See photo of a juvenile hepatic Lesser Cuckoo from Kerala (https://ebird.org/checklist/S32374244), which is given here, where the rump is barred and each rump feather shows prominent white tips; note here that it has a proportionately large-headed appearance and few adult-type feathers on the nape are unbarred bright rufous, which is typical of hepatic Lesser Cuckoo. In other photos of the same bird posted on eBird, the plumage looks tawny and not as rufous, and only a few nape feathers looks rufous. Thus, camera settings will also affect the plumage tone in these cuckoos to some extent. The Himalayan/Oriental Cuckoo and Lesser Cuckoo hepatic juveniles show barred rump but in Lesser Cuckoo, the pattern of barring is probably different (each feather showing prominent white tips to rump and uppertail covert feathers) from Himalayan / Oriental Cuckoo. However, the extent of variation in rump barring in juvenile hepatic Lesser Cuckoo needs more study and it remains to be seen if it it varies from Himalayan/Oriental Cuckoo. As per Mann (2013), optatus and saturatus lack white tips to rump feathers but it is not clarified whether this is true for hepatic juveniles. However, photos of hepatic juvenile Oriental / Himalayan Cuckoo on OBI and eBird do show very faint white tips to rump feathers, somewhat similar to what is seen in the Mahuva bird, but these white tips are not as broad, uneven and prominent as seen in juvenile hepatic Lesser Cuckoo and the rump is more evenly and regularly barred. Further, in Lesser Cuckoo, even in hepatic juveniles, the nape usually shows

a few bright rufous feathers and structurally, it looks rather large-headed, which was not noted in the Mahuva bird.

After post-juvenile moult to adult plumage, the rump and nape becomes unbarred bright rufous in Lesser Cuckoo while it remains barred in Himalayan/Oriental Cuckoo, which can be seen in the photos of hepatic adults of these species. Hence, an adult plumaged hepatic cuckoo which shows a barred rump can be identified as a Himalayan/Oriental Cuckoo but this feature (rump barring) is probably not very useful in hepatic juveniles unless the rump is seen closely and very well and other features (especially nape feathers and structure) are noted. The few bright rufous adult-type feathers, usually present on mantle or nape, are indicative of Lesser Cuckoo as Himalayan/Oriental Cuckoo does not show such bright rufous feathers. There are some differences even in reference texts for the hepatic morph Himalayan Cuckoo; this is illustrated as having a barred rump in Grimmett et al. (2011), Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) and Payne & Kirwan (2020) while Brazil (2010) shows the hepatic Himalayan Cuckoo with unbarred plain rump and hepatic Oriental Cuckoo with prominent rump barring!

Prasad Ganpule

Probable Himalayan/Oriental Cuckoo. Note evenly barred rump, which lacks white tips indicating adult plumage. The mantle feathers lack white tips. The underpart barring is partly visible, which shows somewhat broader bars. A Himalayan/Oriental Cuckoo? - adult type plumage with evenly barred rump, lack of bright rufous feathers on nape/mantle suggests that this is not a Common or Lesser Cuckoo. September 2017, Kachchh Gujarat.

We sent the images of the Mahuva bird to Dr. Clive Mann for his opinion and to confirm the identification. He opined that for this individual, 'the plumage is that of an Oriental / Himalayan Cuckoo, and I cannot separate them. But if the observer says it was much smaller than a Common Cuckoo, then I think it must be Himalayan Cuckoo'. Regarding separation from Lesser Cuckoo, he stated that 'the Lesser Cuckoo does not have black and white barring on the tail, is much more rufous on the head, and the rufous colour is much brighter' (in litt., email dated 20 November 2019). We also consulted Antero Lindholm, who has studied optatus and saturatus in detail. He informed (in litt., email dated 21 December 2019) that compared with a Lesser Cuckoo, the Gujarat bird seems to 'have a stronger bill, relatively smaller head, and somewhat longer-looking body, and possibly also tail. This leads away from Lesser Cuckoo. Most rufous feathers in this individual may be already moulted to adult-like (hepatic) plumage'. Thus, structurally, the individual from Mahuva fits more closely to a Himalayan/Oriental Cuckoo rather than a Lesser Cuckoo and the adult-type feathers seen on the mantle here are similar to Himalayan/Oriental Cuckoo and are not bright rufous, as seen in a Lesser Cuckoo. Thus, two expert opinions indicated that the Mahuva bird was an Oriental/Himalayan Cuckoo.

Ali & Ripley (1981) stated that the Himalayan Cuckoo 'has been (rarely) taken from the plains of India' and suggest that this species is liable to be overlooked or misidentified in the non-breeding season. The Oriental Cuckoo is known to be prone to vagrancy and there is a record from Africa (Mann 2013), and it has been noted in Israel, Iran, Crimea and also to western Russia and towards Aleutians and Bering Sea Islands, Alaska, which are all attributed to optatus (Payne & Kirwan 2020). However, vagrancy for Himalayan Cuckoo is not widely reported, probably due to identification difficulties. For this record from Mahuva, it is likely a saturatus rather than an optatus. As stated by Dr. Mann, it is possible that it could be a likely C. optatus too and unless such wintering birds are trapped, measured and subjected to DNA analysis, we cannot be sure. It is very likely that the Himalayan Cuckoo (or even Oriental Cuckoo) could be a winter/passage vagrant to the plains of India in the non-breeding season, but, since the birds are silent, and the identification is tricky, these could be overlooked. Though Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) had stated that reports of optatus from India have not been verified, it is possible that optatus could occur here and hence, saturatus as well as optatus is considered here till more data is gathered and museum studies are done. It is essential that future studies involve large scale trapping and measuring the birds as well as testing for DNA to confirm whether optatus occurs here in India.

The discussion on identification given here is restricted only to hepatic morph birds of Himalayan/Oriental, Common, Lesser and Grey-bellied Cuckoo but this also requires further study, especially

regarding differences in plumages in hepatic juveniles of these species. It is quite likely that grey morph Himalayan Cuckoo, or even Oriental Cuckoo, could also be occurring as a vagrant in the plains of India and birdwatchers should familiarize themselves with the features of these Cuculus sp. in all their morphs. Normal plumaged juveniles would be especially difficult to identify and separate in these species. Further, there are many photos of these species where rufous-looking juveniles show grey newly moulted adult-type feathers, indicating that these would be normal plumaged adults. Such birds are not covered here. It is important to get as many photographs as possible, from all angles, and also note the size of the bird in the field. Photographs showing the underwings are useful for identification, and should be obtained if possible. An overview of all photographs of birds which would fit to Himalayan/Oriental Cuckoos from the plains of India will be helpful to check for more records of the species in the winter, away from its breeding range. Studies of museum specimens will be very helpful in understanding different plumages in these cuckoos. Unfortunately, there are no specimens, from the Himalayas, of hepatic juvenile Lesser Cuckoo and of hepatic juvenile C. saturatus in NHM, Tring, UK, and hence, specimen photos could not be studied or compared to check the various features discussed here (Hein Van Grouw, in litt, email dated 27 January 2020). However, specimens from other areas, especially from Southeast Asia, can be studied and compared.

A detailed paper on the identification of Oriental Cuckoo and Common Cuckoo is set to be published in the journal 'Dutch Birding' in the near future, which will discuss identification of hepatic morph birds also, and will be helpful in the identification of these species (Antero Lindholm, in litt, email dated 21 December 2019). In addition to plumage details, structural differences of Himalayan/ Oriental Cuckoo from Lesser Cuckoo should also be studied and could prove to be important in separating these species. In general, hepatic morph cuckoos have not been studied in Gujarat, or even India, and much work is required before we can establish criteria for identification, especially in hepatic juveniles, for these species. It is hoped that this paper would form a base for future studies.

At this stage, after discussions with senior birders from Gujarat, it was decided to treat this record as a 'probable' Himalayan/Oriental Cuckoo since features in hepatic juveniles of Himalayan/Oriental Cuckoo, Common Cuckoo and Lesser Cuckoo are not widely studied and the criteria for identification are not well established. It was decided to wait till further publications, which clarify the identification in these species, are available. Based on the expert opinions given here, the Himalayan/Oriental Cuckoo is a likely addition to the Gujarat checklist as it has not been noted in Gujarat earlier (Ganpule 2016, 2017). But, the decision on whether to add the Himalayan/Oriental Cuckoo to the state checklist can be taken in the future, based on more expert opinions, and after referring to the latest publications which will better illustrate the features to be studied for conclusive identification. A photo of another probable Himalayan/Oriental Cuckoo from Kachchh is given here, which can be referred to experts in the future. It is suggested that all photographs of Common Cuckoos and Lesser Cuckoos, posted on birding websites in India, be scrutinized for possibility of Himalayan/ Oriental Cuckoo and such photographs can then be referred to experts for further clarifications.

I thank Dr. Clive Mann and Antero Lindholm for helping with the identification of this individual from Mahuva. I am thankful to Hein Van Grouw for checking specimens in NHM, Tring, UK. I am grateful to Pranjal J. Saikia, Lakpa Tenzing Sherpa, Sumesh P. B and S. N. Varu for contributing photographs – Prasad Ganpule]

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Sighting of Red Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicarius* in Nal Sarovar: an addition to the avifauna of Gujarat

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Akbar Alvani

On 25 October 2019, we visited the Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary. At around 11:00 hrs, we saw a bird which looked different from the other birds in the area. It was moving between Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*) and Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*), and was busy feeding. We identified it as a phalarope (*Phalaropus* sp.). In 2018, we had seen a Red-necked Phalarope (*Phalaropus lobatus*) in Nal Sarovar but this bird looked different from a Red-necked Phalarope. It had a much thicker beak, with a pale yellowish base to the lower mandible. It had uniform pale grey upperparts, lacking prominent white edges to upperpart feathers. Based on these features, it was identified as a Red Phalarope (*Phalaropus fulicarius*) in non-breeding plumage. We took many photographs and shared them on the social media, where the identification was confirmed by senior birders. We were very happy to know that this was the first record of the species for Gujarat.

[*The Red Phalarope has a circumpolar distribution, breeding on the coasts of the Arctic Ocean in Alaska, Canada, W Greenland, Iceland, Bear Island, Svalbard, Novaya Zemlya and C & E Siberia and it winters pelagically, mainly off W South America and W & SW Africa (Van Gils et al. 2019). For the Indian Sub-continent, it is a very rare vagrant, with only a handful of records; for India, it has been recorded from West Bengal, Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra (Rawal et al. 2013, Sangha et al. 2013, Raju 2016). There are less than ten records of this species from India.*

The authors took many photographs of this individual and there remains no doubt that it is a Red Phalarope. All the characteristic features of this species are seen and it is either a first-winter or non-breeding plumaged bird. The sightings in India suggest that this species is a vagrant during passage migration here, and is usually seen only for a few days. The sightings are mainly during the autumn or spring passage migration season, which was also seen in this case. The Red Phalarope is not included in the Gujarat checklist (Parasharya et al. 2004, Ganpule 2016, 2017). Thus, as stated by the authors, the Red Phalarope is an addition to the avifauna of Gujarat and our state can be added to the list of states where the Red Phalarope has been seen in our country – Eds]

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Sighting of Rosy Pipit *Anthus roseatus* in Kachchh: a second record for Gujarat

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Jaysukh Parekh

On 20 October 2019, while doing bird photography on the outskirt of Bhuj, Kachchh, with my son Nirav and my friend Dr. Hemen Shah, we were looking for autumn passage migrants which are seen in our region. Due to very heavy rain this year (more than 140 percent rain of average rainfall was recorded in Kachchh), most of the areas were covered with a green carpet of grass, ranging from about six inches to two feet in height. This had attracted a lot of insects and the habitat created was ideal for pipits (*Anthus* sp.).

When we were passing on the road, flocks of pipits were flying suddenly from the grass and landing about 20-30 meters away, with their typical flight. The pipits were feeding in the grass on the ground as well as from the base of small plants, where caterpillars and small insects were easily available. We noted the commonly seen pipits like Paddyfield Pipit (*Anthus rufulus*), Tawny Pipit (*Anthus campestris*), Long-billed Pipit (*Anthus similis*), Tree Pipit (*Anthus trivialis*) and an Olive-backed Pipit (*Anthus hodgsoni*) was also seen. There, I saw a pipit which was walking very fast, continuously, and feeding in the grass. We stopped and I took many photographs, from of all angles, for identification as this bird was looking little different at first sight. I even took a short video of the bird feeding and walking. A brief description is given as follows: It had a broken white eye-ring, broad supercilium with a small whitish patch behind the ear coverts, bold and densely streaked underparts, prominent black malar patch, streaked upperparts, olive-tinged wings, unstreaked rump, and the overall plumage was drab olive. The bill was blackish with the lower mandible pinkish on the basal half. I tentatively identified it as a Rosy Pipit in non-breeding or first-winter plumage.

In this plumage, the Rosy Pipit can be confused with the Red-throated Pipit (*Anthus cervinus*) or even the Olive-backed Pipit or Buff-bellied Pipit (*Anthus rubescens*). Here, the Olive-backed Pipit could be eliminated by the overall plumage, head pattern and the densely streaked underparts. The olive-green in wings, the much thicker bill and the overall plumage helped separate this individual from similar plumaged Buff-bellied Pipit. However, separation from first-winter/non-breeding Red-throated Pipit is more complicated; here, the plain and unstreaked rump, more prominent malar patch, more densely streaked underparts, pinkish base to bill (bill base is yellowish in Red-throated Pipit) and the head pattern was different (from what is seen in Red-throated Pipit) and thus, I could identify this as a Rosy Pipit.

To further confirm the identification, I posted the photos on the 'Oriental Birding Pix' group, where the photos were uploaded on the 'Oriental Bird Images' website as a first-winter Rosy Pipit. I circulated the photos to other birders here and it was identified as a Rosy Pipit by Prasad Ganpule, who stated that the unstreaked rump, overall plumage with olive-green wings and other features matched a Rosy Pipit.

For Gujarat, the Rosy Pipit is a winter vagrant. Dharmkumarsinhji (1951) saw and collected a few individual from Gaurishanker Lake, Bhavnagar, in the first week of April 1951; some individuals were in breeding or beginning to acquire breeding plumage while others were in non-breeding. These specimens are also referred to by Ali (1955) as the only record for Gujarat. There have been no records after the specimens were collected from Bhavnagar and thus, this is the second record and a first photographic record of Rosy Pipit for Gujarat. It is possible that in non-breeding / first-winter plumage, it is overlooked amongst the more common pipits seen here. I have noted that this year, due to the heavy rainfall and growth of grass and overall vegetation, pipits are seen in good numbers. More intensive bird watching may result in more sightings of vagrant pipits in Kachchh or in Gujarat this year.

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Sightings of Pale Rock Sparrow *Carpospiza brachydactyla* in Little Rann of Kachchh and near Rajkot

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The first author [PG] visited the western end of Little Rann of Kachchh, near Tikkar, on 6 October 2019 for routine bird watching with Jignesh Miyatra and K. J. Dave. Due to very heavy rains this year, the Rann was full of water and only the areas on the periphery of the Rann could be accessed. At about 09:00 hrs, PG was moving on a newly made road, which was elevated and surrounded by scrub and fallow fields. A flock of 10-12 small-sized birds flew from the road side and settled about 50 mts behind the car. PG was intrigued by these birds and went back to observe them.

The birds were quite shy and were hidden behind the stones on the road-side. PG waited patiently and soon, the birds came out and started feeding. The first author took some photographs and noticed the overall non-descript plumage, the large and conical pink bill, very long primary projection and faint wing-bars. He immediately recognised these birds as Pale Rock Sparrows (*Carpospiza brachydactyla*). Three more individuals were photographed before the flock flew away. Two other individuals seemed to be in moult, with missing primaries and tertials, and the plumage was quite worn. These birds were observed for more than five minutes. The flock was disturbed by some sheep grazing in the area and flew away. This area was visited again in October and early November but the birds were not located. A few of the photos of the Pale Rock Sparrows taken by PG are posted on the 'Oriental Bird Images' (OBI) website.

The second author [RK] was on routine birding on 9 January 2019, at around 17:15 hrs, at Khirasara *vidi*, near Rajkot, where he saw a group of birds on the ground. These birds were identified as Greater Short-toed Larks (*Calandrella brachydactyla*). Along with these larks was a different looking bird, which was quite inconspicuous, without any noticeable features. RK took some photographs and this individual had a long primary projection extending halfway to the tail, large and heavy bill, faint moustachial stripe, and pale brownish wash on breast. It was identified as a Pale Rock Sparrow. The flock had 15 to 20 birds but it was hard to differentiate between the Greater Short-toed Larks and the Pale Rock Sparrows as both species were feeding and constantly moving in this area. But, there were more than 2-3 Pale Rock Sparrows in this flock. This area consists of grassland interspersed with scrub. In winter, the grass is dried out and many birds, especially wintering larks, are seen feeding on the seeds of these grasses. However, it was quite surprising to find the Pale Rock Sparrow here as it is not known to occur here.

The Pale Rock Sparrow was first seen in Kachchh in January 2012 by Jugal Tiwari, when it was a new species for India (Tiwari 2012); a flock of more than 250 birds was seen and it remained in the Banni area for almost 3-4 weeks. Subsequently, the species has been recorded from Rajasthan, Karnataka and more recently, from Kerala (see photographs posted on the OBI website). For Gujarat, there have been no further records since 2012 and these records of the Pale Rock Sparrow are the second and third records respectively for the state. Due to its very common-looking plumage, it is quite possible that it is overlooked. Further, it is quite similar to the Chestnut-shouldered Petronia (*Gymnoris xanthocollis*), which is very common here and separation and identification from petronia requires close scrutiny. Birders are urged to look for the Pale Rock Sparrow in Gujarat.

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Sighting of Large-billed Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus magnirostris* near Mahuva, Bhavnagar: a second record for Gujarat

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Mahendra Bhil

On 10 October 2019, at around 14:45 hrs, I was birding near my home and taking photographs of a Rusty-tailed Flycatcher (*Muscicapa ruficauda*). While taking photographs, I noticed that a warbler (*Phylloscopus* sp.) came and perched on the branch. I was able to take five photos before it flew away. Out of these five photographs, two photographs showed well all the features of this warbler. I noted that it was larger sized than a Greenish Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochiloides*), with longer and all dark bill. It had dark green upperparts, greyish underparts, a large looking eye, broad and dark eye stripe, yellowish-white supercilium with dark crown and greyish ear-coverts. I identified it as a Large-billed Leaf Warbler (*Phylloscopus magnirostris*) based on the above features. I shared the photographs with other senior birders here and the identification was confirmed by them too.

The Large-billed Leaf Warbler breeds in the Himalayas and winter in the Western and Eastern Ghats (Grimmett *et al*. 2011). It is a vagrant in Gujarat and there is only one previous record of the Large-billed Leaf Warbler from the state; an individual was seen in Little Rann of Kachchh (Ganpule 2016). Thus, this is the second record of a Large-billed Leaf Warbler from Gujarat. It is possible that it could be a vagrant during passage migration and needs to be looked out for in our state.

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Observations of Common Myna *Acridotheres tristis* as predator and prey

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The Common Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*), also known as Indian Myna, is a member of the family *Sturnidae*, a native to Asia. This species is very widely distributed across Asia, including Iran, Pakistan, India, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Afghanistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Myanmar, Malaysia, Singapore, peninsular Thailand, Indo-China and China (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005).

This myna has been introduced in many other parts of the world such as Canada, Australia, Israel, New Zealand, New Caledonia, United States, South Africa, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan, islands in the Indian Ocean (Seychelles, Mauritius, Madagascar, Maldives, Andaman & Nicobar Islands and Lakshadweep archipelago) and also on islands of the Atlantic, such as Ascension and St Helena (Ali & Ripley 2001). The distribution range of the Common Myna is increasing to such an extent, that in the year 2000, the IUCN Species Survival Commission declared it among the 'World's 100 worst invasive species' (Lowe *et al*. 2000). The Common Myna is omnivorous and an opportunistic feeder. The diversity of ingredients found in its dietary spectrum includes various species of insects, arachnids, crustaceans, reptiles, small mammals, seeds, grain, fruits and discarded waste from human habitation (Mathew *et al*. 1978, Ali & Ripley 2001). We were able to observe three instances of Common Myna, whereby it predated on lizards (reptiles) on two different occasions and localities; the other observation is an account of an attempted predation of a Common Myna by a frog. Detailed observations are given as follows:

Observation I: On 1 July 2015, few mynas were observed foraging under the dense hedge cover in the garden of Vishwamitri River Project office, Karelibaug, Vadodara. Suddenly, a myna somehow was able to catch a live lizard, about 6-8 cm long, from the grass cover. The myna continued to repeatedly poke its beak and attack the lizard on the head.


Raju Vyas

After striking at the head many times, the beak of the myna almost tore apart the lizard's head, which was dead by then. Later, the bird flew away with the dead lizard in its beak, far from the other birds, onto a distant wall. The myna then sat on the wall and began to swallow the prey. The lizard was identified as a supple skink (*Riopa* sp.) on careful observation with the help of binoculars.

Observation II: On 16 June 2018, a myna was observed carrying some unusual prey in its beak, flying from the road side forest, to finally land in the open, at Shivarajpur, Jambughoda, Panchmahal. The myna was observed intensively poking its beak on the prey it was carrying. On careful observation of the prey item, it was identified to be a large adult garden lizard (*Calotes versicolor*).

Observation III: We were able to record a myna being caught by an Indian bullfrog (*Hoplobatrachus tigerinus*). On 2 October 2018, during our bird watching trip to a small village pond near Rajapur, Padra, Vadodara, we heard extremely sharp and unusual distress calls from a bird in the vicinity of the pond. Upon walking in the direction of the sound, we could see a medium-sized bird fluttering on the ground and crying out frequently. We identified the bird to be an adult Common Myna, which was trying to fly but was somehow unable to take off. Upon carefully watching the bird with the help of binoculars, we were surprised to see that the bird was actually struggling to escape the jaws of a very large frog. The frog was persistently pulling the myna downwards and making attempts to swallow it whole, but the myna was trying equally hard to save its life. After a few minutes of this tussle, the myna was finally able to break free from grip of the frog's jaws and hurriedly flew away. The entire event continued for about five to eight minutes. We were quickly able to identify the frog species due to its large size (approx. 15 cm) to be an Indian bullfrog. This observation with photographic evidence depicts a record of a predatory attempt, where the Common Myna as a prey struggled to escape predation by a large Indian bullfrog. This frog species is a voracious feeder and attacks almost anything that is moving, pounces upon its prey and immediately swallows it. If need be, it uses its anterior limbs to thrust larger food into its mouth. In addition to a great variety of insects, it feeds on mice, shrew, young frogs,


Raju Vyas

earthworms, roundworms, juvenile snakes, and small birds. Vegetable matter and several odd objects have also been found from the contents of its stomach. Lizards like spiny-tailed lizard (*Uromastyx* sp.), common wolf snakes (*Lycodon aulicus*), Brahminy Worm Snake (*Ramphotyphlops braminus*), Thread Snake (*Leptotyphlops* sp.) and young Rat Snake (*Ptyas mucosus*) have also been recorded to be a part of its diet (Khan 1973, Daniel 2002, Rahman *et al*. 2012).

All three observations are noteworthy, especially the observations of lizards preyed by the Common Myna during the months of June-July; this being the breeding season of the species suggests a possibility that the myna might be preying on lizards due to the need for additional nutrition for its hatchlings or chicks. The attempted predation of the Common Myna by the frog shows that this frog attempts to prey even on birds the size of this myna.

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Grey-Bellied Cuckoo *Cacomantis passerinus* in Indroda Nature Park, Gandhinagar

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The Indroda Nature Park (henceforth INP) is situated in Gandhinagar, which is the capital of Gujarat. INP is a well-wooded forest with dense vegetation of trees, shrubs, herbs, climbers, and grasses. The INP is situated on both banks of the Sabarmati River. As a large part of INP is less disturbed, vegetation dependent fauna including insects, reptiles, amphibians, birds and some mammals are regularly seen here. In INP and its surroundings, Asian Koel (*Eudynamys scolopaceus*), Sirkeer Malkoha (*Taccocu leschenaultia*) and Common Hawk Cuckoo (*Hierococcyx varius*) are seen regularly while the monsoon migratory Jacobin Cuckoo (*Clamator jacobinus*) and Eurasian Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*) have also been noted. In July 2018, Grey-bellied Cuckoo (*Cacomantis passerinus*) was recorded from INP, which is uncommon/rare for Gandhinagar.

On 18 July 2018, at 15:15 hrs, in the Botanical Garden of INP, a familiar call of a cuckoo was heard by the first author, and an adult male Grey-bellied Cuckoo was seen perched and calling from the top of a tree. It was continuously calling. It was photographed on 19 July 2018 at the same location, on top a *desi baval* (*Acacia nilotica*), at around 16:00 hrs by the second author. On 23 July 2018 at 11:00 hrs, the bird was busy in foraging and seen feeding on hairy caterpillars. On the same day, another male was observed near the camp site of INP by the second author. On 1 August 2018, at 15:00 hrs, one hepatic female was seen near the campsite of INP on a Neem tree (*Azadirachta indica*). The aerial distance between the two locations is approximately 2-3 kms. At both the locations, the birds were seen till the middle of August and were frequently seen and heard calling. The female was seen only 2-3 times and mostly preferred to perch in the canopy and was seen flying across from one tree to another to catch insects.

The Grey-bellied Cuckoo is shown to be resident in southern Gujarat (Grimmett *et al*. 2011). However, the species is widely distributed in the state, and thought to be a resident in south Gujarat and a monsoon migrant to Gir National Park area; there are isolated records from other parts of Saurashtra and northern Gujarat (Bagada *et al*. 2015). For central Gujarat, there was a recent sighting in early summer from Vasad, Anand (Nagrecha 2018). There are now many records of the species from Saurashtra from areas like Hingolgadh and Rampara (near Rajkot) posted on the website 'eBird'. Though there are many sightings of the Grey-bellied Cuckoo from various districts in the state now, there is paucity of data regarding its occurrence in Gandhinagar. It is interesting that two males and one female were seen in Gandhinagar over a period of almost one month. It is possible that it is an uncommon monsoon migrant in this district. Further sightings will help in understanding its status and distribution here.

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Sighting of Lesser Kestrel *Falco naumanni* in North Gujarat

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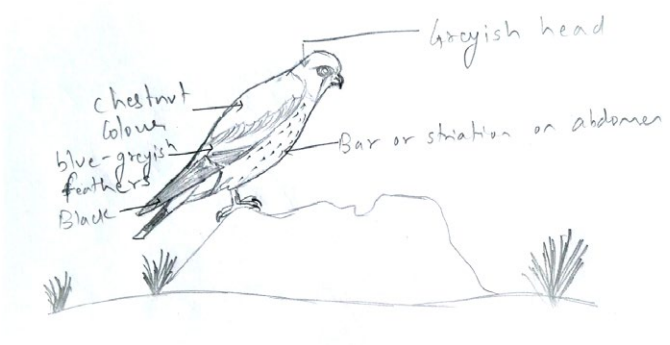

The Lesser Kestrel (*Falco naumanni*) is mainly a passage migrant and winter visitor to the Indian Subcontinent (BirdLife International 2001, Naoroji 2006, Grimmett *et al.* 2011). Though widespread, its status in the region is uncertain owing to very few confirmed specimens and being generally overlooked or mistaken for the Common Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*), with most sightings lacking details and confusion with Common Kestrel being always possible (Naoroji 2006, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Bhatt & Ganpule (2013) compiled sightings of Lesser Kestrel from Gujarat and stated that it is a rare but regular autumn passage migrant here. There have been a few more sightings from Little Rann of Kachchh and Velavadar National Park since 2013, and photos are posted on the 'Oriental Bird Images' website.

The adult male Lesser Kestrel has blue-grey head, uniform chestnut upperparts, blue-grey secondaries and greater upperwing-coverts. In this plumage, it is easier to identify and separate from the Common Kestrel. However, the female and juvenile of Lesser Kestrel are very similar to Common Kestrel but can be separated by its paler, less streaked cheeks, no dark line behind eye, pale (yellowish) claws, wing-tips reaching or almost reach tip of tail when perched (Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001, Naoroji 2006, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012, BirdLife International 2016). We report here the occurrence of the Lesser Kestrel in North Gujarat.

On 19 October 2018, while birding at Aravalli Ranges of Banaskantha district in North Gujarat, we observed a small falcon perched on a rock. Later, on closer observation through binoculars we initially identified it as a Common Kestrel. However, on taking photographs and on closer scrutiny, we could clearly identify it as an adult male Lesser Kestrel since it had a prominent grey head lacking moustachial stripe, plain rufous upperparts, grey greater-coverts, creamy underparts with few spots and wing-tips almost reaching tail tip. The photograph was not very clear, so we sketched the bird in the field. This being a new species to the area, an extensive search was initiated in the following days and the literature as well as 'eBird' data for the area was surveyed. An adult male was again seen perched on a wire in Sabarkantha district on 25 October 2018.

Being a rare passage migrant, the Lesser Kestrel has not been seen earlier or may have been overlooked due to identification difficulties with Common Kestrel in parts of North Gujarat. Bhatt & Ganpule (2013) have shown its presence in Little Rann of Kachchh, Naliya and Velavadar National Park, Bhavnagar, and Ganpule (2016) cited the sightings by Bhatt & Ganpule (2013), and stated that isolated records from elsewhere in the state are known. The occurrence of Lesser Kestrel in North Gujarat has not been reported earlier. Our sightings from North Gujarat are thus new for the region. We request birdwatchers of North Gujarat to report their sightings of Lesser Kestrel for a better understanding of the status and distribution of the species in Gujarat.

Acknowledgements

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Red-necked Falcon *Falco chicquera* and Asian Palm Swift *Cypsiurus balasiensis* – predator and prey together in a Palmyra Palm tree

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Divyesh Ghervda

On 26 February 2019, Raju Karia and I were on routine bird watching near Nyari-I Dam, Rajkot. We observed a pair of Red-necked Falcons (*Falco chicquera*) perched on a *ca*. 50 feet high Palmyra Palm tree (*Borassus flabellifer*) but could not take good photographs as it was very late in the evening. We also observed Asian Palm Swifts (*Cypsiurus balasiensis*) flying around the tree and going in to the tree. I visited the same place on 9 March 2019 with Divyesh Ghervada and Hemanya Radadiya, to get good photographs of the falcons in morning light. I also observed the falcons chasing away a Black-headed Ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*) coming towards the tree. I again noted Asian Palm Swifts going inside and coming out of the Palmyra Palm even though the falcons were present on the tree. I took many photographs and seeing those photographs on a computer after reaching home, I found one nest built in the center of the palm tree, beneath where the falcons were perched.

Afterwards, on 31 March 2019, Divyesh Ghervada called me and sent a photograph showing the adult falcon and 2 or 3 juveniles roosting on the tree near the nest. It was confirmed that the nest was of a Red-necked Falcon and it was breeding in the tree. I visited the place again, with Raju Karia, to see the falcons on 17 April 2019 in the evening. We could not see any bird on the tree but after close observation, we located four birds perched on fencing poles of a farm near the palm tree. One bird had a kill in its feet. We observed that it was the adult pair with two juveniles. They suddenly flew away and started chasing each other in sky. It looked like adult was teaching chasing to the juveniles! The birds then perched on a nearby *Prosopis juliflora*. We went to the site again on the next day in the evening. I observed that the adult bird was flying towards the palm tree, carrying food for juvenile birds. On this day, we went very near the tree and saw two grown juveniles perched on the palm. But, we noted with surprise that the Asian Palm Swifts were also flying around and visiting the tree and carrying out their regular activities.

There are two aspects to these observations which are very interesting:

1) During the course of our visits over two months, we never observed the Red-necked Falcons chasing, attacking, or feeding on the Asian Palm Swifts despite their presence on the nesting tree, very near to the nest of the falcons. Naoroji (2006) noted that this falcon preys on swifts; so swifts are a part of their diet but the author does not specify any specific swift species. A literature search showed that in Africa, the previously conspecific but now treated as a distinct species, the Red-headed Falcon (*Falco ruficollis*), was observed preying on African Palm Swifts (*Cypsiurus parvus*) and a pair was also observed attacking a swarm of swifts (de Baerdemaeker 2018). While I could not ascertain whether the palm tree was used as

only a roosting site or it was a breeding site also for the swifts, it was certain that the swifts continued using the tree despite the presence of the falcons. The relationship between predator and prey in this instance is not understood; was it any kind of symbiosis? What benefit did both these species get from one another? Or was it simply a case of the falcons tolerating the swifts in their neighborhood? Why would the swifts continue to use this tree when their predators were nesting there? I searched on 'Google scholar' extensively but did not find any reference or observation of these two species inhabiting the same tree.

2) The choice Palmyra Palm as a nesting tree by the Red-necked Falcon is unusual. This species does not have any specific tree preference for its nesting and it is regarded as unspecialized in its nesting choice (Naoroji 2011). A nesting of this falcon in a Palmyra in the Union Territory of Puducherry was discovered in January 2016; this was the first report of the Red-necked Falcon nesting in a Palmyra from India (Lekshmi & Boobalan 2018). However, this species has been observed breeding on Palmyra in Bangladesh (Foysal 2015) and the Red-headed Falcon in Africa has been reported breeding on a Palmyra (Osborne 1981). Thus, this is only the second report of the Red-necked Falcon breeding on a Palmyra Palm in India.

Both the above observations are unusual. The breeding biology of the Red-necked Falcon in India has been widely reported in the recent years (Naoroji 2011, Vora *et al*. 2017, Lekshmi & Boobalan 2018) and it has also been seen nesting on electricity pylon (Mori 2018). However, the nesting on a Palmyra and that too with the Asian Palm Swifts in the same tree, is very interesting. I visited this tree again in November 2019 but did not find the falcons or the swifts there. On 25 February 2020, I visited the palm tree with Neel Sureja, Hemanya Radadiya, Raju Karia and Taej Mundkur. We saw the falcon pair in the tree and could observe some part of what seemed to be a new nest. At around 18:00 hrs, we saw some palm swifts, going out and returning back in the same tree. A local farmer had informed Neel that this pair was being seen in this tree for 8 years now. Thus, it seems that the falcon pair is regular in this tree and the palm swifts are also resident in the palm tree. A unique situation where the predator and prey are living in the same tree!

Acknowledgements

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Sarus Crane *Grus antigone* pair successfully fledging a chick at Thol Lake, near Ahmedabad, with help of local farmer community

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The environs of the Thol Lake, near Ahmedabad, have a rich agricultural base that has traditionally sustained waterfowl and other avian populations. From paddies during the monsoon months providing post-harvest fallen grains to resident and incoming wintering birds, to the subsequent wheat crop that too caters adequately to the needs of migrants returning to their breeding grounds, the agro mosaic offers a classic example of how the needs of waterfowl and terrestrial birds are being met in the framework of a larger lake ecosystem. Large, contiguous tracts of paddy cultivation around Thol Lake due to ready availability of rain water from the lake, greatly augmented in the recent years by the Narmada Canal waters, provide suitable nesting habitat for the Sarus Crane (*Grus antogine*). Annual records of three pairs, having carved out distinct territories within the *ca*. 500 acres of cultivation, have been maintained by me over nearly two decades of monitoring.

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Periodic drought conditions, however, alter agricultural patterns and consequently, the nesting of the Sarus Crane. So dependent is this species on paddy cultivation, especially with the virtual obliteration of the region's earlier natural marshes, that drought affects its breeding to a large extent. Given the negligible rains in the 2018 monsoon season and the uncertainty regarding the release of Narmada waters in to the lake for irrigation, the farmers refrained from sowing paddy, thus jeopardizing the nesting of the Sarus Crane. Despite regular surveys, no nesting by the three pairs that have been regularly monitored by me was recorded.

It was in one of these highly fragmented patches of paddies, totaling not more that 10-12 *bighas* and shared between three farmer families, that on 14 October 2018, I received calls (and cell phone photographs) regarding the presence of a pair of Sarus Crane with two chicks! It was surmised from the photographs that the chicks were about 4-5 days old. Neither the local farmers, nor I, could establish where the nesting had actually taken place, but it was assumed that it was the third pair, which traditionally nested in an area some 750 meters to the south, which had these chicks. Initially, this pair with chicks, and that too in a small patch of paddy, was viewed with some concern by the farmers, due to the potential damage to the crop. But judicious discussions persuaded the farmers to ensure that the Sarus family was not disturbed. Close but discreet observation of the area was maintained and although the locals asserted that both chicks were seen till 17-18 October 2018, a more detailed check showed only one chick on 20 October 2018. No attempt was made to enter the area for a more comprehensive assessment of the dead chick as that could stress the parents to move away and thereby, leave the remaining chick in danger.

With active participation of the farmers, a vigil was kept on the two principal predators here, feral dogs and jungle cat. While no direct sighting or attack by the jungle cat was witnessed, possibly due to the nocturnal nature of this

predator, its presence was evident from scat found during surveys of the patch. With the drying up of the paddy fields, closer observations were made of the family – earlier records indicated that while females stayed with the chick throughout, the male tended to wander to feed, especially when prey was scarce in the immediate vicinity of the nesting area. This absence, however brief and always within ear shot of the female's alarm calls, could be detrimental to the chick due to the constant presence of feral dogs in the area. In order to ensure that the adults got adequate feed, *jowar* seeds were strategically scattered in the areas frequented by the family, in a way that the birds could feed on it. We had observed that placing the seeds in a heap attracted wild pigs. Additionally, the farmer with the largest land holding and who also had a bore well that irrigated the entire patch was requested to flood small fallow patches, since past observations had shown that this would inevitably draw the Sarus family in search for invertebrates and amphibians that the flooding normally attracted.

Still, food scarcity in the present patch would only increase and harvesting of paddy would mean loss of the vegetative cover and exposure of the yet vulnerable chick to predators, although the standing *jowar* crop within the area would be of use. Regular scattering of cereals/grains and flooding of small patches was even more useful when the paddy was finally harvested and the patch lay bare. At this time, the chick was still only about a month old, hardly mobile enough to escape predation, requiring the close attendance of the parents and was a long way from the ninety-odd days when a Sarus chick normally takes flight. It was observed that threats during day time were negated with the adults walking the chick into the adjacent *jowar* fields that provided some semblance of cover. Invariably, by dusk, the family would return to the security of a small pond that was not drained by farmers due to its high salinity, which had made it unsuitable for crops.

With paddy harvested during the second week of November, the adult cranes were seen making several movements towards their traditional nesting ground but returned each time to roost in the small pond. With the sowing of the wheat crop by mid-December, the Sarus family was seen feeding on the freshly sown grain. To assuage farmer resentment, scattering of *jowar* seeds was stepped up. This was later supplemented by husked rice grains procured from local farmers. It was presumed that the adults, once the chick fledged by the second week of January 2019, would attempt to either fly into the more familiar surroundings of their earlier nesting territory or fly to the Thol Lake, which has been traditionally used by the Sarus pair, accompanied by the young, for nightly roosts. But, till the second week of March, the family remained in the same area and roosted in the same pond, despite the water shrinking rapidly. It was only by mid-March that the Sarus family was observed in very early hours within Thol Lake and on daylight, flew back to the patch where the chick was raised. By then, the chick had fledged and could fly short distances. Attentive parenting shielded it from constant predation attempts by feral dogs and also from jungle cats, whose recurrent presence was evidenced by repeated sighting of scat. Parental care amongst Sarus Cranes is known to be particularly attentive as indeed it was in this particular case.

Here, the role of the small and marginal farmers in understanding the needs of the adult and young birds should be much commended. Their initial dissent but subsequent willingness to discuss, debate, and accept a certain loss of produce was invaluable in the successful fledging of the chick. With regard to addressing farmers concerns, it was seen that logical reasoning, while tabulating likely crop loss, was important while accommodating the crucial element of farmers seeking redressal for loss of produce. Other livelihood features, like domestic animal rearing and better animal husbandry practices to enhance productivity, were also attempted here.

It can be argued that this one instance cannot become a template for conservation. It can, however, also be asserted that bringing in the farming community, with which the Sarus Crane shares its annual cycle of nesting, into decision making and stakeholder-ship, could be replicated elsewhere. Understanding the nesting ecological requirements of the Sarus Crane, in conjunction with the needs of the farming community, is of critical importance. Scientific knowledge of the species, however crucial, will only be bolstered by the acceptance and involvement of local communities. In this regard, Gujarat can take a lead in the conservation of the Sarus Crane. There is a good population of the Sarus Crane in central Gujarat and adjoining areas. Involving farmers to protect the Sarus Crane, while compensating for any loss in produce which might occur, will definitely help in the conservation of the species. The Forest Department and other NGOs or wildlife conservation bodies can look into this and further develop a model for sustainable conservation of the species.

The one individual who played a central role in this entire exercise, Shri Babuji Thakore, and whose personal contribution was invaluable, passed away on 31 January 2019. This article is a very humble tribute to Shri Babuji Thakore. □

Sighting of the Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug* at Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary

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The Saker Falcon (*Falco cherrug*) is a rare and uncommon winter migrant, mostly to north-western part of the Indian Subcontinent (Naoroji 2006). The Saker Falcon is one of the four species of *Hierofalcons*. It is listed as an 'Endangered' species, as there has been a rapid decline in its numbers over the past many years (BirdLife International 2019). This decline is mainly attributed to habitat loss in its distribution range along with rampant trapping of birds on its wintering grounds for falconry; it is a highly sought after and prized bird. Two races of the Saker Falcon are thought to occur in India, *F. c. cherrug* and *F. c. milvipes*. The distribution of *cherrug* is across central Europe to southwestern Russia, N Kazakhstan to Asia Minor and Iran; it winters in SW Asia. The distribution of *milvipes*, though a bit uncertain, is known to be from C Tien Shan and Altai Mountains to S Transbaikalia, Mongolia and N & C China, and recently in Jammu and Kashmir, N India and these birds winter in the subcontinent in Pakistan, Nepal & probably in semi-arid northwestern India (Ali & Ripley 1978, Orta *et al*. 2019). It is thought that northwestern India is where the wintering ranges of both the races probably overlap (Naoroji 2006).

Historical distribution in Gujarat: Dharmakumarsinhji (1955) wrote quite elaborately about the identification of Saker Falcon, and gave details from his field notes regarding the distribution of the Saker Falcon in Saurashtra. His observations during the mid-1950s were that it was a fairly common winter visitor to the desert tracts of northern Saurashtra, Kachchh & northwestern Gujarat. He made a specific mention of his sightings during that period in Wankaner (near Rajkot) as well as in Bhal grasslands of Bhavnagar and observed that these falcons usually arrived a bit late, towards the end of November or early December, and remained only for a short period during the colder months. These important and interesting observations by him correspond well with the recent sightings in Gujarat.

Sighting at Nal Sarovar: On 3 December 2018, a Monday, I received a call late in the evening around 18:00 hrs from the second author. He informed me of his sighting of a possible juvenile Laggar Flacon (*Falco jugger*) in a farmland at Aniyari Village, about 8 kms from Nal Sarovar. The record image which he sent was not very clear due to the fading evening light and the bird was perched quite high and was far. However, the face and breast markings of the falcon were visible in the image. One usually cannot make a firm conclusion on the identity with record images, especially when differentiating between a Laggar Falcon and Saker Falcon, as both tend to appear quite similar at first glance. After looking at the image thoroughly, I was convinced that this was a Saker Falcon and as more images came in, could convincingly conclude it as one. I requested the second author to keep a close watch on the bird till sunset and zero in on its roosting location, which would give a fair opportunity to photograph the bird the next morning.

After getting a confirmation about the roosting spot, I planned a visit to the location the next day, on 4 December 2018, with the second author and his son Ramzaan. We reached the site early and saw the bird perched at the same spot, where it was seen the previous evening. We made a slow and cautious approach, to get to a good photograph and managed to take some decent photos. The bird perched there till around 09.55 hrs, before taking off. In the following days and thereafter, I made several field visits in the mornings and evenings, till 18 December 2018, to further observe and take notes regarding the behavior of this individual. I also shared my sightings with a couple of senior birders to keep them abreast about this

important sighting. This individual was later identified as a second-year sub-adult female, by senior ornithologist Yoav Perlman from Israel, through the kind help of my friend and field researcher Giovanni Leonardi from Italy. This individual was last seen and photographed on the 14 March 2019 by the second author, and was believed to have returned back to its breeding grounds. It stayed in this area for more than three months, which is a rather long period for this species to stay at one location.

Over the past 10 years, there have been occasional and irregular sightings of this falcon, which have mainly been from the Little Rann of Kachchh and from the Greater Rann of Kachchh (Mori & Shah 2017). There have been other sightings of Saker Falcon in the winter season of 2018-2019 in Gujarat, which included sightings from the Little-, and Greater Rann of Kachchh. This sighting is a first record of this species from Nal Sarovar in the past many years. Also, it is important to note is that the Saker Falcon, which is a winter visitor mainly to the deserts now, was seen wintering throughout the season in a farmland area, close to a bustling village and in an area frequented by humans regularly. It should be noted that there were large numbers of *Calandrella* sp. larks, mostly Greater Short-toed Larks (*Calandrella brachydactyla*), in the surrounding area and their number was estimated to be in thousands (*pers. observation*). It is possible that due to the easy availability of prey, this falcon came and stayed here for the duration of the winter. This sighting of a Saker Falcon from Nal Sarovar is important and suggests that this species is seen outside of its preferred habitat of deserts if there is availability of prey. Similar locations should be scouted for the presence of Saker Falcon, especially in Saurashtra.

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A first confirmed breeding record of Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher *Ceyx erithaca* in Gujarat

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Introduction

The Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher (*Ceyx erithaca*), is also known as the Indian Three-toed Kingfisher. Since the last few years, the Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher has been recorded from multiple sites in Gujarat (Jat 2015, Rathod 2017). It was assumed that the species could be a breeding migrant to the forests of south Gujarat as it was recorded attempting to dig a tunnel near Ahwa, in Dang Forest (Mistri *et al*. 2017) and an individual was recorded in Vansada National Park in October 2018 (Mishra 2018). However, there is no confirmed breeding or nesting record reported from Gujarat. We report here a nest of an Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher from Vansada National Park.

Observations

On 30 June 2019, a pair of Oriental Dwarf Kingfishers was seen in Vansada National Park during a field survey. The pair was

seen digging a burrow in a vertical land cutting (mud bank) about 2.5 mts above the ground. The location was very close to a dirt road. There was a small stream around 30 meters from the nesting site. When seen for the first time, the pair had just started to dig the burrow. Both the male and the female were actively participating in digging the burrow. Within two days, they dug a burrow around 1.5 ft deep (horizontally) in the mud bank. Later on, they were observed to continue digging the burrow for the next few days. During daily observations, we observed the birds twice with kills; once it was a skink and the other time, it was a small frog. They were more active in the early morning and late evening. In the process of digging, they continuously went in and out of the burrow and also perched on a nearby tree. While coming back, they used to have mud on the beak.

The rains were a big problem, as during heavy rain, some portion of mud bank was washed away and the burrow became exposed. On 11 July we decided to check within the burrow with the help of an endoscopic inspection camera.

Devvratsinh Mori

Krunal Trivedi

Table 1: Observations at nest of Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher

Date	Time	Observation(s)
30 June 2019 - 1 July 2019	-	The pair was first seen while making a burrow in the vertical mud bank.
2 July 2019	14:30 hrs	Found inside the burrow, with some dirt in its beak.
3 July 2019	09:30 hrs	Observed the male holding a skink (probably *Eutrophis macularia*) in its beak and perching near the burrow.
3 July 2019	11:22 hrs	Pair seen in a bamboo thicket, on the other side of the road.
4 July 2019	07:30 hrs	One bird seen perching in the bamboo thicket on the other side of the road, holding a frog in its beak. Unfortunately, it was not possible to identify the species of frog as the entire body of the frog was not visible.
4 July 2019	07:42 hrs	Came out of the burrow with dirt in its beak and went in again after an interval of 20-30 seconds. Action repeated several times
5-6 July 2019	-	Heavy rain and no sightings during multiple visits.
7-8 July 2019	-	Sitting on the perch near the burrow
9 July 2019	-	Heavy rain and no sightings during multiple visits.
10 July 2019	-	Seen in the burrow.
11 July 2019	09:16 hrs	Five eggs noted. No bird was there during the visit.
12 July 2019	07:46 hrs	Seen incubating the eggs inside the burrow
13-16 July 2019	-	The nest site was observed only occasionally as we preferred not to disturb the birds. It was raining very frequently.
17 July 2019	-	Seen in the burrow.
18 July 2019	-	Female observed inside the burrow incubating while male was seen in the bamboo thicket on the other side of the road.
20 July 2019	-	No sightings during multiple visits at the nesting site.
28 July 2019		Nest destroyed due to incessant rains washing away the mud bank
29-30 July 2019		Pair last seen near the destroyed nest

Nest details recorded are as follows:

Nest Site: Vansada National Park
Nesting Substrate: Horizontal burrow with larger egg chamber in vertical land cutting (mud bank)
Height above ground: 8 feet
Habitat within immediate surrounding area (*ca*. 50 mts): Water stream, deciduous forest, bamboo thicket
Distance of nest from pathway: 4 meters
Number of eggs: 5
Date on which eggs were laid: 8-11 July 2019
Date of destruction of the nest: 28 July 2019

While inspecting, we discovered that five eggs were present. The eggs were probably laid between 8 July and 11 July. After discovering the eggs, we decreased our visits to the nesting site, as we did not want to disturb the birds. During the occasional visits, we noticed that the male was seen near the nesting site and the female was seen incubating the eggs in the burrow.

This year, the rains were very heavy and it was raining every day. The soil around the burrow, on the land cutting, was getting washed away and on 28 July 2019, due to heavy and continuous rain for the previous three days, the entire mud bank collapsed and the nest got destroyed. The birds were seen around the nest site for two more days but after that, we were not able to find the birds again. The nest details are given here and the observations recorded at the site are given in table.

Discussion

Our observations confirm that the Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher breeds in Gujarat. The breeding season is similar to what has been documented in Chiplun, Maharashtra; the number of eggs is also similar (Palkar *et al*. 2009). The incubation period for this species is around 17-18 days and it is possible that the chicks would have hatched or were on the verge of hatching when the nest was destroyed, as 17 days had passed from the date when the eggs were laid.

Palkar *et al*. (2009) list the difficulties faced by the Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher during breeding and one of the reasons given is that 'the birds excavated the nest in loose land cutting—the earth caved in easily during the onset of heavy rainfall'. This is precisely what was observed here and it appears that the destruction of the nest due to heavy rainfall washing away the mud bank is a problem faced by the species during breeding. The amount of rainfall is also important and affects its breeding. The destruction of the nest was documented here but it is not known to what extent this factor affects its breeding success; Palkar *et al*. (2009) noted that five eggs (out of 24) were destroyed due to collapse of the nest chamber.

Future observations of nesting of the Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher in Gujarat will be useful in understanding the breeding ecology of the species here and would help in understanding reasons for breeding success (or failure) in the state.

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Sighting of Black-throated Thrush *Turdus atrogularis* in Kachchh

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Bharat Kapadi

This sighting of Black-throated Thrush in Gujarat is very important as it has been seen for the first time in Gujarat after more than 100 years! The Black-throated Thrush was given as 'rare' in Kachchh by Stoliczka (1872) while it was listed in Butler (1879) as 'not uncommon' in Sind (Pakistan) and in Kachchh. However, Dr. Salim Ali (1945) did not come across this species during surveys in Kachchh and included this species in the birds of Kachchh on the basis of records by Stoliczka (1872). Thus, this is the first record of this species from Kachchh after independence.

On 20 December 2019, the second author was visiting Kachchh for a birding tour and we were doing bird watching near Chhari-Dhandh Lake, Banni, with other fellow birdwatchers. The first author observed a different looking bird, foraging on the ground, with a flock of Rosy Starlings (*Pastor roseus*) at around 11:30 hrs. The black throat and upper breast, contrasting with white belly, was looking conspicuous in this bird. The first author, being unfamiliar with this bird, thought it could be some morph of Rosy Starling. It was constantly feeding on cattle dung in the area. The second author, who had recently visited the Himalayas, and had prior experience of watching birds there, thought that it was probably a Black-throated Thrush (*Turdus atrogularis*). We took several photos and after referring to the field guide (Grimmett *et al*. 2011), came to the conclusion and confirmed that this individual was a male Black-throated Thrush.

Subsequently, on reading about this sighting in the newspaper and after personal communication with the first author, senior birder Shantibhai Varu and others visited Chhari-Dhandh Lake on 22 December 2019 and saw the Black-throated Thrush foraging in the same area. He added that the bird was foraging alone, near dried cattle dung, and went into dry branches of *Acacia* spread on the ground in the area. So this individual was present in this area after three days, and could have remained there for some time this winter.

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Short Birding Notes

Black-bellied Terns *Sterna acuticauda* near Gandhinagar

On 26 October 2019, we (Rahul Rathore, Mihir Mishra, Rakesh Singh and I) were wandering near Sabarmati River, around Karai Village, Gandhinagar District. Flocks of egrets (*Egretta* sp.), Little Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax niger*), and a few waders were seen along the edge of the water. We saw some River Terns (*Sterna aurantia*) diving to catch fish. We realized that there were at least three species of terns there; River Terns with a deep forked tail, black cap and yellow-orange beaks, Whiskered Terns (*Chlidonias hybrida*), which had a black belly and were much smaller in size with shorter tail and the third species is what caught our eye as it had a black belly with a very deeply forked tail, orange beak and it was smaller in size compared to the River Terns. We referred to field guides and immediately confirmed these terns as Black-bellied Terns (*Sterna acuticauda*). There were 6 individuals there and we took several photographs. The Black-bellied Tern is now rare in our state and there is only one recent record of the species from Bharuch (Andharia 2018). Thus, this is an important sighting of Black-bellied Terns from Gandhinagar District.

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Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia* on Adalaj-Koba Road, near Gandhinagar

On 9 October 2019, early in the morning while I was exploring the area around Ambapur Village, on Koba-Adalaj main road, I saw a small water body near a *gaushala*. I thought it would be a good place for birding and soon saw a few species of warblers like Booted Warbler (*Iduna caligata*), Sykes's Warbler (*Iduna rama*) and Blyth's Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus dumetorum*). After a while, I saw a small bird flying towards a pool of water. As it landed just in front of me, I noted that it was heavily streaked on the back, had a short tail, which seemed to be growing, and was olive-brown in colour. I could not identify it in the field and so took a few pictures and later posted these on 'Ask ID' Facebook page. Many experts confirmed this individual as a Grasshopper Warbler (*Locustella naevia*). There have been many recent records of Grasshopper Warbler in Gujarat but this seems to be a first record for Gandhinagar.

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Lesser Cuckoo *Cuculus poliocephalus* near Bhavnagar

On 6 October 2019, in the evening at around 16:00 hrs, we went for the birding at Malnath Hills, near Bhavnagar. We saw many common birds there and at around 17:15 hrs, we noticed two cuckoos (*Cuculus* sp.) perched on a nearby tree. We observed these birds for a few minutes and took record photographs, and noted that the birds were chasing each other and flew away. After coming home, we studied the photographs and concluded that the photographed bird was a hepatic morph Lesser Cuckoo (*Cuculus poliocephalus*), based on the bright rufous head and nape (which was unmarked), broader dark barring on the underparts and vent, rufous barred upperparts and small size. The Lesser Cuckoo is thought to be a rare passage migrant in Gujarat, with a recent sighting from Mahuva, near Bhavnagar (Bhil 2018). This is another sighting of the species from Bhavnagar and suggests that it could be a rare but regular passage migrant through this region.

Prashant Andharia & Vivek Upadhyaya: Bhavnagar.

Ruddy-breasted Crake *Porzana fusca* near Junagadh

On 20 January 2019, while bird watching in a lake besides Vadla Village, which is approximately 8 kms from Junagadh, I saw and photographed a Ruddy-brested Crake (*Porzana fusca*). It was easily identified by its plumage and the red legs. I could take some good photographs. The area is full of reeds and the habitat is suitable for crakes and other waterbirds. The Ruddy-breasted Crake is widely distributed in central and south Gujarat and records are shown up to Nal Sarovar area by Parasharya *et al*. (2016). There are recent records from Rajkot too (Moteria 2018). Hence, this sighting from Junagadh is not unexpected but this is probably the first confirmed winter sighting from this district.

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Pallid Scops Owl *Otus brucei* in Rajkot

On 18 October 2019, I was on a visit to the outskirts of Rajkot with Neel Sureja, during the night, in search of nocturnal wildlife activity around city. I live in Gandhidham, but was on official work to Rajkot and so thought of exploring areas outside the city, in the night, for birds. On the way from Vagudad to Khirasara *vidi*, we saw a small-sized owl (*Otus* sp.) perched on the fence. Using a torch, I identified it as a Pallid Scops Owl (*Otus brucei*) based on its plumage and took some photographs, which further confirmed the identification. After sometime, it went towards a neem tree and then flew away. The Pallid Scops Owl is a rare or uncommon winter migrant to Gujarat, with many sightings from Saurashtra (Ganpule 2016). It has been noted in Rajkot earlier, but it is generally rare here.

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Unusual feeding behaviour of Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus* in Rajkot

On 20 June 2019, at around 18:30 hrs in the evening, I was with my nephew Harshvardhansinh and we visited the lake outside Pradyumna Park Zoo, Rajkot. We saw a few birds feeding at the edge of the lake and took photographs. After coming home and checking the photos, I was surprised to see that the few Greater Flamingos (*Phoenicopterus roseus*) were feeding on *gathiya*, a deep fried snack made from chickpea flour, which is very commonly fed to birds here. Since this was the first time I had seen this, I shared the photos with Bhavesh Trivedi and others, and confirmed that the flamingos were indeed feeding on this snack. Dr. Bakul Trivedi further confirmed with Dhaval Vargiya that the flamingos feed on this snack in Gujarat. Flamingos are filter feeders, feeding on brine shrimp, small insects, crustaceans and algae. Thus, seeing the flamingos feeding on *gathiya* in Rajkot was quite amazing and also distressing. The effects, if any, of these birds feeding on *gathiya* are not known but this is not their natural food. People should be made aware that *gathiya* is not the natural food of birds and the feeding of *gathiya* to birds should not be encouraged.

Namrataba Jadeja: Rajkot.

Blue-capped Rock Thrush *Monticola cinclorhynchus* near Rajkot

On 8 October 2019, we were birding around Bhootnath, Halanda Village, near Rajkot. At around 09:30 hrs, I saw some bird movement in the bushes from a distance. As I got closer and took photographs, I realised that it was a male Blue-capped Rock Thrush (*Monticola cinclorhynchus*). It perched in the tree for a few seconds and then flew away but we could get a good look and also take some record photographs. This species is an uncommon winter migrant to Gujarat, with sightings from well forested areas of the state; in Saurashtra, it is seen regularly in Gir NP area (Vaghashiya & Bagda 2017). However, this may be one of the first photographic records from Rajkot area as we could not find any earlier record of this species for Rajkot.

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Pacific Golden Plover *Pluvialis fulva* near Surat

On September 2019, a Sunday, we (Gajendra Mandora and I) were on our routine birding near Tena Village, which is one of the hot spots for birders around Surat. On the edge of Tena Lake, we spotted some waders with binoculars. On a closer look, we found some birds with different plumage, which were looking brownish from far. With curiosity, we moved forward towards these birds and found that these were Pacific Golden Plovers (*Pluvialis fulva*). We took some good photographs and saw that these birds were moulting out of breeding plumage. This species is rare around Surat and this was the first time that we had noted the Pacific Golden Plovers here.

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Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* at Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary

On 9 November 2019, we (Sejal Shah Daniel, Tushar Tripathi and I) visited Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary to photograph the Small Pratincole (*Glareola lactea*) and Pacific Golden Plovers (*Pluvialis fulva*), which were seen there. While photographing the Small Pratincole, I observed two Ruddy Turnstones (*Arenaria interpres*) close by. I took a few images of one bird immediately, while the other was searching for food in the green grass. After returning home and while discussing the sighting with my fellow birders, I realized that this species was not so common at Nal Sarovar. In general, the Ruddy Turnstone is a coastal species and there are very few inland records. It was recently seen in Dhari, near Amreli (Joshi 2018). This is another inland sighting of the Ruddy Turnstone for our state.

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Great Bittern *Botaurus stellaris* in Vadodara

On 6 November 2018, we were birding at the Timbi Lake, situated in the outskirts of Vadodara. At around 08:30 hrs in the morning, we were passing by a large bed of reeds and suddenly, our attention was caught by a large heron-like bird flying towards us. As it was coming from the direction of sun we could not identify it at first but when sunlight fell on it, we finally identified it as a Great Bittern (*Botaurus stellaris*). I took a few photographs of it in flight and so re-confirmed the identification. It then landed in a reed bed and it was impossible to see it in the dense reeds. The Great Bittern is a rare winter migrant to Gujarat (Ganpule 2016), with sightings from many parts of the state. This record from Timbi Lake is important and adds to the sightings of this species in Gujarat.

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Flock of Sulphur-bellied Warblers *Phylloscopus griseolus* in Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary

On 21 September 2015, I was in Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary. Near the entrance gate of the sanctuary, I saw and photographed a small flock of Sulphur-bellied Warblers (*Phylloscopus griseolus*) at around 10:00 hrs. A total of five birds were perched and seen feeding nearby each other in trees and scrub, and also on the ground. The identification was confirmed by taking a few photographs and noting the brownish-grey upperparts, yellow supercilium in front of eye and whitish edges to wing feathers. It was surprising to see this species in a flock as mostly, only single individuals are noted. The Sulphur-bellied Warbler is given as a common winter visitor in Saurashtra (Ganpule 2016). This sighting was in September, which is a little early for this winter migrant. Thus, this sighting of Sulphur-bellied Warbler in a flock, and that too in September, is quite surprising.

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Trumpeter Finch *Bucanetes githagineus* near Bhuj, Kachchh

On 9 December 2018, we went for morning birding to a hilly and rocky area on Bhuj - Mundra Road, near Bharapar Village. There, we found a little water pool by the roadside, where we saw a few Striolated Buntings (*Emberiza striolata*) and Grey-necked Buntings (*Emberiza buchanani*). When we were photographing the buntings, a bird came and perched near the buntings. We immediately identified it as a Trumpeter Finch (*Bucanetes githagineus*). We took a few photographs but the Trumpeter Finch got disturbed by a few goats and flew away. We waited for some time but did not see it again. A second visit in the afternoon was unsuccessful. While the Trumpeter Finch is seen in Kachchh, this was a new location in which it was noted. It is uncommon here in Kachchh, but was seen good numbers in the winter of 2018-2019 in Banni.

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Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* in Kachchh

On 26 November 2018, we visited Jakhau Salt Pans, near Naliya, Kachchh. Due to less rain in the monsoon of 2018, most of the lakes and ponds were dry and so water birds were attracted to these salt pans and we saw a good number of birds here. While birding in the area, we saw 35 Common Shelducks (*Tadorna tadorna*) in two flocks. We managed to photograph 27 birds in one frame. It was difficult to locate and count these birds as the area is very large. The birds stayed here till 15 January 2019, after which we could not visit the area. The Common Shelduck is a rare winter migrant to Gujarat, with scattered sightings from Kachchh and other parts of the state (Ganpule 2016). The first author had seen 20 Common Shelducks in *Shervo-Dhand*, in Kachchh, in January 2017. There have been reports of even larger flocks from salt pans in Kachchh (posted on the social media). Thus, these sightings of Common Shelduck are noteworthy as this species is not usually seen in large flocks here.

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Water Rail *Rallus aquaticus* near Junagadh

On 20 January 2019, a Water Rail (*Rallus aquaticus*) was seen and photographed in a lake besides Vadla Village, about 8 kms from Junagadh. All its characteristic features like the long down-curved red bill, olive-brown underparts, black and white barred flanks and pinkish legs were seen and photographed. The Water Rail is winter migrant in Saurashtra and there are records from many districts like Rajkot, Bhavnagar, and Gir-Somnath (Mashru 2018, Patel 2018). However, as far as I am aware, there are no records from Junagadh and this is probably a first photographic record from this area. It is likely that it is overlooked and could be occurring in other similar habitats around Junagadh and needs to be looked out for.

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ABSTRACTS

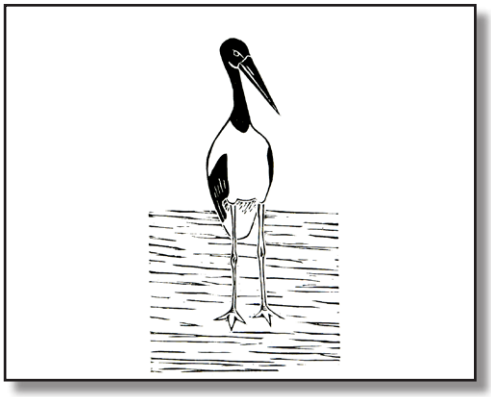
This feature reports articles and papers published in various national and international journals regarding birds in Gujarat.

Little Bittern: 'Probable breeding of Little Bittern at Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary with notes on identification of juveniles' by Rajni Trivedi & B. M. Parasharya. *Indian BIRDS* 15 (1): 17–20.

The authors report probable breeding of the Little Bittern (*Ixobrychus minutus*) at Nal Sarovar, with photographs of two juveniles. The authors speculate, based on plumage of the juveniles (presence of down feathers and mandibular gap), that the juveniles could have been possibly born at this particular site. The authors discuss the identification and separation of juvenile Little Bittern from the similar juvenile Yellow Bittern (*Ixobrychus sinensis*), giving details of key features to look out for. It is stated that the Little Bittern, being nomadic, could be breeding at suitable habitats in Gujarat.

Ringed Bridled Tern: 'Ringed Bridled Tern found at Porbandar, Gujarat in September 2017' by Dhaval Vargiya & Bharat Kanjariya. *Indian BIRDS* 15 (1): 25–26.

The authors report a rescue of a Bridled Tern (*Onychoprion anaethetus*) from Chhaya Rann Wetland, Porbandar. The bird was found in a dehydrated condition and had a ring on its leg. The ringing details were obtained and it was a bird ringed as a chick ringed in Nakhilu Island, Persian Gulf, Iran. This individual was more than six years old when found and the distance from the ringing place to Porbandar was about 1963 kms. The authors state that though the Bridled Tern is found in good numbers off the Gujarat coast, this is only the second record of a ringed Bridled Tern from Gujarat.



Black-necked Stork: 'Does the Black-necked Stork keep a larder?' by Yashodhan Bhatia & Chirag Solanki. *Indian BIRDS* 15 (1): 30–31.

The authors report an interesting observation of the Black-necked Stork (*Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*) on its nest. A female Black-necked Stork was seen early in the morning on its nest on the western side of Khijadiya Bird Sanctuary, near Jamnagar. During observations, in a period of about one and a half hours, the female fed on (swallowed) seven snakes and one unidentified item of prey. It was noted that all these prey items were taken from its nest and the authors state that there is no mention, in reference works, of this species maintaining a larder in its nest for later consumption.

Oriental Honey Buzzard: 'Observations at a nest of the Oriental Honey Buzzard' by Devvratsinh Mori. *Indian BIRDS* 15 (2): 49–52.

The author observed a nest of Oriental Honey Buzzard (*Pernis ptilorhynchus*) near the Narmada Canal at Jesagpura village at Kadi Taluka of Mehsana District. The morphometrics of the nest and the nesting tree are given in detail and the nest was monitored with a motion sensor camera. Two eggs were laid but only once chick survived. Details of inclubation and hatching are given. In 14 days of study, the hatching of the chicks was observed and the surviving chick was fed with different sized pieces of honey comb wax and unidentified bird hatchlings. However, the study ended abruptly as the 9-day old chick was predated by a Bonelli's Eagle (*Aquila fasciata*) and further observations could not be carried out.

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