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Bulletin of Gujarat Birds



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Editorial

The year 2020 has left fearful memories for us on a finishing note! While bringing out the last FLAMINGO Gujarat issue of the year, I have mixed feelings.

It is very unfortunate that we lost a birdman of Gujarat and one of the finest ornithologists of the country, Dr. Bhavbhuti Parasharya, to COVID. He was also a founder secretary of BCSG and had worked for the society in various capacities. Losing Dr. Parasharya is a big loss to us, the birdwatcher fraternity of Gujarat. He will always be remembered and respected for his enormous contribution to the ornithological science of Gujarat. We have dedicated the newly published 'A Checklist of the Birds of Gujarat' to him.

On a happy note, BCSG has published a hard copy 'A Checklist of the Birds of Gujarat', compiled by Prasad Ganpule. It contains, in a tabulated form, an updated list of all the avian species recorded in the state, with Gujarati and alternate names, as well as their status, under different categories. I am sure it will make for a very handy reference material for one and all.

The pandemic had put constraints on the movement of bird watchers for the large part of the year. We are still not out of danger and friends who have resumed field trips still need to follow all the necessary safety protocols. Good rains in the last monsoon have ensured that bird watching will be enjoyable in the coming months. Best wishes!

- Bakul Trivedi

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Cover Photo: 'Small Buttonquail' by Raju Karia



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Notes on Small Buttonquail *Turnix sylvaticus* in Khirasara vidi, near Rajkot

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Introduction

The Small Buttonquail (*Turnix sylvaticus*) is a small sized buttonquail which is resident in India. In the north-western part of the country in Gujarat, Rajasthan and adjoining regions, it is a summer visitor or monsoon breeding migrant (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). For Gujarat, it is given as an uncommon monsoon / breeding migrant, regular in the grasslands of Saurashtra and Kachchh (Ganpule 2016). The Small Buttonquail is known to occur in Khirasara *vidi*, and in other *vidis* in Saurashtra in the monsoon (Mashru 2017). It is a secretive species, and has been less studied in Gujarat. I present here observations on the Small Buttonquail, made over three years of study at Khirasara *vidi*, near Rajkot, Gujarat.

Observations

I regularly visit Khirasara *vidi*, which is a grassland near Rajkot. The *vidi* is typical savannah grassland, interspersed with trees, and is spread over more than 450 hectares. In the monsoon, there is a profusion of grass growth and the whole area turns green. The roads in the *vidi* are all that remain uncovered by grass. I first observed a Small Buttonquail at Khirasara *vidi* at the start of the monsoon season in June 2018. I initially mistook it for the Barred Buttonquail (*Turnix suscitator*), which is common here, but when I processed the photographs on my computer, I realised that it was a Small Buttonquail. I then started visiting the place more than four-five times a week in the monsoons and I observed and documented the Small Buttonquail here during my visits. The birds are usually seen singly or in pairs from early June, till about the second week of September, depending on the monsoon rains. The study was carried out in the monsoon months of 2018, 2019 and in 2020.

Behaviour: The Small Buttonquail is a secretive bird. It comes out, on the road, usually in the late evening, about half an hour before sunset. The birds often dust bathed on the road in the late evening and fed on the seeds of grasses and insects/invertebrates. If the conditions were overcast, then they can be seen on the road earlier in the evening and sometimes, even in the late afternoon. They are not disturbed by cars but often move quickly into the grass if approached on foot.

The monsoon season is the breeding season of this species and the Small Buttonquail breeds here in Khirasara *vidi*. When seen initially in June and July, single birds are often seen but in August and September, they are seen in pairs. Early in the monsoon, the calls of the Small Buttonquail are frequently heard in the *vidi* area. I have often seen the birds calling – the call is a booming *hoon hoon hoon* which is heard in the early

morning, afternoon or late evening at the start of the monsoon. The calling behaviour has been described by Ardesana & Bharad (2017), who observed it here in Khirasara *vidi*, and it is as described by the authors – the female puffs up her body and especially the nape (hindneck) and utters calls which are ventriloquial in character.



Photo 1

Raju Karia



Photo 2

Raju Karia

Sexing: Since I observed the Small Buttonquail, in pairs, many times over the past three years, I was able to take numerous photographs of the birds. In this species, the females are larger than the males; they are dominant and known to be polyandrous (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). I had the opportunity to study their movements and physical differences between the male and female for the past three years. Based on my observations, I noticed that the male is smaller in size and has pink or fleshy (pinkish-white) legs (Photo 1) while the female is bigger, more colourful and has grey or slaty legs (Photo 2). The difference in size is obvious

Small Buttonquail...

when the pair is seen together. These observations of the birds in pairs were in the months of August and September in all three years from 2018 to 2020, which is their breeding season (Photo 3 & Photo 4). The plumage also differs, with the female having more rufous on hind-neck. The chest is also rufous in both species, but in the female, the colour is a richer rufous.



Raju Karia



Raju Karia



Raju Karia

Breeding: While it is known that the Small Buttonquail breeds here in Saurashtra and also in the Khirasara *vidi*, I have observed a presumed male with four chicks, only once, on 3 August 2019. I have never found a nest here but then, I have not looked for a nest actively since this could be disturbing to the nesting birds. When I saw the adult with chicks, it appeared on the road, and four chicks followed. They stayed on the road, in the open, looking for food and moved about on the road for a few moments and then disappeared into the

grass. The adult was quite wary, and constantly on the lookout for any danger. I quickly took some photos to document the adult with chicks (Photo 5). The plumage in juvenile was mottled, and the legs were pinkish, similar to an adult male. It is pertinent to note that in the Small Buttonquail, the polyandrous female lays eggs but the incubation and rearing of young is done by the male alone (Debus & Kirwan 2020).

Discussion

It should be noted that none of the reference texts state the difference in leg colour for male and female. Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) state that the Small Buttonquail has 'pink, whitish or grey legs' while Grimmett *et al.* (2011) give 'legs pinkish or greyish' for this species and Debus & Kirwan (2020) state that legs are pale pinkish with yellow or blue tinge. Dharmakumarsinhji (1955) stated that 'legs in some birds are greyish and pink in others'. All these reference texts state that the female has brighter and more extensive rufous on hind-neck than the male. Ali & Ripley (1980) stated that the sexes were more or less alike and that the female was slightly larger. However, based on my observations over three years in Khirasara *vidi*, I could make out the difference in leg colour in the sexes. While ideally, the birds should be trapped and checked in-hand for sexing, the empirical evidence presented here suggests that the female has grey or slaty legs while the male has pinkish or fleshy legs and this feature, along with the plumage, can be used to sex the adult birds. I observed an adult, presumed male, accompanying four chicks; the adult had pink legs and the plumage was less colourful, indicating that it was a male – what further supports my observation that it was a male is that the male does the rearing of chicks and hence it is more likely that the adult accompanying the chicks was a male.

To further confirm whether leg colour can be used for sexing the adult birds, I checked photographs of the Small Buttonquail on the website 'Oriental Bird Images' (OBI) and 'eBird'. There are currently 40 photos of this species from India on OBI and 86 photos on 'eBird' and I checked each photo, especially wherein a pair is seen together. In such photos also, I observed that the female, which had a more vivid coloured plumage, had grey/pale slaty legs and the male had pinkish or fleshy legs, which is consistent with what I have observed here in Khirasara *vidi*. Regarding plumage, while the reference texts describe the female as having more rufous on hind-neck, the underparts are also a richer rufous in the female than the male. Though the male may also have a light rufous wash on the chest and upper belly, the colour in the female is brighter and richer rufous. This is given in Dharmakumarsinhji (1955), who

stated that the male is less richly coloured on the breast. Thus, plumage and colour of legs can be used to sex the adults in the field.

The breeding of the Small Buttonquail in Khirasara *vidi* is not surprising as it is known to breed in Saurashtra commonly (Dharmakumarsinghi 1955). The plumage in juveniles is not often photographed. While my observations of juveniles was limited to a sighting of four chicks together, my data, along with the photos posted on the different website of this species from India show that the leg colour in juvenile is pink or fleshy, and thus juveniles can be mistaken for adult male if the plumage is not properly observed. In juveniles, the white scalloping on the wings is more prominent and the mantle has more white fringes, and juveniles lack the broad pale streaks of adult. The size is smaller than in adult.

Conclusion

The Small Buttonquail is a species which is quite difficult to study over long periods. It is secretive, quite wary and quickly disappears in the grass if there is even a hint of danger. Prolonged observations are difficult. Over the past three years, I have spent many days in the *vidi* during the monsoons in studying these birds and taking photographs. It is not rare, and there is a good population in the *vidi* area but, observing them is challenging. While the observations presented here need further confirmation, it is interesting to note that there is a distinct difference in plumage, as well as leg colour, in adult male and female. This information can be useful in sexing the birds in the field.

Khirasara *vidi* is an ideal area to study this species since the habitat is very good for the Small Buttonquail. Sustained

observations in the coming years will be helpful in knowing more about this secretive species. Many aspects of the species' biology are not known and whether it is a resident bird here or whether it arrives before the monsoon and departs after breeding is not clear. The breeding biology is also not well known. Sustained data should be gathered to know more about the Small Buttonquail in Saurashtra.

Acknowledgements

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Sighting of Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis* at Nalsarovar: a second record for Gujarat

Shabbir Belim & Mehmud Multani: At – Nalsarovar.

On 1 November 2020, we were doing routine birding at Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary. At around 10:45 hrs, we observed a small dove perched on a *Prosopis juliflora* tree. On closer observation, we realised that it was not one of the common species of doves seen here. This bird had a long tail, with grey patch on the wings and black patches on the lower scapulars. The uppertail coverts had two dark bands. The bill was black and lores were dark. We identified this dove as a Namaqua Dove (*Oena capensis*) based on the above described features. It seemed to be a female or juvenile.

We posted information about this sighting on the social media, on Facebook and Whatsapp groups. Many bird

watchers visited the place and were able to see the individual well and photograph it here. It was seen in the same area for about three to four days. After that, it was not seen again.

A Namaqua Dove was recently seen in Khijadiya Bird Sanctuary, near Jamnagar, which was the first record of the species for Gujarat, as well as India (Trivedi & Trivedi 2018, Patel & Raol 2018); a detailed editor's note was given to explain why the record was considered to be of a genuine wild vagrant and not an escapee from the pet trade; it was included in the Gujarat checklist based on the Jamnagar record (Ganpule 2020). A recent paper on the range expansion of the Namaqua Dove in the Palearctic and South Asia explained the details

Namaqua Dove....



Shabbir Belim

about the expanding range of this species and the Jamnagar record was treated as a part of the range expansion (Ławicki 2020).

This sighting from Nalsarovar is a second record of the Namaqua Dove from Gujarat as well as India. This individual

also did not seem to be an escapee since the plumage was good and there was no damage to the feathers which is often seen in escapees. It has been explained that changes in the landscape, due to shifting agricultural patterns, has benefitted this species and helped it in expanding its range and colonizing new areas. While it is early to say whether the Namaqua Dove could become a regular visitor to Gujarat, it is urged that bird watchers keep a lookout for this species in other parts of the state.

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Sighting of Golden Eagle *Aquila chrysaetos* in Kachchh

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Dr. Riaz Khojani

On 13 December 2020, I was bird watching on Misaryado-Udau Road in Banni, Kachchh. The birding was good and I saw many birds in the area. At around 13:00 hrs, I saw an eagle (*Aquila* sp.) in flight. I took a few photographs and noted the following features: a large dark eagle, with blackish underparts, distinct white bases to the primaries and secondaries, white tail with dark tail band, powerful looking beak and large size. When the upperparts were seen in flight, there was a distinct

golden wash on crown and nape. Based on these features, I identified it as a juvenile Golden Eagle (*Aquila chrysaetos*). The white patch at the base of flight feathers and the white tail with dark band is distinct in the Golden Eagle.

This was a very surprising sighting for Kachchh. The Golden Eagle is a vagrant to Gujarat and there is only one previous published record from the state; a juvenile/immature Golden Eagle was seen near Palanpur, in northern Gujarat, in December 2018 (Prajapati *et al.* 2018) which was the first record for the state. The individual near Palanpur was seen in the same area for more than three months and many birders went to see it. This sighting, from Kachchh, further confirms the occurrence of the Golden Eagle in Gujarat. It will be interesting to see whether there are more sightings of the Golden Eagle from the state in the future. I will continue to visit the area where this bird was seen to see if it remains here for a few weeks.

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Sighting of Namaqua Dove *Oena capensis* near Mahuva, Bhavnagar: a third record for Gujarat

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On 28 November 2020, we were on the road from Naip Village to Nikol, which is an unpaved road, when we chanced upon an unusual dove in the area. Since we were aware of the recent sighting of Namaqua Dove (*Oena capensis*) from Gujarat, we could immediately identify this bird as a male Namaqua Dove. The dove was feeding on the road and would fly and perch on a *Prosopis juliflora* when it was disturbed. It used to come down on the road and continue feeding if there was no disturbance. It perched on the *Prosopis* tree and used to start preening. We observed it for almost two hours and took many photographs and recorded short videos of its activities. This location - 21° 5' 50.29" N, 71° 51' 34.98" E) - is around 1.5 km from the sea, near the wetland Nikol *bandhara*, and the habitat has *Prosopis* trees and other shrubs. We saw it only once and it was not seen again in the area even though we searched for it in the following days.

Plumage: This individual was superficially similar to some *Streptopelia* sp. doves but it was much smaller and the tail was very long. It had greyish-white crown, black face and upper breast, dark eye, bill with red base and yellow tip, brownish mantle, grey wing-coverts, red legs, white belly and a very long pointed tail. When seen in flight, the primaries were chestnut, both above and below, and were attractive when visible in flight. We could easily age it as an adult male.

Its behaviour was similar to other *Streptopelia* sp. doves. It was feeding on grass seeds and stems, and on other seeds which were present on the ground. A Namaqua Dove was recently seen in Khijadiya Bird Sanctuary, near Jamnagar, which was the first record of the species for Gujarat as well as India (Trivedi & Trivedi 2018, Patel & Raol 2018). It was recently (first week of November 2020) seen in Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary (see elsewhere in this issue – Eds) and thus, this is the third record of the Namaqua Dove from Gujarat and India. However, this is the first time an adult male has been seen here. The previous sightings were either of juvenile or female and this individual was a colourful male.

Looking at the plumage, its behaviour and other observations (feeding and foraging), we are certain that this individual was not an escapee. A recent paper on the range expansion of the Namaqua Dove in the Palearctic and South Asia explained the expanding range of this species and the Jamnagar record was treated as a part of the range expansion (Ławicki 2020). Now, there are two more records of the species from Gujarat and it seems that the range expansion is really happening and it is possible that in a few years, it could be a regular visitor here! It should be noted that all the sightings so far have been in the winter months, which is not the breeding season of this species. It is possible that it could be a winter migrant here at present but could establish itself in the future.

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□

Rescue of Slaty-legged Crake *Rallina eurizonoides* from Madhavpur-Ghed, near Porbandar

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On 17 October 2020, people from the village area of Madhavpur-Ghed, near Porbandar, found an injured bird and informed Paresh Nimavat, of Sanjivani Nature Foundation, about it. Paresh Nimavat visited the place immediately and rescued the bird, gave primary treatment, and brought it to the Sanjeevani Nature Foundation hospital for more treatment.

A brief description of the bird is as follows: it had olive-brown upperparts and head. The breast and upper belly was also olive-brown in colour. The lower belly had prominent black-and-white barring. The legs were slaty-grey in colour.

The photograph of the bird was sent to senior birder Ashok Mashru for identification; he identified it as Slaty-legged Crake (*Rallina eurizonoides*) and it seemed to be a juvenile bird, lacking rufous on head and nape. The Ruddy-breasted Crake (*Porzana fusca*), which is found in Saurashtra, lacks the prominent white-and-black barring on belly in all plumages. The Water Rail (*Rallus aquaticus*), Slaty-breasted Rail (*Gallirallus striatus*) and Spotted Crake (*Porzana porzana*) have different plumage, and the bill size, colour and shape is also different

from what was observed here and hence, this bird could be identified as a Slaty-legged Crake. He further informed that it was a very important sighting and a first record of the species for Saurashtra area. The bird was treated for two days under my guidance and was released back in the wild on 19 October 2020. The bird flew away immediately on release and so, we could not capture a photo or video of its release. It had fully recovered and hence was released back in the wild.

The Slaty-legged Crake is a monsoon migrant to the base of the Himalayas and in the Western Ghats in Maharashtra and Karnataka; it is resident in Northeast India, Kerala and is shown with isolated records from elsewhere in the country (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). For Gujarat, the Slaty-legged Crake was recently photographed at Madhuban Dam, near Silvassa, in Dadra & Nagar Haveli, near southern Gujarat (Mishra 2017) which was the first record for the state since records from the Union Territories of Daman & Diu and Dadra & Nagar Haveli were included in the state checklist. It was again seen in the same area with chicks and it was confirmed to be breeding in the area (Mishra 2019). However, there are no records of this species from adjoining parts of south Gujarat or from central Gujarat. Hence, this rescue of a juvenile Slaty-legged Crake from coastal area of Saurashtra is very interesting and is the first record within the boundaries of the state. It suggests that juvenile birds may be dispersing in other parts of Gujarat. This sighting further confirms that the addition of the Slaty-legged Crake to the Gujarat checklist is correct.

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Sightings of Great Bittern *Botaurus stellaris* near Amalsad, South Gujarat

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On 2 December 2019, the first and second authors, PCP and ANB, went to a wetland at Kotha Village, near Amalsad (South Gujarat), which is around 500 acres in size. This wetland is inundated with water during the monsoon season and dries in the summer. The winter months are peak season for birding. Various water birds and raptors are seen here during this season. On that day, early in the morning, we were walking on a small trail in the wetland and we were actively observing birds with binoculars. At that time, PCP saw a flying heron-like bird but its flight was different and it was flying towards us. So, we immediately sat down and observed this different looking bird in flight. It passed just 50 feet from us, flew onwards, and landed in the grass of the wetland, around 200 mts away from us. During that time, we took around 10 photographs and observed all the photos carefully, confirming that this was a Great Bittern (*Botaurus stellaris*). After this observation, we

walked towards the other side of the wetland from where two more Great Bitterns flew away. So, within an hour, we observed three Great Bitterns in this area. We thought that this was probably the first record of Great Bittern for South Gujarat as we had never seen it here and not heard about its occurrence in our region. We informed about this surprising sighting of Great Bittern to local bird-watcher and our friend DP and told him to keep a watch for this species in this area. DP visited this area several times and observed the Great Bittern in this wetland. Sightings of Great Bittern are detailed in Table 1:

After 13 December 2019, there were no sightings of the Great Bittern from this area even though we visited the wetland frequently. It seemed that the birds were here only for a few days.

In the map for Great Bittern in Grimmett *et al.* (2011), an asterisk is given for Gujarat, which denotes 'isolated record(s) – exact location uncertain'. The Great Bittern was stated to be a rare winter migrant to Gujarat, with sightings from Saurashtra, North and Central Gujarat (Ganpule 2016). Recent records of the species from Khambhat (Vora 2018) and Vadodara (Shah 2018) in Central Gujarat are known. However, there were no documented records of Great Bittern from South Gujarat and no photos from this area were posted on popular birding websites or on social media before these sightings. Thus, these sightings confirm that the Great Bittern

Table 1: Sightings of Great Bittern near Amalsad

Sr. No.	Date	Time	No. of birds	Observer(s)
1	2 December 2019	08:30 to 09:30 hrs	3	Pravin Patel & Anil Bhatt
2	3 December 2019	09:05 hrs	1	Dipak Patel
3	4 December 2019	09:00 hrs	Not seen	Dipak Patel
4	5 December 2019	08:30 to 10:00 hrs	2	Dipak Patel, Viren Bachu Desai & Dr. Anand Patel
5	6 December 2019	08:30 hrs	2	Dipak Patel and Dr. Pragnesh Patel
6	7 December 2019	08:30 hrs 10:00-11:00 hrs 18:45 hrs	1 2 1	Dipak Patel Pravin Patel, Mukesh Bhatt Dipak Patel
7	8 December 2019	17:00 hrs	1	Dipak Patel
9	9 December 2019	07:30 hrs 09:00 to 10:30 hrs	1 1	Dipak Patel Pravin Patel, Anil Bhatt, Dr. Nilay Desai, Dr. Dhanesh Vaidya, Mukesh Bhatt
10	11 December 2019	08:00-09:00 hrs	1	Dipak Patel
11	12 December 2019	07:00 hrs	1 (busy feeding)	Dipak Patel
12	13 December 2019	09:00 hrs	1 (last record)	Dipak Patel

Great Bittern....

does visit this region and it could be a rare winter migrant here.

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Does the Grey Nightjar *Caprimulgus jotaka* occur in Gujarat?

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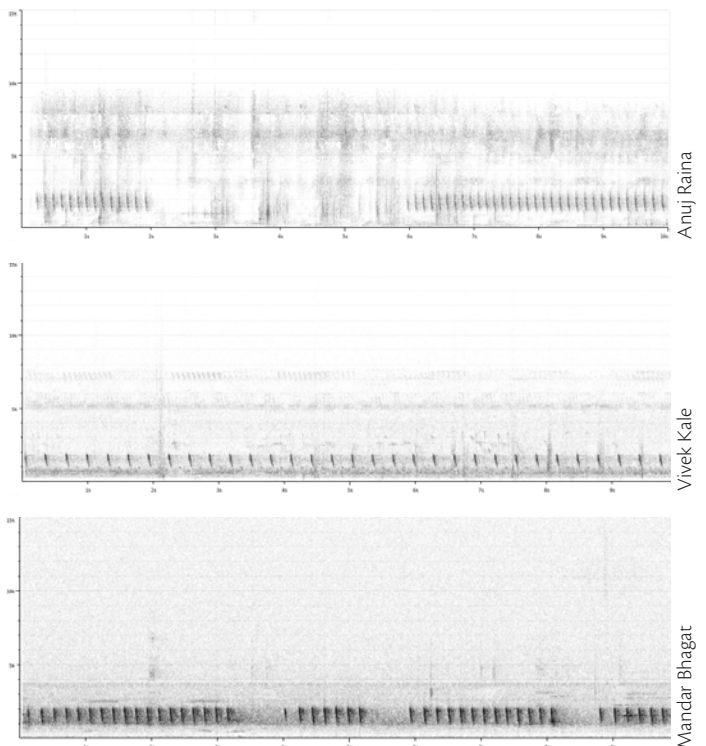
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On 17 June 2018, we visited Kumkotar (20° 53' N, 73° 12' E), near Vansada National Park in South Gujarat. We were mainly doing amphibian surveys in the area as seasonal rains had increased the flora and fauna diversity. At around 04:30 hrs, very early in the morning, we heard a call of a nightjar (*Caprimulgus* sp.). We recorded the call and tried to locate the bird. We saw a nightjar flying away but could not get photos as it was dark and the nightjar was seen briefly and that too only in flight. This call did not match with any amphibian species found in this location and we were sure that this was a call of a nightjar. Two calls were heard from the opposite direction during the survey. The site is near Koskhadi River, a tributary of Ambika River, which connects the secluded forest of Kumkotar (Surat district) with Vansada National Park (Navsari District). The forest land of Kumkotar has similar forest type as Vansada national NP i.e. tropical moist deciduous forests.

We were somewhat confused by this call. Being familiar with the call of the Indian Jungle Nightjar (*Caprimulgus indicus*), we could make out that the call of this bird was faster than the call of the Indian Jungle Nightjar. The first author has birded extensively in the Himalayas and heard the call of the Grey Nightjar (*Caprimulgus jotaka*) and was reminded of that call in pitch and frequency. We generated a sonogram from our recorded call and compared it with the call of a Grey Nightjar from the Himalayas and an Indian Jungle Nightjar from Gujarat. Three sonograms are given here – sonogram of call recorded by us, sonogram of call of Indian Jungle Nightjar (Xeno Canto XC131945 by Vivek Kale) and Grey Nightjar (Xeno Canto XC320019 by Mandar Bhagat).

It can be seen that the call recorded by us matches with the call of the Grey Nightjar more than the call of an Indian Jungle



Nightjar. For call of the Indian Jungle Nightjar, there are around 3 to 4 notes/second. The call of the Grey Nightjar is faster, with 6 to 7 notes/second. The relative pitch also differs slightly, with the Grey Nightjar call being of slightly higher pitch. These differences are slight, but the call recorded by us points to the identification of this individual as a Grey Nightjar rather than an Indian Jungle Nightjar.

[The recording by one of the authors (Anuj Raina) has been uploaded on the website Xeno Canto as the call of a Grey Nighthjar and can be accessed online at <https://www.xeno-canto.org/439948>. The Indian Jungle Nightjar and the Grey Nightjar are now treated as

distinct species based on consistent morphological and vocal differences, different juvenile plumages and eggs are also dissimilar (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

The Grey Nightjar is a breeding migrant to the Himalayas, from northern Pakistan to Jammu & Kashmir, till Arunachal Pradesh, and SE Bangladesh; it is a winter migrant to Odisha and NE Ghats and two specimens have been collected from the Andaman Islands, which shows the migrating ability of this species (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Grimmer et al. (2011) show it as breeding migrant in NW Himalayas and as a resident in NE India and Bangladesh. There are no records shown for Peninsular India in both these reference texts. In contrast, the Indian Jungle Nightjar is resident in Western Ghats, most of central and northern India and also in eastern parts of India. In Gujarat, the Indian Jungle Nightjar is resident in the forest areas from North Gujarat to South Gujarat, in Gir NP and surrounding areas of Saurashtra and also in other well wooded parts of Saurashtra. It is absent in Kachchh. However, the Grey Nightjar is not known to occur here in the state (Ganpule 2016).

The call/song of the Grey Nightjar is described as a loud, evenly spaced, "schruck schruck schruck" together, at rate of 5-6 notes/s, and may last for up to 7 minutes while the call/song of Indian Jungle Nightjar is described as a "fwik-m fwik-m fwik-m", with the two notes evenly spaced, at the rate of two couplets/s, and sometimes ending with a faster "foo foo foo" (rate of 6 notes/s) and often ending at a faster rate of 9 notes/s (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). However, this faster song/call ending (described as "foo foo foo") of Indian Jungle Nightjar described by Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) is not heard in over 80 songs/calls of the species from India on the website 'eBird' and over 20 songs/calls from India on the website 'Xeno Canto'.

For the call recorded by the authors, the rate is about 7-8 notes/s, and it can be described as evenly spaced, "schruck schruck schruck", similar to the call of Grey Nightjar, but somewhat faster; the second note, which is present in song/call of Indian Jungle Nightjar, is not present in the call recorded by the authors. Though this song/call is similar to call/song of Grey Nightjar, there is some uncertainty regarding the faster call of Indian Jungle Nightjar as described by Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) - is it possible that the call/song given

here could be the faster "foo foo foo" of Indian Jungle Nightjar? While it is unlikely that this could be the call of Indian Jungle Nightjar since it is acoustically different, there is less knowledge about the songs and calls of both these species. This can be judged by the fact that the alternative song for Indian Jungle Nightjar, described as "uk-krukroo" by Ali & Ripley (1983) was mistakenly attributed to this species but is the song/call of Oriental Scops Owl (*Otus sunia*) (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Thus, the entire vocal repertoire of the Indian Jungle Nightjar and the Grey Nightjar needs further study.

This record, in mid-June, is intriguing. Could it be a Grey Nightjar and if yes, is it possible that this species could be migrating to parts of Peninsular India in the winter and could be on its return journey to the Himalayas for breeding when it was seen in Gujarat? Could it be overlooked due to identification difficulties? This is speculation but it is true that not much is known about the wintering range and migration of the Grey Nightjar in India. While it is possible that this could be a Grey Nightjar, till there is more data, both vocal as well as morphological, it is not possible to accept this record as a first for Gujarat – the call heard here is faster and it could be some other nocturnal species or even other taxa or could be a Grey Nightjar too. However, bird watchers are urged to keep a look out and especially record calls and take photographs, of individuals which have a faster song/call than the song/call of an Indian Jungle Nightjar, to ascertain the possibility of the occurrence of Grey Nightjar in Gujarat.

We are grateful to Ramit Singhal for his inputs – Eds]

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Sighting of Hume's Short-toed Lark *Calandrella acutirostris* in Little Rann of Kachchh and a review of its status in Gujarat

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Prasad Ganpule

The Hume's Short-toed Lark (*Calandrella acutirostris*) breeds in the Himalayas – from NW Pakistan till Bhutan and in Baluchistan in Pakistan and winters in northern India, mainly in Gangetic Plains from NW India to Assam (Grimmett *et al.* 2011, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). There are two subspecies – nominate *acutirostris* and *tibetana*, and both winter in the Indian Subcontinent (Alström 2020). The Hume's Short-toed Lark is very similar to Greater Short-toed Lark (*Calandrella brachydactyla*) and Mongolian Short-toed Lark (*Calandrella dukhunensis*) and is separated by less contrastingly streaked crown, dark loreal stripe, better-defined whiter and narrower but more contrasting supercilium, usually less white on outer rectrix, usually longer and more slender and pointed bill with yellow coloration and darker culmen (Alström 2020). In

addition to these features, Shirihai & Svensson (2018) stated that triangular-shaped dark centres to scapulars and clean white underparts are also important in distinguishing it from Greater-, and Mongolian Short-toed Lark. However, Mongolian Short-toed Lark is often quite similar and a host of features are required to be studied before the identification can be concluded.

On 13 December 2019, I visited the western part of Little Rann of Kachchh, near Handi-bet, with Ashok Mashru and Manoj Finava. At around 17:30 hrs, we saw many flocks of larks (*Calandrella* sp.) in the area. A small flock of around 15-20 birds perched around our car and the calls uttered by these birds seemed different. These birds uttered a 'thiurr' call, which was different from the call of Greater-, and Mongolian Short-toed Lark. We took some photographs and noted that they had an orange bill with dark culmen and tip, dark lores and eye line, whitish supercilium prominent above the eye, the mantle was less streaked than what is seen in a Greater Short-toed Lark and it had cleaner white underparts. Referring to Shirihai & Svensson (2018), I identified these larks as Hume's Short-toed Larks as the dark lores and especially the bill, with orange-yellow colour and dark culmen, and call, was different than in a Greater-, or Mongolian Short-toed Lark.

Table 1: Records of Hume's Short-toed Lark from Gujarat

Sr. No.	Date	Location	Remarks	Reference
1	14 January 1949	Sidhpur, Patan Dist.	Specimen skin 232776 in FMNH, USA	A male collected by Walter Koelz
2	30 December 2012	Velavadar National Park	Photographed – shows distinct bi-coloured bill, dark lores & triangular centres to scapulars	Author's sighting – photo posted on 'Birds of Gujarat' (BOG) website
3	October 2015	Velavadar National Park	Photographed – shows distinct bi-coloured bill, whitish underparts and dark lores	Sunil Kini, <i>pers. comm</i>
4	30 January 2016	Little Rann of Kachchh	Two individuals seen well. Noted dark lores, dark tip to beak, unmarked breast. Confirmed by call - the much different 'thrrrr' from the chirps of the Greater Short-toed Larks	Ramit Singhal & Dinesh Singhal, details posted on eBird – checklist S27201030
5	13 December 2019	Little Rann of Kachchh	A flock of around 15-20 birds. Photographed. Orange-based bill with dark culmen and tip, dark lores, and clean white underparts	Author's sighting – photo given here
6	15 February 2020	Aniyali, Nal Sarovar outskirts	One individual. Photographed. Yellow-orange bill with dark culmen and tip, dark lores	Prof. Andrew Ingilis, Punit Lalbhai & Vivek Menon. ML 215769131 on eBird website
7	21 February 2020	Abdasa, Kachchh	Minimum 2 seen. Significantly paler birds, very unstreaked on crown, cheek and breast. Small beak size, compared to the Greater Short-toed Larks. Photographed	Dylan Vasapolli. Posted on eBird – checklist S64858809

Records from Gujarat

For Gujarat, the Hume's Short-toed Lark was not included in the Gujarat checklist by Parasharya *et al.* (2004). Grimmett *et al.* (2011) show only one record of the species while Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) do not show its occurrence in the state. The approximate location of the record shown in Grimmett *et al.* (2011) is in central Gujarat. It is probably based on a specimen in the collection of the Field Museum of Natural History (FMNH), Chicago, Illinois, in USA, which was said to be collected from Sidhpur, Vadodara, in January 1949 (see <https://collections-zoology.fieldmuseum.org/catalogue/1486117>, Skin – 232776 in FMNH). There is some confusion regarding the locality of this specimen record since Sidhpur is near Patan, in north Gujarat, and not in central Gujarat. Walter Koelz had collected specimens from Sidhpur (in Patan District) and the co-ordinates given for other specimens collected by W. Koelz match to Sidhpur, Patan, and the location is given as 'Patan District, Baroda' for these specimens. There are no specimens collected from Vadodara by W. Koelz. Hence, this specimen record of Hume's Short-toed Lark is most likely from Patan District and not from Vadodara and thus, the location is depicted incorrectly in the map given in Grimmett *et al.* (2011).

The Hume's Short-toed Lark was included in the latest Gujarat Checklist (Ganpule 2016) based on this specimen record and other records from Velavadar NP and Little Rann of Kachchh. Records of Hume's Short-toed Lark from Gujarat, which have been verified by photographs or calls, are given in Table 1.

The records given in Table 1 are all confirmed records of the Hume's Short-toed Lark from Gujarat. In addition to these records, there are other records from the state which could not be confirmed – for ex., by Dhyey Shah from Velavadar NP in December 2012 (posted on eBird) which shows a lark with dark lores, prominent white supercilium and the bill looks yellowish with dark culmen. However, the photos are not sharp and it is difficult to judge the critical features required for identification. It is not possible to confirm the identification beyond any doubt from the given photos and hence, erring on the side of caution, is treated here as unconfirmed. There are a few other photos from Gujarat, posted as Greater Short-toed Larks on different birding websites, which require closer scrutiny, as there is a possibility of a Hume's Short-toed Lark being misidentified.

Discussion

It can be seen that there are a few confirmed records of Hume's Short-toed Lark from Gujarat and it has been noted in different areas of the state. The wintering range of the

nominate subspecies is given as Pakistan and NW India while the subspecies *tibetana* is said to occur in the N Indian Subcontinent (Alström 2020). It is very likely that the birds breeding in Baluchistan, Pakistan, could be wintering here as this region is not very far from Gujarat. Hence, its occurrence in the state is not surprising but it is not known which subspecies occurs here. However, based on the location where the nominate subspecies *acutirostris* breeds, it is more likely to occur here in the winter.

The main difficulty for birders here is its identification and separation from congeners. The Greater Short-toed Lark is seen in almost all parts of the state and that too, in very large flocks or in good numbers. Such flocks are not seen closely, or properly checked, for the presence of Hume's Short-toed Lark. Good photographs or recording its call is the only way by which the Hume's Short-toed Lark can be identified. Further, there is less awareness among birders here regarding its occurrence in Gujarat. In view of this, the Hume's Short-toed Lark is probably overlooked in the state. From the confirmed records given here, it can be said that the Hume's Short-toed Lark is most likely to be a rare winter visitor rather than a vagrant to Gujarat. Though these records are insufficient to draw any conclusion, the sighting of a flock of 15-20 individuals in Little Rann of Kachchh and other records from different areas suggest that the Hume's Short-toed Lark winters here in small numbers in suitable habitat.

Acknowledgements

I thank Sunil Kini for sharing photographs and for all his help.

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Few interesting observations on nesting Indian Pitta *Pitta brachyura* at Hingolghadh, near Rajkot

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are preferred for making nests; the pittas usually use trees of different species for making nests. The use of electric poles for nesting has not been reported earlier for this species. There is no shortage of trees for nesting here in the area but it was not clear why the electric pole was chosen by the pitta for making the nest on these two occasions. It is also noteworthy that breeding was successful both times when the nest was made in the electric pole.



Bhavesh Trivedi



Bhavesh Trivedi

The Indian Pitta (*Pitta brachyura*) is a regular monsoon visitor in Hingolghadh Nature Education Sanctuary, near Rajkot. It arrives at the end of May and departs around October, after completing its breeding. We have been observing the breeding of the India Pitta at Hingolghadh for the past few years and we (the first and second author) had conducted a detailed study on the breeding of the species at this location, the results of which were reported earlier (Theba *et al.* 2019). We report here a few interesting observations on the nesting of the Indian Pitta at Hingolghadh.

On 16 July 2013, a pair of India Pitta had built a nest behind a metal box placed on an electric pole (Photo 1). The nest was at a height of approximately 6 feet. The pair successfully completed all breeding activities at this unusual nest site. The metal box was the box in which the electricity meters are installed. The space behind the box was used by the pitta pair for making the nest and it was odd to see the Indian Pitta nest on the electric pole. On 13 August, 2015, one pair had built a nest in a groove of a concrete electric pole and successfully completed all breeding activities, with the chicks fledging (Photo 2). Thus, the nesting on the electric poles was seen by us on two separate occasions. The Indian Pitta prefers to build its nests in forks of tree trunks (Solanki *et al.* 2018), and trees

On 18 August 2017, a pair of Indian Pitta had built a nest near the campsite and successfully completed breeding. Then, another nest was built besides this nest, possibly by the same pair, and breeding was again successful, with the chicks fledging in the second nest too. At the same time, the first nest, which was empty and not used by the pitta pair, was used by a pair of Scaly-breasted Munia (*Lonchura punctulata*) for breeding. The Scaly-breasted Munia pair added some grass and other materials and repaired the nest and started breeding in the old nest. This was quite unusual, as the munias and the pittas were seen nesting side-by-side, with the former using the old nest of the latter (Photo 3).

In July 2019, a pair of Indian Pitta had built a nest in a Neem tree near the campsite but before the female laid eggs, a Rat

Snake (*Pythas mucosa*) attacked the nest, which was abandoned by the birds. Thereafter, they built another nest on the roof of the campsite and successfully laid eggs. The eggs subsequently hatched and the pair was seen feeding the chicks. On 21 July 2019, we noted a Brahminy Starling (*Sturnia pagodarum*) feeding the chicks of the pitta (Photo 4). As per the first author's previous observations, the Brahminy Starling is known to attack the nest of the pitta, often killing the chicks or making them fall out of the nest. So, this interspecific feeding, by the Brahminy Starling, of the India Pitta chicks, is indeed very interesting. Interspecific feeding of chicks of Indian Paradise Flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi*) by Oriental White Eye (*Zosterops palpebrosus*) and by Red-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*) has been documented earlier from Gujarat (Balar 2009, Mori & Malaviya 2016). However, the interspecific feeding of chicks of Indian Pitta by a Brahminy Starling has not been known earlier and this is probably the first such documentation from Gujarat.

The breeding of the Indian Pitta in Gujarat has been studied in detail recently (Solanki *et al.* 2018, Theba *et al.* 2019). However, the observations presented here are different and show that there is still a lot to be learnt about the breeding of the Indian Pitta in the state.

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Road kill of a Black Bittern *Ixobrychus flavicollis* near Narmada Main Canal, Narmada District

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Hiren Patel

The Black Bittern (*Ixobrychus flavicollis*) is a blackish or dark brown plumaged bittern, with a brown-and-white striped throat bordered by yellow (Grimmett *et al.* 2011, Heron Conservation 2020). It is usually seen flying away into thick vegetation of reeds such as *Typha latifolia*. The Black Bittern is a 'Least Concern' species as IUCN states that its decline is not believed to be sufficiently rapid to approach the threshold under the population trend criterion and the population size is very large. However, the population trend is declining (BirdLife International 2017). It is one of the largest bitterns with an extremely large range as it is distributed in India, Southeast Asia, Indonesia, Philippines, Australia, and New Guinea to the Solomon Islands (Grimmett *et al.* 2011, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012, Heron Conservation 2020).

In the Indian subcontinent, the Black Bittern is a resident and patchily distributed (Ali 2002). As per Kazmierczak (2000) and Grimmett *et al.* (2011), it is a winter visitor in Sindh in Pakistan and these reference books show isolated records in Gujarat while Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) do not report its occurrence in Gujarat. The species was not recorded in Gujarat by Ali (1954). However, Khacher (1996) and Mukherjee *et al.* (2002) reported all the three species of bitterns breeding around Pariej Tank while Mistry & Parasharya (2016) have reported road kills of Black Bitterns around Pariej Wetland (in Kheda District). The status of Yellow Bittern, Cinnamon Bittern and Black Bittern was studied by Patel *et al.* (2017) in Central Gujarat and in South Gujarat by Patel *et al.* (2018). But Patel *et al.* (2018) did not report the species from Narmada District. We report here the road kill of a Black Bittern near Narmada Main Canal and it is probably the first record of the species from the Narmada District.

On 10 May 2020, while travelling on the road beside the Narmada Main Canal (21° 50' N, 73° 44' E) of Narmada District in South Gujarat, we observed a dead bittern on the

Black Bittern....

road. Later, on closer observation, we could identify it as an adult Black Bittern as it had a prominent dark back, striped neck bordered by striking yellow streaks, and a long bill. This being a new species in the area, an extensive search was initiated in the following days in reed beds around the canal. We searched for literature as well as 'eBird' data for the area. We observed White-breasted Waterhen (*Amaurornis phoenicurus*), Little Cormorant (*Microcarbo niger*) and Asian Openbill (*Anastomus oscitans*) around the canal area but could not find the Black Bittern.

Several kinds of research has shown the impacts of roads on biological diversity and roads pose a serious threat to them (Geneletti 2003). In India, many such incidences of roadside mortality of wild animals and birds are regularly reported (Chhangani 2004, Parasharya & Tere 2007, Bhaskaran & Bhoominathan 2010). However, Mistry & Parasharya (2016) have also discussed some feasible mitigation measures, which can be incorporated. Moreover, from the conservation point of view, reed bed habitats should be protected as they are ecologically valuable for many invertebrates and birds as they are used for shelter as well as a source of food (Sears *et al.* 2013). In Gujarat, bitterns are considered as resident breeding birds (Parasharya *et al.* 2004, Ganpule 2016). Hence, at least during the summer, reed bed habitats should not be disturbed as it is the breeding season of bitterns. Further, we request birdwatchers and researchers of Gujarat to report the sightings of Black Bittern from other areas of the state for a better understanding of its status and distribution here.

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An incidence of brood parasitism: Purple-rumped Sunbird *Leptocoma zeylonica* feeding a juvenile Grey-bellied Cuckoo *Cacomantis passerinus*

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The Grey-bellied Cuckoo (*Cacomantis passerinus*) breeds in the Himalayas and it is a widespread resident and winter migrant in the country, but

unrecorded in NW India (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). For Gujarat, it is resident as well as a monsoon migrant and seen in the forest areas of the state from north to south Gujarat, in Gir NP area in Saurashtra, with scattered records from elsewhere in Saurashtra and Kachchh (Bagda *et al.* 2015, Ganpule 2016).

On 2 November 2018, we noticed a pair of Purple-rumped Sunbirds (*Leptocoma zeylonica*) feeding a fledgling of an unidentified, small-sized, juvenile black-coloured cuckoo (*Cacomantis* sp.) at Gavier Lake (21° 07' N, 72° 44' E), near Surat, Gujarat. With the help of Grimmett *et al.* (2011), we identified the small-sized cuckoo, which had a prominent reddish gape and the overall plumage was dark greyish, as a juvenile Grey-bellied Cuckoo. Unfortunately, we were not carrying a camera with us when we observed this unusual behaviour.

We visited Gavier Lake again on 3 November 2018. We were able to hear calls but could not see the birds due to the dense vegetation. Later, on 6 November 2018, we finally photographed a female Purple-rumped Sunbird feeding the fledgling of the cuckoo. We noticed the pair feeding the cuckoo fledgling every day. The male bird also actively participated in feeding and raising the fledgling. Both the foster parents were feeding the fledgling simultaneously. The feeding used to be at a peak in the morning and evening. One day, we noticed two pairs feeding the fledgling. After observing for a while, we found that there were actually two cuckoo fledglings and two different pairs of Purple-rumped Sunbirds were raising them. They both were raising the fledglings nearby each other's areas. The fledglings were grown up and always seen perching high on trees like the Neem tree (*Azadirachta indica*), which made it difficult to document or take good photos. Both the fledglings were seen together in one instance. Observations were made till 19 November 2018. Later, we did not notice the fledglings around Gavier Lake. We assumed that the fledglings might have left the sunbird pairs and fledged. All

observations were made at Gavier Lake, which has been adopted by Nature Club Surat.

Most members of the cuckoo family (*Cuculidae*) are known brood parasites. The Grey-bellied Cuckoo is known to usually lay eggs in nests of small passerine birds. It is a well known reproductive strategy reported in cuckoos. The female cuckoos are usually host-specific and lay their eggs in nests of passerine birds and then leave all parental care to the hosts. Here, Purple-rumped Sunbirds were acting as foster parents of the cuckoo fledglings.

The Grey-bellied Cuckoo is known to be brood parasitic; the hosts are mainly warbler species with closed nests with narrow entrance, like Common Tailorbird (*Orthotomus sutorius*), Plain Prinia (*Prinia inornata*), Ashy Prinia (*Prinia socialis*), and Zitting Cisticola (*Cisticola juncidis*), as well as two species of sunbirds (*Leptocoma* sp.) (del Hoyo *et al.* 2020, Praveen & Lowther 2020) and sunbirds were observed to be hosts here. Other birdwatchers from different states of India have posted photographs of brood parasitism in cuckoos on Facebook and on the website 'OBI' (Oriental Bird Images). However, there are very few such observations from Gujarat and we request birdwatchers to report brood parasitism behaviour in cuckoos from Gujarat.

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Re-sighting of a Russian-tagged Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris* at Jamnagar

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they spotted a tagged Great Knot at the Balachhadi Beach, Jamnagar. They, along with other bird watchers, took many photographs of the marked bird in an attempt to identify the tag details. The bird had a yellow coloured flag on its left leg with 6Z inscribed on it. The right leg had a metal ring. However, the inscriptions on the metal ring were not legible in any of the photographs.



The first author informed the second author about this find of the tagged Great Knot. The second author in turn sent the images and the re-sighting information to many ornithologists, including Simba Chan of BirdLife Asia Secretariat at Tokyo. A response was received from Dmitry Dorofeev, who had marked this Great Knot at Khairusova-Belogolovaya Estuary in the Kamchatka Peninsula of Russia. The straight-line distance between the marking location and re-sighting location is a whopping 7732 kilometers (see the tagging and re-sighting details in Table).

The Great Knot (*Calidris tenuirostris*) is an uncommon winter visitor to Gujarat, with sightings from coastal areas of Jamnagar, Porbandar, Bhavnagar and Kachchh (Ganpule 2016). BirdLife International (2020) has recently listed the species as 'Endangered' in the IUCN Red List. The justification for this is cited as 'This species has been uplisted to Endangered owing to recent evidence showing a very rapid population decline caused by reclamation of non-breeding stopover grounds, and under the assumption that further proposed reclamation projects will cause additional declines in the future'.

The first author and his father Usmanbhai Mulatani are guides for bird watchers visiting Gujarat. It was during one of their birding trips with few bird watchers on 5 March 2020 that

Tagging and re-sighting details of a Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris*

Tagging details	Re-sighting details
Date of ringing: 17 July 2019	Date of sighting: 5 March 2020
Metal ring: HS14026	Metal ring: Not legible in images
Flags: Black and Yellow	Flag: Black and Yellow
Code: 6Z	Code: 6Z
Ageing: Adult	Ageing: Adult, in non-breeding plumage
Tagging location: Khairusova-Belogolovaya Estuary, Kamchatka Peninsula, Russia	Re-sighting location: Balachhadi, near Jamnagar, Gujarat, India
Ringing latitude: 57.07° N	Re-sighting latitude: 22° 36' 26.55" N
Ringing longitude: 156.69° E	Re-sighting longitude: 70° 12' 03.39" E
Ringer: Dmitry Dorofeev	Observer: Abdulbhai Mulatani
	Distance from ringing site: 7732 km
	Remarks: Looked healthy, feeding with other waders and Great Knots
	Heading direction: 279.84 degrees

Dmitry Dorofeev and his team are marking waders in this far eastern part of Russia and the largest part of their marking activities are dedicated to research on Great Knots. They use yellow flags with black engraving as per the 'Colour Flagging Protocol for Migratory Shorebirds' in the East Asian - Australasian Flyway (https://eaaflyway.net/wpcontent/uploads/2017/12/Protocol_birds-marking.pdf). The East Asian-Australasian Flyway website (<https://www.eaaflyway.net>) mentions that they have had re-sightings of Great Knots colour-banded or flagged in Australia, China and Kamchatka. It also mentions that a tagged Great Knot (flag number EI) was seen in Dubai! (<https://www.eaaflyway.net/overview-of-kamchatka-field-season-2017>)

There have been few sightings of tagged Great Knots in India. One bird each, marked in Chongming Island (31° 28' N, 121° 57' E), Shanghai, China, was reported from Henry's Island, Bakkhali in South 24 Parganas, West Bengal (<http://www.kolkatabirds.com>) and one was re-sighted at Chinchani Beach, Tal. Dahanu, Dist. Palghar, Maharashtra (Babre & Kasambe 2016). The first one was marked on 22 April 2007 and was re-sighted on 3 February 2008, about 3505 km away from the tagging location whereas the second bird was re-sighted on 18 August 2016 (the flag details could not be read). One bird ringed and colour flagged by BNHS scientists in Point Calimere, Tamil Nadu, was re-sighted near Tianjin (30° 01' N, 118° 19' E), on the eastern coast of China, on 22 April 2017 (Balachandran *et. al.* 2018). A bird tagged in Sakhalin Island (49° 19' N, 143° 40' E), Russia, was re-sighted at Kakinada, Andhra Pradesh, on 6 December 2016 (Balachandran *et. al.* 2018).

For Gujarat, there has been a sighting of a tagged Great Knot in Jamnagar earlier; an individual tagged at Kamchatka by Dmitry Dorofeev (mark on flag VM) was seen near Jamnagar, in October 2018 (Varu & Varu 2018). The tagging location and the re-sighting location was almost the same and hence, this is the second record of a Great Knot tagged at Kamchatka in Far East Russia being seen in Gujarat. Thus, this sighting further establishes a migratory link between the Russian Far East and the western part of India.

Though the Great Knot is reported from the western coast of India, from Kerala to Gujarat (<https://ebird.org/india/species/grekno/IN>) more often than previously believed (Ali & Ripley 1983, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), it is important to understand the migration of this species. Sightings of tagged birds will help us in understanding the distribution, the migration route as well as suggest conservation measures towards the protection of this species.

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We thank Simba Chan of the BirdLife International – Asia Division, based in Tokyo, Japan, for following up and helping to get in touch with the ringing agency. Thanks to Dmitry Dorofeev, Senior researcher at the All-Russian Research Institute for Environmental Protection (VNII Ecology), Ministry of Natural Resources and Environment of the Russian Federation, for providing the tagging details.

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First breeding record of Black-naped Monarch *Hypothymis azurea* and Black-headed Cuckooshrike *Coracina melanoptera* in Kachchh, along with other interesting observations

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Dipak Goswami

Photo 1



Dipak Goswami

Photo 2

On 28 June 2020, I was on my routine birding trip to Kotdi area, Ta: Mandvi, in Kachchh. I have been observing nesting of Indian Pitta (*Pitta brachyura*) in this area every year since 2011. This time too, a pair of Indian Pitta was nesting in the area. While observing the nest of the pitta, I saw a male Indian Paradise Flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi*) chasing a small bird which I could not identify due to the dense canopy. After a few minutes, the bird came on a perch and I was surprised to see that it was a female Black-naped Monarch (*Hypothymis azurea*), a rarity for Kachchh. On 2 July 2020, I revisited the same spot and this time found that both male and female Indian Paradise Flycatcher were chasing the Black-naped Monarch female. The female monarch had a grass twig in its bill. I followed it and found its nest (Photo 1). It was built on an *Acacia nilotica* tree, at the junction of three hanging branches. The nest was very well camouflaged and looked like a nest of a Purple Sunbird (*Cinnyris asiaticus*). There are a few winter records of the Black-naped Monarch in Kachchh but this is for the first time that its breeding has been noted in Kachchh.



Dipak Goswami

Photo 3

During my above described visits, I saw a male Black-headed Cuckooshrike (*Coracina melanoptera*) in that area. On 12 July 2020, during my third visit, I was surprised to see its nest (Photo 2). Both the male and female were present. The female was sitting inside the nest and sometimes with food (Photo 3). The nest was smaller in size and built on a *Prosopis cineraria*, which is locally known as *Khijado*. On 26 July 2020, I found two chicks inside the nest. This is also the first breeding record of this species in Kachchh.



Dipak Goswami

Photo 4

I noted other important observations in the same area, which are as follows:

- 1) The sighting of a pair of Indian Paradise Flycatchers and their behavior was suggestive of their breeding in the area.
- 2) On 2 July 2020, an Asian Brown Flycatcher (*Muscicapa latirostris*) was seen and photographed in the same area (Photo 4). The presence of this species in July is suggestive of its breeding. However, I could not locate its nest due to the dense canopy. But, the record of this species in July in Kachchh is certainly odd and worth investigating further in the next monsoon season.
- 3) On 28 June 2020 and 2 July 2020, a Tickell's Blue Flycatcher (*Cyornis tickelliae*) was seen and seemed to be active in breeding. This species is also not common in Kachchh and the sighting in June and July is also suggestive of its breeding in this area.
- 4) On 2 July 2020, a nest of Marshall's lora (*Aegithina nigrolutea*) was seen on a Neem tree at a height of about four feet. The nest had three eggs and the female was busy in incubation. I continued observing the nest. It was noted that the eggs hatched on 22 July 2020. The parents continued feeding the chicks and all three chicks were seen moving outside the nest on 8 August 2020. It was surprising to see the nest of the Marshall's lora at a height of only four feet on the tree. The nest was easily visible and the activities of the parents could be observed without any disturbance to the birds. Due to a very heavy monsoon in Kachchh this year, the nest was damaged when the chicks had hatched. However, a few locals put a plastic tray as support for the nest. The nest had better support due to this addition and the parents did not seem to be disturbed by this. The chicks continued to be fed by the parents in the nest and also in the tray. Eventually, all the three chicks were seen hopping outside the nest and taking short flights on the nesting tree. Thus, all three chicks fledged.

Discussion

Due to the unique geography and habitats of Kachchh, the avifauna here is slightly different than what is seen in other parts of Gujarat. Many species, which are commonly seen in Saurashtra, are either rare or absent in Kachchh. Regarding the Black-headed Cuckooshrike and Black-naped Monarch, both these species are fairly commonly seen in the forested and well wooded areas of Saurashtra – especially in Gir National Park and surrounding areas and in other well wooded areas in the region. But, Black-headed Cuckooshrike is a vagrant to Kachchh (Ganpule 2016), and there are only a handful of records from this area. It was seen earlier by me at this location

in July 2017 (Goswami 2017), and there are two records from Mandvi – In April 1963 (Himmatsinhji 1964A), and later by S. N. Varu (*pers. comm*). There is another record from Than, near Nakhatrana, by Darshit Mehta in July 2014 (photo on <https://www.birdsofgujarat.co.in>) but this is the first breeding record of the Black-headed Cuckooshrike in Kachchh. Similarly, the Black-naped Monarch is also widespread in Saurashtra but it is rare in Kachchh (Ganpule 2016). A first record of this species from Kachchh was from Mandvi in January 1963 (Himmatsinhji 1964B). Another record from Chavda Rakhal, near Bhuj, in March 2006 is known (Varu 2007) but, there are no records of any of these species breeding in Kachchh.

I also conducted an online search of the websites 'Oriental Bird Images' (OBI) and 'Birds of Gujarat' (BOG) for records of these species from Kachchh. I could only find one other photographic record of Black-naped Monarch from Kachchh by Pankaj Maheria while the photographic record of Black-headed Cuckooshrike from Kachchh is by Darshit Mehta, referred to here earlier. Thus, these breeding records of Black-headed Cuckooshrike and Black-naped Monarch are significant and prove that they breed here in Kachchh. It will be interesting to know if these species are regularly breeding here or this year, due to the very heavy rainfall and subsequent suitable conditions, breeding was seen.

My other observation of an Asian Brown Flycatcher in the same area in the month of July is also noteworthy. This species is known to breed in Gir National Park area and possibly in other well wooded areas of Saurashtra but it is not known to breed in Kachchh. Further study is needed to confirm if the Asian Brown Flycatcher also breeds in this area. The presence of Indian Paradise Flycatcher and Tickell's Blue Flycatcher here in the months of June and July is not very surprising. Both these species, though uncommon in Kachchh, are known to occur here.

The fact that Marshall's lora breeds in Kachchh is well known. However, there are no detailed studies carried out on its breeding biology and many aspects of its breeding are not known – like the incubation period and fledging period. Though my observations were not part of a detailed study, I observed that the incubation period was around 18-20 days and the fledging period was around 21 days (approximately three weeks). However, these observations are the result of a casual study and not part of a breeding study and hence it is possible that there might be some error here. It is surprising that the Marshall's lora remains a less studied species even though it is fairly common in some habitats in Kachchh and its nesting is commonly seen here.

....Breeding record

Conclusion

The breeding records of Black-headed Cuckooshrike and Black-naped Monarch confirm that both these species breed in Kachchh. It is possible that the breeding occurred this year to an unusually heavy monsoon, with rains more than 250% of normal. This habitat, in Mandvi Taluka, supports very good vegetation and it is likely that the Asian Brown Flycatcher could also be breeding here. The breeding of Marshall's lora in this area is not unusual but the breeding biology of this species needs further study. This area should be monitored from late May till September in the coming years to see whether the Black-headed Cuckooshrike and the Black-naped Monarch continue to breed here.

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Breeding of Small Pratincole *Glareola lactea* near Jamnagar

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Ankur Gohil

Jamnagar has always been on high priority when it comes to birding, bird studies and bird photography. Birding in Jamnagar is always a treat for all birders and especially when we talk about waders, we cannot forget Jamnagar. We present here a few observations about the breeding of Small Pratincole (*Glareola lactea*) near Jamnagar and draw attention towards the impact of human activities on the breeding of this species near Jamnagar.

The Small Pratincole is a resident in almost all parts of India and it is a breeding migrant to Pakistan (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). It is a Least Concern species (BirdLife International 2020) and is mainly found near lakes, pools, freshwater marshes, rivers, agricultural fields, dam sites, irrigation canals etc. For Gujarat, it is a common to uncommon resident and local migrant, with sightings from all over the state (Ganpule 2016). We thought it was not very common around Jamnagar but after intensive

search, we were able to find the Small Pratincole at several places. We were lucky to observe its nesting near Jamnagar.



Ankur Gohil



Ankur Gohil

Sightings

The maximum sightings of the Small Pratincole were around Ranjit Sagar Dam and Sapda Dam. Both these dams are located near Jamnagar. Our first visit was in February 2019, while we were going for our regular birding and bird photography, as per our routine. On that day, we saw Small Pratincoles in the area. We saw a pair where it appeared that a male was courting a female. It was exciting to see this behaviour and so we started regularly visiting the sites to observe the complete breeding cycle of this species near Jamnagar.

Subsequently, we saw a maximum of about 200 individuals at these sites over a period of more than two months. We documented pre-courtship display, courtship display, fight among males during mate selection, mating, nesting, eggs, egg hatching, chicks, feeding of chicks, until the chicks became independent and fledged. We documented 12 nests at Ranjit Sagar Dam site and only one nest at Sapda Dam site. At both these sites, there is anthropogenic pressure, with excavation for purpose of water conservation, fishing and use of dry dam area for agriculture being the main impediments to successful breeding. Despite the fact that there is a good population of the Small Pratincole at Sapda Dam, only one nest was seen and the breeding was not successful. At Ranjit Sagar Dam, only 12 pairs made nests and out of these, only 8 pairs were able to successfully raise young.

We wish to draw the attention of the bird watching community toward this habitat destruction. We observed that there is considerable pressure on the Small Pratincoles at both these dam sites. While it is possible that these birds could be nesting at some other places nearby, the nesting here is difficult. Due to human activities, the breeding is often not successful. Though the Small Pratincole is not a threatened species, it is unfortunate that the conditions are not conducive for its breeding at these two dam sites. It is suggested that the local people should be made aware that these birds are nesting there and some area should be kept undisturbed for the breeding of the Small Pratincole. We intend to work towards conserving the habitat and making efforts so that the breeding activities of the Small Pratincole are not interrupted by human activities.

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Ashy Woodswallow *Artamus fuscus* near Vadodara

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Arvind Ghode

On 8 September 2019, I was birding with my friends Pratik Nagrecha, Ranjitsingh Sahota and Bhargav Vyas and we decided to go to Jawla Lake at Savli, near Vadodara. We reached our destination at about 06:45 hrs and started looking at the birds there. We could find some Red Avadavats (*Amandava amandava*), Baya Weavers (*Ploceus philippinus*) and a couple of Black-headed Munias (*Lonchura malacca*). While walking along the bank of the lake, we also saw a solitary Scaly-breasted Munia (*Lonchura punctulata*).

After some time, as the sightings reduced and the sky was overcast, we decided to walk further. After about one km, towards a bend on the road and perched on an electric wire, Pratik called me to look at a different looking bird. On seeing it through the camera lens, we identified it as an Ashy Woodswallow (*Artamus fuscus*). We confirmed the identification by referring to Grimmett *et al.* (2011). We took

pictures and sent them to Ayaz Mansuri for confirmation – he confirmed that it was an Ashy Woodswallow. We saw many individuals but they were perched high on the electric wires. We did not think of getting a better picture and stayed at the same place so as not to disturb the birds. But still, they slowly started drifting towards an electric cable tower and we counted a total of around 20 individuals in this group. We went to another location and after about an hour, when the sun came up, we returned back to check but the Ashy Woodswallows had gone by then.

The Ashy Woodswallow is resident in Gujarat – there are previous records of the species breeding in Vadodara and Dahod Districts (Vyas & Upadhyay 2015). Regarding its distribution, it is thought to be distributed in Central and South Gujarat, in various types of habitats, from deciduous forests, thorny scrub to agricultural lands. The species also breeds in these areas during March to May. However, it is not very common here around Vadodara.

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Pallid Scops Owl *Otus brucei* at Ambla, near Bhavnagar

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The Pallid Scops Owl (*Otus brucei*) is a small-sized owl, known to winter in Sindh (Pakistan), Gujarat and Maharashtra (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012) and even up to Kerala (Chandran *et al.* 2016). Within Gujarat state, it is known to occur in Great Rann of Kachchh and Little Rann of Kachchh, with isolated records in Saurashtra and Kachchh and one record near Ahmedabad (Ganpule 2016). Though its record from Bhavnagar district by Dharmakumarsinhji (1955) is quite old, there are few recent sighting records from Surendranagar (Sangha & Malik 2010, Dave 2017), Rajkot (Mundkur 1986, Rajput 2015), Gir-Somnath (Chauhan 2017) and Jamnagar (Jadeja *et al.* 2019) districts of Saurashtra region of Gujarat. In this note, I report a recent record of the Pallid Scops Owl

from Ambla Village, near Sanosara, Dist. Bhavnagar (21° 42' 47.88" N, 71° 50' 31.47" E).

On 23 March 2019, I noticed a small owl struggling to walk along the compound wall of our campus at about 15:00 hrs. On a closer approach, the bird did not try to fly away. Probably, it was too weak to fly. With the help of some students, we took photographs with mobile phone and identified it as a Pallid Scops Owl by referring to field guides. In all the pictures, its eyes were closed. Initially, we suspected some eye infection/injury. With an intention to treat its eyes with some eye drops, we captured the owl and brought it to my home. As the bird was struggling on the ground for several

winter in our area at least from 15 October till beginning of February (Sangha & Malik 2010) or 3 February (Jadeja *et al.* 2019). Its present record on 23 March further extends its known wintering period in our area.

[There are photos of Pallid Scops Owl from Mahuva, Rajula and Bhavnagar, in Bhavnagar District, posted on the 'Birds of Gujarat' (BOG) website (<http://birdsofgujarat.co.in/>). Thus, it is known to occur in the area. As stated by the author, this sighting, in late March, is interesting and suggests that this species remains in our region till almost the end of March – Eds]

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Bhartendu Dave



hours in the hot sun, we offered water using a dropper. Slowly, water drops were kept on the junction of two mandibles and the bird sucked the drops. It consumed almost 20 ml of water. Then suddenly, it gave a jerk and escaped from the hands of the person who was holding it. It flew out of the door and perched on a Neem tree nearby. Our plan to treat its eyes could not be executed. On the Neem tree, it perched too high from where, re-capturing it was not possible. Till night, we could see it on the tree. In the morning on the next day, we searched for it on the Neem and in nearby area but could not find it.

On 23 March 2019, the daily maximum temperature had risen up to 38° C. It seems that after consuming 20 ml of water, the owl recovered from heat stress. I hope that it completed its return migration successfully. With the present record at Ambla, the past record from Bhavnagar is reconfirmed and it further supports its wide spread distribution, at least in Saurashtra region of Gujarat. The Pallid Scops Owl is known to

A rare colour aberrant Common Crane *Grus grus* in Kachchh

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Pratik Joshi



Pratik Joshi

On 10 December 2020, I was visiting a friend's house near Gandhidham, Kachchh. As per my habit, I was carrying my camera and binoculars. While travelling in the area, about 7 km from Gandhidham City, I stopped and went near an elevated part of a farm so that I could see the surroundings. I saw a flock of Common Cranes (*Grus grus*) feeding in an abandoned farm where the crop had been harvested and a few *Prosopis juliflora* trees were present. I noticed a white coloured bird in this flock. At first, I thought it could be an egret (*Egretta* sp.) but as I went closer and saw the bird properly, it was a white coloured Common Crane. This crane was entirely white, except for a black patch on the lores and crown. It was quite

shy, and remained within the flock. I took some photographs. The flock took flight and I could see that this white coloured crane had completely white wings.

This sighting of a colour aberrant Common Crane here is quite unusual. There has been only one previous sighting of a colour aberrant Common Crane from Gujarat – a bird was seen on 14 February 2020 in Banni area, Kachchh, by scientists of Wildlife Institute of India (WII) which was reported in the Times of India, dated 20 February 2020 (ToI 2020). In an extensive review of colour aberrations in Indian birds by Mahabal *et al.* (2016), there is no mention of colour aberration in any crane species. Thus, it seems that colour aberration in cranes is rare. I could not identify the exact colour mutation.

[We sent the photos of the colour aberrant Common Crane to Hein van Grouw for confirming the exact colour mutation. He replied (in litt, email dated 16 December 2020) that 'The aberration involved with the Crane I cannot be sure of as the photos, unfortunately, do not show enough detail. It is, obviously, not Albino and also not Leucism or Ino. It may be Brown but bleached strongly further by the sunlight'. Hein van Grouw further stated that it could also be a different mutation wherein the bird is at first colour aberrant but gradually becomes 'normal' plumaged. Hence, since the details were not visible in the photos, the exact colour mutation could not be determined. This is a rare sighting of a colour aberrant Common Crane from Gujarat.

We are extremely grateful to Hein van Grouw for his help in providing inputs about the colour mutation in this bird – Eds]

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ToI, 2020. Link: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/ahmedabad/amid-shades-of-grey-a-rare-white-crane-spotted-in-kutch/articleshow/74210798.cms> □

Short Birding Notes



Eurasian Scops-Owl *Otus scops* in Bhavnagar

On 23 October, 2020, I was birding in the Malnath Hills, Bhavnagar. Around 09:45 hrs, while observing and photographing a Grey-headed Canary Flycatcher (*Culicicapa ceylonensis*) in a Banyan tree, I saw a small owl fly away and settle in a Mango tree close by. The smaller birds nearby raised the alarm immediately on spotting the tiny predator and I identified the owl as a Eurasian Scops Owl (*Otus scops*). I took photographs and the owl did not seem to be disturbed either by the mobbing birds or by my close presence. I observed it closely for around 90 minutes in the same location, and observed a variety of birds heckling the owl. It flew away when disturbed by cattle and was not seen again. It was identified as a Eurasian Scops Owl by rufous markings above the eyes and on the scapulars, underparts with prominent cross-barring and the overall plumage. The photos were also shown to experts who confirmed the identification. This species has been recently reported from different locations in Gujarat, like Little-, and Greater Rann of Kachchh, Mahuva, Amreli, etc. This sighting makes it the second record near Bhavnagar.

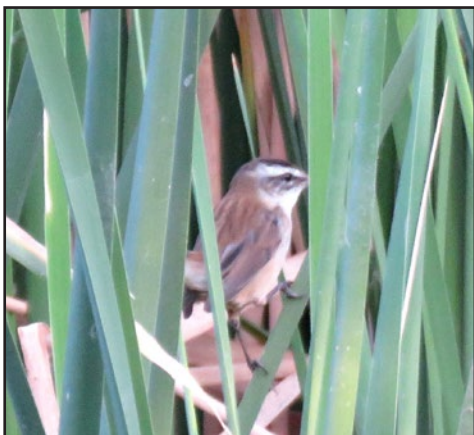
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Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia* in Girnar Wildlife Sanctuary near Junagadh

On 27 November 2020, I was bird watching at Bordevi, in the Girnar Wildlife Sanctuary near Junagadh. I observed a small bird, which was moving about on the ground. It was olive-brownish in colour, with streaked upperparts. The crown was also streaked blackish and the undertail coverts were distinctly marked. Based on these features, I identified it as a Grasshopper Warbler (*Locustella naevia*). This was the first time I had seen this bird here and it was a surprise sighting since the Grasshopper Warbler has not been documented in Junagadh area so far. It is possible that it is overlooked. It has been reported from Amreli (see photo on the website Oriental Bird Images), which is not far from here and there are recent sightings from other parts of the state. This sighting confirms its occurrence in the Junagadh area.

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Moustached Warbler *Acrocephalus melanopogon* in Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary

On 18 January 2020, at around 08:00 hrs, I was at Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary. While I was observing a Common Grasshopper Warbler (*Locustella naevia*) inside the reeds, I heard a different call. I searched for the bird and found two Moustached Warblers (*Acrocephalus melanopogon*) in the reeds. I identified these warblers as Moustached Warblers based on the typical plumage (streaked upperparts, long and broad white supercilium, thin bill and blackish sides of crown) and structure. I went closer and took some record photographs of one bird while the other bird went into the reeds. There have been recent sightings of Moustached Warbler in Gujarat (Ganpule 2016) but it is uncommon to rare here in Nalsarovar. Further sightings will help in understanding its status in this area.

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Kasim Sama Sidhani: At: Nal Sarovar.



Sighting of Painted Sandgrouse *Pterocles indicus* near Rajkot

On 2 August 2020, in the morning, I was with a few friends and we decided to go for bird watching and photography near Vagudal and Khirasara *vidi* near Rajkot. On the way, near Balasar Village, I saw a bird sitting on a rocks, which I could identify as a sandgrouse but on looking through my camera, I was delighted and surprised to see that it was a beautiful male Painted Sandgrouse (*Pterocles indicus*). It was alone and there was no sign of the female. It was my first sighting of Painted Sandgrouse near Rajkot. Though this species is widely distributed in the state, there are very few records from near Rajkot and this is probably the first photographic record in the past few years for this area.

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Amur Falcon *Falco amurensis* near Dwarka

On 19 December 2019, while going from Dwarka to Mithapur, we saw a small falcon perched on a wire. We turned the vehicle and went back to the spot. It was an Amur Falcon (*Falco amurensis*). We realised that probably the same bird was perched here a day before but, as we were in a hurry, it was ignored. Fortunately, we were carrying a small point and shoot camera, along with binoculars, so the first author was able to click few photos, which further confirmed the identification. The bird was lethargic and had primaries, especially of the right wing, in poor shape. It was also continuously mobbed by House Crows (*Corvus splendens*) and so it had to change its position every few minutes. The Amur Falcon is an uncommon / rare passage migrant (both spring and autumn passage migrant), in Gujarat (Ganpule 2016). There are 13 observations of Amur Falcon from Gujarat on 'eBird' website, and it is reported from November to January and April-May (eBird 2020). This sighting is an addition to the sightings of this species in Gujarat.

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Flock of Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps nigricollis* in Jakhau, Kachchh

On 18 November 2018, my son Nirav and I went to the Jakhau Salt Pans for photography. Due to drought-like situation in the winter of 2018-2019, the birds, especially winter visitors, were absent everywhere except on the sea coast and in salt pans. We saw a few grebes from some distance, which I initially identified as Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) but Nirav corrected me and on a closer look, were indeed Black-necked Grebe (*Podiceps nigricollis*). A group of 5 individuals was seen in one section. These birds were seen regularly over 5-6 visits but on 8 December 2018, we saw 35 individuals in this area. We took photographs and the birds approached to about 10-12 mts from us. This species is common in Charakhla Salt Pans near Dwarka, where large flocks have been noted and there are sporadic sightings from other parts of Saurashtra and Kachchh. The Black-necked Grebe has been noted in Kachchh earlier, including Jakhau, but it is generally uncommon here (Akhtar & Tiwari 1992, Varu 2007, 2009).

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Tawny Eagle *Aquila Rapax* in Ahmedabad

On 9 July 2020, I was birding in a field near my home in Chandkheda, Ahmedabad, in the morning. I noticed a huge flock of Black Kites (*Milvus migrans*) circling at a distance. When the flock moved closer to my location, I noticed an unusual looking, whitish-coloured raptor, which was bigger in size than the kites it was flying with. I took a few photographs but could not identify the bird in the field. On posting the image on 'Raptor Identification' Facebook page, it was confirmed by many experts as a Tawny Eagle (*Aquila rapax*). With the Tawny Eagle being an uncommon resident and local winter migrant, and that too recorded mostly from desert areas and arid scrub, this is certainly an unusual record, and could possibly be the first record for Ahmedabad in the past few years. It would be worthwhile to be on the lookout for this raptor in and around the city.

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Sighting of Jungle Nightjar *Caprimulgus indicus* at Khirasara vidi, Rajkot

On 26 July 2020, a Sunday, I was with Dr. Sandeep Nandani, Dr. Chetan Hansalia and Pilubhai Sitapara in the morning and we were on our weekly bird watching trip in Khirasara vidi area, during which we saw slight movement on an *Acacia* sp. tree. On close observation and looking through the camera, we identified some bird camouflaged on the branch of the tree and so we silently approached towards it. A nightjar (*Caprimulgus* sp.), totally camouflaged, was present on the branch. We took some photographs and identified it as a Jungle Nightjar (*Caprimulgus indicus*). We confirmed the identification with Ashokbhai Mashru. The Jungle Nightjar is known to occur in Hingolghadh Sanctuary but this is probably the first confirmed record of this species in Khirasara vidi and hence a significant sighting for Rajkot.

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Western-crowned Warbler *Phylloscopus occipitalis* in Kachchh

There had been good rains in Kachchh since the last two years and so the birdlife is good. We were on a birding trip on 25 October 2020 near and around Mandvi area. This area was very rich in *khair* and *desi babul* trees and so there was lot of activity of small birds. We stopped near one *khair* tree where activity of warblers was good. We spotted a warbler which we thought was a Greenish Warbler (*Phylloscopus trochiloides*) and took photographs of it. Later, on seeing the photographs on the computer, we saw that this warbler had whitish crown stripe and darker sides of crown. The supercilium was whitish and the upperparts had greyish tinge. We identified it as a Western-crowned Warbler (*Phylloscopus occipitalis*), which was later confirmed by experts. In Kachchh, the first sighting of this warbler was by Veer Vaibhav Mishra in September 2019. This is a second record of the species from this region.

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Ashy Prinia *Prinia socialis* in eastern Banni, Kachchh

In October 2020, during part of nocturnal field work and survey in Banni region in Kachchh, we went to south-eastern part of Banni, near Lonthia town, in the morning. We saw a prinia perched on a *Prosopis juliflora*. It was moving very quickly from one perch to another. I was unable to identify it at that time. We were looking for European Nightjars (*Caprimulgus europaeus*) which were seen in flight the previous night in this area. After coming back, I shared the photographs of the prinia with senior birders Maulik Varu and Shantilal Varu; they identified it as an Ashy Prinia (*Prinia socialis*) and informed that this was the first record of Ashy Prinia from mainland Kachchh. The Ashy Prinia was seen in a patch with vegetation, nearby a seasonal river. I was accompanied in the field by my friends Vatsal Chedda and Pratik Shah during this trip to Banni.

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Removal of dead chick from nest by Brahminy Starling *Sturnia pagodarum*

A pair of Brahminy Starling (*Sturnia pagodarum*) had started nesting in a hole above an electric meter, situated in the building just opposite my home, in month of April 2020. It had started feeding insects to the chicks. In the morning on 30 June 2020, I saw a Brahminy Starling coming out from the nest with something big in its beak. I came out of my house and on searching, I found the Brahminy Starling sitting on a wire above my house but without any thing in its bill. I found a well grown dead chick, on the street exactly below the wire where the bird was perched. I understood that the Brahminy Starling had removed the dead chick from its nest. The chick was without any sign of injury but there were some threads wrapped on one leg. Earlier, I observed a similar incident during the study of breeding Coppersmith Barbet (*Megalaima haemacephala*), wherein dead chicks were removed from the nest by the adult barbet (Mashru 2018). It is likely that if the chick dies, then the parent birds remove it to keep the nest clean.

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Black-headed Munia *Lonchura malacca* in Kachchh

While birding at Anjar Taluka on 8 December 2019, we saw one Black-headed Munia (*Lonchura malacca*) with a flock of Black-headed Buntings (*Emberiza melanocephala*) and Red-headed Buntings (*Emberiza bruniceps*). The birds had flocked together to feed on *Jowar* grain in a nearby field. We took some photographs and confirmed the identification. The Black-headed Munia is rare in Kachchh. It was not reported to occur in Kachchh by Ali (1945). I had seen this bird for the first time at Khari River, near Bhuj, in September 1980. Subsequently, I had again seen this species at Chhataradi Tank with Navin Bapat. Thereafter, it was not recorded in Kachchh and this sighting in December 2019 was another record of the Black-headed Munia for Kachchh. I was accompanied by fellow bird watchers Jaysinh Parmar, Mahesh Parmar, Ibrahim Darvadiya, Manoj Tank and Mahendra Tank during my visit to Anjar Taluka.

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Colour aberrant Black-breasted Weaver *Ploceus benghalensis* near Kheda

On 15 August 2020, we were birding in the outskirts of Kheda, which is very rich in avifauna. It is around 40 km from Ahmedabad. Early in the morning, we were looking for Red Munia (*Amandava amandava*) in the reeds, and so we were checking the whole patch of reeds. The second author saw a white bird perched in the lush green background and we identified it as a weaver species (*Ploceus* sp.). It was difficult but we managed to take a good photo of this colour aberrant weaver. This individual had normal coloured wings and some feathers on the mantle were blackish. The crown showed a few yellow feathers. But other than this, the entire plumage was white. The bill and legs were normal coloured. We identified it as a Black-breasted Weaver (*Ploceus benghalensis*) based on the large greyish bill and referring to van Grouw (2013), we thought that the mutation was likely to be 'progressive greying' but we were not sure. This was an unusual sighting of a colour aberrant Black-breasted Weaver from Gujarat. [The photo was referred to Hein van Grouw, who confirmed the colour mutation in this Black-breasted Weaver as 'progressive greying'. We are thankful to Hein Van Grouw for his help in the identification of the exact colour mutation –Eds]

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Colour aberrant Brahminy Starling *Sturnia pagodarum* near Mandvi, Surat

On 14 January 2020, I was bird watching with my friends Jayant Bhojwala (from Mandvi) and Rajesh Jadav (from Surat). Since it was a holiday, we had planned on birding for the whole day. Early in the morning, after picking up Jayant, we proceeded towards the forest area. As we were approaching a water body after taking a detour from a small village, I spotted three birds flying into a tree. From the flight, I could immediately guess that they were starlings but was confused as one of the birds was creamier white. I stopped my car and we took some photos and saw the birds with binoculars. We could confirm that the three birds were Brahminy Starlings (*Sturnia pagodarum*). Cautiously, we approached nearer and were able to take good photos of the colour aberrant Brahminy Starling. It was interesting to note that the colour aberrant bird was enticing its partner for mating. They kept flying from the tree to the electric wires and back. This bird had whitish head and wings but the underparts were pale rufous.

[The mutation in this individual was identified as 'progressive greying' by Hein van Grouw. We are thankful to Hein van Grouw for helping with the identification of the colour mutation – Eds]

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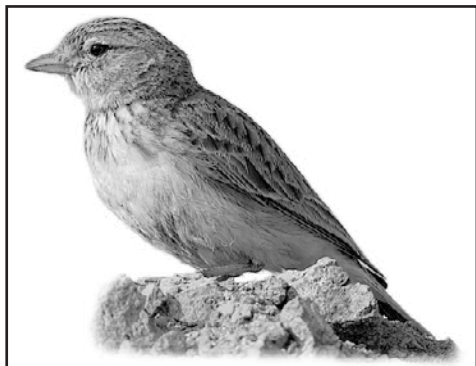
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ABSTRACTS

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



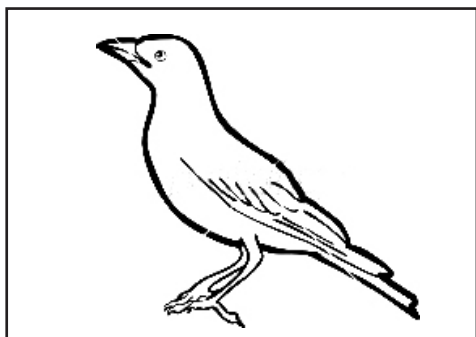
Sand Lark: 'Field identification of Sand Lark and Lesser/Asian Short-toed Lark – An unacknowledged pitfall' by Prasad Ganpule. *Indian BIRDS* 15 (4): 97-111

The author presents a detailed paper on field identification of Sand Lark (*Alaudala raytal*) and Lesser/Asian Short-toed Lark (*A. rufescens/cheleensis*) based on study of Sand Larks in Gujarat. The author has stated that identification and separation of Sand Lark from the Lesser/Asian Short-toed Lark is difficult and requires studying a host of features, with overlap of features in these species. A photo of 'putative' Lesser/Asian Short-toed Lark from Gujarat is also discussed in detail and remarks are given on photos of Lesser/Asian Short-toed Lark taken in India. Variation in Sand Larks in Gujarat is discussed, and it is stated that both subspecies (*adamsi* and *krishnukumarsinhji*) of Sand Lark are widely distributed in Gujarat. The author suggests taking photos, from all angles, of suspected Lesser/Asian Short-toed Lark for identification, and also further study of Sand Larks in Gujarat.



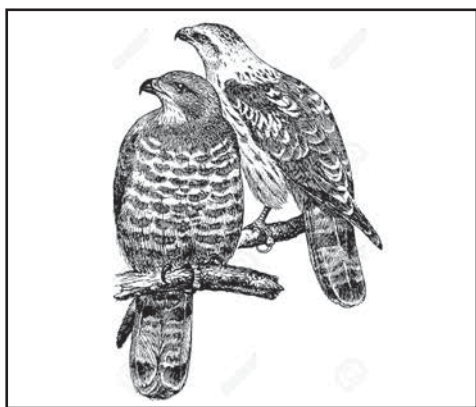
Greater Flamingo: 'First report of successful breeding of Greater Flamingo in the Gulf of Khambhat' by B. M. Parasharya & I. R. Gadhvi: *Indian BIRDS* 15 (5): 136-139

The authors report on the breeding of Greater Flamingo in the Gulf of Khambhat, Gujarat. A colony of Greater Flamingos (*Phoenicopterus roseus*) was seen in a salt pan around the Gulf of Khambhat and observations were made over a period of more than three months. Breeding was successful and more than 300+ chicks were seen there. This was the first ever successful breeding of Greater Flamingo at a new site in the Gulf of Khambhat. The authors propose to inform the salt pan owners to provide a larger island and manage the water depth in the pan to deter terrestrial predators and keep out visitors from the area so that Greater Flamingos breed here regularly.



Rufous-tailed Lark: 'Colour aberration in Rufous-tailed Lark from Gujarat' by Yuyutshu N. Bhattacharya & others: *Indian BIRDS* 16 (2): 54

A colour-aberrant Rufous-tailed Lark (*Ammomanes phoenicurus*) was seen and photographed near Timbi Irrigation Reservoir, near Vadodara, by the authors. A 'white plumaged' Rufous-tailed Lark was seen with a normal plumaged individual. The colour aberration in this individual was identified as 'progressive greying', which is due to the result of progressive loss of melanin pigments with each successive moult. In this individual, whitening of more than 75% of the feathers was seen. The authors state that this was the first record of progressive greying for this species from India.



European Honey Buzzard: 'First record of European Honey Buzzard for India' by Dhaval Vargiya & others. *Birding ASIA* 33: 128-131

The authors report of a rescue of a juvenile honey buzzard from Porbandar, which was later identified as a European Honey Buzzard (*Pernis apivorus*). The individual was rescued off the Porbandar coast, was injured, and recovered after treatment. Measurements were taken for this bird and the plumage (lack of gorget) and underwing pattern (dark carpal patches and the pattern of barring on the secondaries) were similar to European Honey Buzzard and did not match to Oriental Honey Buzzard (*Pernis ptilorhynchus*). The wing formula further confirmed it as a European Honey Buzzard. Expert opinions were taken and they confirmed that it was a juvenile European Honey Buzzard. This was a first record of European Honey Buzzard for Gujarat as well as India.

□



Obituary: “Heavenly flight of a birdman of Gujarat”

Dr. Bhavbhuti Mukundray Parasharya (4 July 1955 – 9 October 2020)

It was Sunday, 20 September 2020; I called Dr. B. M. Parasharya in the morning at around 10 am on his cell phone, telling ‘Bhai’ (as I usually called him) ‘is it convenient for you to have a round in the salt pans in the Bhal region (around 10 km from Bhavnagar city) for birding in the afternoon?’ He received the cell phone call with usual original zeal! ‘Yeah...lovely’ he replied and added ‘but why don’t you join us right now at Victoria Park (a reserve forest in Bhavnagar)?’ He was with a group of students of Zoology Department of Sir P. P. Institute of Science, teaching them biology of butterflies! Unfortunately, it was the last Sunday in the field with him. We were on a birding trip till the late evening. As the light was not favourable, we planned to visit the place again after a couple of days. But that day never came! On the following Sunday (27 September), when I called him again for the planned birding trip he said, ‘I am not feeling well, I am Corona positive and now I have to be home quarantined for a fortnight! You also take care and please finish that pending task’. We were neighbours; his house is just 100 mts away from mine. As he was Corona positive, I could not meet him but I was in constant contact with him till his sad demise. On 2 October, he was admitted to the hospital and on 9 October morning, he was shifted to the ICU as his condition was deteriorating and in the evening, he had some cardiac trouble. It was the most unfortunate day for me and for all the bird lovers of our country, as I received a call from Dr. Dishant, his nephew, at 10 pm, that we had lost the warrior; he had lost the battle against Covid-19 and the birdman took heavenly flight, leaving behind many friends and family members.

Dr. Bhavbhuti Mukundray Parasharya was the sixth among seven children of Smt. Nirmalaben and a great poet and writer, Shri Mukundray Parasharya. He was born in Bhavnagar, in Gujarat, on 4 July 1955. He was a brilliant student from his childhood. His whole academic career was with first class distinction marks. He completed schooling and B. Sc in 1977 from Sir P. P. Institute of Science at Bhavnagar and went to Vadodara for a Masters degree in Zoology, with specialization in ornithology and fisheries biology, from M. S. University, in 1979. He completed his Ph. D. on “Studies on the coastal birds and their marine habitat with a special emphasis on the biology of Indian Reef Heron *Egretta gularis* (Bosc.)” under the supervision of the renowned biologist Prof. R. M. Naik from Saurashtra University, Rajkot, Gujarat, in the year 1985. International heron experts from USA, Dr. James Hancock and Dr. James Kushlan, were the external referees of his Ph. D. and admired his research work greatly. For the initial six months of his career, he joined the National Institute of Virology in the year 1984 and from August 1984, till July 2017, he was in various positions, from Jr. Scientist to Senior Professor (Research), in AINP Ornithology Project, at Anand Agricultural University, Anand, Gujarat.

Dr. Parasharya authored 112 research papers, which were published in peer reviewed national and international journals and also 9 books, including one on butterflies of Gujarat! He also wrote on damsel flies, dragon flies and spiders. He was probably the first author to describe the breeding between different colour phases of Reef Egrets. He was a thorough naturalist. He was contributing for Asian Waterfowl Census (AWC), a project by Wetlands International, since 1987 and was the coordinator of the AWC programme for Gujarat State from 2001 till his sad demise. He designed and formulated two masters degree courses (1) Agricultural Ornithology and (2) Vertebrate Pest Management, which were finalized by ICAR and implemented by all agricultural universities of India. He was an active member of research, monitoring and advisory committee, the Standing Committee on Applied Ornithology (SCAO), constituted by International Ornithological Congress (IOC) for 1990-1994 & 1994–1998 and by Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON), Coimbatore, from 2006 to 2020. He was also an active member of more than 10 national and 3 international organizations working for avian diversity and conservation. Being a member of IUCN Flamingo Specialist Group, he prepared an informative booklet on Lesser Flamingo. He was a founder member of Bird Conservation Society, Gujarat (BCSG), and served as Joint Secretary, Secretary and Vice President and was the chief editor of “Flamingo”, the newsletter of the society. His demise is a great loss to the scientific community of our country.

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