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**Cover Photo:** 'Spotted Crane' by Dhaval Vargiya

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# Sightings of Slaty-breasted Rail *Gallirallus striatus*, Little Crake *Porzana parva* and Spotted Crake *Porzana porzana* at Mokarsagar Wetland: Additions to the avifauna of Porbandar, with notes on their behaviour

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## Introduction

Rails and crakes, belonging to the family *Rallidae*, are typically skulking birds, more often heard than seen. Their usual habitat is reeds and marshes, and they are difficult to see in the open. In Gujarat, Ganpule (2016) listed six species of *Rallidae*: Slaty-breasted Rail (*Gallirallus striatus*), Water Rail (*Rallus aquaticus*), Baillon's Crake (*Porzana pusilla*), Little Crake (*Porzana parva*), Spotted Crake (*Porzana porzana*) and Ruddy-breasted Crake (*Porzana fusca*). A seventh species, the Slaty-legged Crake (*Rallina eurizonoides*) was later added to the checklist when it was seen and photographed in Dadra & Nagar Haveli near southern Gujarat (Mishra 2017).

Not much is known about the habits of these species and their status and distribution in our state is also not well known. We present here observations of Slaty-breasted Rail, Spotted Crake and Little Crake in Gosabara-Mokarsagar Wetland Complex (hereinafter Mokarsagar), an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA) site of Porbandar, Gujarat.

## Observations

On 8 December 2019, Ashok Mashru, Manoj Finava, Prasad Ganpule and Swadeepsinh Jadeja planned a birding trip to Mokarsagar Wetland, with Bhaskar Thankey and the authors DV and GB. A detailed description of the Mokarsagar Wetland has already been given in Varagiya & Chakraborty (2018) and can be referred to for the habitats in this area. The group visited Mokarsagar in the afternoon of 8 December 2019 and in the morning of 9 and 11 December 2019. We were thrilled to see thousands of large white-headed gulls (*Larus* sp.) at their evening roost on one side of the wetland.

On 9 December 2019, at around 10:00 hrs, DV spotted a skulking bird moving in the reeds. DV and Ashok Mashru photographed the bird in the few seconds before it disappeared in the reeds again. When the next vehicle arrived, Ashok Mashru showed the photo to Prasad Ganpule, who identified the bird as a Slaty-breasted Rail, a lifer for all six birders (**Photo 1**). The bird was identified as an immature, based on its plumage: the crown and neck were rufous-brown, finely streaked with dark brown and the flanks were marked with irregular wavy white bands and spots. The upperparts were olive-brown, with black markings. The bill was pale pinkish or flesh-coloured, with a darker culmen. We waited for

it to reappear and it showed up together with a Spotted Crake (**Photo 2**), and both birds gave quite good views before they moved into the reeds again.



Gaurang Bagda



Dhaval Vargiya

Unlike the Spotted Crake, the Slaty-breasted Rail is vocal in the winter. A sharp whistled note, repeated several times, was heard twice by us once it disappeared in the reeds. We compared this call with the call of the Slaty-breasted Rail and confirmed that it was indeed the call of this species. Both species were seen together by us in this area probably due to their same food and habitat preference.

On 11 December 2019, GB visited Mokarsagar Wetland in the morning with Dr. Narendra Parmar and at the same place,

## Slaty-breasted Rail....

one Slaty-breasted Rail was seen at around 07:15 hrs. We saw it closely and took many photographs, and noted that it was the same bird which was seen two days earlier based on its plumage. After about five minutes, we saw one Spotted Crake at same place along with one Baillon's Crake. We saw a total four Baillon's Crakes at Mokarsagar area in the roadside reeds, probably due to good habitat. We saw one crake which initially looked like a juvenile Baillon's Crake. It was buffish, with whitish face and breast, but with distinct red at base of bill. Based on the red base to bill, we identified it as a Little Crake, but its wings looked shorter and the primary projection was not extending clearly beyond tertials. So, we considered it as a probable immature Little Crake (**Photo 3**). The shorter primary projection could have been due to moulting wings but we were not sure about this.



Caurang Bagda



Caurang Bagda

On 16 December 2019 we visited Mokarsagar Wetland again, but we could not find the Slaty-breasted Rail. However, at the

same place, we saw and photographed one Water Rail and one Spotted Crake feeding together. We saw a total of three Baillon's Crakes. We also found the previously seen probable immature Little Crake at the same spot. Near to that location, we saw a blue-grey plumaged crake, with distinct red at base of bill, longer wings and primaries extending well beyond tertials. After taking some photographs, we confirmed it as a male Little Crake (**Photo 4**). On 22 December 2019, we visited Mokarsagar Wetland and saw two Water Rails, two Spotted Crakes, six Baillon's Crakes and two Little Crakes, including one adult male. We got good photographs of all these birds. These sightings suggested that Mokarsagar Wetland is an ideal habitat for rails and crakes. We also tried to estimate the numbers of these species based on the total counts done by us. The numbers estimated by us were as follows:

Sr. No.	Species	Maximum Count
1	Baillon's Crake	8
2	Little Crake	3
3	Spotted Crake	3
4	Water Rail	5
5	Slaty-breasted Rail	1

## Status in Gujarat

The Slaty-breasted Rail was previously known as Indian Blue-breasted Banded Rail. Ali & Ripley (1974) described it as a widespread resident in India. Ganpule (2016) gave it as rare monsoon migrant to Gujarat, based on recent sightings near Barda Hills, Nal Sarovar and sightings from South Gujarat. The Slaty-breasted Rail affects reedy swamps and mangroves, margins of village tanks, inundated paddy cultivation and similar habitats. It is a monsoon (mid June-October) breeder and is quite a generalized feeder i.e. seeds and shoots of marsh plants, mollusks, crustaceans, grubs, worms, and insects are all in its diet based on availability and need. The elongated toes help it to step over floating vegetation while in search of food. It swims well if required and can also dive when alarmed or threatened (Ali & Ripley 1974).

The Little Crake is a quail-like swamp bird of about 20 cm length. Grimmett *et al.* (2011) described it as a winter visitor & passage migrant to India, with few wintering areas shown in Jammu & Kashmir but with only three isolated records from the mainland. Ali & Ripley (1974) described it as uncommon winter visitor. Ganpule (2016) gave it as a winter vagrant to Gujarat. The Little Crake prefers, chiefly, aquatic insects as food. Due to difficulty in identification (it is very similar to the Baillon's Crake) and skulking nature, it remained elusive and data deficient in India for a quite long time. The species was first photographed for India in December 2017 at Jamnagar,



Gujarat (Trivedi 2018) and later, it has been photographed at several locations in Anand, Kheda, Vadodara (Vadhvana) and Nal Sarovar in Gujarat.

The Spotted Crake is given as a widespread winter visitor to India (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). Ganpule (2016) described it as uncommon to rare winter visitor to Gujarat based on isolated sightings from Rajkot and Ahmedabad Districts. It stays in Gujarat till April. The Spotted Crake affects, mostly but not always, reeds and marshes of irrigation reserves and canals. It also prefers generalized food like the Slaty-breasted Rail. There have been many records of the Spotted Crake in Saurashtra in the past few years.

The Baillon's Crake winters regularly every year in Mokarsagar Wetland, though in a small numbers. It is a widespread winter migrant to Gujarat, with sightings from all regions. But, none of these three species – Slaty-breasted Rail, Little Crake and Spotted Crake – were recorded earlier in any wetland of Porbandar District; only the Baillon's Crake has been recorded from Porbandar earlier (Dhadhal 2005). Hence, these three species are additions to the Porbandar checklist. Further, regarding the Slaty-breasted Rail, except for South Gujarat, this is only the third photographic record of this species from Saurashtra, after a photograph near Barda Hills (on Jamnagar – Barda Road) (Das 2010) and from Dhari (Vagadia 2019).

It is important to note that an immature Slaty-breasted Rail was sighted here. The Slaty-breasted Rail is a monsoon visitor/breeder to Gujarat and all the sightings (n=9) from Bharuch District were from June to September from 2015 to 2018 (Patel 2019). The sighting from Jamnagar was also in June (Das 2010), which is the breeding season of this species. The sighting from Hajira, Surat, was in February 2019 (Joshi 2019) while the recent sighting from Dhari was from November 2018 and this sighting from Porbandar is third such record from the winter months, which suggests that the species may be more widespread than believed. The sightings of immature individuals twice in Saurashtra are interesting; is this species breeding here in suitable habitats? However, there is no data which confirms this but it could be possible and birders need to keep a watch for this species in Saurashtra. Due to its shy, elusive and skulking nature, it is overlooked by birders. Adding to that, the movements and activities of these species are also somewhat ambient temperature dependent; they are mostly seen during the golden hours i.e. approximately two hours after sunrise and before sunset (Bhatt & Patel 2017).

### Notes on behaviour

During our several field trips with birders during December 2019 and January 2020, we spent whole days at the wetland.

One of our objectives was to study the activities of rails and crakes during the day; noting their activity in the afternoon, especially when the sun is overhead, was of special interest for us.

On 22 December 2019, a Spotted Crake was seen at 07:08 hrs. It emerged from the reeds and walked towards a base of *Prosopis juliflora* in the northern direction. The Water Rail was seen at 07:30 hours for 15 minutes. The Baillon's Crake was seen at 08:00 hrs. It was interesting to observe that all these birds used to perch on a stone in shallow water, and they were usually seen preening on the stone after bathing (**Photo 5**). The Little Crake was seen from 08:30 hrs onwards. The Slaty-breasted Rail was spotted in the morning after 08:00 hrs and emerged again at 10:45 hrs for 15 minutes and then it was not seen again on that day. The Spotted Crake was the most active of these species; it was seen feeding, preening and bathing till 13:00 hrs. After that, it remained idle at the base of a *Prosopis* tree, with the Water Rail in the vicinity. The Spotted Crake and Water Rail were seen to be active only after 17:00 hrs, till sunset at around 18:30 hrs.



Photo 5

Dhaval Vargiya

The activity of the Baillon's Crake and the Little Crake was dependent on *Prosopis juliflora* trees (Gujarati name: *Gando Baval*), an invasive species in India and a menace to humans and the ecosystem. Every year, villagers cut down *Prosopis juliflora* trees parallel to the concrete roads of Mokarsagar Wetland, which connect Gosa and Mokar villages. Only trees which create hurdles for vehicles passing on the road are cut down. These cut-down trees are then kept at the same place of its origin, but are strewn in the adjoining water / ponds. The stems of such cut down trees gradually dry out and its

## Slaty-breasted Rail....

leaves fall in the water. This process, along with the presence of marshy areas (with reeds growing in between) creates a niche for aquatic insects, which attracts rails and crakes here (**Photo 6**). Aquatic insects are seen at the bottom and mayflies are seen flying on the top where these cut *Prosopis* are put.



The Baillon's Crake and Little Crake were seen feeding on, or searching for, aquatic insects close to dry *Prosopis* trees and stems (**Photo 7**). It was interesting to observe that all the sightings of Little Crake were from the road sides, at the base of dry and cut *Prosopis* trees. It was noted that Little Crakes were many times accompanied by Clamorous Reed Warbler (*Acrocephalus stentoreus*) on top of *Prosopis* trees, feeding on mayflies trapped in spiders' webs. Such *Prosopis* created micro habitats were seen all along the several kms long road. Dry *Prosopis* trees also provide shade and the shallow water maintains the temperature in these habitats. Due to this combination, crakes were seen feeding on insects in such areas and were noted to remain in such habitats almost throughout the day. In general, it requires a great amount of patience to observe these rails and crakes as these species prefer to remain inside the vegetation/reeds and come out rarely. We need to spend more time with such shy and skulking species of rails and crakes to understand how they behave and how long they stay in our wetlands.

## Conclusion

The sightings of Little Crake, Slaty-breasted Rail and Spotted Crake are new for wetlands of Porbandar and are important sightings for Saurashtra. The habitat in Mokarsagar Wetland is ideal for these birds. It was seen that they are present in this wetland for more than two months in the winter. These sightings confirm that the Mokarsagar Wetland is an important area for wintering rails and crakes as they are seen in good numbers here.

## Acknowledgments

We are thankful to Prasad Ganpule for identifying the Slaty-breasted Rail in the field. We also thank Jugal Patel for sharing the status of Slaty-breasted Rail in South Gujarat. We are grateful to Dr. Maulik Varu, Vikrantsinh Zala and Deepak Patel for sharing their total counts here.

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# Sighting of Orange-breasted Green Pigeon *Treron bicinctus* in Gir-Somnath District: An addition to the avifauna of Gujarat

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Ravi Dave

On 20 January 2014, at about 10:30 hrs, while driving between Sasan – Chitradvad Road (21° 06' 56" N, 70° 31' 43" E), in Gir-Somnath District, I spotted a green pigeon (*Treron* sp.) foraging on a lantana shrub at eye level. I would have ignored this bird if had not been so low and at eye level. With perfect lighting conditions and the chance availability of a camera with me, I was able to take portraits of this pigeon and initially identified it as a Yellow-footed Green Pigeon (*Treron phoenicopterus*). On closer observation, I noticed the pinkish-red feet in this bird but thought it could be an individual in breeding plumage or with some odd features. The thought that it could be another species of green pigeon did not occur to me at that time. This location is a few kilometres from Gir National Park, and is a part of the revenue area. The road is surrounded by agriculture farms, bordered with limestone boulders, which, over a period of time, have got covered with dense vegetation and become a home for many birds.

At first glance, this pigeon resembled the commonly found Yellow-footed Green Pigeon. With the many good photographs that I was able to take, I could easily observe features which were different from the Yellow-footed Green Pigeon; presence of blue-grey nape and yellowish-green crown, yellowish-green underparts and the red feet. The upper tail had central feathers of slaty-grey colour rather than the green colour as normally seen in female of Yellow-footed Green Pigeon. Comparing the photos with field guides, it was identified as a female Orange-breasted Green Pigeon (*Treron bicinctus*). This individual lacked the lilac and orange bands across the breast, which are present in the male and so was identified as a female. No call was heard during my observation and I noted that there were three-four other birds, perched on the adjacent power line, while one female, which was photographed, was foraging on the lantana shrub.

According to Grimmett *et al.* (2011), the Orange-breasted Green Pigeon is a resident in the lower Himalayas, from Uttarakhand, extending to North-east India; it is also resident in the Eastern Ghats, some parts of Central India and in the Western Ghats. Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) show it as a resident in the Himalayas and in large parts of eastern India, Western Ghats and some parts of central India. These authors show an isolated record from Sindh, in Pakistan. However, none of these texts show any record of this species for Gujarat. The Orange-breasted Green Pigeon is not listed in the checklist of birds of Gujarat (Ganpule 2016, 2017) and hence, it is an addition to the avifauna of the state.

This sighting from the Gir National Park area, in the winter, suggests that this species may be nomadic and could be visiting well forested areas, away from its range, in the non-breeding season (winter). The record from Sindh, Pakistan, points to this as it is also a winter record; the author specifically mentioned that the bird in Sindh was not an escapee as the plumage was in perfect condition and the crop contained freshly eaten *peepal* berries (Eates 1938). Similarly, the birds seen here were in a small flock, with one bird feeding on lantana, and were in very good plumage. It is unlikely that these were escapees as the plumage looked very good, it was feeding on a lantana and a group of four birds was present.

It is possible that the Orange-breasted Green Pigeon is overlooked due to its similarity to the Yellow-footed Green Pigeon; the females of both these species are very similar looking. It could occur in the forests of South Gujarat and needs to be looked out for in that area. This species prefers evergreen and moist deciduous forest types; similar to all other green pigeons, it is gregarious, arboreal, and frugivorous (Ali & Ripley 1983). The Orange-breasted Green Pigeon is resident in some parts of Madhya Pradesh and in the Western Ghats; it could visit Gujarat from these areas.

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## Sighting of Indian Swiftlet *Aerodramus unicolor* at Kevdi Campsite, near Surat: a first record for Gujarat

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Pankaj Maheria

On 15 April 2017, it was our first visit to the Kevdi Ecotourism Campsite, in Mandvi Taluka, Surat District. As we were coming from Patan, where the Red-whiskered Bulbul (*Pycnonotus jocosus*) is not seen, we stopped on seeing these birds. We saw several Red-whiskered Bulbuls perched on farm hedges, and we took some photographs. After some time, we also scanned the surrounding area. On the opposite side, a few swift-like (*Apus* sp.) birds were hunting over the farms. The structure and hunting style of these birds was similar to swifts, and so we believed they were Little Swifts (*Apus affinis*). Since the Little Swift is a common and resident bird at Patan (in North Gujarat), we took just a single record photograph and went ahead.

After several months, this photograph was uploaded as a Little Swift on the 'Oriental Bird Images' (OBI) database/website. In March 2020, while looking at photos of Little Swift on the website, Prasad Ganpule identified this bird as an Indian Swiftlet (*Aerodramus unicolor*). The main features were grayish-brown underparts with only slightly paler throat, lack of white rump, tail without any significant indentation, and grayish wings with darker (blackish) wing linings led to its identification as an Indian Swiftlet. The Little Swift has much darker underparts, with a prominent pale rump. Other martins and swallows (*Hirundinidae*) could be excluded based on the

plumage as none of these matched with what was seen here. This identification was then informed to the administrators of the OBI website; this photograph was checked for identification, corrected and was subsequently uploaded as an Indian Swiftlet on the website.

The Indian Swiftlet is a monotypic species, endemic to the Indian Subcontinent (SW India & Sri Lanka) (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). It prefers hills in forested areas, and roosts gregariously, frequently in caves (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). It is resident in Sri Lanka and in the Western Ghats, up to Maharashtra. There are recent records of the Indian Swiftlet on eBird, with photographs, from Tansa Wildlife Sanctuary, in Thane District near Mumbai, Maharashtra; there are other records north of Mumbai on this website. These locations are quite near to Gujarat. Hence, its occurrence in our state is not very surprising. As such, swifts and martins are ignored by birders since it is very difficult to get good photographs and the identification is often quite challenging. In view of this, the Indian Swiftlet, even if present earlier in Gujarat, was likely to be overlooked. This photographic record confirms its occurrence here in Gujarat. The Indian Swiftlet was not included in the Gujarat checklist (Ganpule 2016, 2017). Hence, it is an addition to the avifauna of Gujarat.

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## Sightings of Large Hawk Cuckoo *Hierococcyx sparveroides* near Girnar: an addition to the avifauna of Gujarat

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Anand Vachhani

The first and second authors [GB & AV] visited Laldhori area of Bhavanath, Girnar, near Junagadh, on 10 March 2018. We saw a hawk cuckoo (*Hierococcyx* sp.) in the deep shade of a large tree. It was moving in the area and we followed it and got good photographs. It looked similar to a Common Hawk Cuckoo (*Hierococcyx varius*). After some time, when we saw the photographs of that bird again, we felt that it was somewhat different from a Common Hawk Cuckoo. It was larger sized, had a black chin, was darker and browner on the upperparts and had a slaty-grey head contrasting with brownish-grey mantle. The tail had broader and fewer tail bands than in a Common Hawk Cuckoo and the thin whitish bands on the tail, normally seen in a Common Hawk Cuckoo, were lacking. We identified it as a Large Hawk Cuckoo (*Hierococcyx sparveroides*). All three of us saw another hawk cuckoo in the same area on

3 January 2019. We photographed it and initially identified it as a Common Hawk Cuckoo. But, Prasad Ganpule saw the photographs in our eBird checklist (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S51286618>) and informed us that the bird looked similar to a Large Hawk Cuckoo. After rechecking the photographs, we found that the following features matched with a Large Hawk Cuckoo: we remembered that it was large sized, had dark-brown barring on underparts, a distinct black chin was visible and there was chestnut streaking on throat and breast. We identified it as an adult Large Hawk Cuckoo. The similar Common Hawk Cuckoo has pinkish-rufous on breast, with greyer upperparts and grey-and-rufous bars on belly (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

The Large Hawk Cuckoo breeds in the Himalayas; it winters along the base of the Himalayas and in the Eastern and Western Ghats (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Grimmett *et al.* (2011) give isolated records of the Large Hawk Cuckoo from the Western Ghats in the winter. There are recent winter records of this species from Maharashtra, and a record from Mumbai is also known (Dhaigude *et al.* 2020). Hence, it could occur as a vagrant in Gujarat too and these sightings confirm its occurrence here. Both these sightings can be considered to be in the winter season and would suggest that the Large Hawk Cuckoo may be migrating to suitable habitats outside its known range in the non-breeding season. The challenge is in the identification of the Large Hawk Cuckoo in the field since it is quite similar to the Common Hawk Cuckoo. The identification can be confirmed only with good photographs, which show well all the features. In juvenile plumage, it is extremely similar to the Common Hawk Cuckoo and it might be difficult to identify it conclusively even if seen well. In this respect, a juvenile/immature hawk cuckoo seen in Kachchh in November 2019 by S. N. Varu and others was identified as a probable Large Hawk Cuckoo. However, the upperparts were not visible and the tail pattern could not be ascertained; there were differing opinions from experts and so the identification could not be confirmed.

The Large Hawk Cuckoo is not listed in the recent checklist of the birds of Gujarat (Ganpule 2016, 2017). These sightings from Girnar are thus important and the Large Hawk Cuckoo is an addition to the avifauna of the state. It is suggested that all hawk cuckoos should be properly photographed and

## Large Hawk Cuckoo....

scrutinized, especially in the winter, as there is a possibility that a few birds could turn out to be Large Hawk Cuckoos. Birders should be aware of the occurrence of this species in Gujarat, especially in forests and well wooded areas in the winter, and familiarize themselves with the features of both hawk cuckoos – the Common Hawk Cuckoo and the Large Hawk Cuckoo, for correct identification.

### Acknowledgements

We thank Shri S. N. Varu for sharing the details of the Kachchh sighting. We are thankful to Prasad Ganpule for helping with the identification.

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## Woodchat Shrike *Lanius senator* or Masked Shrike *Lanius nubicus*? Sighting of an unusual shrike in Velavadar National Park

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Pankaj Maheria

We visited Blackbuck National Park, Velavadar, near Bhavanagar, on 23 October 2017. It is the largest roosting ground for harriers (*Circus* sp.) and it is quite well known for their spectacular evening roosting numbers. We observed harriers in large numbers and many other species of birds. While birding in the area, we observed one juvenile shrike (*Lanius* sp.) perched on a tree cage. We initially identified it as an Isabelline Shrike (*Lanius isabellinus*) and the photos were uploaded on the OBI website.

Later, we got an email from Prasad Ganpule regarding the identification of this shrike. He suspected that the images

which were uploaded on the OBI website were either of a juvenile Woodchat Shrike (*Lanius senator*) or a juvenile Masked Shrike (*Lanius nubicus*). We sent high resolution images and a video of the same bird for identification. It was later identified as either a juvenile Woodchat Shrike or a juvenile Masked Shrike by experts but the identification could not be concluded. This sighting also shows that the identification of juvenile shrikes is often very difficult and some birds cannot be conclusively identified even when photos and video is available.



Pankaj Maheria

[A brief description of the individual is as follows: a juvenile shrike, aged by the dark scaling to upperparts. It had creamish underparts,



with scaling on the breast sides and flanks. A large, prominent white primary patch was seen. Whitish scapulars were apparent and the rump was pale. The tail was in moult, brownish in colour and one adult-type tail feather was growing, which was black, with white band on distal end. It had a blackish mask, with barred crown and a fairly strong bill. In the video, it was seen that the tail was flicked up and down.

The common (in Gujarat) Bay-backed Shrike (*Lanius vittatus*) was ruled out since the upperparts looked too greyish, the tail was maybe too dark and the white primary patch too prominent; these features were different from a juvenile Bay-backed Shrike. The prominent white primary patch in juvenile plumage which was seen in this individual is usually shown by Masked Shrike and Woodchat Shrike; this patch is only shown by juvenile Bay-backed Shrike when the wings are in worn plumage. However, identification of juvenile shrikes is quite difficult. To confirm the identification, the photographs and video was sent to Tim Worfolk, who has extensively studies shrikes. He replied (in litt, email dated 7 October 2019) that 'It is looking more like a Woodchat Shrike based on the video; the shape/structure looks better than in photos and it appears to have quite a bit of white at the base of the tail and the upper-tail coverts look pale (should be dark on Masked Shrike). If Woodchat Shrike, then the most likely subspecies to occur is *niloticus*, which is typically much further advanced in moult (more adult like) than this by late October but perhaps, this a particularly late moulting individual? Sorry I cannot be more certain; I really do not think there is enough to make a definite identification given the rarity of both Woodchat Shrike and Masked Shrike in India'.

We also took the opinion of Lars Svensson. He informed (in litt, email dated 7 May 2020) that 'the bird has a rather long and narrow tail, slim bill, much white on edges of outer webs of secondaries and tertials, greyish upperparts without any hint of rufous tinge, prominently white barring on centres of feathers visible on crown and mantle, all leading to the conclusion that it is a juvenile Masked Shrike. So, quite a rare record for India I imagine.

It is interesting to speculate about when it was hatched. To keep the juvenile plumage for almost a year does not seem very likely. But tail-feathers seem quite worn at tips, so it is definitely not hatched this year. Maybe a very late brood last year, but it is aberrant in having inhibited moult for so long as this bird apparently has. Odd'.

Hence, the identification was not conclusive since expert opinion differed. Van Duivendijk (2011) stated that the Masked Shrike 'often holds tail downwards and flicks it up and down' and this behaviour is not shown by the Woodchat Shrike. This up-down tail flicking was seen in this individual. It is possible that the tail was flicked to maintain its balance on the perch but this behaviour is indicative of Masked Shrike. Shirihai & Svensson (2018) stated that

'juvenile Masked is basically a grey-and-white bird (brown element subordinate) whereas Woodchat has obvious rufous and ochre-brown elements, notably on tertials and greater coverts, often also on nape'. This individual did not look distinctly grey-and-white, and it was difficult to judge the plumage tone since the plumage looked worn. Both experts opined that the moult in this bird was delayed and this individual looked quite odd.

Since expert opinion was not conclusive, this record is treated as a Woodchat Shrike/Masked Shrike. Both Masked Shrike and Woodchat Shrikes are vagrants to India and are classified as national rarities (Praveen et al. 2019). The Masked Shrike has been noted in Gujarat earlier from Vyara, in Tapi District, and it was the first record for Gujarat and India (Bharti 2017). The Woodchat Shrike has not been noted in Gujarat and it is not included in the Gujarat checklist (Ganpule 2016, 2017). However, there is a record of the Woodchat Shrike from Maharashtra (Nandgaonkar 2013) and it is the only record of the species for India so far. Thus, this record from Velavadar is important for Gujarat as well as for India. Though this individual could not be conclusively identified, this record shows that both Woodchat Shrike and Masked Shrike could occur here and are possibly overlooked due to identification difficulties. It is advised that birders should look out for odd looking shrikes in September-October, during the passage migration season, when the occurrence of both these vagrant species is possible.

We are extremely grateful to Tim Worfolk and Lars Svensson for helping with the identification of this shrike – Eds]

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## Sighting of White-faced Whistling Duck *Dendrocygna viduata* near Navsari

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Rajendra Desai

On 13 October 2019, I was birding with four fellow birders – Kamlesh Gandhi, Darsh Patel, Deep Desai and Neera Pandya and we visited several water bodies near Navsari. After the initial disappointment of very few sightings, I noticed some strange ducks, with white heads, near Sultanpur. As they were very far, we had to observe them through a scope and we found that there were more than ten similar looking birds. We tried to take photographs but as they were very far, we were not able to take good photographs but could manage to take some record shots. One thing we were sure about was that these birds were new for us and we had not seen them before.

On arriving home, I started searching in the reference guides for birds of the Indian Subcontinent and found no clue about these ducks. Meanwhile, we were informed that these were White-faced Whistling Ducks (*Dendrocygna viduata*), which are found in South America and some parts of Africa. No previous record, in Asia, was found and so we were very surprised to see this species in a group here. We need to investigate if these birds were wild vagrants or some escaped captive birds. My observations of the behaviour of these birds indicated that they could be wild birds and not escapees as they were very far in the water body and moved away from us when they noticed us. The birds slowly moved to the vegetation in the water

and hid themselves. Normally, birds acquainted with human presence do not show this behavior. Opinions from other experts will be of help in determining the origin of these birds.

[A White-faced Whistling Duck was reported from Jamnagar in February 2017 and the photograph taken at that time was widely circulated amongst experts. It was found that the bird was an escapee from a large private collection near Jamnagar and not a wild vagrant. It was further found that there were more than 50 pairs of White-faced Whistling Ducks in the collection and the birds were not kept in cages. It is possible that the birds seen in Navsari were part of the collection and had locally migrated to other parts of the state.

The White-faced Whistling Duck was recently added to Appendix 2 of the India Checklist v3.1 – the records of species added to Appendix 2 are treated as 'of unknown origin' and the species is not added to the main country checklist (Praveen et al. 2019). We feel that this is the correct decision taken by the India Checklist makers at this stage for the White-faced Whistling Duck. We see no reasons to propose any changes for the treatment of White-faced Whistling Duck for Gujarat. We feel it will not be appropriate to accept this into the Gujarat checklist since it is widely known that a private aviary has the species in its collection in Gujarat and hence it is not added to the Gujarat checklist – Eds]

### Acknowledgements

I am thankful to Nikunj Vedak in helping with the identification of this bird through his mobile app.

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## Second update to the Gujarat checklist: March 2020

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This paper is the second update to the Gujarat checklist; the checklist was published in 2016 (Ganpule 2016) and the first update in December 2017 (Ganpule 2017), which took the total number of species documented within the boundaries of the state of Gujarat, along with the adjoining Union Territories of Diu & Daman, and Dadra & Nagar Haveli, to 582. This paper reviews important records, lists the additions to the checklist, discusses taxonomy followed and changes to the taxonomy, and explores the question of adding special categories to the Gujarat checklist.

In the last two years, there have been many additions to the checklist and other interesting records were noted, which are given and discussed in detail here. Interesting records and new additions to the state checklist, since the publication of the first update of the checklist in December 2017 up to 31 March 2020, are discussed in this paper. Two or three of the sightings listed here have not been formally published in birding journals/magazines. However, these sightings have been posted on the social media, Whatsapp groups, websites like 'Oriental Bird Images', 'Birds of Gujarat' and other birding websites. Personal discussions with bird watchers helped in getting additional details for a few of the records discussed and listed in this paper.

### **The records of the following species have been reviewed:**

**Thick-billed Green Pigeon (*Treron curvirostra*):** An injured Thick-billed Green Pigeon was recovered near Mangrol, in Junagadh District, in November 2017 by Mital Moradiya (Moradiya 2018). It had a neck injury and survived for only two weeks. This species is resident in E Himalayas, NE India, Bangladesh and Odisha (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). Though correctly identified, this record from Gujarat is way out of range for this species and it was most likely an escapee. This species has been widely noted in the pet bird trade. Thus, the Thick-billed Green Pigeon is not included in the Gujarat checklist as there are no records of this species from western India and its occurrence here as a wild vagrant is quite unlikely.

**Red-breasted Parakeet (*Psittacula alexandri*):** There have been two recent records of Red-breasted Parakeet from Gujarat; it was first seen and photographed near Surat (Parikh & Patel 2017) and the second record was from Vadodara (Patel *et al.* 2019). In both cases, it was explained by the authors that these individuals were likely to be escapees from the pet trade. It is well known that feral populations of Red-breasted Parakeets are seen in large cities like Mumbai and Chennai, well away from its natural range. However, these sightings

from Gujarat are of single individuals and at present, there is no confirmation of a feral population establishing itself. Hence, this species is not included in the Gujarat checklist.

**Himalayan / Oriental Cuckoo (*Cuculus saturatus / optatus*):** A hepatic cuckoo seen in October 2019 near Mahuva, Bhavnagar, by Batuk Bhil and others, was identified as a probable Himalayan / Oriental Cuckoo (Bhil *et al.* 2020). There is very less data on identification and separation of hepatic Himalayan / Oriental Cuckoo from hepatic Lesser Cuckoo (*C. poliocephalus*) and Eurasian Cuckoo (*C. canorus*) and the criteria for identification are not well understood. In such a case, though expert opinions indicated that the cuckoo seen near Mahuva was a Himalayan / Oriental Cuckoo, it was felt that until there is clarity regarding the identification of Himalayan / Oriental Cuckoo out of its normal range, the species should not be added to the Gujarat checklist. A detailed paper on the identification of Oriental Cuckoo and Eurasian Cuckoo has been recently published in *Dutch Birding*, which will be helpful in the identification of these species (Lehikoinen & Väisänen 2020). In view of this publication, it was decided to wait and re-assess the Mahuva record with more expert help in the future. There are other potential sightings of Himalayan / Oriental Cuckoo from Gujarat (birds of hepatic form in adult plumage, showing barred rump but identified as Eurasian Cuckoo) and it is recommended that all such sightings be collected and analysed in detail. This species is likely to be added in the Gujarat checklist in the future subject to expert opinions but is, at present, not added to the Gujarat checklist.

**White-faced Whistling Duck (*Dendrocygna viduata*):** Two records of White-faced Whistling Duck have been reported from Gujarat so far – one from Jamnagar in February 2017 and one from Navsari in October 2019 (Rajendra Desai, *see elsewhere in this issue*). Upon investigation, it was found that a private collection near Jamnagar has more than 50 pairs in its collection. Both records were considered to be probable escapees from this collection. In the India Checklist v3.1 this species was added to Appendix 2 – treating the records as 'of unknown origin' (Praveen *et al.* 2019A). This species is not added to the Gujarat checklist as these records are likely to be of escapees from this private collection.

**Woodchat Shrike / Masked Shrike (*Lanius senator / Lanius nubicus*):** A juvenile shrike was seen in Velavadar NP in October 2017, which was identified as either a Woodchat Shrike or a Masked Shrike, with expert opinion divided (Pankaj

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Maheria *et al.*, see elsewhere in this issue). Unfortunately, the identification could not be confirmed since the photos / video were considered inconclusive. It should be noted that both these species are vagrants to India, with only once record of each species from the country. While the Masked Shrike has been noted in Gujarat earlier, the Woodchat Shrike has not been documented here so far. This interesting sighting is at present treated as a Woodchat Shrike/Masked Shrike and the Woodchat Shrike is not added to the Gujarat checklist.

### Since the publication of the Gujarat checklist and the first update, the following species have been added:

#### Species added

**583. Bronzed Drongo (*Dicrurus aeneus*):** This species was treated as hypothetical in the Gujarat checklist (Ganpule 2016). This treatment evoked responses from senior birders from South Gujarat and also from other bird watchers here in the state. Sight records were received from Dang forest area and also from Shoolpaneshwar WLS. The species is included in a few trip reports from Vansada NP area, which are available online. The Bronzed Drongo is resident in the Western Ghats, and is seen north of Mumbai, up to the Gujarat border. Senior birder Adesh Shivkar had reported it from Vansada NP and Mukesh Bhatt also mentioned a sight record from this area. Based on discussions with senior birders of the state, it was decided to include this species in the checklist based on sight records by experienced bird watchers. There are no photographic records of the species from Gujarat till date and birders are urged to look for and photograph this species in our state to further confirm its occurrence here.

**584. Namaqua Dove (*Oena capensis*):** A female Namaqua Dove was seen and photographed in December 2017 in Khijadiya Bird Sanctuary, Jamnagar, and was the first record for India (Trivedi & Trivedi 2018, Patel & Raol 2018). There was speculation that this could have been an escapee but detailed analysis was presented in the editor's note, which explained the logic in treating this record as that of a wild vagrant rather than an escapee. Further, as explained in the editor's note, this species has a tendency for colonizing new areas. A detailed article on the range expansion of the Namaqua Dove was recently published in *Dutch Birding*, which listed records from South Asia (including the Gujarat record) as a part of this range expansion (Ławicki 2020). This was accepted to the Gujarat checklist and is also accepted into the India checklist (Praveen *et al.* 2019A).

**585. Black-legged Kittiwake (*Rissa tridactyla*):** An adult Black-legged Kittiwake was seen and photographed in December 2017 in Mandvi area, Kachchh, and is the first record

for Gujarat (Mehta 2018). Earlier records from India were mostly of juvenile / immature birds and this was the first time that an adult was seen here.

**586. Rook (*Corvus frugilegus*):** A Rook was seen and photographed at Velan-Kaj Wetland, in Gir-Somnath District (Dave & Raina 2018). This was the first record of a Rook from Gujarat. This is also the southernmost record of the species for India.

**587. Chestnut Munia (*Lonchura atricapilla*):** A Chestnut Munia was first seen and photographed in a flock of Tricoloured Munia (*L. malacca*) around Tarapur, in Anand District (Bhatt *et al.* 2019). A few individuals with belly colour intermediate between white and chestnut were also seen, and were presumed to be hybrids. The editorial comments given in the note state that till date, there are no records of Chestnut Munia in flocks of Tricoloured Munia and more studies are needed to establish the origins of the birds seen in Gujarat, with conclusions and decisions drawn till then treated as tentative. Till further studies are conducted, the photographic record from Anand District is considered to be the first record for Gujarat. This record can be reassessed in the future based on the findings of DNA studies.

**588. Variable Sunbird (*Cinnyris venustus*):** A first sighting of Variable Sunbird from Jamnagar area was discussed in Ganpule (2017), and the species was not accepted into the Gujarat checklist as it was treated to be 'of unknown origin'. Subsequently, a second sighting of Variable Sunbird was reported from Gir National Park (Devmurari 2018). This individual was different from the earlier one reported from Jamnagar. The editor's note in Devmurari (2018) explained in detail the various aspects of this sighting. This species was added to the Gujarat checklist based on the two sight records, of different individuals, from Gujarat. This inclusion is somewhat contentious, but, based on the two well documented sight records from Gujarat, this seems to be the best course of action till further data is available. The Variable Sunbird is added in Appendix 2 of the India checklist, treating these records as 'of unknown origin' (Praveen *et al.* 2019A).

**589. Swinhoe's Minivet (*Pericrocotus cantonensis*):** Two Swinhoe's Minivets were seen and photographed in Gandhinagar in February 2018 (Theba *et al.* 2018). The identification is discussed in detail in this paper and all the diagnostic features were noted for these two individuals, which separated these birds from the similar Ashy Minivet (*P. divaricatus*) with the help of good photographs taken. This is the first record of Swinhoe's Minivet for Gujarat.



**590. Common Redstart (*Phoenicurus phoenicurus*):** A Common Redstart of the subspecies *samamisticus*, also known as Ehrenberg's Redstart, was seen and photographed in Thol Bird Sanctuary (Bhatt 2018). Though the Common Redstart of the nominate subspecies had been noted in India before, this was a first record of Ehrenberg's Redstart for India. The Common Redstart is an addition to the state checklist. The nominate subspecies of Common Redstart has not been noted in Gujarat yet and only Ehrenberg's Redstart has been documented. This is the first record of Common Redstart for Gujarat.

**591. Eastern Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla tshutschensis*):** A first sighting of a probable Eastern Yellow Wagtail, of the *taivana* subspecies, was reported from Kachchh by Varu (2016). At that time, the occurrence of Eastern Yellow Wagtail in India was uncertain and all records of the species were under review. Later, a detailed paper by Vishwanathan *et al.* (2017) confirmed its occurrence in India; they treated the record by Varu (2016) as a 'potential' Eastern Yellow Wagtail. Another sighting near Rajkot by Radadiya (2018) was identified as a 'putative' Eastern Yellow Wagtail (Radadiya 2018). A recent sighting from Rajkot, again by Hemanya Radadiya, in December 2019, was also identified as a probable Eastern Yellow Wagtail (Hemanya Radadiya, *pers comm.*). The photo from Kachchh by Varu (2016) shows all features of a *taivana* but the slight curving of the yellow supercilium on the ear coverts was thought to be a little odd; there was only one photo available for study. For the individual reported by Radadiya (2018), expert opinion (by Per Alström) indicated it to be a first winter Eastern Yellow Wagtail moulting into summer plumage. The editor's note in Radadiya (2018) explained that this species was added to the Gujarat checklist pending further molecular studies, treating the sightings from Kachchh and Rajkot to be of *taivana* subspecies of Eastern Yellow Wagtail. The sighting by Varu (2016) fits best to a *taivana* and is the main reason for its acceptance in the Gujarat checklist. The other sightings by Radadiya can be considered to be of Eastern Yellow Wagtails but can be confirmed beyond any doubt only by DNA studies. It is recommended that such wagtails in Gujarat be trapped and studied so that the exact status of various taxa in the state can be determined.

**592. Black Noddy (*Anous minutus*):** A Black Noddy was seen and photographed in Porbandar in August 2018 (Jadeja 2018). The photos showed well all the features of the species and the identification was confirmed by experts. The Black Noddy is an addition to the state checklist.

**593. Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*):** A Golden Eagle was reported near Palanpur in December 2018 (Prajapati *et al.* 2018). The bird was well photographed and seen in the same area for almost two months, with many birders visiting the site to see it. This was the first record of a Golden Eagle from Gujarat and is the southernmost record of the species for the country.

**594. Yellow-browed Warbler (*Phylloscopus inornatus*):** The identification of Yellow-browed Warbler is challenging as it can be confused with other *Phylloscopus* sp. warblers, especially Hume's Leaf Warbler (*P. humei*). For Gujarat, there have been claims of Yellow-browed Warbler from Gir NP and from other forest areas of the state. The call of Yellow-browed Warbler is diagnostic and helps in separating it from Hume's Leaf Warbler. Photos of suspected *P. inornatus* from Gujarat were collected and sent to Nils Van Duivendijk, who opined that bare part colouration varies in both species and it is not a reliable feature for identification but instead, a good Yellow-browed Warbler should show a more obvious second wing-bar over the median coverts, more green upperparts, at least some green on the crown, more contrastingly patterned wing as a whole and most importantly, it has a different call (Nils Van Duivendijk, *in litt*, email dated 23 September 2016). A well documented sighting from Shoolpaneshwar WLS by Anand Patel, which was confirmed later by experts, shows a warbler which matches well with a Yellow-browed Warbler, showing a prominent median covert wing bar, greenish mantle, a supercilium with yellow at the end and contrasting wings (Patel 2015). The photo is also uploaded on the OBI website. Though the call was not noted, the photo shows features which match well with a Yellow-browed Warbler and hence, this species is added to the Gujarat checklist. Birders should look out for the Yellow-browed Warbler in the forest areas of Gujarat.

**595. Yellow-breasted Bunting (*Emberiza aureola*):** A Yellow-breasted Bunting was documented, with photographs, from Pariej, near Kheda (Mengar 2019). This was the first record of this species from Gujarat. The Yellow-breasted Bunting is now listed as 'Critically Endangered' and the species has declined all over its range (BirdLife International 2020). This record, from the western part of the Indian Subcontinent, after more than 115 years, is an important record for India.

**596. Lammergeier (*Gypaetus barbatus*):** A juvenile/immature Lammergeier, also known as Bearded Vulture, was photographed in Girnar WLS in January 2019 (Vadher 2019). This was the first confirmed record of Lammergeier for Gujarat. An earlier sighting, from Kachchh, was treated as unconfirmed

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due to lack of photographs or other corroborative evidence (Thakkar 2005, Ganpule 2016). This sighting confirmed the occurrence of Lammergeier in Gujarat.

**597. Great Snipe (*Gallinago media*):** An unusual snipe was seen in Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary in February 2019, which was identified as a female Great Snipe (Kini *et al.* 2019). The identification was widely discussed and some experts expressed concerns that this could be a Pin-tailed Snipe/Swinhoe's Snipe (*G. stenura*/*G. megala*). As explained in the editor's note in Kini *et al.* (2019), the identification was confirmed by experts who had studied the Great Snipe in Scandinavian countries; they conclusively opined that it was a female Great Snipe. Hence, this species was accepted into the Gujarat checklist. This is the first record of a Great Snipe for Gujarat.

**598. Spot-bellied Eagle Owl (*Bubo nipalensis*):** A Spot-bellied Eagle Owl was photographed in Shoolpaneshwar WLS in June 2019 (Kanthariya 2019). This individual was seen in the same area for more than 2 months and was photographed by many birders. This was the first record of the Spot-bellied Eagle Owl for the state.

**599. Lesser Short-toed Lark (*Alaudala rufescens*):** A detailed paper on Sand Lark (*A. raytal*) and its separation from Lesser / Asian Short-toed Lark (*A. cheleensis*) was recently published in *Indian BIRDS* (Ganpule 2019A). A sighting from Kachchh, by Jugal Tiwari, is discussed in detail in this paper and it was treated to be a 'putative' Lesser / Asian Short-toed Lark. This sighting was widely discussed here in Gujarat and a critical re-assessment of the photos confirmed that its features matched more with a Lesser Short-toed Lark than a Sand Lark. For this bird, based on inputs received from senior birders in the state, it was recommended that this sighting be accepted as a Lesser / Asian Short-toed Lark based on the photographs available, and it be included in the Gujarat checklist. It is included in the checklist as a Lesser Short-toed Lark. Here, *A. rufescens* includes *cheleensis* as a subspecies of Lesser Short-toed Lark, with explanation as follows:

The taxonomy in this group is complex and unresolved, with many authorities treating *cheleensis* as a separate species, the Asian Short-toed Lark. Further study is required for this complex and it is likely that there will be a taxonomic revision for this group in the future – it has been suggested that the *A. rufescens* – *A. raytal* complex should be separated into at least four, or even five, separate species (Ghorbani *et al.* 2020). However, until such a revision is formally done, the various forms likely to occur here in Gujarat, like *persica*, *heinei*, *cheleensis* or even *pseudobaetica*, are retained under one species – the Lesser Short-toed Lark. The exact subspecies occurring

in Gujarat is not known but occurrence of *persica*, *heinei* or *cheleensis* is speculated. The Kachchh sighting is treated as a Lesser Short-toed Lark without going into detailed subspecific identification since separation without trapping and DNA analysis is often impossible.

Birders should look out for this species in the state and more documented sightings will help in further confirming its occurrence here. This species has been listed in trip reports of a few foreign birders visiting Gujarat; all such sightings are from Kachchh. However, photographs are not available for study. Details for a few other sightings could not be traced. Hence, it is likely that this species could be occurring but without corroborative evidence, it is not possible to consider these sightings. It is recommended that all Sand Larks be looked at closely, especially in the winter, as the Lesser Short-toed Lark is very similar and good photos are required for identification.

**600. Red Phalarope (*Phalaropus fulicarius*):** A Red Phalarope was seen and photographed in Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary in October 2019 (Alvani *et al.* 2020). The identification was confirmed by the many photos taken and it was an addition to the Gujarat checklist.

**601. Lemon-rumped Warbler (*Phylloscopus chloronotus*):** A *Phylloscopus* warbler, initially identified as a Western Crowned Warbler (*P. occipitalis*), was reported from Ahmedabad in February 2011 and the sighting was published, with photograph, in the Gujarati language birding newsletter 'Vihang' (Trivedi 2012). A re-assessment of the photographs concluded that this individual was a Lemon-rumped Warbler and the identification was confirmed by experts (Rajnikant Trivedi & Devvratsinh Mori, *in print*, information given by Devvratsinh Mori, *pers. comm.*). The Lemon-rumped Warbler was not listed for Gujarat earlier and this is an addition to the avifauna of the state.

**602. Large Hawk Cuckoo (*Hierococcyx sparverioides*):** A hawk cuckoo seen in Kachchh in November 2019 by S. N. Varu and others caused a lot of debate; some of the features of this individual did not match with the Common Hawk Cuckoo (*H. varius*) and it was speculated that it could be a Large Hawk Cuckoo. Expert opinion was divided, with few experts opining that it was a Large Hawk Cuckoo while others suggesting it as a Common Hawk Cuckoo.

There are well documented records of Large Hawk Cuckoo from Girnar, near Junagadh, where adult birds were photographed twice by Dr. Gaurang Bagda and others (Gaurang Bagda *et al.*, *see elsewhere in this issue*). These birds show well all the features of Large Hawk Cuckoo and a



reassessment of the photographs by experts confirmed the identification. Interestingly, the Large Hawk Cuckoo was recently noted in Maharashtra and a record from Mumbai is also given in Dhaigude *et al.* (2019). So, its occurrence here is not surprising. The Large Hawk Cuckoo is thus added to the Gujarat checklist based on the photographic records from Girnar. The other record from Kachchh mentioned here could also be of this species but is, at present, treated as unconfirmed and needs further checking.

**603. Indian Swiftlet (*Aerodramus unicornis*):** An Indian Swiftlet was photographed near Kevdi, Mandvi Taluka, Surat (Pankaj Maheria *et al. see elsewhere in this issue*). The photo shows all the diagnostic features of the Indian Swiftlet and was uploaded on the OBI website. The Indian Swiftlet has been noted north of Mumbai, in Tansa WLS, near to the Gujarat border. The location of Kevdi is not very far from Tansa WLS and this species could be occurring in the forests of southern Gujarat but is probably overlooked. The Indian Swiftlet is an addition to the avifauna of Gujarat.

**604. Orange-breasted Green Pigeon (*Treron bicinctus*):** A group of four green pigeons were seen and photographed near Gir National Park in January 2014. These were initially identified as Yellow-footed Green Pigeons (*T. phoenicopterus*). A subsequent re-examination of the photographs confirmed that these were Orange-breasted Green Pigeons (Ravi Dave, *see elsewhere in this issue*). This species was not listed in the Gujarat checklist and is an addition to the avifauna of the state.

**605. European Honey Buzzard (*Pernis apivorus*):** A juvenile honey buzzard was recovered off coastal Porbandar. Since it was injured, it was treated for a few days and recovered from its injuries. This bird showed all the features of a European Honey Buzzard like five fingered primaries, dark carpal patch, small bill and legs. Morphometric data was collected. Expert opinions confirmed it as a European Honey Buzzard. This was the first confirmed record of European Honey Buzzard for Gujarat and India (Vargiya *et al., Birding ASIA* 33).

**Details for certain vagrant species included in the checklist, which were photographed recently in Gujarat, are given as follows:**

**Little Crane (*Porzana parva*):** This species was included in the checklist based on a sight record from Little Rann of Kachchh (Mallard & Showler 2010). However, there was no photographic or specimen evidence of its occurrence here in Gujarat. In December 2017, a Little Crane was seen and photographed near Ranjitsagar Dam, Jamnagar (Trivedi 2018), which was the first photo of this species from India. Since then, the Little Crane has been recorded in many locations

like Khijadiya in Jamnagar, Anand and Kheda Districts, Nal Sarovar, Porbandar and also in central Gujarat (photos on OBI website). Thus, there remains no doubt that the Little Crane occurs here fairly regularly in suitable habitats and its addition in the Gujarat checklist is further strengthened by these photo documentations.

**White-tailed Eagle (*Haliaeetus albicilla*):** The White-tailed Eagle was included in the Gujarat checklist based on a record from Kachchh (Himmatsinhji 1970). There was no specimen record or photo of this species from Gujarat. A juvenile / immature White-tailed Eagle was seen in Velavadar in January 2018 and this individual was in the same area for almost 3-4 weeks (Bhatt 2018). It was seen by many birders and photographed, thus confirming its occurrence here.

**Fulvous Whistling Duck (*Dendrocygna bicolor*):** In the Gujarat checklist (Ganpule 2016), the Fulvous Whistling Duck was included based on historical records from Kachchh. In April 2019, a pair of Fulvous Whistling Ducks was seen and photographed near Vadodara (Naria *et al.* 2019). This sighting is important and established that this species does still occur in Gujarat and is a vagrant here.

**Baikal Teal (*Anas formosa*):** A male Baikal Teal was seen in February 2018 in Bhavnagar, which was the first photographic record for Gujarat (Mishra 2018). It was seen in the same area for almost one month. It was included in the Gujarat checklist based on two previous records. This sighting from Bhavnagar was an important record of this species for Gujarat.

**Red-necked Stint (*Calidris ruficollis*):** The Red-necked Stint was included in the Gujarat checklist based on a ringing record from Kachchh. A Red-necked Stint in breeding plumage was seen and photographed near Mahuva in May 2019 (Bhil 2019). This sighting further confirmed the occurrence of the species for Gujarat and was the first photographic record for the state.

**Rosy Pipit (*Anthus roseatus*):** Specimens of Rosy Pipit were collected from Bhavnagar in April 1951 (Dharmakumarsinhji 1951) and this was the basis of its inclusion in the Gujarat checklist. A Rosy Pipit was photographed in Kachchh in October 2019 by Jaysukh Parekh 'Suman' (Parekh 2020) and the identification was confirmed based on the photos and video taken. This was the second record and first photographic record of the species for Gujarat.

**Pale Rock Sparrow (*Carpospiza brachydactyla*):** A large flock of Pale Rock Sparrows was seen and photographed in Kachchh in January 2012 by Jugal Tiwari, when it was the first record for Gujarat and India (Tiwari 2012). A small flock, of about 10-12 individuals, was seen in Little Rann of Kachchh in October 2019 and another sighting was noted

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in Rajkot in January 2019 (Ganpule & Karia 2020). These sightings, in October and January, suggest that this species could be occurring here and is probably overlooked due to identification difficulties.

**Large-billed Leaf Warbler (*Phylloscopus magnirostris*):** A Large-billed Leaf Warbler was seen and photographed near Mahuva in October 2019 by Mahendra Bhil (Bhil 2020). This was only the second sighting of this species for Gujarat. An earlier sighting from Little Rann of Kachchh in November 2009 was the reason for the inclusion of this species in the checklist (Ganpule 2016). The present sighting further confirms its occurrence here.

**Black-throated Thrush (*Turdus atrogularis*):** The Black-throated Thrush was included in the Gujarat checklist based on historical records from Kachchh. In December 2019, a male Black-throated Thrush was seen and photographed in Chhari-Dhand, Kachchh (Kapdi & Kulkarni 2020). This was a record of the species in Gujarat after more than 100 years and is an important record for the state.

### Taxonomic notes

BCSG follows taxonomy as per Grimmett *et al.* (2011). Since the publication of this reference, changes have been proposed / incorporated for many species. The India checklist (Praveen *et al.* 2016) initially followed Howard & Moore 4<sup>th</sup> Edition (Dickinson & Remsen 2013; Dickinson & Christidis 2014). In the subsequent taxonomic update to the India checklist (Praveen *et al.* 2018), the authors took a pragmatic approach, wherein for the species lumps/splits for which there is consensus amongst the three major taxonomies – BirdLife International/HBW (currently HBW-BirdLife version 9.1) (BirdLife International 2017), IOC (Gill & Donsker 2017), and eBird/Clements (Clements *et al.* 2017), – changes in species limits were approved provided the above three taxonomies were in consensus.

BCSG has now decided to follow the taxonomy as per the India Checklist v3.0 (Praveen *et al.* 2019B), but with a few changes. The new checklist, with updated taxonomy, is going to be published by BCSG in the near future (Dr. Bakul Trivedi, *pers. comm.*). The taxonomic changes from the India Checklist v3.0 which are being adopted for the Gujarat checklist will be explained in detail in the upcoming checklist.

The additions in the Gujarat checklist when compared to the species documented in the earlier checklists (Ganpule 2016, 2017), due to changes in taxonomy, are given as follows:

**(1) Taimyr Gull (*Larus taimyrensis*):** In a recent article on large white-headed gulls (Ganpule 2019B), the Taimyr Gull

was treated as a distinct species; the Gujarat checklist treated it as a subspecies of Heuglin's Gull (*L. heuglini*). The occurrence of *taimyrensis* – type gulls in Gujarat is beyond any doubt and such gulls have been well documented here. However, the taxonomy is complex and occurrence of Vega Gull (*L. vegae*) – type of gulls in the state has also been speculated. Till such a time the taxonomy becomes stable, it was suggested that the Taimyr Gull be treated as a distinct species. This treatment is different from the India checklist v3.0 and the earlier Gujarat checklist taxonomy. This was widely discussed with senior birders here and the same was accepted for the Gujarat checklist.

**(2) Mongolian Gull (*Larus vegae mongolicus*):** Gulls similar to Mongolian Gulls have been documented 3-4 times in Gujarat and it is thought to be a vagrant here (Ganpule 2019B). The identification of such birds can be confirmed beyond any doubt only by DNA studies but based on the photos available, it can be seen that these individuals matched to Mongolian Gulls, which was confirmed by gull experts. The Mongolian Gull was treated as a subspecies of Caspian Gull (*L. cachinnans*) in the Gujarat checklist. The taxonomy for this gull is followed as per Malling Olsen (2018) and is different from the India Checklist v3.0. It was decided to treat the Mongolian Gull as a subspecies of Vega Gull as this seems to be the preferred treatment as of now.

**(3) Sykes's Short-toed Lark (*Calandrella dukhunensis*):** Also known as the Eastern Short-toed Lark or Mongolian Short-toed Lark, this species was split from Greater Short-toed Lark (*C. brachydactyla*). The Sykes's Short-toed Lark occurs in Gujarat and there are specimen records as well as recent sightings documented with photos – see Ganpule (2018). In the Gujarat checklist, the Sykes's Short-toed Lark was not treated as a separate species and this is an addition due to the recent taxonomic changes.

**The Variable Wheatear (*Oenanthe picata*) complex:** Shirihi & Svensson (2018) split the Variable Wheatear into Blyth's Wheatear (*O. picata*), Gould's Wheatear (*O. capistrata*) and Strickland's Wheatear (*O. opistholeuca*); this treatment was suggested as the best solution for this complex till further DNA studies are carried out in the areas where these forms breed and more data is available. In the Gujarat checklist, the Variable Wheatear was treated as single species but it should be noted that *picata*, *capistrata* and *opistholeuca* occur here as winter migrants. After discussions with senior birders here, it was decided that this split should be accepted – the checklist will now have, in addition to Blyth's Wheatear, two more species from this complex:



**(4) Gould's Wheatear (*O. capistrata*):** This is seen in Kachchh, Saurashtra and surrounding areas. The exact distribution in Gujarat is not well known but birders should look for this in suitable habitats to know its distribution range here. It occurs here regularly, in arid areas, and should be documented, preferably with photos, to know its distribution here.

**(5) Strickland's Wheatear (*O. opistholeuca*):** This is somewhat uncommon / rare and there are not too many records of it in Gujarat. The Strickland's Wheatear has been documented in Kachchh, Saurashtra and N Gujarat, but nowhere is it common. More sightings will help in knowing its status and distribution in the state.

It should be noted that other authorities have not accepted this split and treat these as morphs. While it is radical to accept this split, only future studies in its breeding areas will clarify the taxonomy. Till such studies are done, we accept this split into three species. This can be reassessed in the future after results of DNA studies are published.

Though BCSG has decided to adopt the taxonomy as per the India Checklist v3.0, there has been a recent taxonomic revision for the India Checklist; the new India checklist v4.0 follows taxonomy and nomenclature as per eBird/Clements and IOC (Praveen *et al.* 2020). Changes in species limits (either splits or lumps) will be adopted only if both the taxonomies (eBird/Clements and IOC) accept the splits/lumps consistently for all the subspecies of the parent taxon occurring in South Asia. Independent review of emerging taxonomic literature will also be considered if warranted. This approach has resulted in some changes from the India Checklist v3.0. However, at this stage, BCSG has decided to follow the taxonomy mainly as per the India Checklist v3.0. Whether to adopt this change for the Gujarat checklist, and follow the revised India Checklist with its updated taxonomy, can be decided in the future. There is also another major initiative in the works; the IOU has formed a working group on avian checklists, which will produce and maintain an open access global checklist of the birds of the world. It is intended to serve as a benchmark for all avian taxa. This resource, when available, will be a landmark in avian checklists. This development will also be closely watched and can be used as a reference in the future.

#### **The issue of having special categories in the Gujarat Checklist**

One of the much discussed aspects of the Gujarat checklist is the lack of categories to keep birds of unknown origin, escapees from captivity or human assisted / ship assisted birds in a separate list, which does not form a part of the

main checklist. Many state or country lists classify species as per such categories. For example, the British Ornithologists' Union Records Committee (BOURC) has species categories A, B, C & D wherein each species is assigned to a category, depending on the criteria for its admission to the British List; only those species in categories A, B & C form the main British List. The India Checklist, from 2019 onwards, has Appendix 1 and Appendix 2, wherein Appendix 1 lists the species that have occurred in the country by virtue of human assistance and Appendix 2 lists species for which the origins are unknown. The species listed in Appendix 1 & 2 are kept outside the main India checklist.

The Gujarat checklist, at present, does not have special categories. A species is either added to the main checklist or rejected. For example, White-faced Whistling Duck has not been added to the Gujarat checklist while Variable Sunbird was included in the list, with reasons and explanations given as to why this decision was taken. Similarly, the Thick-billed Green Pigeon was not accepted to the list. Though decisions taken for all accepted or rejected species are logically explained, some species can be put in special categories in the list so that checklist users know about such species and their records in the state. Categories can be added to the Gujarat checklist in the future, which will be helpful for a few species for which there is inadequate information, which are suspected to have arrived by human assistance or are of unknown origin. This is something which is being seriously considered and could be done in the next update or when the entire checklist is again reviewed taxonomically in the future. The decision on whether to add categories to the checklist will be taken keeping in mind all the pros and cons of such a move.

The decisions for inclusion or exclusion of a species in the checklist are often controversial, with dissenting views expressed by experts. Many such examples are there where there is no unanimity. But, this is to be expected since it is often impossible to be sure whether a record is of a genuine vagrant or is ship assisted / human assisted or of an escapee and any decision taken in such cases is always open to questions. Though the decisions for inclusion or exclusion of a species for the Gujarat checklist have been logically explained for each species, these decisions may not be acceptable to all. But, they were taken based on informal discussions with senior birders and majority opinion was considered. Hence, while the India Checklist v3.0 has been taken as a base for taxonomy and nomenclature, records / sightings for a few species have been assessed critically at the state level and taxonomy has been looked at independently, by referring to literature published

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in various national and international journals and global checklists. This has ensured that there is no inflexibility (which is seen when following only one source or reference) for the checklist.

## Discussion

The number of species documented in Gujarat, along with the Union Territories of Daman & Diu and Dadra & Nagar Haveli, with updated taxonomy (mainly following India Checklist v3.0 but with few changes) is now **609**. In the earlier Gujarat checklist (Ganpule 2016), the Black-eared Kite (*Milvus migrans lineatus*) was assigned a separate number, while in the forthcoming new and updated checklist, it is listed under Black Kite (*M. migrans*). With the addition of 5 species due to changes in taxonomy and deletion of one species from the earlier list, the total number of species for the state comes to 609 [605 (as per details here) – 1 (removal of Black-eared Kite) + 5 (species added due to taxonomic changes and listed here) = 609], which is the same as per the new and updated checklist for the birds of Gujarat. Thus, this update brings the list of species documented in the state, till 31 March 2020, in line with the new, to be published, Gujarat checklist. Some of the splits accepted in the Gujarat checklist can be considered as bold and forward looking but it is always possible that these may be endorsed by future research or these can be reviewed in the future.

Since the taxonomy will now be updated and followed mainly as per the India checklist v3.0, but with few changes, it is hoped that this will bring the Gujarat checklist in agreement with the latest taxonomic developments. As with any state/regional checklist, the taxonomy needs to be updated periodically to keep the checklist in line with the latest taxonomic changes. It can be seen that since the publication of the first update to the Gujarat checklist in December 2017, there have been many additions as well as interesting records documented in the state and taxonomy for a few species has been revised.

The bird watching community in Gujarat is growing and birders are out in the field in all seasons, helping add new records and documenting important sightings with photographs. But, there is still very less data on pelagic birds. Gujarat, with its long coastline, can become one of the hot spots for pelagic birding and this can also be developed as an income generating activity for fishermen. Towards this, NGO's and the Forest Dept. can take active interest and develop a network which can be beneficial for both, the birders as well as fishermen, and this can generate data on pelagic species occurring off the Gujarat coast, which could add new species to the state checklist. The Gujarat coastline is not a well birded

area and more pelagic trips are needed to get an idea regarding the species occurring here.

As stated in the first update, checklists are dynamic and need to be reviewed periodically. It can be seen that there is potential for adding the Himalayan / Oriental Cuckoo to the state checklist after the record is properly reviewed by experts. In the next few years, it is hoped that the birding community in the state will keep on growing, which will help in getting more birders with cameras out in the field. This will result in getting more data and interesting records from the state. The next update will again aim to cover all such new and interesting records.

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## Sighting of Little Bittern *Ixobrychus minutus* in Little Rann of Kachchh

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Vipul Ramanuj

In the Indian Subcontinent, the Little Bittern (*Ixobrychus minutus*) is known to be a resident but breeding only in Sindh, NWFP, Gilgit, Kashmir and Baluchistan; it is widely recorded as a passage / winter migrant elsewhere in India and Pakistan (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). In India, there are isolated sightings from the northern states like Rajasthan, Delhi, Punjab, Uttaranchal, and Uttar Pradesh; the records from the south-western states are from Maharashtra, Karnataka, and Kerala (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). While none of the field guides show records of the species from Gujarat, there many published records in the past few years (Bhatt 2003; Trivedi 2015; Bendre 2017; Sudhir 2017; Magiawala 2018). There is also a record of

probable breeding of Little Bittern at Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary (Trivedi & Parasharya 2019). Recently, there was a sighting in Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary in October 2019, where an adult male was seen over three weeks and widely reported (photos on 'eBird' and OBI website).

On 16 November 2019 I was on a birding tour with Swayam Thakkar, Shreyas Bharadwaj, Desigan AGV and Santosh Mulik at the Little Rann of Kachchh. Inside the Rann (23° 15' N, 71° 35' E), about 16 kms from Kharaghoda, on the vast open mudflat, I saw a bird but could not identify it given the oddity of its structure when seen from afar and the location. Upon a closer inspection, we identified it as a juvenile Little Bittern based on the following features: a small-sized bittern with medium-length bill, black on forehead, crown, and nape prominent; dark brown stripes on ventral side of the neck, dark upperparts (including tertials) with pale whitish edges, pale wing coverts and heavily streaked dark underparts.

In juvenile plumage, both Little Bittern and Yellow Bittern (*Ixobrychus sinensis*) can be quite similar and identification is challenging. The contrast between the dark back and pale wing panel as well as the prominently dark nape and crown are said to be important for identification; further, the heavily streaked brownish underparts, shorter bill and the field observation of

the relatively smaller size are important features which helped in the identification of this bird. We sent the images to Dr. B. M. Parasharya, who confirmed that it was a juvenile Little Bittern.

This bird was found roosting on the flat open ground. It is important to note that this behaviour is unusual as the habitat of Little Bittern comprises of reed beds and dense vegetation around water. It is possible that this individual, probably on migration, was disoriented due to the cyclonic effects of the Maha Cyclone near the Gujarat coast during the week. The sighting of Little Bittern inside the Rann is quite odd as previous records from Gujarat are not from desert areas, and are instead around wetlands / in reed beds. This is probably the first sighting of the species from the Little Rann of Kachchh and hence it is noteworthy.

### Acknowledgements

I thank Dr. B. M. Parasharya for his inputs in the identification of this bird.

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## Morphometrics of Crab Plover *Dromas ardeola* in the Gulf of Kachchh

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During two wader surveys in the Gulf of Kachchh in October 1996 and April 1997, a total of four Crab Plovers (*Dromas ardeola*) were opportunistically trapped in mist nets. Three birds were trapped and processed on 14 October 1996 and one bird on 7 April 1997 at Vadinar, in Dwarka District.

Measurements were obtained using standard techniques. Wing-lengths were measured to the nearest whole mm, bill and tarsus to the nearest 0.1 mm and weight to the nearest gram. Bills were measured from feathers. The birds were aged and measured. Prater *et al.* (1977) was followed for ageing the birds. All the birds were found to be adults.

### Results

Measurements (biometrics) of bill and tarsus (Table 1) were within the range of measurements given by other authors

(Ali & Ripley 1980, Hayman *et al.* 1986) while measurements of wings were at the upper end of the range given in these references.

Weight ranged between 305-325 gms and averaged 315.25 gms. This is higher than what was observed by Ali & Ripley (1980).

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**Table 1: Morphometrics of Crab Plovers in Gulf of Kachchh**

No	Date	Wing	Bill	Tarsus	Weight
1	October 1996	230 mm	62 mm	97 mm	315 gms
2	October 1996	223 mm	54 mm	92 mm	325 gms
3	October 1996	-	50 mm	92 mm	305 gms
4	April 1997	225 mm	57 mm	95 mm	316 gms

**Table 2: Morphometrics of Crab Plovers published in reference works**

Wing	Bill (from feathers)	Bill (from skull)	Tarsus	Tail	Reference
♂♂ 202-225 mm	51-61mm	60-70mm	88-100 mm	64-76 mm	Ali & Ripley 1980
♀♀ 201-216 mm	54-56mm	62-66mm			
200-226 mm	41-64mm		84-102 mm	62-70 mm	Hayman <i>et al.</i> 1986
Weight 6 ♂♀ (autumn/winter) 230-300 (average 265.1) gms – BNHS					



## Besra *Accipiter virgatus* in Girnar, near Junagadh

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Naman Doshi

On 19 June 2019, I was bird watching at my regular place in Bhavnath, Girnar, near Junagadh. At around 09:15 hrs, I heard a call of a bird in flight. The call was loud in beginning, followed by rapidly repeated *tchew-tchew-tchew*. I had never heard this call before and knew this was something different. Though the bird was not visible, other small birds such as Red-wattled Lapwings (*Vanellus indicus*), Jungle Babblers (*Turdoides striata*) and Red-vented Bulbuls (*Pycnonotus cafer*) were alarmed. Thus, I assumed it to be a raptor and the closest bird I could think of was that it was some *Accipiter* species. So I started hearing calls of all possible *Accipiters* on my mobile phone and confirmed that the call was matching to the call of a Besra (*Accipiter virgatus*). At around 09:35 hrs, I again heard the same call and started looking for the bird and it appeared, flying from the back of a small hill, coming closer, and I was able to take some photographs for identification. After coming home, I shared the photographs and the call recordings with Nirav Bhatt and Viral Joshi, and they confirmed that it was a Besra. In the photographs I managed to take, the compact structure, tail with broad tail bands and the underpart streaking were all similar to what is seen in Besra. The loud *ki-weeer* in the beginning followed by rapidly repeated *tchew-tchew-tchew* is a call which Besra makes while displaying. This indicates possibility of the presence of more than one individual in that locality.

The habitat in which I found this bird consisted mainly of teak trees, with a small lake in the center which holds water throughout the year, except in the last weeks of summer. The bird was seen calling in flight, and it tried to perch on one of the top branches of a *Nilgiri* tree, but could not do so as it was immediately mobbed by Jungle Crows (*Corvus macrorhynchos*). One more observation I made was that though other birds were alarmed in the beginning when the Besra flew by, there was no other instance when the birds were alarmed on seeing it. They were alarmed twice when there was a Shikra (*Accipiter badius*) in flight in the area. This is just an assumption but maybe, the surrounding birds did not consider the Besra as a serious threat.

For Gujarat, there are records of Besra from forests of Polo, Shoolpaneshwar WLS and Vansada NP (Khadakkar *et al.* 2016, Patel 2017). A Besra was recently seen and photographed in the Barda Hills, near Porbandar (Vikrantsinh Zala, photos/video posted on Facebook). There is a record of a Besra in Girnar, in 2006, in Bordevi area (Dr. Maulik Varu, *pers comm.*). This is one of the few well documented sightings of Besra from Saurashtra.

### Acknowledgements

I thank Nirav Bhatt and Viral Joshi for their valuable inputs and for confirming the identification. I also thank Dr. Maulik Varu for sharing his sighting of Besra from Girnar.

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## Photographic record of the Indian Cuckoo *Cuculus micropterus* from Dahod and a review of its past records from Gujarat

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Rajni Trivedi

During my trip to Dahod and surrounding areas in first week of September 2010, I had photographed a cuckoo (*Cuculus* sp.) on 6 September 2010 in the outskirts of Dahod city (22° 50' N, 74° 15' E). Recently, while reviewing my old images, I realized that the cuckoo in this image was a little different from the fairly common Eurasian Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*) which is usually seen here. Though similar in size, it had a prominent, broad terminal tail band and broad black horizontal bars on breast. Moreover, its grey head was looking distinct from its body colour. I could identify it as an Indian Cuckoo (*Cuculus micropterus*). To confirm my identification, this image was sent to Krys Kazmierczak. Agreeing with my identification of this bird as an Indian Cuckoo, Krys wrote that 'in addition to the tail pattern, the broad dark bars on the underparts as well as the grey of the head contrasting with the brown upperparts are indicative. It appears to be an adult male.'

I looked at the published records of the species from Gujarat and found that its presence in Gujarat is poorly documented. Ali (1954) had not come across the species in Gujarat. However, Shull (1962a & 1962b) had collected specimens from Dang forest in south Gujarat (specimen skin 778636 in American Museum of Natural History). Monga & Naoroji (1983) also recorded it from Rajpipla forest, adjacent to

Narmada River. There exists a vernacular name for the species – ભારતીય કુકુકા ('Bharatiya Kuhukanth'). Parasharya *et al.* (2004) listed it as a migratory species in the Gujarat checklist.

Till 2004, it was known to occur in south Gujarat, up to the Narmada River (Joshi & Jat 2004). After that, there were two dubious records from central Gujarat. Jain *et al.* (2005) listed it from the Gujarat University campus, Ahmedabad, and Iyer (2005) from Thol Bird Sanctuary. The record by Jain *et al.* (2005) is quite doubtful as they had failed to record the much common, resident and widespread Common Hawk Cuckoo (*Hierococcyx varius*) but listed a rare and range restricted species as common and resident, which itself suggests that the record of Indian Cuckoo was a case of mistaken identity. Besides listing Indian Cuckoo, Iyer (2005) had also listed Common Cuckoo and Common Hawk Cuckoo from the Thol Bird Sanctuary, indicating his awareness about the differences of the characters amongst the species. Unless there is photographic evidence, it is quite difficult to distinguish Indian Cuckoo from Common Cuckoo and Common Hawk Cuckoo. However, if call is heard, then the identification is easier. Neither Jain *et al.* (2005) nor Iyer (2005) have given photographic evidence to support their identification. Iyer (2005) does not give further details of the sighting and it is not known how the identification was made. Probably, only for these two unconfirmed records, Ganpule (2016) had to show its distribution in central Gujarat too.

In the recent past also, there are records of the species from south Gujarat – south of Narmada River (Joshi & Jat 2004, Mashru 2004, Mishra 2016) but except Mishra (2016), none have supported their records with photographic evidence. Hence, the present photograph of a male Indian Cuckoo from Dahod is an important record for the state.

Ali & Ripley (2001) opined that the Indian Cuckoo did not occur in the arid regions of Pakistan, Rajasthan, Kachchh, Saurashtra and N Gujarat. However, in the distribution map given in the same book, its range is shown in south Gujarat, Saurashtra and central Gujarat. In fact, till 2001 (the publication date of the revised edition of the handbook), the Indian Cuckoo was not reported from central Gujarat or Saurashtra region! Hence, the distribution map seems incorrect.

The Indian Cuckoo occurs through the Himalayas to Assam, NE Peninsula and Central India. Within Central India, its distribution is shown along Narmada River in Madhya Pradesh

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and Gujarat (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). As the species is known to wander up to Pakistan (Roberts 1989, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), the present record of the species ca. 200 kms north of the Narmada River is not surprising. If it can turn up in Pakistan, it may turn up any where in Gujarat, but, we need to have proper documentary proof of its occurrence in the arid regions of the state.

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## Nesting of Purple Heron *Ardea purpurea* in a small water body near Gandhinagar

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The present observations started with the random photo of a Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*) I took almost five years ago, when I saw a pair in a small water body. This location was near Uvarsad, Gandhinagar, when I was returning from my village on the way from Ahmedabad to Gandhinagar. This lake is very small in size (about 50×150 mts) and is located near Uvarsad Village Road, which is very crowded and there is a constant traffic of small and heavy vehicles. I used to visit my village every month and as I am passionate about nature and birds, I observed the habitat here. This small lake has been

overlooked and is not known to many birders. Breeding and nesting of Purple Heron was observed in the rainy season at this particular site. A single nest was observed at this location for the past five years in a large heronry.

Many *Acacia* trees and few tiny 'bets' (small islands in the lake) are present in this lake. Along with the nest of the Purple Heron, nesting of many other heronry birds was observed on trees in this lake. The nesting of Black-headed Ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*), Red-naped Ibis (*Pseudibid papillosa*), Indian Pond Heron (*Ardeola grayii*), Black-crowned Night Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*), Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*), and Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) was observed at this site. In the midst of this heronry, a single nest of Purple heron was seen on an *Acacia* tree. This nest was the only nest of this species observed in the almost 350-400 other nests in the same lake. Both birds were involved in building the nest and the male actively participated in collection of nesting material whereas the female built and shaped the nest. I visited this site regularly and I observed the incubation period and egg hatching. An incubation period of around 25-30 days was observed. On 15 August 2017, I observed three juveniles in the nest and nesting was successful that year with the juveniles fledging. On 14 July

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2019, the nest was located in an *Acacia*, and was surrounded by nests of Indian Pond Herons. The actual distance of the nest from road was about 25 mts. More than 20 other heron nests were seen in the immediate vicinity of this nest.

The Purple Heron is a common resident and quite widespread in Gujarat (Ganpule 2016). It is frequently seen in suitable habitats in the state in good numbers. It is surprising that this heronry consistently contained only one nest of the Purple Heron for the 5 years I observed it since this species is fairly well distributed all over the state. The Purple Heron is known to nest colonially, usually in small loose groups but large colonies have been observed (Martínez-Vilalta *et al.* 2020). It is known to nest along with other species of herons and egrets. Hence, the nesting here in a colony where other heronry species were present is not surprising but the observation of only one nest in this nesting colony over 5 years is odd. It is obvious that this area has a good heronry with lots of nests of other birds. Also,

the Purple Heron, being widespread, is resident in and around this area. So, it is a mystery as to why this species does not nest in more numbers here. Another interesting and unanswered question is whether the same pair nested in this area over the past five years? If yes, then it would suggest nest site fidelity in the Purple Heron. However, without tagging the birds, it would not be possible to confirm this. This location has a good heronry with many species nesting here even though it is a crowded area with vehicular traffic. This site needs to be monitored in the monsoon season regularly.

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## An unusual incident of a Brown Fish Owl *Ketupa zeylonensis* predated by an Indian Python

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of water in the tank during the summer months, we often see good bird life and other wildlife near the tank. We had regularly seen a pair of Brown Fish Owl (*Ketupa zeylonensis*) in the area as it usually nests here and is seen around streams, rivers and water tanks. The Brown Fish Owl is resident in and around Gir National Park.

On reaching there, we heard a fluttering sound and quickly rushed towards it and saw that a bird was drowning in the water tank. At first, it seemed like the bird was injured and had probably fallen down from the tree. On a closer look, we realized that the predator had become prey! A Brown Fish Owl was caught by an Indian Python (*Python molurus*). I did not have a DSLR camera but took a few pictures with my mobile phone.

The python was totally camouflaged with the dry leaves which had fallen from the tree. For a moment, I thought about helping the bird as it was still alive when we reached there. But, I decided against interfering in this predator-prey interaction and so I did not disturb the python. Instead, we saw the entire event for about one-and-a-half hours. The python gradually constricted the bird to death. Every time the owl exhaled, the python tightened its grip on the bird and also simultaneously was drowning it. We had seen a pair of Brown Fish Owls here before and to our surprise, after some time, a second owl

On 27 April 2019, I was at my farm in Itvaya Village, near Girgadhada, around Gir National Park, with my cousin Chintan Dudhat, and we went for an evening walk about 18:30 hrs to a nearby place that has a huge Banyan tree and a water tank. Being close to the sanctuary and because of availability

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perched on a nearby tree and uttered a few calls. It was dark before the python started swallowing the owl.

I sent the photos to Viral Prajapati and Pinal Patel, and confirmed that it was indeed a Brown Fish Owl. It was surprising to see the Brown Fish Owl become a prey of the python. Though it is known that this python feeds on mammals, birds and reptiles, there are no documented reports of it feeding on a Brown Fish Owl – I did an extensive search on the internet but could not find this owl species as a prey of the python. In direct observations of the python feeding on birds in Bharatpur, Rajasthan, the following species were noted: Comb Duck (*Sarkidiornis melanotus*), Cattle

Egret (*Egretta garzetta*), Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*), Greater Coucal (*Centropus sinensis*) and Grey Francolin (*Francolinus pondicerianus*) (Bhupathy *et al.* 2014).

This observation shows the opportunistic feeding behaviour of the python and confirms that owls are also a prey of the python.

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## Letter to the Editor

Greetings Sir,

I am a student pursuing Masters in Life Sciences in wildlife management and its conservation as my specialization in Navrachana University, Vadodara. Although I am not a member of BCSG (Bird Conservation Society of Gujarat), I frequently come across the amazing articles and interesting notes published in *Flamingo Gujarat*. I came across an article entitled 'A first confirmed breeding record of Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher (*Ceyx erithaca*) in Gujarat' which was published recently (Trivedi & Mori 2020). Firstly, what concerns me the most is that such invasive methods were used by individual researchers to study a schedule IV species protected under WPA 1972 inside a National Park and this was duly permitted by the concerned forest officer. In June 2018, some photographers had disturbed a pair of Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher up to an extent that the pair had to leave the site. They used call playback to lure the bird out and attain good and clear photographs in spite of warnings given by Dang Forest Division. Despite being aware about the status of the bird, the permission was granted.

Continuous presence around the nest may attract a predator or a poacher, giving them a clue about the presence of the nest. There have been several occasions where birds have abandoned the eggs/nest after frequent disturbances caused by photographers. As we all know, the rate of poaching in Dangs is quite high and Oriental Dwarf Kingfishers are considered to be traded as pets and also, it is very critical to disclose or expose the location of the nest. Secondly, *Flamingo Gujarat* is a very well known and inspirational journal among the birders community, not only in Gujarat but in other states also. Amateur researchers like me would be inclined towards using such methods by doing these kinds of studies

which might negatively impact the birds. So, such studies should not be promoted nor motivated amongst the scientific community.

I went through the article and it was quite clear that they did not care about the critical conditions inside the nest while using an endoscope to check the nest. Was it sterile? Did they check the fluctuation in temperature before and after inserting an endoscope inside the nest? Temperature plays an eminent role in incubation and hatching success. As the authors mention in their study that the nest was washed away and exposed due to heavy rains and the hatching was not successful, the pair would have built another nest and raised a second brood while the first one failed (Palkar *et. al.* 2009). It can be concluded that the pair did not show up in that place due to continuous human intervention and disturbance. Such studies should be done with utmost care and precision keeping the birds' welfare in mind.

I also went through several other articles published by the second author on breeding biology and it is quite concerning that there has been a high rate of mortality in the chicks and most of the eggs did not hatch or chicks were eaten by a predator, which is alarming; see Mori (2019A) and Mori (2019B). Recently, in Gandhinagar, a group of photographers allegedly harassed a nest of Indian Grey Hornbill (*Ocyrceros birostris*) (Schedule 1, WPA 1972) due to which the three chicks inside died. Two of chicks died in the nest itself and one was found dead on the ground below the nest. So, nest photography should be strictly prohibited and strict action should be taken for the same. This is a criminal offence and the perpetrators should be booked under Section 9 of WPA 1972. If and at all an upcoming researcher adopts such invasive methods for study, who should be held responsible for it? I request you to look into this matter and do the needful.

Thank you for sparing your precious time and taking this into consideration and doing what is right. I respect the authors as well as their approach and participation in research. I have no intention to hurt the feelings of anyone, including the authors mentioned here or the concerned parties. If and at all it did, I apologize for the same.

Regards,

**Aamir Matli.** Email: aamirmatli72@gmail.com

### **Reply to the letter by Aamir Matli**

#### **To Flamingo Gujarat Editorial Team**

Dear Sirs,

In reference to the letter sent by Aamir Matli regarding the study of breeding of the Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher (*Ceyx erithaca*) in Gujarat (Trivedi & Mori 2020), we would like to clarify all the points highlighted by him. Please find the answers clarified and explained below:

**Point 1:** Permission of working within the National Park and exposing the location of the nest to others as highlighted in the letter

There has been a typographical mistake regarding the location of the nest. The nest was observed while surveying the outskirts of the national park and not within the national park. Since the park is closed during the monsoon season, no visitors are allowed to visit the park. Hence, while Vansada NP is mentioned in the article, the location of the nest was on the periphery and outside the NP area. No location description or GPS co-ordinates are published in the article or were revealed to any other person to avoid any unnecessary attention to the nest. There are already many publications/photographs from Dang forest, published with GPS co-ordinates of Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher sightings. The authors decided not to provide the GPS coordinates as they were aware of the potential threats it can lead to the Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher nest.

**Point 2:** Continuous presence of authors around the nest

It is very clearly mentioned in the note that the nest was very close to a dirt road which was used by locals on a regular basis. The numbers of visits are clearly mentioned in the observation table published in the article. All the observations were made far from the road, maintaining necessary distance, to avoid disturbance and all photos were taken using a telephoto lens/point and shoot cameras to avoid getting close to the nest. One can notice that no more than two observations were made in one day. In the span of 30 days, the numbers of visits conducted by the authors at the location were not extensive so as to disturb the birds.

**Point 3:** Use of endoscopic camera for the nest

It is clearly mentioned that the nest/burrow was exposed due to heavy rain. One of the photos published in the article with kingfisher in the burrow shows the amount of nest exposed due to rain. The endoscopic camera used was actually used to maintain the distance from the nest. The endoscopic camera was five meters long and was brought closer to the opening of the nest to see the status of the nest. It was not inserted in the nest as the nest was already exposed and so the question of infections (if any) due to the camera does not arise. Utmost care was taken while using the camera and making sure the bird or the nest was not being disturbed. And the total observation time was not more than 20 seconds, which would not make any appreciable difference to the temperature inside the nest.

**Point 4:** Conclusion of kingfisher pair raising second brood at a different location after the failure of first attempt

There are high chances that the pair may have raised second brood at some other place, but it does not conclude that they chose another site for nesting due to the human intervention or disturbance. The pair was habituated to human presence around the nest due to the close proximity of the nest to the road and never showed any signs of disturbance. The fair conclusion is that the pair did not choose the same site for nesting due to the mud bank being washed away due to heavy rain.

Regarding chick mortality mentioned in the letter for the other two studies, the same cannot be concluded to have happened due to the studies carried out on the nests by me/us. In fact, due to these studies, we now know the predators for these species and whenever conservation action is needed, these studies will be helpful in knowing about nest predators. For two other studies which were carried out by me/us but are not mentioned in the letter, the chicks fledged successfully (Mori *et al.* 2017, Mori 2019C). So, to say that chick mortality has been high in the studies carried out by me/us is not correct. All scientific protocols for breeding studies have always been followed by me/us and the well being of the birds was kept as the highest priority.

I/we appreciate the concern of Aamir Matli for the well being of the species being studied by us and we remain confident that we are following the best possible methods and protocols for conducting breeding studies.

Regards,

**Devvratsinh Mori.** Email: devvratsinhmori@gmail.com



## Letter to the Editor...

[A recent paper in Indian BIRDS has given guidelines to be followed for nesting or breeding biology studies for birds in India (Barve et al. 2020A, Barve et al. 2020B). The authors have given suggestions on different aspects of breeding studies and the protocol to be followed. Bird watchers and researchers in Gujarat should refer to the same when conducting breeding biology studies. We believe bird watchers conducting breeding biology studies in Gujarat would have adhered to scientific protocol and followed best practises keeping the welfare of the birds as the highest priority and would continue to do so in the future. Further, we follow the procedure of all authors being required to confirm in their papers that due scientific protocol was followed for the studies conducted by them and this is required to be informed to us when papers on breeding biology are submitted for publication – Eds]

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## Short Birding Notes



### Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* at Ranagadh, Nal Sarovar

On 2 November 2019 we were birding around Ranagadh area of Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary. At about 08:30 hrs, while scanning the area with binoculars, we saw a few stints, plovers and other waders from a distance. As we approached closer we realised that there was a small plover (*Charadrius* sp.) which appeared a little different from the regularly seen Little Ringed Plover (*Charadrius dubius*). On closer observation we could identify it as a Common Ringed Plover (*Charadrius hiaticula*) from its prominent breast-band, white hind collar, orange legs and the missing yellow eye-ring. The second author visited the place several times after the initial sighting and recorded a small flock in the same patch, up to March 2020. This sighting is unusual for two aspects: The Common Ringed Plover is an uncommon to rare winter visitor in Gujarat with only scattered sightings from Porbandar, Bhavnagar, Kachchh, and a few sightings from Nal Sarovar and South Gujarat (Ganpule 2016) and so a small flock seen here is noteworthy. Further, these sightings, for more than four months in the same area, suggest that these birds remain at the same site in the winter if the habitat is suitable. This is an important inland sighting of this species from Gujarat.

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**Ramzan Kasam Sidhani:** At Post Village Vekaria, Nal Sarovar.



### Unusual interaction between a Short-toed Snake Eagle *Circaetus gallicus* and Black Drongo *Dicrurus macrocercus*

On 4 November 2018, we observed a Short-toed Snake Eagle (*Circaetus gallicus*) perched on the topmost branch of a tree in Velavadar National Park. It was surrounded by few Black Drongos (*Dicrurus macrocercus*). At first, we thought that the drongos were mobbing the eagle, as they were visibly pecking on its head. But, we noticed that the behaviour here appeared to be something different. The drongos were not aggressive and the eagle sat quietly and was unusually calm, unlike in a situation where it was being mobbed. It seemed like the Black Drongos were picking something turn by turn from the Short-toed Snake Eagle's head and we assumed that the drongos were removing parasites. The situation was more like a symbiosis between predator and prey! The Black Drongo is known to mob birds of prey and we frequently see it mobbing raptors in Little Rann of Kachchh. Since we had seen mobbing behaviour earlier, we could recognize that this was something unusual. However, such a symbiotic relationship between a Short-toed Snake Eagle and Black Drongo has not been documented earlier. It could be that this was an opportunistic alliance between the eagle and the drongo where the drongos got food and the eagle was rid of parasites. [We request birders to report more such unusual interactions or instances of symbiotic relationships in birds – Eds]

**Dr. Pankaj Maheria, Viral Patel & Geet Maheria Patel:** Ahmedabad. drpankajmaheria@gmail.com



### Chestnut-tailed Starling *Sturnia malabarica* in Kachchh

On 28 November 2019, in the afternoon, I saw and photographed a Chestnut-tailed Starling (*Sturnia malabarica*) near Dhunai, on Bhuj-Mandvi Road, Kachchh. The bird was perched on a *Prosopis juliflora* and the identification was confirmed by senior birder Shantibhai Varu. This species is vagrant to Kachchh and there are only a few earlier records – at Vijay Vilas Palace in 1969 (Himmatsinhji 1970), at Naliya in 2000 by Kavi Tej and R. D. Jadeja and at Loriya in 2002 by Shantibhai Varu (Shantibhai Varu, *pers comm.*). This is another sighting of this species from Kachchh. This sighting, in the early winter, may be indicative of this species being scarce winter visitor to Kachchh. More sightings will help in knowing about its status in Kachchh.

I thank Shantibhai Varu for confirming the identification and giving details of the past records of Chestnut-tailed Starling in Kachchh.

**Urmi Jani:** Kachchh. urmi6420r@gmail.com



### A winter sighting of Yellow-legged Buttonquail *Turnix tanki* in Rajkot City

On 24 January 2020, at about 17:00 hrs, my mother called me up to see a new bird at my home, situated at Jagnath Plot, in the middle of Rajkot City. I went there and saw that a tiny bird was sitting on the first landing of the staircase. I immediately took a photo from my mobile phone and thought about taking a video but the bird suddenly flew vertically and vanished. It stayed there for hardly five minutes. I could not identify this bird. Then, I sent the photo to my brother Rupesh Ravani, and he sent it to senior birder Ashok Mashru for identification; it was identified as a Yellow-legged Buttonquail (*Turnix tanki*), and he further informed that this was a grassland bird and had possibly landed at my home due to some movement during its local migration. He stated that the plumage looked washed out, lacking rufous, and bare parts were not bright yellow, rather unlike what is seen in the breeding season. The Yellow-legged Buttonquail is a monsoon migrant to Gujarat and there are very few records from the winter months. This is a rare winter sighting of this species.

**Urvashi Ravani:** Rajkot.



### Blue Rock Thrush *Monticola solitarius* near Navsari

On 23 September 2018, Nikunj Vedak sent me an unclear photograph of a bird for identification. To my surprise, it was Blue Rock-thrush (*Monticola solitarius*.) This bird, as per my knowledge, was seen in this area for the first time in the past few years. On the next day, I went to the location where it was seen, in the AB school Campus, Partapore, near Navsari. I could observe the bird and photograph it for two days, in the morning and evening. It was seen in a very small area. On 26 September 2018, it disappeared. It was probably on passage and stayed here for a few days. This bird was fairly fearless and was observed accompanying a Pied Bushchat (*Saxicola caprata*) and seen hunting an insect. Grimmett *et al.* (2011) show the distribution of Blue Rock Thrush all over the state but it is quite uncommon in our area.

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### A winter sighting of Grey-bellied Cuckoo *Cacomantis passerinus* in Little Rann of Kachchh

On 4 February 2020, I was in Little Rann of Kachchh for a nature education camp. I was accompanied by a friend and as soon as we got some free time, we visited the Rann for birding. We saw a different bird perched in a *Prosopis juliflora* and on a closer look, identified it as a Grey-bellied Cuckoo (*Cacomantis passerinus*), took several photographs and confirmed the identification. The cuckoo did not call while we observed it. This sighting in the winter, from an area like the Little Rann, is quite surprising. In and around Savarkundla, where I live, this species is quite common and vocal in the monsoon season and it is also seen in Gir NP and in the *vidis* of Saurashtra. But, after the monsoon, it is not seen at all near my home! There are sightings from Saurashtra and from other parts of the state (Bagda *et al.* 2015) but this record, in the winter, from the Little Rann of Kachchh is very interesting.

**Bhanubhai Adhiyaru:** Savarkundla. Dist: Amreli. ab.adhvaryu@gmail.com



### Masked Booby *Sula dactylatra* in Rajkot

On 14 July 2020, at 16:00 hrs in the evening, a big bird was found injured near our residence; the area is located at Chandan Park Main Road, Indian Park, Jamnagar Road, Rajkot. Later, it was identified as a juvenile Masked Booby (*Sula dactylatra*) by posting its photograph in the 'Ask ID of Indian Birds' Facebook group. The bird was rescued by the local animal welfare organisation 'Karuna Foundation' for treatment but it did not survive. The Masked Booby is seen, quite rarely, during the monsoon season along the coast of Saurashtra. These sightings are usually of windblown birds due to bad weather; this species is mainly pelagic and does not normally venture near the coast. Recently, another Masked Booby was rescued at Jamnagar coast by Jagat Raval in June 2015 and taken for treatment (sighting posted in Facebook group.) As Rajkot is quite far from the coast, this is a surprising sighting of a Masked Booby from the middle of the city.

**Ashish Khakharia:** Rajkot.





### Sighting of Little Crake *Porzana parva* near Surat

On 28 February 2019, I went to wetland near Palanpore Village, just on the outskirts of Surat city. At around 08:15 hrs, I was passing on Palanpore Canal side road, when I saw a crake (*Porzana* sp.) basking in the reeds. Slowly, I moved closer and took 10-12 photographs. After observing carefully, I could detect a red patch at the base of the bill. Along with this, I noted the long primary projection, less extensively barred underparts and yellowish-green bill with reddish base, confirming it to be a Little Crake (*Porzana parva*). I found that this bird was very shy. Many bird-watchers from Surat visited this place but could not take any photographs. My friend Anil Bhatt could take a record shot. The Little Crake was seen in this area for a week. Though there are recent records of Little Crake from different parts of the state (photos posted on the OBI website), this is probably the first photographic record of Little Crake for South Gujarat.

**Pravin C. Patel:** Surat. pravin93navyug@yahoo.com



### Slaty-breasted Rail *Gallirallus striatus* near Vadodara

On 16 June 2020, at about 07:30 hrs in the morning, I was birding at Timbi Lake, near Vadodara. While birding, a Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*) took flight some feet ahead on my path. The sudden flight of the bird caught my attention and I noticed a crake (*Rallidae*) cross over the path I was on and go into the bush nearby. I stopped to see if the crake would come out again. And it did take a quick peep back on the path. But, since I was very near to it, it darted off again under the bush. This time, I knew it would not come back again. So, I quickened my pace to have a better look or may be take a good photograph. I saw a trail leading away from the lake towards a small water hole nearby with a few bushes. I saw the crake go into it. I waited for a while for it to come out and to my surprise, when the bird did appear, it was not a Brown Crake (*Amauornis akool*) but something similar in size but with different plumage. The most prominent feature of the bird was its red beak. I managed to take a few photographs before it disappeared in the bush. I waited for 30 minutes but it did not appear again. I immediately sent the photos to Mrs. Deepti S. Mehta, who, with the help of Dr. Gaurang Bagda, identified it as a Slaty Breasted Rail (*Gallirallus striatus*). The next day, I went again at the same spot to get a better look at the bird but got just a glimpse of it. I have been observing the bird for four days now. It seems to have made itself comfortable at this spot.

**Jenny Solomon:** Vadodara.



### Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* at Valda Dam, near Nal Sarovar

On 9 December 2018, we were birding around Vadla Dam area near Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary. At about 10:30 hrs, while scanning the area with my binoculars, we saw three unusual looking ducks in a large group of Northern Shoveler (*Anas clypeata*) & other commonly seen migratory ducks. As we took record images & zoomed in, we realised that that these were Common Shelducks (*Tadorna tadorna*), which is very uncommon for this area. We approached slowly and managed to get some good images of one of the three birds. We later learnt that the last sighting of Common Shelduck in Nal Sarovar area was many years back and that this species is not a regular visitor there. An important thing to note was that in spite of the location being favourable for them in the winter, these three birds were only seen here for a short period of 5-7 days, post which they probably migrated to other areas with suitable habitats.

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**Kasim Sama Sidhani:** At: Nal Sarovar.



### Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis* near Rajkot

Dr. Rajesh Bhalodia and I visited Khirasara Vidi, near Rajkot, on 3 September 2019 for birding, especially to look out for passage migrants which occur in our area. There, I saw a small warbler (*Sylvia* sp.) in the scrub which we could not identify in the field. However, we were able to take a few record shots. The bird had a white throat, brownish wings and pinkish legs. It was identified as a Common Whitethroat (*Sylvia communis*) by Shivam Bhatt on the social media. This was later confirmed by Ashok Mashru and Prasad Ganpule. Normally, this species is an autumn passage migrant and is regularly seen in Kachchh and is known to occur in other areas of Saurashtra. But, there are few documented records. This sighting near Rajkot is thus of interest and confirms its occurrence in the district.

**Dr. Sunil Moteria:** Rajkot. drsunilmoteria@gmail.com



### Forest Wagtail *Dendronanthus indicus* in Rajkot

On 14 February 2020, in the evening at around 17:00 hrs, near Randarda Lake, Rajkot, I observed a bird perched on a tree branch. I took some pictures but it was perched for only about five seconds. On seeing its plumage, I found it to be different than the common wagtails (*Motacilla* sp.) here and I identified it as a Forest Wagtail (*Dendronanthus indicus*). As this bird was shy and sitting far away, I could take only a few images before the bird flew away. I tried to follow it but it had disappeared. Later, I confirmed the identification with senior birder Ashok Mashru, and as per his opinion, this was probably a first photographic record of Forest Wagtail for Rajkot District. This species is generally uncommon for Saurashtra, but sightings from Gir NP, Jamnagar & few other areas are known. During this short birding trip, my friends Pinkesh Tanna, Jaymin Panchasara, Jayson Dholariya & Parth Bhatt were with me.

**Priyank Dhami:** Rajkot. priyank.dhami@gmail.com



### Indian Pitta *Pitta brachyura* in Sabarkantha District

On 20 June 2020, I was birding near Ranasan Village, located in Sabarkantha District, which is about 65 kms from Gandhinagar. In the morning, roughly at around 09:00 hrs, after photographing a Striated Heron (*Butorides striata*), I went to a different place and saw a Marshall's lora (*Aegithina nigrolutea*). After 1-2 minutes, I heard a *wheet-tieu* call and then the trademark triple note, *hhwit-wiyu*, of Indian Pitta (*Pitta brachyuran*). The bird came out and I observed it for almost two hours, and enjoyed by taking a series of behavioral photographs of this Indian Pitta. I was surprised to observe many other species at this location and discovered that it was very rich for birding and the area was undisturbed. There are multiple nesting and sighting records of the India Pitta from the Aravalli Range i.e. from Polo, Jessore, Bakor and Panchmahal, but this record, in this patch of Sabarkantha, was something new for me.

**Jagrut Shah:** Ahmedabad. Jagrutshah7@gmail.com

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## Book Review

**Prasad Ganpule:** C/o Parshuram Pottery Works, Opp. Nazarbaug, Morbi 363642. prasadganpule@gmail.com

**Title:** THE BIOLOGY OF MOULT IN BIRDS – 306 pp

**Authors:** Lukas Jenni and Raffael Winkler

**Publisher:** Helm, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, London. 2020.



Lukas Jenni & Raffael Winkler

This book, published by Helm (Bloomsbury Publishing Plc), and written by Lukas Jenni and Raffael Winkler, covers a very important but often neglected feature in birds – feather moult. The authors, Lukas Jenni and Raffael Winkler, who have vast experience of field and museum studies, had earlier written the seminal 'Moult and ageing in European Passerines' and this book is complementary to their earlier work.

The format of the book is a preface, followed by five chapters covering the various aspects of moult in birds, and finally, a detailed list of references. The five main chapters of the book are 1) functions of plumage, 2) plumage maintenance and the need for plumage renewal, 3) the processes of moult: feather growth, physiology, energetics and control of moult, 4) the effect of environmental conditions during moult on plumage quality and their consequences and 5) fitting moult into the annual cycle: moult strategies. The list of references is comprehensive and an index is provided at the end. The authors do not provide a systematic review of moult in every group of birds but rather, provide an overall picture of moult in birds. The species names are as per the IOC list.

The authors state in the preface that moult is a neglected field of study and this book provides a first review on the biology, physiology and ecology of moult. The authors inform that they have tried to provide an overview about the phenomenon and consequences of moult in birds – the importance and function of moult and how it affects other aspects of a bird's life. The main part of the book is structured in five different chapters so that the different aspects of moult are properly explained.

Each chapter has different subheadings under which the listed topic is discussed in detail, often accompanied with sketches, photographs and graphs where required, and a summary is provided at the end of each topic. There are many photographs and illustrations in the book, explaining in detail the different topics covered. The anatomy of feathers is explained in great detail, with photos and illustrations, including with electron microscope photographs. Interesting facts are presented and explained, including how water is retained in specialized ventral body-feathers in sandgrouses and how feathers of some species are toxic. A few interesting topics covered over the five chapters are changes in plumage with age, size and structure of non-ornamental and ornamental feathers, moult strategies, and moult and migration. Specific examples are often given, with photos, to explain various details: for example, photos of Ruff are given to show plumage variations, Rock Ptarmigan to show plumage in various seasons, Curlew Sandpiper and Northern Wheatear to show differences in breeding and non-breeding plumages.

Since moult is not well studied, the authors have highlighted the inconsistencies in data, contradictory findings, knowledge gaps and pointers for future studies. A very interesting point presented by the authors is that they could not find a single study on how the Indian Peafowl produces its train (tail), which is one of the showpieces of sexually selected traits – and the factors affecting it. Surely, this is one subject in which Indian ornithologists can conduct in-depth studies and contribute to the study of moult in this species. There are many other features of moult in various species of birds in India which can be studied by Indian ornithologists and bird watchers.

This book fills a very important gap in our knowledge of moult. Though further studies are required to know the different aspects of moult and its effect on birds, this book provides the impetus required for future studies. This book does not cover moult in nestlings and development of juvenile plumage. That is beyond the scope of this work. But, almost all aspects of moult in adults are covered.

Though study of moult is not a topic of interest for most amateur as well as serious bird watchers in India, this book provides information, in simple language and with examples, photos, graphs and illustrations, for those interested. This subject may seem to be esoteric, but, with this book, a comprehensive overview is now available. This book will be available in the near future with online retailers (like Amazon) in India and is also sold by the publishers on their website in hardcopy as well as in PDF at: <https://www.bloomsbury.com/au/the-biology-of-moult-in-birds-9781472977205/>. This book will be an important addition to a birders library.

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