



Flamingo



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EDITORIAL

Serious meaningful birdwatching increasing in our state is largely because of three major co-coordinating activities: Asian Waterfowl Census which started way back in 1987, Publication of 'Vihang' –our Gujarati Newsletter and formation of BCSG and publication of 'Flamingo' - a Newsletter in English. We are getting evidences in support of these from the recent activities. Asian Waterfowl Census has once again picked up momentum. In January 2004, 94 volunteers counted 175 sites with a total number of 5,95,202

waterbirds! We hope to achieve much more in the coming years. 'Vihang' and 'Flamingo' both have played vital role in linking birdwatchers of our state. We could actually see the overwhelming response of birdwatchers of Gujarat in the recently held Vulture Workshop at Anand. More than 300 participants have never gathered earlier in any of the bird conference in this country. Since all these coordinated activities are running smoothly, we hope to 'link' more people in achieving the goal of conservation.

Unusual Feeding Behaviour of River Tern (*Sterna aurantia*)

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Aji-1 Dam is located near Rajkot. There is a zoo and a park adjacent to the dam. Lot of people daily visit this place and offer grains, gramseeds and 'Ganthia' (a fried edible item made from gram-flour) to pigeons. Many other birds such as House Crow (*Corvus splendens*), Bank Myna (*Acridotheres ginginianus*), Common Myna (*A. trisole*), Eurasian Collared-Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*), Baya Weaver (*Ploceus philippinus*) and Little Brown Dove (*Streptopelia senegalensis*) feed on them. Even Black Drongos (*Dicrurus macrocercus*) are seen eating the grains. To our surprise three Common Indian Mongoose were also seen once eating along with them.

On 13th April 2004, we visited the dam in the morning for birdwatching. We saw nearly 50 River Terns (*Sterna aurantia*) flying over this area and picking gramseeds and

'Ganthia' and probably grains too, in the same way as they catch fishes from the water. Some preferred to settle on the ground for feeding with the other birds, to feed. We visited the site again on 21st April 2004 and observed the same unusual feeding behaviour of River Terns. The staple food of River Tern is fish, how does it digest vegetarian food ?

Red-wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*) and Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*) are also seen feeding on grains along with the pigeons during winter. Can we explain this as a new mode of adaptation? (*Terns and gulls are closely related and belong to the same family Laridae. The gulls are known to feed on 'Ganthia' and other eatables being offered by the people. A large number of gulls and a few terns follow the boat travelling between Okha and Beyt*



Dwarka and pick up eatables thrown by the passengers. Possibly, there too, the terns are picking up 'Ganthia' but that is yet to be confirmed. River Tern feeding on

'Ganthia' is certainly new information. However, Red-wattled Lapwing, Ruff and Black-tailed Godwit are known to feed on grains.-Eds)

Report on the Asian Midwinter Waterfowl Census 2004

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A statement showing number of sites counted during AWC 2004 in 18 districts of Gujarat state and total number of birds in each district is given below.

Coverage of the sites and number of participants is increasing every year giving tremendous success. In the

last census of January 2004, on 175 sites of 18 districts 5,95,202 birds were recorded. Total 94 volunteers participated in the census.

The suggested dates for the AWC in 2005 are 8-23 January.

Sr.	Districts	Sites	Birds
1.	Amreli	4	7,500
2.	Anand	5	61,404
3.	Banaskantha	10	33,548
4.	Bhavnagar	22	40,924
5.	Bharuch	1	3,471
6.	Dahod	8	45,300
7.	Junagadh	1	53,950
8.	Kachchh	24	24,942
9.	Kheda	10	59,241
10.	Navsari	1	21,992

Sr.	Districts	Sites	Birds
11.	Panchmahal	26	67,760
12.	Porbander	18	41,496
13.	Rajkot	13	46,645
14.	Sabarkantha	3	13,157
15.	Surendranagar	9	32,977
16.	Surat	9	9,373
17.	Vadodara	10	31,307
18.	Valsad	1	215
Total		175	5,95,202

Black-capped Kingfisher in Kachchh

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As per 'The Birds of Kutch' by Salim Ali (1945), Black-capped Kingfisher (*Halcyon pileata*) is not recorded in Kachchh. Shri J. K. Tiwari had seen this bird in mangrove forest of Jakhau seacoast in the year 1998-99 (*personal communication*). The bird was seen again by RDJ and Shri Kavi Tej at Naliya village tank on 17th December 2001. After that SNV along with Shri Ashwin Pomal visited this place and saw a single bird on 17th February 2002. This bird was seen here up to 11th March 2002. It seems that this bird

might have come from mangrove forest of Jakhau coast which is just 14 km from Naliya. The bird was seen again by RDJ at Kosa creek on 13th April 2003. Considering repeated sightings around Naliya, it should be added to the checklist of the birds of Kachchh.

Reference:

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Status of Black-capped Kingfisher in Gujarat

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During his ornithological survey, Salim Ali had recorded Black-capped Kingfisher (*Halcyon pileata*) only south of Ambika River in South Gujarat. He did not come across it elsewhere in the state (Ali, 1954). Dharmakumarsinhji (1955) has not shown its presence on

the Saurashtra coast but has quoted reference of Salim Ali's record of South Gujarat in his book 'Birds of Saurashtra'. Since there were no published records of its sightings from the west coast of Gujarat, it led us to believe that the species is not common on Gujarat coast as reflected in the books

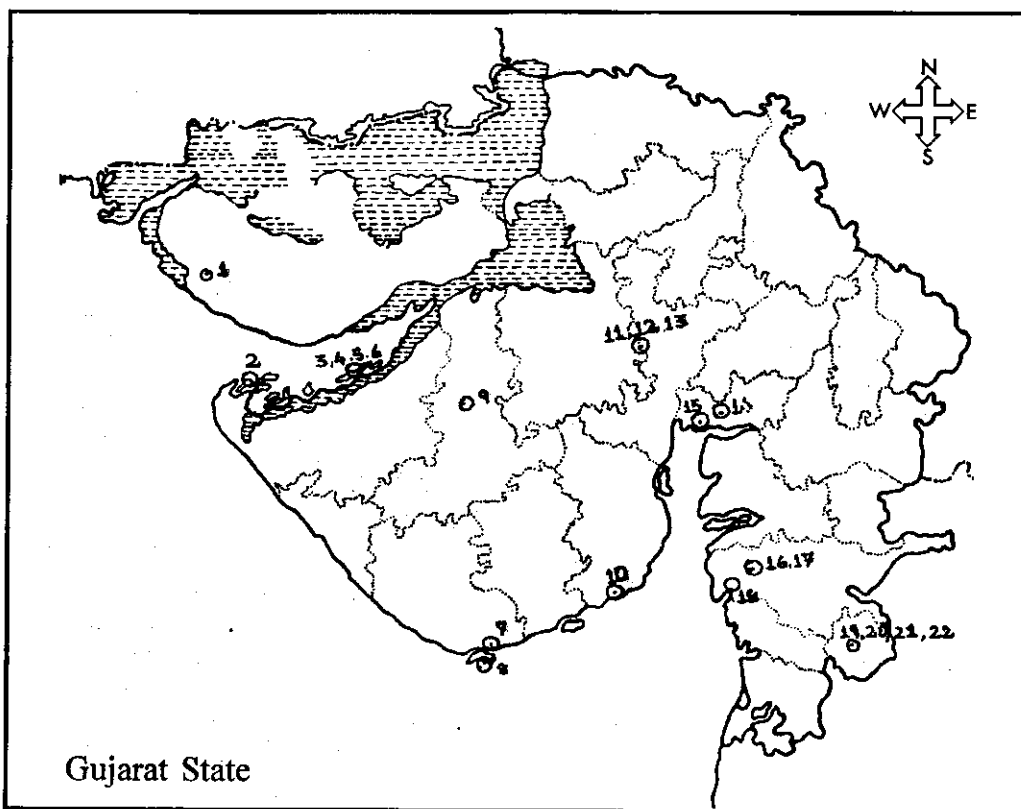
by Ali and Ripley (1983) and Grimmett *et al.* (1998). Ali and Ripley (1983) have described it as not common but frequent on the western seaboard from about Bombay southward down to Ceylon (Sri Lanka) and up the eastern coast of the peninsula. However, Khacher (1996) has opined that the species is being seen all along the coast in recent times suggesting its favoured former mangrove habitat extended to the Kori creek in the western Kachchh. Recently, Kazmierczak (2000) has also shown the species all along the Gujarat coast in the distribution map. Present compilation of our existing knowledge about the records of this species bridges the gaps of sight records.

The Black-capped Kingfisher is primarily a maritime kingfisher. It affects the seashore and mangrove swamps, often ascending the creeks and estuaries for considerable

distance above tidal limits. Sporadically it penetrates much deeper inland along the larger rivers and their feeder (Ali and Ripley, 1983). Occurrence of this kingfisher in Dangs and Nalsarovar are the examples.

Ali had not recorded the species in Kachchh and there had been no published record of its occurrence in Kachchh. However, in this particular issue of Flamingo (Vol.2 No. 3 & 4), Jadeja and Varu have established its occurrence in Kachchh and opined that it should be added to the checklist of the birds of Kachchh. In spite of a tremendous increase in number of birdwatchers and birdwatching activity in Gujarat, there are only a few sightings of an individual bird. This establishes that the species, is not common though is distributed all along the Gujarat coast.

Fig. 1 : Records of Black-capped Kingfisher in Gujarat (Numbers correspond to the Sr. No. in Table 1)



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Table -1: Records of Black-capped Kingfisher in Gujarat

S.No.	Place	District	Date	Observer	Reference
1	Naliya	Kachchh	17 th Feb. 2002	R.D.Jadeja, Ashwin Pomal & S.N.Varu	Jadeja & Varu (2004)
2	Lalapar, Beyt Dwarka	Jamnagar	5 th July, 2001	Ghanshyam Jebalia	Jebalia, 2001
3	Khijadia BS	Jamnagar	1984-1990		Naik <i>et al.</i> , 1991
4	Khijadia BS	Jamnagar	Dec., 1982	B. M. Parasharya	Unpublished
5	Khijadia BS	Jamnagar	1984 to 1990	Taej Mundkur	Mundkur, 2004
6	Khijadia BS	Jamnagar	On several occasions	Lavkumar Khacher	Khacher, 2004
7	Ahmadpur-Mandavi	Junagadh	1993	B. N. Trivedi	Unpublished
8	Diu	Union Territory	26-28 th May, 2004	Tarun and Gayatri Joshi	Joshi and Joshi, 2004
9	Chhapervadi, Nyari-II, Aji-III	Rajkot	25&26 th Dec., 1999	Tushar Sanghani	Sanghani, 2000
10	Pingaleshwar, Near Mahuva	Bhavnagar	4 th January, 2004	Jaidev Dhadhal	Dhadhal, 2003
11	Nalsarovar BS	Ahmedabad	20&21 st Jan., 2001	Mukesh Bhatt	Bhatt, 2001 ^a
12	Nalsarovar BS	Ahmedabad	4 th Nov., 2000	Kasam Sama	Sama, 2001
13	Nalsarovar BS	Ahmedabad - Surendranagar	18 th Feb., 2004 till first week of March, 2004	Kasam Sama, Satya Priya Gautam, B. N. Trivedi	Personal communication.
14	Kanewal Res.	Anand	1995	B. M. Parasharya	Unpublished
15	Tarakpur, Pandad	Anand	October, 1997	B. M. Parasharya, Aeshita Mukherji, C. K. Borad, Raju Vyas	Unpublished
16	Gavier Tank	Surat	Few years back	Shailesh Master	Unpublished
17	Gavier Lake	Surat	30 th Nov., 2000 to 1 st Jan., 2001	Mukesh Bhatt	Bhatt, 2001 ^b
18	Dumas	Surat	3 rd Dec., 2001	Mukesh Bhatt	Bhatt, 2001 ^c
19	Mahal	Dang	11-16 th Nov., 1999	Prashant Shah	Shah, 2000
20	Sakalpatal	Dang	24 th March, 1948	Salim Ali	Ali, 1954
21	Mahal	Dang	6 th Nov., 2003	Shyama Shodhan, Chaula Patel, Narendra Shodhan	Shodhan <i>et al.</i> , 2003
22	Mahal-Chikhali Road.	Dang	25 th Oct., 2000	Mayur-Ulupi	Mayur-Ulupi, 2001
23	All along the coast			Lavkumar Khacher	Khacher, 1996

Abbreviations : BS = Bird Sanctuary, Res = Reservoir

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A Visit to Kanewal Reservoir

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A birdwatching trip to Kanewal was organized jointly by BCSG, Youth Hostels Association of India, Anand branch and Vallabh Vidyanagar Nature Club on 31st January 2004. Twenty-five volunteers participated in the programme. Kanewal is the largest water body of Anand- Kheda district and since it is linked with Mahi Right Bank Canal, it retains water throughout the year. We reached the reservoir at 08:00 hrs in a vehicle arranged by Shri Dhaval Patel

The reservoir is surrounded by *Pilu* (*Salvadora persica*) trees. The environment was charged up with chirping of Rosy Starlings (*Sturnus roseus*) relishing the *Pilu* berries. As we approached from the temple side over the bund near Rel village, we were welcomed by a rhythmic *tuk tuk* call seemed to be coming from a Clusterfig tree (*Ficus recemosa*). With much difficulty, we could locate a Coppermith Barbet (*Megalaima haemacephala*) camouflaged in the foliage. Shri Dhaval Patel and Prathmesh Patel could do videography as the bird was not apparently disturbed by our presence.

We enjoyed magnificent diving of Lesser Pied Kingfisher (*Ceryle rudis*) in the water in and outside the reservoir. A Western Reef-Egret (*Egretta gularis*) was standing silently in the marsh among the flock of Indian Pond-Herons (*Ardeola grayii*) and other waterbirds. We were amazed by the perfect aerobatics of a pair of unidentified raptors, one diving over the other, holding their

feet together and separating just before they touch water level. It was really a perfect *Jugalbandhi*.

Dr. B. H. Patel, 'the Spiderman of Gujarat' was very busy in collecting the spider specimen. Shri V. A. Pathan and N. A. Thakor were erecting the telescope to locate the waterbirds. A Rufous-backed Shrike (*Lanius schach*) was seen carrying a dead snake of 30 cm length. It was identified as Checkered Keel-back (*Xenochrophis piscator*). It was noon by the time we reached the Boarding School at Khaksar village for lunch.

Shri Rashmin Joshi distributed the booklets on Sarus Crane (*Grus antigone*) and other bird pictures to the resident students. He explained the importance of birds and bird conservation. We saw a raptor gliding high above with a light broad band underneath the wings. Shri Dishant Parasharya immediately referred the field guide by Grimmett *et al.* and was identified as Booted Eagle (*Hieraaetus pennatus*). After lunch, we returned via Varasada village. We sighted two Egyptian Vultures (*Neophron percnopterus*) in an agriculture field. It was really an interesting birdwatching experience for us having seen both types of birds, the waterbirds and the terrestrial ones.

The birds sighted by us (B.M. Parasharya, Dhaval Patel, Prathmesh Patel, Rashmin Joshi, and others) are listed below.

1. Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*)
2. Indian Shag (*Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*)
3. Great Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*)
4. Little Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax niger*)
5. Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*)
6. Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*)
7. Indian Pond-Heron (*Ardeola grayii*)
8. Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*)
9. Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*)
10. Western Reef-Egret (*Egretta gularis*)
11. Painted Stork (*Mycteria leucocephala*)
12. Asian Openbill-Stork (*Anastomus oscitans*)
13. Oriental White Ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*)
14. Black Ibis (*Pseudibis papillosa*)
15. Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*)
16. Eurasian Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*)
17. Brahminy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*)
18. Northern Pintail (*Anas acuta*)
19. Common Teal (*Anas crecca*)
20. Spot-billed Duck (*Anas poecilorhyncha*)
21. Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*)
22. Gadwall (*Anas strepera*)
23. Eurasian Wigeon (*Anas penelope*)
24. Garganey (*Anas querquedula*)
25. Northern Shoveller (*Anas clypeata*)
26. Common Pochard (*Aythya ferina*)
27. Ferruginous Pochard (*Aythya nyroca*)
28. Tufted Pochard (*Aythya fuligula*)
29. Cotton Teal (*Nettapus coromandelianus*)
30. Comb Duck (*Sarkidiornis melanotos*)
31. Black-shouldered Kite (*Elanus caeruleus*)
32. Booted Eagle (*Hieraaetus pennatus*)
33. Greater Spotted Eagle (*Aquila clanga*)
34. Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*)
35. Western Marsh-Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*)
36. Sarus Crane (*Grus antigone*)
37. White-breasted Waterhen (*Amaurornis phoenicurus*)
38. Common Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*)
39. Purple Moorhen (*Porphyrio porphyrio*)
40. Common Coot (*Fulica atra*)

41. Pheasant-tailed Jacana (*Hydrophasianus chirurgus*)
42. Bronze-winged Jacana (*Metopidius indicus*)
43. Red-wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*)
44. Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*)
45. Common Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*)
46. Common Snipe (*Gallinago gallinago*)
47. Little Stint (*Calidris minuta*)
48. Greater Painted-Snipe (*Rostratula benghalensis*)
49. Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*)
50. Yellow-legged Gull (*Larus cachinnans*)
51. Brown-headed Gull (*Larus brunnicephalus*)
52. Whiskered Tern (*Chlidonias hybridus*)
53. Gull-billed Tern (*Gelochelidon nilotica*)
54. Caspian Tern (*Sterna caspia*)
55. Blue Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*)
56. Eurasian Collared-Dove (*Streptopelia decaocto*)
57. Little Brown Dove (*Streptopelia senegalensis*)
58. Rose-ringed Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*)
59. House Swift (*Apus affinis*)
60. Lesser Pied Kingfisher (*Ceryle rudis*)
61. White-breasted Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*)
62. Indian Roller (*Coracias benghalensis*)
63. Coppersmith Barbet (*Megalaima haemacephala*)
64. Bay-backed Shrike (*Lanius vittatus*)
65. Rufous-backed Shrike (*Lanius schach*)
66. Eurasian Golden Oriole (*Oriolus oriolus*)
67. Rosy Starling (*Sturnus roseus*)
68. Jungle Crow (*Corvus macrorhynchos*)
69. Sand Martin (*Riparia riparia*)
70. Unidentified Warbler Spp.
71. Common Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*)
72. Yellow-eyed Babbler (*Chrysomma sinense*)
73. Common Babbler (*Turdoides caudatus*)
74. Bluethroat (*Luscinia svecica*)
75. Common Stonechat (*Saxicola torquata*)
76. Indian Robin (*Saxicoloides fulicata*)
77. Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*)
78. Citrine Wagtail (*Motacilla citreola*)
79. Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*)
80. White Wagtail (*Motacilla alba*)
81. Purple Sunbird (*Nectarinia asiatica*)
82. House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)
83. Baya Weaver (*Ploceus philippinus*)
84. Black-breasted Weaver (*Ploceus benghalensis*)

Marsh Harrier Roosting at Saiyant Reservoir

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Saiyant reservoir near Alina village in Mahudha tahsil of Kheda district is an important wetland for the wintering waterbirds. On 18th January 2004 we conducted Waterfowl Census on the reservoir in the late evening hours. By the time we finished the bird count, the sun had set. In the evening a few Western Marsh-Harriers (*Circus aeruginosus*) were flying above the wetland disturbing Common Coots (*Fulica atra*) and other waterfowls. As the sun set, they started landing into the cattail (*Typha angustata*) growth one by one. A few of them also landed on the adjoining open field. All of a sudden they flew off getting disturbed by something and settled again. Taking this opportunity, we counted them to be 50. A few more arrived later from distance adding 36 more to our count. When we left the place, in the dark, 86 harriers had settled on the field/ Typha growth at the edge of the wetland. Surprisingly, we could not see a single mature male amongst the roosting birds.

The harriers are known to roost on the ground within the grassland of Velavadar National Park (Clarke, 1993; Gadhavi and Rathod, 2003) or Rolapadu Bustard Sanctuary

(Rahmani and Manakadan, 1986). However, we are not aware about their roosting on Typha at the edge of a wetland. Moreover, in Gujarat the only known large roosting site of harriers is Velavadar National Park where more than 2000 harriers of four species, namely Hen Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*), Pallid Harrier (*Circus macrourus*), Montagu's Harrier (*Circus pygargus*) and Western Marsh-Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*) roost during winter (Clarke, 1993). Hence, Saiyant Reservoir seems to be an important roosting site for a single species like Marsh Harrier in the central Gujarat.

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Bird Count of Atul Heronry

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In 1992, the Asian Openbill-Stork (*Anastomus oscitans*) was recorded nesting for the first time at Atul in Valsad district. There are no previous authentic records of their nesting in Valsad district. Since then the heronry size has been growing gradually.

The heronry is located in the premises of Atul Ltd—a large chemical company that is about 8 km from Valsad city. Whole heronry is located in the campus of the factory (Atul east). River “Vanki” provides food for young and adult birds and factory wall gives great protection from other human interference and from natural predators. About three years ago, they were seen only in monsoon a nesting season, but now most of them have settled here and seen throughout the year. Of course still some of them leave the place in winter. After 1996, Black-crowned Night-Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) and Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) had also started nesting here. Approximately 4000 sq. feet area is now occupied by this heronry. In 1998 Western Reef-Egret (*Egretta gularis*) also joined the heronry. This year we decided to count the nests and the birds at the heronry. The nest and bird count we made on 3rd July 2004 is given in table. The Asian Openbill-Stork was the dominant species

in this heronry followed by the Cattle Egret and Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*)

We have seen nesting of other waterbirds elsewhere in Valsad district but Asian Openbill-Storks have been nesting only within the compound of Atul factory.

Some important observations on the heronry were:

(1) Most of the nests of Cattle Egrets were at 10 to 14 feet height. But on ‘Goras Ambli’ (*Pithecolobium dulce*) they were nesting little lower at 8 to 10 feet height.

(2) Behind the workshop in the scrap yard, a large branch having a nest of Asian Openbill-Stork broke and rested on an iron scrap about 2 feet height from the ground. The nest on this broken branch and the chicks inside were quite safe. The parents did not find it difficult to feed the young ones at such a low height.

(3) We observed some birds searching nesting place. It seemed that the nesting season had just started, so it was possible that their number might increase later on.

Still among the residents and workers of Atul, Asian Openbill-Storks are the birds from “Australia”!!! Isn’t it funny!!! (*Let the birds be foreigner; they will be treated better. Once our people know that they are ‘resident’ birds, they may ill-treat them. -eds.*)

Table -2 : Heronry Composition at Atul

Sr.No.	Species	Nest No.	Juveniles	Adults	Total birds
1	Asian Openbill-Stork (<i>Anastomus oscitans</i>)	293	541	820	1361
2	Black-crowned Night-Heron (<i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>)	34	60	45	105
3	Western Reef-Egret (<i>Egretta gularis</i>)	5	6	8	14
4	Little Cormorant (<i>Phalacrocorax niger</i>)	22	31	40	71
5	Cattle Egret (<i>Bubulcus ibis</i>)	84	141	160	301
6	Little Egret (<i>Egretta garzetta</i>)	54	110	160	270
7	Large Egret (<i>Casmerodius albus</i>)	4	5	2	7
Total		496			2199

BIRDING NOTES

Mimicry Calls by Indian Chat

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Indian Chat (*Cercomela fusca*) is our resident chat. On 08.02.2004, a pair was seen on TV antennae near my house at Madhapar. One bird among the pair was mimicking Grey Francolin (*Francolinus pondicerianus*). It seemed to be a male. The bird was seen again on 15.02.04 at the same place mimicking Common Tailorbird (*Orthotomus sutorius*) and Purple Sunbird (*Nectarinia asiatica*). I was

wondered by its mimicry.

As per ‘The Birds of Kutch’ by Salim Ali (1945), he has heard perfection calls and songs of Yellow-eyed Babbler (*Chrysomma sinense*), Cuckoo-Shrike (*Coracina spp*) and Tickell’s Blue-Flycatcher (*Cyornis tickelliae*) mimicked by Indian Chat. Has any birdwatcher got more information on its mimicry?

Symphony at Dusk

SAPNA SURENDRAN

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It was 3rd June 2004 at Jambughoda Wildlife Sanctuary: The Red-vented Bulbuls (*Pycnonotus cafer*) were merrily having a duet in the midst of the dry deciduous foliage. Pairs of Common Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*) and Purple Sunbird (*Nectarinia asiatica*) followed suit. The male Common Tailorbird (*Orthotomus sutorius*) with its fully-grown tail added volume to the chirpy surroundings with its sharp shrilly *twit... twit*. The melodious whistle of the White-browed Fantail-Flycatcher (*Rhipidura aureola*) added music to the tunes of the forest life. The Spotted Dove (*Streptopelia chinensis*) cooed from somewhere. Then there were Peahens (*Pavo cristatus*) voicing their presence.

As the sun started descending behind the hills of the Jambughoda range, the warm summer evening winds through the leaves of fruiting Neem and the lush green Kakad and Mahuda trees added swoosh to the chirpy atmosphere. The continuous twitter of the passerines now gained momentum. It mingled with the chatter of the Jungle Babbler (*Turdoides striatus*) and the Asian Palm-Swift

(*Cypsiurus balasiensis*)

What a mellifluous chirpy commotion it was!

The dusk didn't take long enough to engulf the Sun. Soon the noisy environs transformed into a silent zone. Black Drongo (*Dicrurus macrocercus*) was the sole representative voice of aves after sometime. The eerie silence was soon broken by the *chub chub chuturrrrr* of the Common Indian Nightjar (*Caprimulgus asiaticus*). Immediately the Franklin's Nightjar (*Caprimulgus affinis*) gave symphony from another end. This *jugalbandi* continued for a considerable time. The ghostly laugh of the Eurasian Eagle-Owl (*Bubo bubo*) echoed from a distance.

All of a sudden the creepy stillness descended again. It was pitch dark. Even the breeze had stopped completely. Seconds later the moon peeped from behind the dry branches of the Teak tree. As if in synchrony strong winds gushed across and there was noise again. To sum it all the eagerness and the hope of sighting a Leopard in the wild on a Full Moon night made the ambience even more enthralling!

Birding around Rajula

AJIT BHATT

Near Bus Station, Sardarnagar-1, Bhardwaj, Dhari-365 640

I received a call from Shri Pravinbhai Gohil from Port Victor on 29th Feb, 2004 informing that the large number of migratory birds have arrived on water bodies around Rajula. He invited us for birdwatching on 2nd March as that was a holiday on account of Mohrram. We (myself, forester Shri Dangarbai and Shri Suresh Vegda) started from Dhari at 05:45 a.m. in the morning and joined Shri Pravinbhai who was waiting for us on the road to Pipavav Port jetty. We all four then visited Sakaria, popularly known as Hanuman Talav, Bherai and Lunsapur ponds

When we reached Sakaria village pond, it was beautiful to see Common Crane (*Grus grus*) 20-25, Common Coot (*Fulica atra*) -50, Northern Shoveller (*Anas clypeata*) -150-200 and Common Teal (*Anas crecca*) -15 overshadowed by thousands of Demoiselle Crane (*Grus virgo*) flying over the pond. The other important birds were Eurasian Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*), Northern Pintail (*Anas acuta*), Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*), Spot-billed Duck (*Anas poecilorhyncha*), Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*), Gadwall (*Anas strepera*), Large Egret (*Casmerodius albus*), Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*), Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*) etc. A White-breasted Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*), a Small Blue Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*) and two Western Marsh-Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*) were also observed.

We then went further to Bherai village pond. The important birds sighted there were Brahminy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*) -60-70, Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*) -100, Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*) -70, Northern Shoveller (*Anas clypeata*) -100, Indian Pond-Heron (*Ardeola grayii*) -4, Demoiselle Crane (*Grus virgo*) -60, Common Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*) -8, Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*) -20, Little Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax niger*) -20, Red-wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*) -10, Common Coot (*Fulica atra*) -10. Brahminy Shelduck were seen for the first time in such a large numbers. Birds were not disturbed by the buffaloes wallowing in the pond and women of Maldhari community washing cloths nearby. Probably they were used to these activities.

We then moved further to Babarkot village pond. Disappointingly, the pond had almost dried up, however we could see Oriental White Ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*) -26 and Common Teal (*Anas crecca*) -25-30. Four Common Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) were also seen on the electric cable and posts at different places on the way. We finally reached to Lunsapur village pond and satisfied by the good number of bird species, many of them are normally seen on big reservoirs. Important among them were Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*) -40,

White-breasted Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*) -1, Common Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*) -50, Purple Moorhen (*Porphyrio porphyrio*) -20-25, Common Pochard (*Aythya ferina*) -20, Common Coot (*Fulica atra*) -380, Black-winged Stilt -12-15, Northern Shoveller (*Anas clypeata*) -400, Eurasian Wigeon (*Anas penelope*) -50-75, Garganey (*Anas querquedula*) -10, Lesser Whistling-Duck (*Dendrocygna javanica*) -2, Pheasant-tailed Jacana (*Hydrophasianus chirurgus*) -2, Indian Pond-Heron (*Ardeola grayii*) -10, Median Egret (*Mesophoyx intermedia*) -1, Yellow-wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus malabaricus*) -12, Red-wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*)

-10-12, Gadwall (*Anas strepera*) -2, Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*) -2 pairs – seen for the first time, Spot-billed Duck (*Anas poëcilorhyncha*) -75-80, Cotton Teal (*Nettapus coromandelianus*) -10, Citrine Wagtail (*Motacilla citreola*) -4, Western Marsh-Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*) -2, Common Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*) -15-20, Black-shouldered Kite (*Elanus caeruleus*) -2. On way back, a Eurasian Golden Oriole (*Oriolus oriolus*) was seen very closely at 'Mava Dungar' near Mota Khuntavda. The birdwatching trip, particularly to Lunsapur village pond was really a satisfying and rewarding one.

Birdwatching in Vadodara

MOHAMMEDHASAN U. JAT

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I happened to be at Bhailal Amin Hospital in Vadodara during 31st May to 2nd June 2004 for the treatment of one of my relatives. During this period I took opportunity to look for birds in the hospital campus.

I saw a nest of Lesser Golden-backed Woodpecker (*Dinopium benghalense*) in a dried branch of Peltaforum near the entrance of the Emergency and Accident ward of the hospital. Both parents were feeding the chicks alternately.

Other birds seen there were Indian Treepie (*Dendrocitta vagabunda*), Common Tailorbird (*Orthotomus sutorius*), Oriental Magpie-Robin (*Copsychus saularis*), Spotted Dove (*Streptopelia chinensis*), Large Grey Babbler (*Turdoides malcolmi*) etc. Calls of Grey

Francolin (*Francolinus pondicerianus*) were also heard from behind the compound wall.

The most pleasant surprise sighting was of an Indian Pitta (*Pitta brachyura*). On 2nd June at 7:00 am it arrived and settled in a hedge just 7-8 feet away from me, when I was sitting in a canteen shed behind hospital. I could observe it very leisurely. It left the site after sometime. I have seen it only twice before, once in Sasan Gir and then in the Dangs. I was completely astonished having seen this bird in Vadodara.

I think Bhailal Amin General Hospital compound could be a rewarding birdwatching site.

Summer Birdwatching Spree!

TARUN JOSHI and GAYATRI JOSHI

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On 2nd May 2004 at 6:30 am, we visited Narda Pond near Limbasi. It was a pleasant surprise for us to see 40 White-necked Stork (*Ciconia episcopus*) and 37 Comb Duck (*Sarkidiornis melanotos*) enjoying together their morning breakfast in a cultivated, watered field just beside the Narda pond. A group of 17 Sarus Crane (*Grus antigone*) were sighted scattered in the field. We could identify among them 7 males, 4 females and 3 immatures. Six Baya Weaver (*Ploceus philippinus*) in breeding plumage were busy in nest weaving. On the way from Nadiad to Narda, we saw 16 Black Ibis (*Pseudibis papillosa*), 1 Lesser Golden-backed Woodpecker (*Dinopium benghalense*), 3 Greater Coucal (*Centropus sinensis*), 6 White-breasted Waterhen (*Amaurornis phoenicurus*), 3 Painted Stork (*Mycteria leucocephala*) and 8 Oriental White Ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*).

On 15th and 17th May 2004 we were at Mt. Abu. There we observed more than 12 Red-whiskered Bulbul

(*Pycnonotus jocosus*) on a point known as 'Parrot Point', just behind the Tod Rock, near Nakki Lake. Few other beautiful tiny birds were also there (unidentified). A Grey Junglefowl (*Gallus sonneratii*) and 4 Black Francolin (*Francolinus francolinus*) were also observed near 'Anadra Point'.

On 26th to 28th May 2004, we visited Kankai in the Gir. There we sighted 11 Indian Pitta (*Pitta brachyura*) and their nests, 7-8 Bay-backed Shrike (*Lanius vittatus*) and 8 Asian Paradise-Flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi*) – all rufous males. At Diu, we saw an Indian Treepie (*Dendrocitta vagabunda*), a White-breasted Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*), a Black-capped Kingfisher (*Halcyon pileata*), 3 Lesser Pied Kingfisher (*Ceryle rudis*) and of course uncountable number of Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*).

On 27th June 2004 at Lambhvel Sewage Pond near Anand we counted 290+ Greater Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus*

ruber) including immatures, 18 Pheasant-tailed Jacana (*Hydrophasianus chirurgus*), 3 Bronze-winged Jacana (*Metopidius indicus*), 43+ Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*), 17 Painted Stork (*Mycteria leucocephala*), 4 Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*), 6 Eurasian Spoonbill

(*Platalea leucorodia*), 4 Eurasian Golden Oriole (*Oriolus oriolus*), 1 Indian Roller (*Coracias benghalensis*) and 2 Sarus Crane (*Grus antigone*). Two eggs in the Sarus nest were also seen thru' 10 x 50 binocular. There were several other birds in the wetland too.

Rescue of Spotted Owlet

DHAVAL PATEL

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We (Vidyanagar Nature Club) received a call from a volunteer informing about a bird in peril on 4th April 2004. It was a young Spotted Owlet (*Athene brama*), which was saved from stone pelting children. It was a young one still unable to fly properly as base of its wing feathers were still within the sheath. Kalpesh Patel and myself regularly fed it

with small pieces of meat. On the first instance it was force-fed but then it started feeding on its own. Everyday, it was allowed to fly freely within the room. It was released on nearby tree, at night time after 20 days, as the bird was able to fly on its own.

Matting of Red-headed Falcon (*Falco chiquerra*)

YOGENDRA SHAH

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On 14th January 2004, we (myself, Faruk Chauhan, Vishal Thoria, Prashant Chavda, Hussien Thapa and Kishor Rawal from Muli) visited Nayaka Dam, 17 km from Surendranagar. We saw a pair of *Falco chicquerra* mating on a Pipal tree (*Ficus religiosa*). After about half an hour the male bird flew away and came back two hours later

with a prey – Indian Robin (*Saxicoloides fulicata*) and offered it to the female. After finishing the prey, they mated again and then the female quickly settled in the nest. At this site, *Falco chicquerra* is breeding for the third consecutive year. We have collected all the data of breeding activities from mating of the birds to the fledging of chicks.

Another sighting of Indian Plaintive Cuckoo

JIGNESH JOSHI

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Shortly after my first sighting in April, 2004 (Flamingo 2 (1&2):11), we observed another Indian Plaintive Cuckoo (*Cacomantis passerinus*) near Atul colony, near Valsad on 1st July 2004. The bird was being chased by an Oriental

Magpie-Robin (*Copsychus saularis*) that was probably trying to drive the cuckoo away from its territory. We also heard its distinguished call. *pee pieie...*

Indian Plaintive Cuckoo in South Gujarat

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I have seen the Indian Plaintive Cuckoo (*Cacomantis passerinus*) in Dumas near Surat about five years back. I also had known of its presence in Tithal through personal communication with Tilottamaben Mehta. According to Shri Mukesh Bhatt of Surat (personal communication), he has

been regularly observing this species in different areas of Surat like university campus, Gavier Lake, Palgam, Bhairav valley near Kamrej, etc. in the months of May, June and July since last six years. It seems that the species is common around Surat also.

BCSG NEWS

Checklist published : "A Checklist of the Birds of Gujarat" compiled by B.M. Parasharya, C.K. Borad and D.N. Rank has been published by BCSG. Birdwatcher friends are requested to follow this new nomenclature for citing the birds.
AWC 2005 : The dates for AWC are 8 to 23 January 2005. Bird count and site forms are enclosed with this issue.

STOP PRESS

Great Indian Bustards in Velavadar National Park: The Great Indian Bustards (*Ardeotis nigriceps*) were reported to be seen in VNP after 45 years by National Park authorities. The Bustards stayed in the park for 20 days.

SOME IMPORTANT SIGHTINGS

1. Pied Crested Cuckoo (*Clamator jacobinus*) (1) on 5th June 2004, Near Village Kashipura (Ta: Pavi Jetpur); A pair on 14th June 2004, at 10:30 am near Bhatpur village (Ta: Sankheda); Another pair at village Chorangala (Ta. Sankheda). **Snehal Patel, Anand.**
2. Pied Crested Cuckoo (2) on 29th May 2004 near Lambhvel Sewage Pond, Anand. **B. M. Parasharya, Anand.**
3. Houbara (*Chlamydotis undulata*) (4) on 31st January 2004 at Jilandhan Bet and 4 more birds on 1st February 2004 at Kalavera Bet in Wild Ass Sanctuary, Little Rann of Kachchh. **Yogendra Shah, Chiku Vora, Faruk Chauhan, Zala (DFO) and Devjibhai Dhamecha, Surendranagar.**
4. Indian Grey Hornbill (*Ocyroceros birostris*) (2) on 18th July 2004 at 15 km away from Godhra on Godhra-Devgadhbaria Road. **N. A. Thakor, Anand.**
5. Indian Grey Hornbill (3) on 4th June 2004 at Chilakota near Dahod; two birds on Mahuda tree in the nursery on 17th June 2004 at Limkheda; one bird on 4th July 2004 near Devgadbaria. **Sunil Puwar, Godhra.**

RECENT PUBLICATIONS ON BIRDS OF GUJARAT

1. Bhatia Y. (2004). The Caspian Terns of Jamnagar. *Sanctuary Asia* 24(4): 24-29.
2. Varu S. N. (2004). White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* in Kutch. *Newsletter for Ornithologists* 1(5): 77.
3. Tere Anika (2004). Nesting of Western Reef-Egret *Egretta gularis* in the saltpans of G.H.C.L., Dholera. *Newsletter for Ornithologists* 1(5): 73-74.
4. Mahurkar U. (2004). Flamingo: Isle of Death. *India Today* 29(20):68-71.
5. Mashru A. (2004). Heronries around Rajkot city, Gujarat. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 44(5): 74-75.
6. Hathi, D., R. Jhala and B. Trivedi (2004). Unusual feeding behaviour of River Tern (*Sterna aurantia*). *Newsletter for Birdwatchers*. 44(5): 80.

LETTER TO THE EDITORS

* Mr. Hiren Soni's note regarding trade of Indian and exotic birds in Ahmedabad is actually common in most of the Indian cities. We at Nature Club, Surat have taken steps to prevent this trade with the help of forest department. There are laws which prevent trade of endangered animals and if the bird does not fall under this law then there is the law of 'Prevention of Cruelty to Animals', under which birds cannot be caged in large numbers in a small cage, whether the bird is Indian or exotic. Trader can be booked under this law with the help of police. If it is an endangered bird and falls in the Wildlife Act schedule list, then forest department has to be informed and jointly raid can be organised.

We have rescued and released several owls, peacocks, munias, parakeets, hillmynas, spiny tailed lizards, hedgehogs, turtles and pythons-Snehal Patel, Surat

* Shortly after I got back here (from Hingolghadh), the postman delivered "Flamingo" Vol. 2. Nos. 1 & 2 and an intimation of the vulture workshop. I must say there has been a quantum leap in the visual of the "Flamingo" for which my congratulations. The language editing has to be tightened. Also literal translation of Gujarati into English needs to be taken care of. In my letter you

have *sandappled patio* in italics-it should have been "Sundappled" and in ordinary letters. In Gujarati it would have been "tetar chhayon". In the last line then is a big miss out: it should read "you will understand why I am least excited about proving the existence of the Kashmere Flycatcher in the Dangs, yet am really concerned at the absence of the Red-breasted Flycatcher, a formerly plentiful species." Quite possibly the mistake was in my draft itself, but here the editor with his eagle-eye spots an error. "Rolling up checklists" should read "Toting up checklists"

I am not too happy with Grey Wagtail at Nalsarovar by Muni. Should be one of the subspecies of the Yellow Wagtail or juvenile of White Wagtail. Little Gull needs query.-Lavkumar Khacher, Rajkot

[The Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*) is known to occur in Gujarat state (Ali and Ripley, 1983; Grimmett et al., 1998). Ali (1954) had collected specimens from two extreme ends i.e. from Anjar and Surat. Even myself (BMP) has seen the species at several places in Gujarat. So there is no reason why it should not occur at Nalsarovar and record of Nandita Muni to be doubted. We appreciate that Shri Lavkumarsaheb has mentioned about the possibility

of misidentification with the juvenile of any subspecies of the Yellow Wagtail (Motacilla flava). It would be beneficial for all the birdwatchers if he provides the key for field differentiation of Grey Wagtail from the juvenile of Yellow Wagtail. Regarding the record of Little Gull (Larus minutus) at Nalsarovar, the author herself was hesitant in placing the species in the list as it is a rare winter visitor in Gujarat and was anticipating queries about

the sighting. Looking to her confidence in that particular sighting, she was advised to place her sighting on record. I would like to mention here that the Little Gull has been recorded from Nalsarovar and several other places from Gujarat in recent past. B. M. Parasharya, Aeshita Mukherji and T. V. Patel (1999). Sight records of the Little Gull Larus minutus from Gujarat. JBNHS 96(1): 142 -Eds.]]

LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

Today I (24th Feb. 2003) enter my 73rd year. I have been watching birds for more than 50 of these years and yet; can I claim to be an expert? Even today I have to be very, very careful of making identifications of a great many of the more indistinctly coloured species yet, I have a fairly good knowledge of bird calls and so, often I can say a specific bird is around even without seeing it much to the amazement of many bird watching friends. A further advantage is that I am warned by an unfamiliar call of a possibly unknown bird's presence in the vicinity. I use the word "possibly" intentionally because even well known birds often utter sounds one is not aware of and, if it is one of the mimics, the most knowledgeable can be badly mistaken. By taking note of the calls of familiar species there are greater chances of coming across, a new bird, birds often as not, are heard long before they are seen. This is also true, by giving a look over every bird one passes, a habit is formed which helps greater facility of identifying an unfamiliar intruder among the regular neighbors. Like with sound, however, one can be misled by plumage variations and this is where "jizz" can help. To acquire familiarity with this "jizz", it is the common everyday birds one should delight in being continually aware of. Equally helpful is to realize that birds are attracted to habitats in which their species has evolved. Knowing the preference can help in identification. That they are turning up in locations they never frequented before bespeaks of the very considerable alteration taking place in the environment.

This realization makes it all the more imperative to become familiar with habitats, the vegetation and the bird community frequenting them. Some very similar looking species can be confidently identified by the habitat seen in.

Should a species normally abundant suddenly grow scarce red light signals should go up. Similarly, should a species seldom seen in a place become regular and increase in numbers, it bears repeating, we should take note of the possible alterations taking place. True, these changes may be enriched vegetation or a depleted one. Under present situations where habitats are considerably fragmented, changes either way will generate adverse effects on one or more species inhabiting the area. Regular bird watching, then, can play an extremely useful role in monitoring conservation needs. The wildlife managers should therefore encourage regular birdwatchers going over their areas. Of course, the sightings should be meticulously recorded and the data immediately made over to the authorities and not released to the media. Adverse publicity will strain relationships.

My greatest regret is that I did not maintain a record of my daily forays. True, there is a great deal, I can recall from the days when there was relatively less degradation, but memories can not always be relied on. Fortunately, continual observations of birds in their habitats has given me insights which present-day managers would be advised to tap as they grapple with great responsibility that regeneration and maintenance of habitats entail. In fact, we all can collectively enter into an exciting adventure of attempting to resurrect and enhance Gujarat's fantastically varied avian communities.

Of course, we must enjoy our hobby, but with the pleasures there must be a great sense of responsibility in reporting what we see. We need "expert" birdwatchers, and you each one must aspire to grow into one. (Please read "Sundappled" in place of "Sandappled" on page 16 in the last issue—eds.)

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