



# Flamingo

Newsletter of the Bird Conservation Society, Gujarat

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## EDITORIAL

Concern about rapidly declining population of vulture and tiger has remained top issues for the conservationists in past few months. NGOs with the help of media are trying their level best to bring about awareness amongst the people and sensitize the government to take up proper conservation measures.

'Diclofenac' - a non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug is now proven to have been responsible for the total collapse of three species of vultures in Asia. On this ground, 'Indian Board of Wildlife' took a decision in last month (March 2005) to ban 'Diclofenac' in India to phase out the veterinary use of the drug over the next six months and to replace with the drug such as Ketoprofen and Meloxicam. Both the drugs are believed to be less toxic to the vultures. We are happy that the NGOs and media could highlight the whole issue and sensitize our Prime Minister to endorse boards' decision. This is just a first step towards vulture conservation.

There are several questions about the above decision; particularly about its implications on the economy of livestock keepers and Indian drug industry. It is not an easy job to suddenly remove a widely used

drug, which is already established in the market, and to replace it with the drugs that are two-three times costlier only for the sake of being 'relatively safe' to the vultures. What is the meaning of 'relative safety' to the species, which is critically threatened? If the pesticide like 'DDT' still exists in the Indian market, which is not safe for the human health, we have our own doubts about the phasing out of 'Diclofenac' from the market, which is not safe to the vultures.

As concluded at our workshop, Diclofenac may be one of the threats but not the only threat to the vultures. Other threats should also be given due weightage and corrective measures should be taken up immediately. In our state, Gujarat Ecological and Education and Research Foundation, Gandhinagar has taken up fresh initiatives to estimate breeding and non-breeding population of vultures, which shows some concern of the government towards vulture crisis. It is high time now to take up action-based conservation measures for the existing population.

Minutes of the one-day workshop organized by BCSG on 'Current Status of Vultures in Gujarat' held on 19<sup>th</sup> September 2004 are published in this issue.

Photograph by : Kamal Bhatt



## **Report on The Workshop on "Current Status of Vultures in Gujarat" Held on 19<sup>th</sup> September 2004 at Anand**

Bird Conservation Society, Gujarat (BCSG) organized Workshop on, "Current Status of Vultures in Gujarat" at B. A. College of Agriculture Auditorium, Anand on 19<sup>th</sup> September 2004. Dr. B. M. Parasharya, Hon. Secretary of the Society welcomed the guests and briefed the gathering about the activities of the Society and the objectives of the Workshop. Dr. Bakul Trivedi, Hon. Joint Secretary introduced the guests, and briefly narrated the profiles of three ornithologists Shri Lavkumar Khacher, Shri M. K. Himmatsinhji and Shri Lalsinh Raol who were then duly felicitated by the Society for their contribution to the bird conservation movement in the state. Shri Khacher and Shri Raol, who incidentally are the President and Vice President of the Society, blessed the house and shared with the audience their reminiscences of bird watching days. The workshop was inaugurated by Prof. M. C. Varshneya, Honorable Vice Chancellor, Anand Agricultural University. He pointed out the association of vultures with Indian society since the days of Ramayana, citing the example of 'JATAYU'. An updated compilation, 'A Checklist of the Birds of Gujarat' prepared by Drs. B. M. Parasharya, C. K. Borad and D. N. Rank was released at the workshop. This is the first document of its kind, which enlists all the species and subspecies of the birds recorded from Gujarat State with their standardized English, Scientific and Gujarati names. This will prove to be a great help to the birdwatchers of the state and the country.

Speaking on this occasion, Dr. R. B. Shukla, Director of Animal Husbandry said that State Government has recently put up restrictions on the use of 'Diclofenac' drug in treating sick animals with meager chances of recovery from the ailment and no hopes for survival. Recent findings have shown that when the vultures consume very low dose of this drug, in the form of residues from the carcasses of dead animals, they show the symptoms of visceral gout and kidney failure and ultimately die. Gujarat is the first state to issue such instructions to the veterinarians, for the conservation of this species. Shri Pradeep Khanna, Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) said that this Workshop should help us to determine status of the vultures in our state, identify various threats and workout strategy for their conservation.

The workshop was attended by eminent

Ornithologists / Scientists from prestigious institutions like, Bombay Natural History Society, Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology, Royal Society for Protection of Birds- U. K. and Anand Agricultural University. State Government officials like Director- Animal Husbandry, Chief Conservator of Forests (Wildlife) and other senior officers of the Forest Department also attended and gave their valuable suggestions and inputs. The Workshop received an overwhelming response and was attended by about 300 delegates from the State. This is probably the first occasion in Gujarat when such a large number of birdwatchers gathered at one place (perhaps in the country) especially to discuss vulture conservation issue. More than 200 photographs of Vultures by wellknown wildlife photographers\* of the State were also exhibited at the workshop venue.

Deliberations went on for the whole day, with presentations by birdwatchers from different regions of the State on the status of Vultures in the respective areas of the State and probable reasons for their decline. Possible conservation strategies, captive breeding necessities, etc. were discussed during open house session.

In the beginning, Dr. Vibhu Prakash (BNHS) intricately explained Vulture identification in the field. During the deliberations, Chris Bowden (RSPB) opined that 'Diclofenac' - a veterinary drug is the major factor responsible for vulture population decline and should be totally removed from the system. Dr. Bowden also emphasized the need for captive breeding programme and gave details of the initiatives taken up by BNHS and RSPB for Vulture conservation through establishment of 'Vulture Care and Breeding Center' at Pinjor, Haryana. Drs. D. N. Rank and R. H. Sabapara of Anand Agricultural University and State Animal Husbandry Department respectively, presented detailed analysis of all available data and showed that decline in Vulture population was noticed from several parts of Gujarat State, much before the introduction of 'Diclofenac' in 1996. Moreover, the vultures are even surviving today in the areas where a large number of veterinary practitioners are concentrated and 'Diclofenac' use is at its maximum. Also very less percentage of cattle population receives veterinary services and so is spared from exposure to 'Diclofenac'. Their analysis suggested that 'Diclofenac' use can not

be the only factor responsible for the decline of vultures in Gujarat. Many other birdwatchers – to name a few- Dr. Lalitha Vijayan, Shri S. N. Varu, Shri Ashwin Pomal, Shri Devji Dhamecha, Shri Jaydev Nansey, Shri R. V. Assari, Dr. Piyush Matalia, Dr. I. R. Gadhvi, Shri Kartik Shastri, etc. were of the opinion that non-availability of food, competition for food with other animals and human beings, destruction of safe nesting sites, poisoning and shooting of vultures near airports are equally serious threats to their population.

In the plenary session it was resolved that:

1. Since, the populations of different species of vultures were already in decline even before the drug 'Diclofenac' was introduced; this chemical alone cannot be the only factor responsible for the decline of population of vultures. Further scientific studies on 'Diclofenac' in Indian context are urgently required. The problem should be addressed in totality rather than isolating only one factor as the cause of vulture decline.
2. Food and nesting sites may be ensured to the Vultures where they are at present existing now. If necessary, artificial feeding and nesting sites may be created.
3. Since the Vultures are surviving in small patches having different threats, area specific conservation strategies, taking into account those as suggested by the presenters may be designed.
4. For regular monitoring of Vulture population, a proforma for the data collection was circulated. A

systematic status survey is a matter of urgency, which can be collectively done by the State Forest Department and NGOs.

5. Since all scavengers including Vultures are important in our environment, all concerned should work for the protection and increase of their population.
6. The favored niches of Vultures need to be identified and protected.
7. The house expressed gratitude to the Dept. of Animal husbandry for declaring moratorium on the use of 'Diclofenac' for treating cattle.
8. All panjarapoles should be listed and kept under watch for Vulture population monitoring.
9. Dead bodies of Vultures should be sent to the institutions like one at Pinjore and to SACON for research. Procedure should be made easier to facilitate the same.
10. A chronicle on Vulture may be published by BCSG under 'Vulture Monitoring Programme'.
11. Like Vultures, an eye should be kept on other so-called 'Common Birds' by the birdwatcher community before it is too late.

\*List of Photographers: Ashwin Pomal, Bhuj; Bharat Rughani, Porbandar; Bhushan Pandya, Rajkot; Deshal Pagi, Dholka; Kartik Shastri, Ahmedabad; Kunal Patel, Ahmedabad; Manoj Thakar, Vadodara; Mukesh Acharya, Ahmedabad; Raghuvirsinh Jadeja, Nalia; Rohit Vyas, Vadodara; Sanat Shodhan, Ahmedabad; Vikram Pagi, Ahmedabad; Yogendra Shah, Surendranagar.

## Greater Flamingos Inhabiting Paddy Fields

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During our visit to Sarkhej village on outskirts of Ahmedabad city, on 28<sup>th</sup> June 2003, we saw a huge flock of Greater Flamingos (*Phoenicopterus ruber roseus*) on the left side of the road between Juhapura and Sarkhej. To approach them more closely, we went to the interior part of the village called "Chunarvas" and parked our vehicle. There was a channel of sewage water spread in a waste area between the paddy fields and the edge of the village. We crossed it and reached close to the paddy fields. The channel of sewage was having *Prosopis* growth on its either sides. We observed the Greater Flamingos after hiding ourselves behind the *Prosopis*. The paddy fields were spread in about 1-2

km<sup>2</sup> area. The entire cropped area was divided into several square blocks by the bunds and was inundated by water, looking like salt pans. Some paddy fields had freshly transplanted saplings whereas other fields were not prepared for transplantation. We counted total 533 adult Greater Flamingos. Most of them were feeding while some were resting.

A few adult birds at the far off side of the field were seen moving their beak against the bunds. They were lifting their beak from the base to top of the bund, as if building the mounds. This scene triggered our urge to confirm from the close distance. So one of us (AT) went little closer without drawing their attention.

However no nest mounds were found when seen through binocular. Earlier, nest mounds of Greater Flamingos were recorded from sewage water of Shahwadi, about 10 km south-east to this area (Tatu, 1997).

During our two-year study, the Greater Flamingos were found in coastal and inland fresh water wetlands, mudflats as well as in salt pans (Jadhav and Parasharya, 2004). However, Greater Flamingos inhabiting inundated paddy fields are being recorded for the first time. In France, the Greater Flamingos are regularly recorded in the paddy fields of Camarague (Tourenq *et al.*, 2001) and known to damage it by trampling the grain into earth preventing germination, uprooting and consuming them (Del Hoyo *et al.*, 1992). However their regular visits and damage to paddy in India is yet to be documented.

Beside the flamingos, the other birds like Eurasian Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*)-72, Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*.) -52, Oriental White Ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*)-47, Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*) -17, Lesser Whistling Duck (*Dendrocygna juvanica*) -13, Indian Pond Heron (*Ardeola grayii*) -4, Little Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax niger*)-2, Comb Duck

(*Sarkidiornis melanotos*)-2 and Large Egret (*Casmerodius albus*)-1 were recorded. Red-wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*) and Pheasant-tailed Jacana (*Hydrophasianus chirurgus*) were found nesting. We observed two nests of Red-wattled Lapwing, one with 3 eggs and the other with 1 egg on the plain land at the edge of the field.

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## Sarus Crane Count in Kheda District During 2004

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### Introduction

Based on the two different census methods, Mukherjee *et al.* (2001) had established that summer, particularly the later part of the month of May, is the best suitable period for the population count of the Sarus Crane (*Grus antigone*) and also, that night roost count is more accurate than the afternoon count on the water reservoirs in the Central Gujarat. Based on the said census method, population estimate for the Sarus Crane in the Kheda District had improved in 1999 and 2000. Due to vagaries of rain and water scarcity in Saurashtra region, paddy crop in Kheda District was not given irrigation during Kharif season and Canal-linked reservoirs of Kheda District had remained dry in winter and summer of 2000 to 2002. Due to this environmental stress, cultivation of paddy crop was drastically reduced which affected their breeding success also. As a result, Sarus Crane had miserably dispersed away. Nothing is known about the places where they could have immigrated and survived during this period. However,

many of them had returned back after normal monsoon and resumption of regular irrigation through canals in 2003. We presumed that the cranes having returning might have settled again at their original sites. To ascertain the impact of three years' draught on the population size of the Sarus Crane, we took a count in summer 2004 in Kheda (now Anand and Kheda Districts) and nearby places.

### Methods

Night roost count was done on reservoirs from 29<sup>th</sup> May 2004 to 6<sup>th</sup> June 2004 in Kheda-Anand Districts. One person was assigned to count the cranes arriving on the reservoir for night roosting. A person took position on the reservoir at least 30 minutes before the sunset time and counted the cranes present at the reservoir. All arriving Cranes were counted up to 20:00 hours i.e. 45 min past sunset time.

Day-time encounter of cranes in the field was considered, if the night roost count was not done on the nearby wetland.

### Study Area

The count was done on 20 reservoirs and 7 sites on the roadside spread in Matar, Khambhat, Petlad, Tarapur, Anand and Mahudha Tehsils of Anand and Kheda Districts. The reservoirs of this area are linked with Mahi Right Bank Canal and are filled upon need basis. During the count period, most of the reservoirs were re-filled and water had started flowing in the canal.

### Results

#### Count in Kheda District:

Total 494 Sarus Cranes were counted in these two districts (Table 1). Highest number of Cranes was recorded at Narda (130), followed by Bhanderaaj (87), Daloli (82) and Saiyant (60). At other reservoirs, very small numbers of cranes were observed roosting. Some of the reservoirs had deep water on all the edges, which was not suitable for the Cranes to roost. At Narda, we observed that 100+ cranes remained in the adjacent field and did not turn up to the reservoir for roosting as the water level was high and fishing activity was going on in the reservoir.

In May 1999 and 2000, we had counted 1000+ Sarus Cranes in Anand and Kheda Districts (Anon., 1999, 2000). Compared to those figures there is more than 50% reduction in Crane numbers in present count in Anand and Kheda Districts, which should be viewed very seriously. In the year 2000, 2001 and 2002, very little irrigation was given for the paddy cultivation, which seriously affected breeding performance of the Sarus Crane (Anon., 2001, 2002, 2003) as well as paddy crop production. A large number of cranes emigrated from the area. There were several records of adult mortality due to various reasons during that period (Parasharya *et al.*, 2002; Deshal Pagi, *personal communication*).

Reduction in crane number may also be due to the irregularities in replenishment of water in the reservoirs for crop irrigation, which prevailed during the last three years. Choosing the right dates for the count is equally important. With our experience, it is learnt that May-end is the best period for counting the Cranes on the reservoirs in Anand and Kheda Districts. The dates should be fixed up in the second half of May so that the period falls just before the re-filling of the canal linked reservoirs. When there is no water in the landscape (particularly canals and *Talavadi*)

and the reservoirs are the only source of water, the cranes invariably turn up to the reservoirs for night roost where they can be counted precisely. Counting the cranes a few days earlier, before refilling of the wetland would have given better results. Other factors responsible for population reduction need to be investigated immediately.

#### Sarus with young ones

Two pairs were seen with the young ones of less than a month age. Considering incubation period of 30+ days, the pairs might have laid eggs in April. In Kheda District, a small population of the Sarus Crane is known to breed during summer (Mukherjee *et al.*, 2002).

#### Count at some of the other sites:

At other sites we recorded 198 cranes (Table 2). These sites were not surveyed intentionally and yet the count is encouraging. Except Bhaskarpura, all the sites belonged to Ahmedabad District. Second highest concentration of Sarus Crane in Gujarat State is found in Ahmedabad District (Singh and Tatu, 2000). Looking to the extraordinary concentration of 156 Sarus Crane in Sabarmati riverbed near Ahmedabad (Rank, 2004 in this issue), we feel that much more number of cranes can be recorded in Central and North Gujarat, if the area around the Nalsarovar and the Sabarmati River along its entire length are surveyed thoroughly.

In summer 2004, we counted total 494 cranes in Kheda District and 198 cranes at other places, totaling 692 cranes in Central Gujarat. This is more than 40 % of the total count of the Gujarat State counted during 2004 (Pandey and Jethva, 2004).

#### Acknowledgements

We thank our staff Shri N. A. Thakor, P. D. Chavda and N. K. Chavda for their help in counting. We are especially grateful to Dr. D. N. Rank of Veterinary College and our volunteer students for participating in this census, especially Dr. Gaurav Pandya, Dilipsinh Barad, Sandip Umretia, Dr. Sanjay Paneliya, Suresh Mavadiya, Bhavesh Jakasania, Satish Bhalodia, Kanaiyalal Khimania, Dr. K. K. Hadia, Dishant Parasharya, Vikas Trivedi and Chiku Vora. We are grateful to Dr. D. N. Yadav, Officer-in-Charge, Ornithology Project, AAU for the encouragements.

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Table 1. Sarus Crane Census 2004 in Anand and Kheda District

Reservoir/Site Name	Date	No. Roosting	No. in field	Estimated No.
Bhanderaj	3 <sup>rd</sup> June 2004	87	7	87
Narda,	4 <sup>th</sup> June 2004	30	100+	130
Gobarapura	4 <sup>th</sup> June 2004	6	0	6
Daloli	4 <sup>th</sup> June 2004	82	0	82
Traj	4 <sup>th</sup> June 2004	11	0	11
Pariej	4 <sup>th</sup> June 2004	5	0	5
Kanewal	3 <sup>rd</sup> June 2004	10	8	18
Tranja	4 <sup>th</sup> June 2004	6	0	6
Salla	4 <sup>th</sup> June 2004	30	2	30
Naghrama	4 <sup>th</sup> June 2004	0	0	8
Heranj	4 <sup>th</sup> June 2004	0	0	6
Garmala	4 <sup>th</sup> June 2004	0	0	0
Machhial	4 <sup>th</sup> June 2004	0	0	6
Jinaj Village Pond	3 <sup>rd</sup> June 2004	3	0	3
Sojitra	3 <sup>rd</sup> June 2004		2	2
Bedva	1 <sup>st</sup> June 2004	2	-	2
Malay Rd, Umreth	1 <sup>st</sup> June 2004	2 Ad, 2 Young	-	4
Lambhvel sewage	30 <sup>th</sup> May 2004	2	-	2
Saiyant	30 <sup>th</sup> May 2004	60	-	60
Vansar	6 <sup>th</sup> June 2004	6	-	6
Vadala	6 <sup>th</sup> June 2004	2	-	2
Vainaj	2 <sup>nd</sup> June 2004	2	-	2
Amiyad, Near Borsad	2 <sup>nd</sup> June 2004	2Ad, 1 Young	-	3
Jichka Near. Kanewal	2 <sup>nd</sup> June 2004	2	-	2
Padra, Near Kanewal	2 <sup>nd</sup> June 2004	3		3
Vataman	8 <sup>th</sup> June 2004	2 Ad		2

Ad = Adult

Table 2. Sarus Crane Count at other Places

Reservoir/Site Name	Date	No. Roosting	No. in field	Estimated No.
Pipli	8 <sup>th</sup> June 2004		2Ad	2
Bhaskarpura	7 <sup>th</sup> June 2004	13 Ad, 4 Juvenile		17
Gyaspur, Ahmedabad	23 <sup>rd</sup> May 2004	156		156
Nalsarovar	27 <sup>th</sup> May 2004	23		23
Total				198

### Sarus Count on Sabarmati River near Ahmedabad

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A 'Carcass Utilization Plant' run by 'Shri Parishad Khadi Gramoddhar Sangh' is located at Gyaspur Village, near Ahmedabad. The plant is approx. 8 km south-west to Pirana (Ahmedabad Municipal Corporation Octroi Point) on the Sabarmati River bank. Dr. Harshad Goriya and myself visited the site on 23<sup>rd</sup> May 2004 at 12:30 hrs with a hope to see vultures. Very disappointingly we could not see a single vulture. While we were returning, suddenly, we heard loud resonant calls of Sarus Crane (*Grus antigone*) from the riverbed. There was a dense *Prosopis juliflora* belt on the river bank. We approached the riverbed area making our way through the *Prosopis* growth and what a pleasant surprise! There was a big flock of Sarus Crane along with flamingos and other waterbirds in the stagnant water in the river (more appropriately the thick dark industrial effluent).

There were 156 Sarus Crane in two groups. The flock also included about 30 sub-adults. Presence of about 20 % of sub-adults in the population indicates successful breeding during the preceding breeding season *i. e.* monsoon of 2003. Other waterbirds counted on the riverbed were Lesser Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus minor*)-10 (8 adult+2 juvenile), Greater Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus ruber*)-217 (190 adult + 27 juvenile), Painted Stork (*Mycteria leucocephala*)-5, Lesser Whistling-Duck (*Dendrocygna javanica*)-283, Oriental White Ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*)-55, Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*)-110, Red-wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*)-50 and Eurasian Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*)- 20. A dozen of buffalos and 22 stray dogs were also bathing and cooling themselves in the river mud. However, birds were not apparently disturbed by their presence. Dr. Gaurav Pandya and myself visited this site again after a

week *i.e.* on 30<sup>th</sup> May 2004 at around 10:00 hrs in the morning and what an anticlimax we found. This time there were only 3 Sarus Crane (2 adult and 1 sub-adult) seen just arriving and settling in the riverbed. Of course, Greater and Lesser flamingo, White Ibis and Eurasian Spoonbill were present in the same number. Since there were no cranes, we left the site immediately. The site was subsequently visited by Dr. B.M. Parasharya and Dr. Gaurav Pandya on 6<sup>th</sup> June 2004 between 14:00 - 16:00 hours and jubilantly the count was nearly regained. They could observe at least 107 SarusCrane (see article in this issue).

Flocks of more than 100 Sarus Crane have been recorded earlier from Ahmedabad and Kheda Districts (Mukherjee and Parasharya, 1999; Singh and Tatu, 2000). Recently in 2004, 100+ cranes have been sighted at Dantiwada Dam in Banaskantha District and at Dharoi Dam in Sabarkantha District (Pande and Jethva, 2004) but a big concentration like the present one is probably not reported at a single site near Ahmedabad. However, Dr. B. M. Parasharya, C. K. Borad and Aeshita Mukherjee have recorded 300+ Sarus Crane at Gobrapura Reservoir, and 100+ cranes at several sites in Kheda District during noon hours in 1999 and 2000(B. M. Parasharya, *personal communication*).

The huge difference in the number of Sarus Crane in Riverbed (156, just 3 and again 107) appears largely due to the different timings of observations. The Sarus Crane disperses for foraging in morning and returns to the waterbody for noon roosting. During summer, Sarus Crane concentrates in wetlands during hot noon hours of the day *i.e.* approx. during 12:00 -16:00 hours in Kheda District and hence, it is the proper time for Sarus count in summer (Mukherjee and Parasharya, 1999;

Mukherjee *et al.*, 2001). The big count encountered in the present observation also confirmed favourable combination of time, period and location that are suggested in these papers (hot noon hours of last week of May near the water bodies).

Hence, the Sabarmati River bank along its entire length should be viewed as a promising habitat for Sarus Crane during summer and if the entire river length is screened during noon hours in summer, several unrecorded populations may be disclosed.

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**BIRDING NOTES**

**Yellow-legged Green-Pigeon in Kachchh**

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As per the ‘Birds of Kutch’ by Salim Ali (1945), Yellow-legged Green-Pigeon (*Treron phoenicoptera*) has not been recorded in Kachchh. But Shri M. K. Hanvantsinhji had seen this bird at Matano Madh on 30<sup>th</sup> January 1980 (Hanvantsinhji, 1981).

On 2<sup>nd</sup> November 2003, one bird visited a Peepal tree opposite my house at Madhapar, near Bhuj. It was feeding on figs. It stayed here up to 6<sup>th</sup> November 2003.

There after it was not seen again. Thus, this is a second sighting of this bird in Kachchh which I think is worth recording.

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**Red-necked Phalarope in Kachchh**

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During Waterbird Count at Chhari Dhandh on 30<sup>th</sup> May 2004, I saw four Red-necked Phalarope (*Phalaropus lobatus*) swimming in the water. Out of four, three were in summer plumage while one was in a non-breeding plumage. I saw this bird for the first the time in summer in its breeding plumage.

This species was first recorded in Kachchh by M. K. Himmatsinhji at Devisar Tank in May 1948 and May 1949 in summer dress (JBNHS Vol. 54(1):12-56). Thereafter, I have seen this species at various places in Kachchh during winter season in winter plumage. The sighting records are as under:

Date	Place	No. A
10 <sup>th</sup> Oct. 1982	Shitlamata Pond at Mandvi	01 died; 01 live
8 <sup>th</sup> sept. 1987	Topansar Tank at Mandvi	02
12 <sup>th</sup> sept. 1987	Lair Dam Ta.- Bhuj	01
2 <sup>nd</sup> Oct. 1987	Hamirsar Tank at Bhuj	02
18 <sup>th</sup> Oct. 1992	Vekariya Dhandh (Banni)	01
24 <sup>th</sup> Aug. 2002	Pond near Kakhoi Ta. - Bhachau	02
15 <sup>th</sup> Sept 2002	Devisar Tank Ta.- Bhuj	01
2 <sup>nd</sup> Oct. 2002	Vekariya Dhandh (Banni)	06

Though it is a coastal bird, it is always seen in Kachchh on inland waters during autumn/ spring migration.



## Nesting of River Tern and Great Stone-Plover During Midwinter

Ajit Bhatt

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

We did birdwatching at Khodiyar Dam near Dhari during 10<sup>th</sup> Jan to 25<sup>th</sup> Feb 2004. From the Dam, when we approached the water, several River Tern (*Sterna aurantia*) flew over us making loud noise. We realized that there could be chicks/eggs in the nests. We could spot 3 chicks (age /size??) but no eggs. We took photographs. We also saw 2 eggs of Great Stone-Plover (*Esacus recurvirostris*) nearby. We took photographs of the bird flying over and incubating the eggs.

On 15<sup>th</sup> Feb early morning Shri Dangarbai and myself visited the dam site again. We saw 15-17 Black Stork (*Ciconia nigra*). The Black Stork was recorded for the first time in Dhari. Other important bird sightings were as under:

Caspian Tern ( <i>Sterna caspia</i> )	2
Tufted Pochard ( <i>Aythya fuligula</i> )	300-350
Comb Duck ( <i>Sarkidiornis melanotos</i> )	200-250

## Unusual Feeding Behaviour of Spot-billed Duck and Comb Duck

Navaneet C. Bhatt

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This has reference to the note on 'Unusual feeding behaviour of River Tern' published in Flamingo Vol. 2 No. 3-4. I would like to share my observations on unusual feeding behaviour of other waterbirds. During my stay at Bhavnagar, from 27<sup>th</sup> May to 10<sup>th</sup> August 2004, I had seen Spot-billed Duck (*Anas poecilorhyncha*) (12) and Comb Duck (*Sarkidiornis melanotos*) (9 including 2 males) relishing on cereals and *Ganthia* offered by bird lovers near Ravechi Mata Temple at Ruvagam, near Bhavnagar. Common Crow (*Corvus splendens*), Common Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*), Blue Rock Pigeon (*Columbia livia*), House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*), Rosy Starling (*Sturnus roseus*), Brahminy Myna (*Sturnus pagodarum*) and 2-dozen of Black Drongo (*Dicrurus adsimilis*) would also join this feast. Crows are always very envious about presence of other birds and would drive away the Spot-billed Duck but not the Comb Duck male. Comb Duck male would continue to enjoy the *Ganthia* feast and will be last to leave the place. Occasionally Red-wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*) would also join this feast. All the birds were feeding together in harmony (without disturbing others) but the House Crow was quite intolerant about presence of others. This continued very regularly up to 10<sup>th</sup> August 2004. Later on the Comb Duck and Spot-billed Duck were not seen as water level increased in the pond and offering *Ganthia* became irregular because of continuous rain. I could see Spot-billed Duck again on 4<sup>th</sup> December 2004 with a Common Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*). Even yesterday (on 3<sup>rd</sup> Jan, 2005) also, I saw a group of Spot-billed Duck feeding on *Ganthia*.

Both the ducks present in nearby pond would approach the place differently. Spot-billed Duck would swim to the shore and fly up to the feeding site, whereas the Comb Duck would swim up to the shore and walk down the remaining distance. Both the ducks were very regular in their timing and would be waiting for the person to scatter *Ganthia* on the shore at 7 O'clock in the morning. Spot-billed Duck would arrive if there was no disturbance but would be very alert and fly off from the ground on the slightest movement. I have seen them arriving to the feeding site in my presence when I would be facing away, but not when facing toward them. The Comb Ducks are comparatively less shy and they have been seen walking through the distance and passing at about 15 feet distance and continue eating even in my presence.

Thus, the Comb Duck, Spot-billed Duck, Black Drongo, Common Sandpiper and Red-wattled Lapwing are seen eating the food items not described in the 'Book of Indian Birds' by Salim Ali. I have shown this to many local birdwatchers and informed Shri Lavkumar Khacher, Shri Lalsinh Raol, Shri Uday Vora, Shri Indra Gadhavi and Shri Mrudulaben Shukla. I have also sent a report to *Vihang* in June 2004.

On 10<sup>th</sup> January 2005 Ruff, Sandpiper (?) and Common Sandpiper were also seen joining this group but in later hours (time ??). I could see them during my morning walk that I started taking little late due to cold weather. I am not aware whether they were earlier visiting the ground for feeding.

## Heronry near Chhari Dhandh

Ashwin Pomal<sup>1</sup> and S. N. Varu<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Pomal Jewelers, Vokla Falia, Bhuj-370 001, <sup>2</sup> Temple street, Junavas, Madhapar, Bhuj-370 020

We (friends) visited Chhari Dhandh on 28<sup>th</sup> August 2003 in the morning hours. Near Kiro hill, we saw a nesting colony in a wetland. Composition was as under.

Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) 100+ nest,

2/3 chicks per nest

Eurasian Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*) 20+ nests (incubation)

Black-crowned Night Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) 5+ nests (incubation)

Oriental White Ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*) 5+ nests (incubation)

Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*) 1 nest with 1chick  
Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*) 1 nest  
Painted Stork (*Mycteria leucocephala*) 1 nest, 12 adults  
storks in the heronry

Little Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax niger*) 50+ nests

Near the Chhari Village, at Dharka wetland, we saw 200+ Indian River Tern (*Sterna aurantia*). In the evening time when we were going to Vekariya Dhandh, we saw 20 nests (in incubation stage) of the Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*) on the roadside. There were 7 Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*) of which one was a white form.

## BCSG NEWS

### Appeal for Membership Renewal for 2005:

Renewal of membership for many members has become due for the year 2005. We are enclosing membership forms with 'Flamingo' and hope that you will renew your membership in time. If you have already renewed your membership, please ignore this reminder.

Appeal for Note by e-mail: All the readers who have Internet access are requested to send their observations/notes for publication in 'Flamingo' through e-mail. This will certainly reduce our efforts of typing and composing the same.

### Request for Regular Vulture Records:

During the Workshop on 'Current Status of Vultures in Gujarat' held at Anand on 19<sup>th</sup> September 2004, we had circulated a proforma for 'Regular Vulture Records'.

We have received a few forms from the members. However, we request you all to send the duly filled data sheets on regular basis so that the population trend can be monitored. We have to keep tight watch on their population and the threats being faced. A copy of the proforma is enclosed.

### Information Required on Common Shelduck:

Common Shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*) is irregular and uncommon winter visitor to India. Records of its occurrence in Gujarat State are also scanty. In January 2005, there were records of its occurrence from two sites in Gujarat. We need to put up all available information together and show it on a map so that its current status and distribution can be determined. Kindly send us all your past records of this species for compilation.

## SOME IMPORTANT SIGHTINGS

1. Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*) (150) at Kumbharwada (120) sewage pond, Bhavnagar on 22nd May 2004. Vikas M. Trivedi, Bhavnagar.
2. Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*) (2) at Nirma Salt pans near Bhavnagar on 22<sup>nd</sup> May 2004.
3. Vikas M. Trivedi, Bhavnagar.
3. Sarus Crane (*Grus antigone*) (2 Adults + 1 juvenile - half size of the parents) on 26<sup>th</sup> March 2004 at Bedva talavdi, near Anand. P. D. Chavda, Anand.

## RECENT PUBLICATIONS ON BIRDS OF GUJARAT

1. Tiwari, J. K. and A. R. Rehmani (2002). The Common Crane *Grus grus* and its habitat in Kutch, Gujarat, India. pp. 26-34. In: Birds of Wetlands and Grasslands. A.R. Rehmani and Gayatri Ugra (Eds.). Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc., Mumbai, India.
2. Clarke, R. (2002). The implications of cross habitat used by grassland raptors. pp. 95-98. In: Birds of Wetlands and Grasslands. A.R. Rehmani and Gayatri Ugra (Eds.). Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc., Mumbai, India.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITORS

I have just seen the "Flamingo" Vol. 2 No. 3& 4, 2004.

You have asked for my providing a "Key" to the identification of the juveniles of Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*) and the Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*). In the same issue, in my letter I have happened to indicate the great need for care in identifying birds. No amount of experience, keys and well-illustrated field guides can replace care and caution. With wagtails and warblers having declined so noticeably, the opportunity to become familiar with the idiosyncrasies or "jizz" of particular species is reduced. However chances are that a wagtail walking along a water stream, under shade singly anywhere in Gujarat has all possibility of being a Grey Wagtail. On the other hand, a similar looking bird with a few others keeping company among grass in irrigated farmland and beside a waterbody would be one of the off colour Yellow Wagtail. It is not seeing a bird in far-flung locations in a region that is of importance, it is the surrounding that is important.

Particularly with migrants, one can expect a Grey Wagtail anywhere, be it Kachchh or the Dangs –but in nearly every location, the chances of seeing the Grey Wagtail along flowing water in shade – simulating a rivulet in forest or well wooded country would be to the preference of the species in question. Yellow and White Wagtail are birds of wet grass, irrigated wheat and Lucerne and floating aquatic vegetation.

Of course, the shape and stance of the Grey Wagtail is quite different to the Yellow and White Wagtail. Watching them for long will make these traits recognizable. Incidentally, a Forest Wagtail, a bird I have yet to see, should share forest stream margins with Grey Wagtail.

Incidentally, gulls and terns too need second glances before absolute identification. A little caution makes for reliability, which is so essential for ones reputation.  
– **Lavkumar Khacher, Rajkot**

• Thanks ever so much for the bundle of very important information that you have sent to me. I will read and respond to you soon. The 'Flamingo' is very good reading - congratulations for such a fine job; keep it up. Very interesting to read about the River Tern eating *Ganthia*, but then again perhaps they are reacting to available food and perhaps shortage of fish?  
– **Taej Mundkur, Pune**

• First I must apologise. I had been meaning to write to you and thank you for previous issues of "Flamingo" for a long time. Very remiss of me not to have done this before, but I receive so much correspondence and so

many journals and newsletters that it is very difficult to keep up with everything. Yes, the latest issue of "Flamingo" arrived approximately one hour after your e-mail, thank you. I would indeed like to subscribe, although remitting money from the UK to India is not easy. The best thing would be if I were to take out life membership. I understand that this should be at a higher rate than for Indian members, but please not too over-inflated. Some organizations seem to think that just because one is a Westerner, one must need be very rich. Please let me know the cost for Life Membership. Congratulations on all the good work you are doing, including the excellent "Flamingo". It is very pleasing to see that there are so many committed ornithologists and birdwatchers in Gujarat. I'm sure that this closer co-operation and involvement in more organised activities can only benefit conservation in the State.  
Kindest regards .- **Krys Kazmierczak, UK**

• This is with reference to Status of Black-capped Kingfisher (*Halcyon pileata*) in Gujarat (Flamingo vol.-2 No.3&4: 2-4). I want to add one more record to it. Shri Lalsinh Raol, Dr. Bakulbhai Trivedi, Late Shri Dilhasbhai Jafri and myself were on bird census programme in Banaskantha District. When we reached Korda, Village Tank Ta. - Santalpur, Dist.-Patan (former –Banaskantha District), Shri Uday Vora showed us the Black-capped Kingfisher at village tank (month ? year ?). - **P. S. Thakker, Ahmedabad**

• I have seen the Black-capped Kingfisher (*Halcyon pileata*) in Gir Forest, at least thrice during 1987-1988. In November 1987, Shri Mohit Andharia and myself saw it near Chodavadi. In 1988, I saw one bird at Kamaleshwar Dam. In the same year, second sighting was made along with Sudhaben and Taruben Mehta on Hiran River near Valadra. - **Uday Vora, Gandhinagar**

• I sighted Black-capped Kingfisher (*Halcyon pileata*) at Dandi (Surat) and sent report to Rajasthan Patrika (Newspaper) with colour photograph which was published on 29<sup>th</sup> December 2004. The Indian Chat (*Cercomela fusca*) is doing mimicry of other birds. I had recorded it mimicking Yellow-eyed Babbler on 13<sup>th</sup> September 2004. – **Mukesh Bhatt, Surat**

• Sighting of Black-capped Kingfisher (*Halcyon pileata*) in Gujarat is increasing day by day. Either the birds are moving to new areas or they are there only, but due to more and more birdwatching we are sighting them frequently. Article of Dr. Rank and Parasharya on status of the bird is very interesting. In the same issue a note by Tarun Joshi and Gayatri Joshi disclosed its sighting at Diu. Yes, the bird indeed is a maritime –

mangroves dwelling bird. But, I would like to add that I have heard that M.S. Jamsaheb Shri Shatrushalyasinhji had seen this bird at Killeswar, situated in the centre

of Barda forest and members of Flamingo Nature Club, Mahuva sighted it at Hasnapur Dam, Jambudi area, Girnar forest (Dates?). - **Jaydev Dhadhal, Bhavnagar**

## LETTER FROM THE PRESIDENT

While I am still talking generalities, I should take the opportunity to give full expression to over half a century worth of disappointments, anger and apprehensions. My life as a birdwatcher has been largely standing on a metaphoric high point watching, often helplessly swirling action around me. The accelerated degradation of the environment has resulted from a decline in values among the elite, a greater empowerment of the general public to air their aspirations. Individuals in authority have little time to contemplate the possible result of their actions. Humanity, having freed itself from the struggle for existence, has had need to evolve greater philosophical contemplation of the freedom it enjoys. Our action does not merely involve us; even the flies and tiny organisms in the soil are effected! Let me elucidate.

A simple decision and an absolutely necessary one, to free the sweepers from the degrading task of daily handling night soil made Rajkot Municipal Corporation decrease that by a certain date all residences should install water closets. Overnight these were cesspools, clogged gutters and the Aji River became a great sewer. Mosquitoes overtook the city. To date, even as the population is growing astronomically, I am not too sure Rajkot has an efficient sewage disposal system. The old Gandhian practice of operating compost trenches has long ago ceased to operate. Leaves of the few beleaguered roadside trees are burnt. Crores of rupees of valuable manure which if wisely produced and marketed, is instead lost to the sweepers whose position in society has hardly improved.

Were the rulers of earlier periods wiser? I am not sure they were. It is just that they were closer to realities. Emperors riding a caparisoned elephant and a "dhobi" his humble ass both had the scorching sun making them appreciate the value of shade. Today's emperors and their minions fly from Delhi to Ahmedabad, so while the average citizen still travels under the hot sun, the men at court have no urgency. At best they see the need for broad tarmacs and shaded avenues are not charming anachronism! And the general public powering the democracy has little patience for philosopher kings—even their Godmen have taken to the air. Needless to say the very vultures find it difficult to survive! In fact, they are seen as hazards to air travel!

The other day, I was dismayed to have a mechanized pesticide sprayer go past my house spraying poisons in the air to "tackle the mosquito menace", I was told. Great, but since I, my grandchildren and of course all the birds among my trees breathe in air like mosquitoes, surely our benign administrators are poisoning all of us. Can there be any more thoughtless act in this age of enlightenment than this spraying of toxic matter in the air we breathe? The birds will suffer and their numbers decline, even as the rapidly breeding mosquitoes evolve resistant offspring to return in greater numbers. In the countryside, we have had a drastic reduction in almost all insectivorous birds, both resident and migrant, thanks again to short sighted crop spraying. One does not need to be a great visionary to see the portends ahead. Birdwatcher can raise a general alarm and make their communities take notice.

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