



Flamingo



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EDITORIAL

As you may be aware, there has been an outbreak of Bird flu A/H5N1 in wild Bar-headed Geese and other waterbirds in China. From May 2005 onwards, a number of deaths of waterbirds were reported at Qinghai Lake in the People's Republic of China. The exact number of birds that were found dead remains unclear, but over 5,000 deaths of some eight species have been reported during May-July, 2005. Limited sampling and studies of the genetic make up of virus found in five species namely, the Bar-headed Goose, *Anser indicus*, Brown-headed Gull *Larus brunnicephalus*, Pallas's Gull *Larus ichthyaetus*, Great Cormorant *Phalacrocorax carbo* and Brahminy Shelduck *Tadorna ferruginea* revealed virus to be of the highly pathogenic avian influenza strain A/H5N1.

All the infected species are migratory and there is a remote possibility that some individuals that have survived the outbreak still harbour the virus. It is to be seen whether such virus infected birds could spread it to other species. These migrants normally arrive in India in October/November.

From human, poultry and wild bird conservation points of view, it is very important that we are vigilant in India. The Ministries of Environment and Forests, both at the central as well as state levels have been alerted and necessary instructions have been issued to the concerned officers.

Wetlands International is on the Task Force established by the Convention on Migratory Species to look into the issue of avian diseases in migratory birds. Given the populations of Bar-headed Geese and other waterbirds that come to Gujarat each year, we endorse Dr. Taej Mundkur (Wetland International)'s proposal that special attention be given to these species in the coming Asian Waterbird Count. Should any one come across a dead waterbird, the find should be reported to officers of the State Forest Department or of the Animal Husbandry Department. A sudden outbreak of disease in birds would create havoc not only for the wild birds as well as domestic birds and even human being!



Yogendra Shah

A flock of Bar-headed Geese over Nayka Dam, Surendranagar

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BCSG AND FLAMINGO

Bird Conservation Society, Gujarat (BCSG) was founded in 2000 to further the cause of conservation of birds of the state through field research, documentation, training, awareness activities, networking with like-minded NGOs and lobbying for protection of birds and their habitats. It is the only statewide network of bird-watchers, ornithologists and conservationists of Gujarat striving to achieve the above goal.

BCSG brings out a quarterly newsletter – 'Flamingo' for its members. Articles, notes, interesting bird sightings, important bird area, information regarding

conservation issues, field programme reports related to Gujarat State are welcome.

Bird species described in the articles and notes should follow common English names and scientific names as per Manakadan, R. and Pittie, A. (2002). Standardized English and Scientific Names of the Birds of the Indian Subcontinent –2002. Newsletter for Birdwatchers 42 (3): 1-35. If the nomenclature is adopted from other source, full reference should be given.

ARTICLE

Bird Flu

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Avian influenza (AI) virus is one of the re-emerging and ever evolving viruses which has time and again plagued poultry population world wide and also threatened human population. In the beginning of this century, the most devastating pandemic referred as Spanish influenza had occurred in 1918-19 followed by three more outbreaks namely 1957 Asian influenza, 1968 Hong Kong influenza and 1977 Russian influenza and number of epidemics in different parts of globe. With recent outbreaks, Avian influenza virus has again threatened for fresh pandemic. The recent outbreaks of bird flu began in Southeast Asia in 2003. Since then, this bird flu has led to death or slaughter of some 140 million domestic birds, resulting in losses to Asian poultry industry estimated at around \$10 billion and claiming over 60 human lives. Earlier the outbreaks were restricted to Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand, Laos, Cambodia and China. But the fear started tickling later this year when the outbreaks of this bird flu were found in Turkey and Romania and created panic in the public when bird flu virus appeared in poultry in Russia, Kazakhstan and Mongolia. The geographical spread appeared to be tracking migratory routes of wild birds. With this circumstantial evidence of the virus being carried along the migratory birds, the birds were portrayed as world's enemy number -1 in the media. By October, 2005 bird flu was detected in a parrot in UK and among swans in Croatia causing panic throughout the world. People started fearing pandemic like Spanish flu of 1918-19, which killed around 40 million persons. The news in Indian media also started increasing with approaching the season for migratory birds. It reached to peak with the arrival of the migratory birds. However, the actual danger may not be as great as created in the public.

The virus and the spread of disease ?

Bird flu is an infection caused by avian influenza (Bird flu) virus, particularly with pathogenic strains. Three types of influenza viruses, A, B and C are known. It is the subtype of virus A which primarily infects birds. There are numerous strains (at least 144) of avian influenza. Most of these viruses within wild bird

populations are benign, but some forms of the viruses are highly pathogenic. These highly pathogenic-avian influenza (HPAI) viruses can spread very rapidly and cause great mortality upto 100% within 48 hrs in domestic poultry flocks.

Migratory waterfowl, especially ducks, carry the viruses. Although they often appear healthy, these infected birds shed viruses in their droppings, saliva and nasal secretions. Domestic poultry, especially chickens, turkeys and geese, become infected from contact through contaminated water, feed or soil, or even by inhaling the air borne virus. Movements of domestic poultry have been largely implicated in the spread of the disease in Southeast Asia. Transmission is promoted in domestic flocks due to the density of birds. Husbandry methods in Southeast Asia where domestic flocks are often allowed to mix freely with wild birds, especially waterfowl will have facilitated the transmission to migratory waterbirds, leading to several reported instances of die offs.

The highly pathogenic strain, H5N1 was never recorded in wild birds before the recent outbreaks in Southeast Asia. It is likely that it originated in domestic poultry through mutation of low pathogenic sub-types and was subsequently passed from poultry to wild birds.

Humans contract the bird flu virus from close contact with sick birds or with surface contaminated by their feathers, saliva or droppings.

Why the fear ?

The Avian influenza virus does not normally infect humans. However, these viruses have the tendency to mutate and may occasionally spread to other animals and to humans. The fear is that H5N1 may mutate acquiring genes from human flu virus that would make highly infectious with the potential to explode as a pandemic which could kill millions of people worldwide if it acquires the ability to pass easily from human to human. The spread of influenza viruses in human beings have already resulted in the deaths of over 60 people in the last two years in Southeast Asia.

An outburst of avian flu in migratory birds in China, Russia, Romania, Germany and Ukraine has raised fears that the virus responsible could soon spread to India and other countries via winter migratory birds. In fact, the winter visitors have already arrived in India. Fortunately, India has not reported any case of "Bird flu" till date. However we must anticipate its arrival and spread in the near future and be prepared to act in response.

Currently no vaccine is available which can protect humans against the H5N1 virus. However, vaccine development efforts are under way. If a pandemic does occur, one worry is about manufacturing capacity and distribution; making enough of the vaccine and getting it on time and to the right people, without causing panic or black market or leaving poor countries helpless. The condition is more vulnerable as the virus is fast mutating and the vaccine may not be effective against newly evolved virus. Also, the vaccine may ensure the bird doesn't fall to disease but may not stop it from infecting others; it may just shade the virus. India has the poultry population of 440 millions, fifth largest in the world, vaccinating each bird may not be practical or economically feasible.

Regarding treatment, two drugs, Oseltamivir (commonly known as Tamiflu) and Zanamivir (commonly known as Relenza) can reduce the severity and duration of illness caused by seasonal influenza. Their efficacy depends on their administration within 48 hr. after symptom onset. However, fears are that the flu virus may soon become resistant to it. Tamiflu is also expensive and in limited supply and thus would not be effective in the face of a wide spread epidemic.

Our preparedness

The Union Environment Ministry seems to be geared up to ward off the threat. The Departments of Environment and Forests, and Animal Husbandry; Government of India will monitor 50 bird sanctuaries in the country for signs of bird flu virus in 2005-2006. The birds that will be closely watched are Bar-headed Geese, Brown-headed and Pallas's Gulls and Great Cormorants.

All State Animal Husbandry Departments will take blood samples from poultry farms in the vicinity of bird sanctuaries and, where possible, from migratory birds. Sanctuary-wise monitoring will be done continuously

and samples will be sent to the High-Security Animal Disease Laboratory in Bhopal. Dr. Hare Krishna Pradhan, Head of High Security Animal Disease laboratory, Bhopal, has already issued necessary guidelines for collection of samples for testing. In Gujarat, the responsibility is entrusted to Deputy Director (Animal Husbandry) polytechnic Campus, Ambawadi, Ahmedabad. 10 bird sanctuaries and 15 water reservoirs will be monitored regularly. Waterbirds and their faecal samples will be collected from these places and will be sent to HSAD Lab, Bhopal. The good news is that highly pathogenic avian influenza virus has not been detected in 11,000 serum and tissue samples that are tested across the country by HSAD lab.

Experts and scientists are of the opinion that the direct risk of migratory birds infecting human is negligible. The biggest risk to human health rests not in wild birds but in domestic birds –poultry because of their close contact with human. In fact, there is no evidence that H5N1 infection in humans have been acquired from wild birds. Human infections have occurred in people who have been closely associated with poultry. The risk to human health from wild birds is extremely low and can be minimized by avoiding contact with sick or dead birds.

The most efficient control techniques involve improved biosecurity measures including maintaining a high level security regarding all traffic coming onto poultry farms and a very high standard of hygiene to minimize the spread of the disease, to reduce the likelihood of contact between domestic stock and wild birds or infected water sources. Many poultry farms are near the irrigation canals and using the water from canals originating from or ending to water reservoirs like Kanewal, Pariej etc. Poultry farmers should be alert to the symptoms of avian influenza in birds and quickly report any suspicions to the veterinary authorities and ensuring that all sick and dead birds are checked by an experienced veterinarian. Disposal of carcasses and potentially infective material should be done in a biosecure manner.

We as birdwatchers will have to be more vigilant for any signs of illness or deaths in waterbirds. Sighting of a dead bird should be reported to the nearest Forest or Animal Husbandry Department offices. One should not handle the dead bird himself. Let us help government in curtailing possible bird flu outbreak.

NOTES

Tree Pie at Karimshahi Post in the Great Rann of Kachchh

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Tree Pie (*Dendrocitta vagabunda*) is widely distributed in Western India though the bird has not been noted to occur in Kachchh (Ali and Ripley, 2001; Grimmett *et al.*, 1998).

I have visited the Great Rann of Kachchh many times during the years 2001-2004, but have never come across this bird. Recently I visited the Great Rann of Kachchh with 'Aaj Tak' TV Channel staff on 8th and 9th January and again on 25th and 26th March 2005 for the Archaeological Survey of India. During both these visits, I saw a single Tree Pie among *Prosopis juliflora* at the Karimshahi Border Out Post (BOP). I surmise the bird

seen on the two occasions was the same having stayed there about three months. Shri S. N. Varu at Bhuj informed me that the Tree Pie has not been previously recorded in the district.

Reference:

Ali, S. and S. D. Ripley (2001). *Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan*. Vol. 3 (2nd Ed.). Oxford University Press, Delhi.

Grimmett R., C. Inskipp and T. Inskipp (1998): *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*. Oxford University Press, Delhi.

Tree Pie in the Great Rann of Kachchh

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On 17th October 2005, we saw one Tree Pie (*Dendrocitta vagabunda*) at a Border Out Post 10 km west of the Karimshahi BOP on the Sindh border. It was chasing House Sparrows (*Passer domesticus*) in an attempt to capture one. The bird was videographed and the same was shown to Shri S. N. Varu the next day. Though the species has never been recorded in Kachchh or on the periphery of the Ranns, it occurs in Sindh - north of the Great Rann (Grimmett *et al.* 1998; Kazmierczak, 2000) not far from where we saw it. From

the BOP, one can see green hills in Pakistan, which should provide quite suitable habitat for Tree Pies. The Indian BPOs are within a kilometer of the international border.

Reference:

Grimmett R., C. Inskipp and T. Inskipp (1998). *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*. Oxford University Press, Delhi.

Kazmierczak, K. (2000). *A Field Guide to the Birds of India*. Om Book Service, New Delhi.

Counting of Painted Storks and Nests at Piele Garden, Bhavnagar

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Volunteers of Shri Nilkanthvarni Eco Club, Swaminarayan High School, Bhavnagar counted the birds and nests of Painted Stork Colony at Piele Garden and area around in the Bhavnagar city in November 2004. This exercise was arranged to orient students towards

systematic counting. Volunteers were divided into four groups and each group was identified by a bird name. They counted a total of 189 birds and 130 nests. The details are as under:

Group	Bird	Nest	Tree	Place
Kingfisher	03	17	<i>Khijdo</i>	Piele Garden
	25	20	<i>Rukhdo</i>	Piele Garden
	44	29	<i>Neem</i>	Jashonath Chawk
Flamingo	18	12	<i>Khijdo</i>	Piele Garden
	10	06	<i>Peltoforum</i>	Urban Malaria Dept.
	18	08	<i>Neem</i>	Jashonath Chawk
	20	07	<i>Asopalav</i>	Town Hall
Golden Oriole	08	06	<i>Kamalkakadi</i>	Piele Garden
	03	00	<i>Peltoforum</i>	Piele Garden
	01	03	<i>Neem</i>	Jashonath Chawk
	18	08	<i>Neem</i>	Dr. Ambedkar Chawk
Hawk Cuckoo	01	01	<i>Neem</i>	Piele Garden
	08	08	<i>Rayan</i>	Piele Garden
	12	05	<i>Neem</i>	Opp. Jashonath temple
Total	189	130		

In a district level tree plantation project, a total of 22,120 trees were planted in 31 schools of different villages of Bhavnagar district from 16th to 23rd July and on 11th August 2004 with the help of local school level Eco Clubs and other local bodies. The trees were mainly of local Indian varieties e.g. Peepal, Neem, Sevan, Karanj, Peepar, Gulmohar, Kasid, Banian, Saru, Peltoforum, Bili, Garmalo, Udambar, Amla.

[Shri Rajesh Trivedi's efforts are appreciated. It is only if bird censuses and tree planting are conducted regularly that a repo with Nature is established. The youngsters obviously missed out many nest since in 2004, there were 328 nests of Painted Stork on trees in and around Piele Garden.-Eds.]

Saving 200 Vultures From Probable Death

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Although vultures have become very uncommon, Nature Club, Surat volunteers observed about 200 vultures circling and beginning to land for feeding on 6 buffalo carcasses on the morning of 24th April 2005. We were informed the previous night that 6 buffalo had died after drinking poisonous water from an industrial unit at Hazira.

Our volunteers had reached the site early in the morning, when some 8 vultures had arrived. We decided to bury the buffalo carcasses instead of allowing the

vultures to eat the poisoned flash. Within an hour, 200 vultures had gathered and we had a difficult time keeping them away from their food. Ultimately an excavator was arranged for and the carcasses were buried. We felt bad having to keep so many hungry birds away from a rare feast, but our concern was the knowledge that India's vulture population has declined drastically during the last decade, the decline attributed to carcasses of cattle having traces of harmful chemicals.

First Sighting Dates of Some Migratory Bird Species in Northern and Central Gujarat During 2004-05

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Except the bird migration studies carried out by Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS), not much efforts have been made in India to record dates of arrival, departure and occurrence of the migratory bird species. Ali (1954-55) gave dates for his first sightings of many such species during his survey of the birds of Gujarat. For the past two years I have recorded such data for three bird species viz. Rosy Starling (*Sturnus roseus*), European Roller (*Coracias garrulus*) and Spotted Flycatcher (*Muscicapa striata*) at Jessore Wildlife Sanctuary and Ahmedabad. The first species is a winter visitor, where as the other two are passage migrants. The following table gives the dates of first sightings for the species in respective localities.

As can be seen, the dates for Jessore located in northern Gujarat (Banaskantha) precede the dates for Kachchh in all three cases. Of course, this can be due to variation in the observer's presence. If birdwatchers across the state keep a track of their first sighting dates for migratory species, we can get a chart of movement

of respective species. Further, the sighting of Spotted Flycatcher was interesting as Ali (1954-55) and Khacher (1996) mentioned about its occurrence only in Kachchh and Saurashtra, despite the surveys by the former in northern Gujarat (Balaram forests). I do not know if records of this species exist for northern Gujarat, if not, the present records could be treated as noteworthy.

References:

Ali, S. (1954). The birds of Gujarat, Part -I. *J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* 52 (2 &3): 374-458.
 Ali, S. (1955). The birds of Gujarat, Part -II. *J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* 52 (4): 735-802.
 Dharmakumarsinhji, R. S. (1955). The Birds of Saurashtra, India. R. S. Dharmakumarsinhji, Bhavnagar, Saurashtra.
 Khacher, L. (1996). The birds of Gujarat -A Salim Ali centenary overview. *J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* 93 (3): 331-373.

Table 1. First sighting dates for three species of birds in northern Gujarat

Species	Date of First Sighting (PT)	Date of first sighting (SA)
Rosy Starling	29 th July 2004 - Jessore WLS	9 th August 194 - Kachchh
- do -	17 th August 2004 - Ahmedabad	—
- do -	20 th August 2005 - Ahmedabad	—
European Roller	29 th July 2004 - Jessore WLS	17 th August 1943 - Kachchh
- do -	21 st September 2005 - Ahmedabad	—
Spotted Flycatcher	27 th August 2004 - Jessore WLS	1 st September 1943 - Kachchh

PT- Pranav Trivedi, SA - Salim Ali (Ali, 1954, 1955)

Status of White-eared Bulbul in Saurashtra

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Though White-eared Bulbul (*Pycnonotus leucotis*) is distributed all over the Gujarat (Kazmierczak, 2000), it is not that common in Saurashtra region. Here, it is found at few places and that too in very limited areas. The bird is found on island in the Gulf of Kachchh (Piroten, Beyt Dwarka) and at Khijadia Bird Sanctuary in northern Saurashtra. I have seen the species between Madhavpur to Porbandar near Narvaimata temple in very limited area of 15 to 20 km. They can be seen from Nal Sarovar to Velavadar National Park, but not in very similar Bhal area, North to Velavadar. They are absent from Gir, Girnar, Barda and Central Saurashtra.

Dhamakumarsinhji (1955) has reported occurrence of this bird all over the coastal areas of Saurashtra. But presently, except Khijadia and islands of

the Gulf of Kachchh it is not seen from Bhavnagar to Porbandar leaving 15 to 20 kms coastal area near Madhavpur.

It will be interesting to know why the species has restricted itself to a few patches in Saurashtra. The birdwatchers from Saurashtra can help in establishing its current distribution in Saurashtra.

Reference:

- Dharmakumarsinhji, R. S. (1955). Birds of Saurashtra. India. R. S. Dharmakumarsinhji, Bhavnagar, Saurashtra
- Kazmierczak, K. (2000). A Field Guide to the Birds of India. Om Book Service, New Delhi.

Paneli vidi-an Ideal Quail Area

Prasad Ganpule

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Myself alongwith my brother Rohit and Mr. Amarsinhbhai, a local person with knowledge of *vidi*, visited the Paneli *vidi* near Morbi on 26th August 2005 afternoon. It is a well-preserved *vidi*, about 10 km from Morbi. I saw 2 quails near the road. They were of small size and bluish-black (purple) in colour. There was no black and white head pattern. It had lighter i.e. dark grayish colour around the eyes. Also, underparts were nearly of same colour. Unfortunately I could not take photograph, The birds were at the side of the road at not more than 10 feet away from us. We observed them for about 2 minutes. As we got down to take photograph, the birds immediately flew away. Could it be Blue-breasted Quail (*Coturnix chinensis*). As per Kazmierczak (2000) and Grimmett *et al.* (1988) its distribution range is up to Maharashtra only.

I would like to add that the Paneli *vidi* is a prime quail area. We also saw Common Buttonquail (*Turnix suscitator*) and Jungle Bush-Quail (*Perdica asiatica*) in good numbers. Grey Francolins (*Francolinus pondiceri anus*) were also there in good numbers. All in all, a good place for birdwatching.

References:

- Dharmakumarsinhji, R. S. (1955). Birds of Saurashtra, India. R. S. Dharmakumarsinhji, Bhavnagar, Saurashtra.
- Grimmett R., C. Inskipp & T. Inskipp (1998): Birds of the Indian Subcontinent. Oxford University Press, Delhi.
- Kazmierczak, K. (2000). A Field Guide to the Birds of India. Om Book Service, New Delhi.

Chhapariyali Diary

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31.10.2004

10:30 6 Indian White-backed Vultures (*Gyps bengalensis*) soaring in the sky over the hillocks. Carcasses are placed here for skin removal, approximately 0.85 km away from Chhapariyali Panjarapole. Chhapariyali village is approximately 55 km from Palitana and approximately 45 km from Mahuva in Bhavnagar district.

11:30 5 out of the 6 vultures landed to start feeding on the carcasses

22:00-00:30 6 Jackals came to feast

01.11.2004

06:45 5 vultures arrived.

07:45-12:30 I covered myself with gunny bags and concealed myself near the freshly skinned carcasses but vultures did not come on the carcasses probably sensing my presence.

13:00 I went to Chhapariyali office to fill my water bottle. At that time around 35 vultures appeared soaring overhead.

14:00 10 -12 vultures had commenced feeding on the carcasses when I returned. They immediately abandoned feeding and settled on near by rock outcrops.

17: 00 visited the disposal site again. Only one vulture was feeding. It continued feeding for 5 -7 minutes in my presence.

09.11.2004

06:00 50 vultures arrived and settled on the rock outcrops.

08: 30 35- 37 vultures came down to feed, others started soaring. I was watching from 450 meters behind a water tank.

11:00 All the vultures left the carcasses and settled on the rock outcrops.

11:30 Came down to a water pond and took bath.

12:30-13:00 Settled on the hillocks and started drying their bodies with open wings.

13:15 10-15 vultures were feeding on the carcasses, but they immediately flew away seeing me.

14:00 I left for Bhavnagar.

My conclusion : Vultures usually arrive between 06:00 to 15:00 hours. Any bird, which does not get enough food stays late for feeding.

Dogs and vultures enjoy the feast together. Cattle Egrets are also seen feeding along with them*. On occasions the egrets settle on the backs of the dogs!

Vultures remain busy scavenging on carcass even when crows are trying to share the food and perch on them.

Vultures fly away when strangers approach, but not when Panjarapole persons do. It seems they recognise those handling the carcasses.

Around 15-20 dogs regularly come from nearby villages to feed on the carcasses. Some of them even stay overnight.

[* Normally, the Cattle Egrets capture insects and maggots from the soil and dead body. Whether they did scavenging on the carcasses need confirmation - Eds.]

EVENTS

- A one day workshop on 'Cranes and Community in Gujarat: A Holistic Conservation Strategy for Future' was jointly organized by GEER Foundation and Gujarat State Forest Department on 23rd November 2004 at GEER Foundation, Gandhinagar. An exhibition on cranes was also displayed at the venue.
- A state wide survey of Gyps vultures was conducted by GEER foundation in collaboration with Gujarat

State Forest Department in two phases i.e. nesting survey during 12th to 27th March and population survey conducted during 28th-29th May 2005.

- A photo exhibition on "Wildlife" by Shri Yogendra Shah was held during 4th-8th October, 2005 at Vadodara and during 21st-23rd October, 2005 at Surendranagar.

BCSG PROGRAMMES

Ahmedabad Field Trip

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Ahmedabad chapter of BCSG organised a birding excursion for the members on 4th September 2005. The meeting point was Punit Van in Gandhinagar. About 30 members participated in this programme. After a stroll in Punit Van, which might be described as an astrological garden, participants watched birds in a scrub area. Following is a list of some birds observed during the excursion:

Indian Peafowl *Pavo cristatus*
Lesser Golden-backed Woodpecker
Dinopium benghalense
Common Hoopoe *Upapa epops*
Small Bee-eater *Merops orientalis*
Brainfever Bird *Hierococcyx varius*
Little Brown Dove *Streptopelia senegalensis*
Eurasian Collared-Dove *Streptopelia decaocto*
Yellow-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus malabaricus*
Red-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus indicus*
Oriental Honey-Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus*
Bay-backed Shrike *Lanius vittatus*
Eurasian Golden Oriole *Oriolus oriolus*
Large Cuckoo-Shrike *Coracina macei*

Small Minivet *Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*
White-browed Fantail-Flycatcher *Rhipidura aureola*
Common Iora *Aegithina tiphia*
Common Woodshrike *Tephrodornis pondicerianus*
Oriental Magpie-Robin *Copsychus saularis*
Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer*
Franklin's Prinia *Prinia hodgsonii*
Ashy Prinia *Prinia socialis*
Large Grey Babbler *Turdoides malcolmi*
Jungle Babbler *Turdoides striatus*
Purple Sunbird *Nectarinia asiatica*
Yellow-throated Sparrow *Petronia xanthocollis*
White-throated Munia *Lonchura malabarica*

It being the Monsoon season, various beautiful wildflowers like the rose-purple Oriental Sesame (*Sesamum orientale*), the common Fringed-flower Vine (*Trichosanthes cucumerina*), the yellow Tanner's Cassia (*Cassia auriculata*) and the gorgeous but sadly endangered Glory Lily (*Gloriosa superba*) proved to be additional attractions of the outing. Shri Uday Vora was the resource person for the programme.

First Event of BCSG-Rajkot Chapter

Rajdeep Jhala

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A birdwatching programme was organised as a part of the first activity by BCSG-Rajkot Chapter on 4th September, 2005 at 7:30 a.m. The venue was Nyari-1 Dam and a nearby checkdam, located 8 kms from Rajkot city off the Kalawad Road.

The event was held under the inspiration and guidance of our President Shri Lavkumar Khacher. Twenty two participants of varied age groups (school children to senior citizens) actively took part in the programme. Shri Ashok Mashru organized the entire programme. Literatures regarding the heronry and nest count forms were distributed.

Since the last two years, nests of herons, egrets, and cormorants have formed on the *Prosopis* that are

half submerged in the Nyari Reservoir water. But this year these *Prosopis* had dried probably due to higher water level and the heronry had shifted towards the distal end of the reservoir where the *Prosopis* were taller and thicker. In the nearby checkdam there was another active heronry.

The number of nests observed in both the heronries is as follows:

Nyari-1 Dam Heronry : Great Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*)-05 incubating; Little Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax niger*)-08 incubating; Eurasian Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*)-10 incubating; Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*)-01 feeding; Indian Shag (*Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*)-25 incubating

Checkdam Heronry (Near Nyari-1 Dam) : Little Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax niger*)-37 incubating; Oriental White Ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*)-04 incubating; Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*)-27 in some nests chicks were visible; Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*)-11 incubating; Indian Pond-Heron (*Ardeola grayii*)-01 incubating

Other Birds : Little Green Heron (*Butorides striatus*), Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*), Indian Shag (*Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*), Darter (*Anhinga melanogaster*), Lesser Whistling-Duck (*Dendrocygna javanica*), Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*), Spot-billed Duck (*Anas poecilorhyncha*), Common Coot (*Fulica atra*), Black-breasted Weaver (*Ploceus benghalensis*).

Bhavnagar : An Urban Bharatpur

Indra Gadhvi

Plot 2200, Ankur Society, Hill drive, Bhavnagar-364002

Bird Conservation Society, Gujarat (BCSG) and Dharmakumarsinhji Nature Conservation Society, Bhavnagar jointly organized an unique programme on 2nd October 2005 –the first day of Wildlife Week and launched the Bhavnagar Chapter of BCSG. A small but meaningful function was held at Piele Garden- a Municipal garden in heart of the city. Officials of the Municipal Corporation and the State Forest Department along with 150 birdwatchers of Bhavnagar attended the function. 10 bird enthusiasts from Anand and Nadiad also attended. This function was specially organized to appreciate the existence and steady growth of a Painted Stork nesting colony in and around Piele Garden and the silent role played by the Municipal Corporation –and particularly the Garden staff and people of Bhavnagar in its conservation. Painted Storks are large waterbirds, which breed colonially on tall trees. Due to its small population size, uneven distribution and irregular breeding, the species has been categorised as near threatened by the Birdlife International.

Dr. Indra Gadhvi, Hon. Secretary of Dharmakumarsinhji Nature Conservation Society introduced the guests and welcomed them by offering flower bouquets. Dr. B. M. Parasharya informed that the Bird Conservation Society, Gujarat was starting its Bhavnagar Chapter with this unique function. Dr. Parasharya, who has been maintaining the records of nest numbers of Painted Storks since 1979, informed that in 1979 there were only 43 nests in Bhavnagar and 23 nests at Ghogha – a coastal town just 19 km south to Bhavnagar. With passing of time the colony of Ghogha and that of Gopnath have perished but the colony at Bhavnagar continued to thrive with the number of nests going up to 500! Today, the Bhavnagar stork colony is possibly the largest urban colony in the country and for that the credit goes to the Municipal Corporation and its garden staff as

well as the people of Bhavnagar. Since 10 other waterbird species also breed *en mass* within the city, Bhavnagar is in Shri Lavkumar Khacher's terminology, "an Urban Bharatpur". The Municipal Corporation and the hotel owners should take maximum advantage of their urban winged wildlife to attract tourists. Shri Khacher – a senior most birdwatcher of the country, a renowned naturalist and President of BCSG had specially come for the occasion advised the audience to find mental peace from the joy of birdwatching and conservation. Birds, like these storks, were the integral part of "Vibrant Gujarat" he added.

Dy. Conservator of Forests Shri N. V. Kataria and Shri J. P. Vasava, Dy. Commissioner Shri Tanna, Chairperson of the Garden Committee Smt. Ritudevi Gohil and Mayor Shri Narendra Chavda also spoke on the occasion. Mayor Shri Chavda and Garden Committee Chairperson Smt. Gohil were very much aware of the importance of the stork colony within the urban area and the need for its conservation. Both of them promised the wholehearted support of the Corporation for this noble cause. The Mayor announced the setting up of a rescue centre for the Painted Storks, in the Garden. Stork chicks get injured falling to the ground, and the soaring adults frequently cut their wings on the sharp threads of kites flown around Makarsankranti (14th January) each year.

The organizers honored Shri Shrenik Shah and Haribhai Chavda for their contribution to Painted Stork conservation. Excellent photographs of Painted Storks taken by Shri Raju Chauhan were presented to the Mayor and the Dy. Commissioner in recognition of their commitment towards stork conservation. After the function, the participants enjoyed viewing the stork colony. As per the latest count on November 2, 2005 there were 402 nests in the colony.

VULTURE UPDATE

This section is the compilation of feed back received from the members of BCSG and other birdwatcher friends after the Vulture Workshop organized by BCSG at Anand in September 2004.

Date	Place	Vulture spp	Activity	Bird watcher
20-22 th Aug.04	Bustard Sanctuary, Kachchh	WBV-85	-	Piyush Patel, Valsad
17 th Oct.-04	Ahmedabad (above Sabarmati Railway Station)	WBV- Approx. 24	Soaring	Rajdeep Jhala, Rajkot
21 st Nov.-04	Nani Kakral, District - Navsari	WBV -2	-	Jairaj Vashi, Navsari
25 th Nov.-04	Near Dungar, Victor Dist. -Amreli	WBV-18	Soaring	Pravinbhai H. Gohil, Victor, Dist. Amreli
27 th Nov.-04 Dec-04 and Jan-05 7 th Dec.04	Morbi town Morbi town Ahmedabad	WBV -28 WBV-4-5 WBV-10	3- on nest Soaring, No sighting since Feb.05 6 soaring; 4 roosting on Neem tree Soaring	Ashok Mashru, Rajkot Prasad Ganphule, Morbi B. M. Parasharya, Anand
14 th Dec.-04	Krishnagadh Dam Site, Savarkundla, Dist.-Amreli	WBV-8	Soaring	Pravinbhai H. Gohil, Victor.
18 th Dec.-04	Khoda village 39 km from Ahmedabad	EV-1	Soaring	Anika Tere and B.M. Parasharya, Anand
18 th Dec.04	Ahmedabad	EV-15+	Soaring on Municipality waste dumping area Soaring	Anika Tere and B.M. Parasharya, Anand
27 th Dec.-04	Lunsapur Pond, Dist. -Amreli	WBV-6	Soaring	Pravinbhai H. Gohil, Victor
19 th Dec.-04	Dabhala Panjrapole, near Ahmedabad	HGV-1 along with EGV	-	Kartik Shastri, Ahmedabad
26 th Dec.-04	Dabhala Panjrapole, near Ahmedabad	WBV-110 along with chicks	Feeding on carcass	Kartik Shastri, Ahmedabad
26 th Dec.-04	Dabhala Panjrapole, near Ahmedabad	EGV-6, HGV-2	-	Kartik Shastri, Ahmedabad
10 th Jan.-05	Near Kareda Pond, Ta Ghogha, Dist. Bhavnagar	CV-1	Soaring	Darshan Andheria, Bhavnagar
18 th Apr.-05	Gadulkpur Village Near Godhra	WBV-14	Feeding, other birds were Jungle Crow, Cattle Egrets	Sunil Puwar, Godhra
4 th May-05	Nageshri, Ta-Jaffrabad Dist. Amreli	WBV-colony (25-30 birds) with 3-4 nests	-	Vipul Laheri, Rajula (Source : Amit Jethva Khambha)
5 th May-05	Near Johiskuva Village, Ta-Anklav, Dist. Anand.	WBV-4	-	Manish Gor, Vadodara

Abbreviations : WBV - Eurasian White-backed Vulture, EV - Egyptian Vulture, HGV - Eurasian Griffon Vulture, HGV - Himalayan Griffon Vulture.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS ON BIRDS OF GUJARAT

1. Hathi, D., R. Jhala and B. Trivedi (2004). Unusual feeding behaviour of River Terns (*Sterna aurantia*). *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* 44: 80.
2. Pathak, B. J., S. Vijayan, B. P. Pati and Belim Hanif (2004). Black Stork *Ciconia nigra* in and around Gir forest. *J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* 101(2): 311-313.
3. Varu, S. N. (2004). Whit-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* in Kutch. *Newsletter for Ornithologists* 1(5): 77.
4. Devkar, R. V. and M. D. Visavadia (2005). Nesting of vultures at Girnar Hill, Junagadh (Gujarat). *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* 45 (2): 21-22.
5. Iyer, M. (2005). Sightings of Gyps (vultures) and Aquila (eagles) at Dabhla pound and Thol Bird Sanctuary. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* 45(2): 24-25.
6. Jethva, A. B. (2005). 40 White-backed Vultures die at Mahuva vulture colony, Gujarat. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* 45(3): 44.

SOME INTERESTING BIRD SIGHTINGS

1. Sarus Crane (*Grus antigone*)-4 on 17th Oct-04 on Viramgam to Ahmedabad road, and one pair foraging in the field between Bawla and Bagodara on 16th Aug. 2005.-Rajdeep Jhala and Dhaivat Hathi., Rajkot.
2. Greater Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus ruber*)-475 including 25% immature at Aji-II Dam, Rajkot on 26th January 2005-Ashok Mashru, Rajkot.
3. Lesser Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus minor*)-3000 at Jambuda site, Khijadia Bird Sanctuary on 10th January 2005.- Jaypalsinh Jadeja, Jamnagar.
4. Great White Pelican (*Pelecanus onocrotalus*)-1, White-necked Stork (*Ciconia episcopus*)-1, Painted Stork (*Mycteria leucocephala*)-6 soaring near Bavla at 10:00 hrs on 7th Dec. 2004- B. M. Parasharya, Anand
5. Garganey (*Anas querquedula*) (male-females) about 70 in summer plumage at Dahisara village Tank of Bhuj Taluka, probably on return migration on 25th March 2005. -S. N. Varu, Ashwin Pomal and Navin Bapat, Bhuj.
6. Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*)-18 on Kodadha and Taranagar wetlands, Patan District on 13th Feb. 2005 - V. A. Vora, Gandhinagar.
7. Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*)-20 at Randarda Pond, Rajkot on 23rd January 2005-Ashok Mashru, Rajkot.
8. Lesser Whistling-Duck (*Dendrocygna javanica*)-one pair with 5 chicks, Common Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*) 15-20 on 19th October 2004 near Christ College.-Rajdeep Jhala, Rajkot.
9. Mallard (*Anas platyrhynchos*)-6 sighted only at Bhimsar Jheel of Nakhtrana Taluka, out of total 32 sites counted during Water Fowl Census 2005. S. N. Varu, Bhuj.
10. Black-breasted Weaver (*Placeus benghalensis*)-Approximately 25-30 nests in the reeds near the overflow of Nyari Dam on 22nd August 04 Dhaivat Hathi, Rajkot.
11. Common Kestrel (*Falco tinunculus*)-1 at Morbi seen on 29th Jan. 05 at around 4:30 p.m.-Prasad Ganpule, Morbi.
12. Common Shelduck (*Tadorna tadorna*)-6, Black-necked Grebe (*Podiceps nigricollis*)-1 on Sidada dam near Santalpar, District -Patan in first week of Feb. 2005 - U. A. Vora, Gandhinagar.
13. Crested Bunting (*Melophus lathami*) male-25+ roosting in hedge at Vardi Dam near Meghraj, District-Sabarkantha and Crested Bunting (*Melophus lathami*) male-1 near Shamlaji on 10th Jan.2005-U.A. Vora, Gandhinagar; B. M. Parasharya and Sanjay Paneliya, Anand; B. N. Trivedi, Ahmedabad.

BCSG NEWS

Annual General Body Meeting of our Society will be held on 1st January 2006 at Pariej Reservoir. Morning 0700 – 1000 will be spared for birdwatching on the reservoir, to be followed by Annual General Body Meeting. In the post-lunch session, we will visit some

smaller wetlands like Narda and Naghrama near Limbasi to see a large number of Sarus Cranes with their young ones.

Asian Waterfowl census 2006 during 7th-26th Jan. 2006 census forms enclosed.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

● This has a reference to 'Letter from The President' in Vol.-II, No.3-4 regarding ability/expertise of identifying a particular bird from its call. Late Darbarsaheb Shivrajikumar Khachar of Jasdan visited Late Thakorsaheb Rudradatsinhji of Sanand to inquire after his health in July 1987. Thakorsaheb had fractured his leg. At that time I was serving with Thakorsaheb. I escorted the Darbar Saheb to Thakorsaheb's room and waited outside observing the birds in the garden of the darbargadh. Suddenly, I heard a musical symphony from a bird hidden among the plants. I tried to locate it but could not see the songster which I thought was of an Oriental Magpie Robin. I knew Khachersaheb as great ornithologist and when he came out, I inquired if he had heard any musical bird call. He confirmed having heard a Magpie Robin. I was thrilled to have my identification conformed by a recognized bird expert. He later sent me a copy of Chatak (vernacular language newsletter) published by the Saurashtra (Rajkot) Division of World Wildlife Fund, India.

–Narhari Bhatt, Ahmedabad

● In connection with article "Birds and bats in ambience by Ranjisingh Devker, Pradip Khanpara and Ramesh Katara, I am to state that there was a Cattle Egret colony on the Banyan tree near Hamirsar Tank at Bhuj. Flying Foxes were also living with them. Unfortunately, this banyan tree is removed due to planning of Bhuj city after the earthquake.

I also agree with Snehal Patel, regarding dogs scaring vultures. At Poladiya (Taluka, Mandvi), dogs disturb vultures. Poladiya has possibly the highest number of vultures. 300 White-backed Vultures and 100 Long-billed Vultures were seen on Dt.27-6-2004; about 7-8 dogs were there.

Jignesh Joshi of Valsad writes (Letters to the Editor) that according to the Field Guide to The Birds of

India by Krys Kazmierczak, the Little Green Heron is a wide spread resident in Gujarat and much of India (except Kachchh, Rajasthan and North west India) but, the Little Green Heron (now called the Striated Heron or the Little Heron) occurs in Kachchh in several places. I have seen it at Chhatardi Tank of Bhuj, Pragsar Tank at Chaduva of Bhuj Taluka, Ningar tank of Anjar Taluka and Creek at Jakhau of Abdasa Taluka. It is quiet, secretive rather than a rare bird. Now it is very rare. Generally it is active in the mornings and evenings.

–S. N. Varu, Bhuj

● I read Vol. 3 No. 2 with interest. The 'Editorial' dealt with breeding of the waterbirds in heronries with a special mention of the Painted Storks in Bhavnagar. The letter from the President was as usual well written and with the typical sobriety and maturity one expects from him.

I found a good example of the comments I had made in my letter ('with so many good picture plates and new bird books available these days, an over-enthusiastic watcher can easily imagine he has seen a bird depicted in such publications') in response to the report of the occurrence of the Bearded Vulture in the Great Rann by P. S. Thakker. The editors have commented that the occurrence should be kept under a question mark till accepted proofs are available. I would however go beyond this remark to state that even the publication of this matter should have waited for sufficient proofs!

As regards the paper dealing with the nesting of flamingos in the Great Rann of Kachchh by H. A. Vaishnav et al., it would not be correct to state that there has been no breeding of the Greater Flamingo in their traditional "Flamingo City" since 1977 –for since then they have been bred there off and on depending upon the inundation of the area through tidal action from the Koree Creek to

the west and through the flow of rain water mainly of the Luni River from the Rajasthan side to the North-east. This free flooding from the Luni stopped after a dam was built on it. Thus the water from that source comes in the years when the dam overflows and continues to overflow with subsequent heavy rainfall. Rivers and rivulets both from the Sindside and the north-flowing streams from Kachchh also empty into the Great Rann of Kachchh. One can now safely say that the concentration of these birds is no where near the estimated half a million adult and young as estimated by Dr. Salim Ali in the year 1945. The old colony still exists and when conditions are suitable it is occupied, but the adult *P. ruber* do not exceed the figure of $\pm 30,000$ birds.

Breeding of this interesting feathered biped did not take place for 2 or 3 seasons after the spraying of the pesticides on the Kala Dungar to eliminate the Desert Locust. Otherwise conditions permitting they have bred in their traditional colony off and on. The most recent breeding has been reported in 1991, 99 and 2003. In the last instance one brood was raised but, by the time the second brood chicks could grow and become independent the water in the area started drying up fast and a large number of Flamingo young perished (this wasn't unusual) owing to starvation.

I would refer you to my article in the Newsletter for Birdwatchers (Vol- 31, Nos 5&6) wherein I have dealt in detail on the subject. In recent years breeding of Flamingo has also been reported in the Western most area of the Great Rann of Kachchh in the Pakistani side. Perhaps *P. minor* also sometimes nests in that area (this of course needs confirmation). I may mention here that on 6th January 1984, 800+ Lesser Flamingo were noted by me in the area near the last BSF Border Observation Post among which the majority were young with a group smaller in size and darker in plumage colour appearing as if they had come over from a breeding area nearby.

Writing about *P. minor* and flamingo species in general brings to mind the necessity for a count of the former simultaneously all along the Gujarat coast to ascertain the near actual population of the species. The movements of the latter also need monitoring. Our knowledge about the movements of both the species is very meager. This

exercise needs international participation with the help of all modern devices along with traditional methods of tracking bird migration/ immigration.

-M. K. Himmatsinhji, Bhuj.

● I trust you will ensure that we have certain very clear procedures for accepting new additions to the birds of our region. Yes, I am referring to the report of a Bearded Vulture you have included in the last "Flamingo". We must constitute a committee which critiques all such sight records. You should have circulated the piece and elicited comments. Of course, an editor's "?" mark should suffice, better still there should be a doubt expressed by the claimant himself. I am writing to the UK to learn how they resolve such problems. Good photographs would be ideal as next to a specimen, which we cannot ask for. Anyway, let each of us have a side list in which such observations are placed to be shifted to the main list after proper verification. There is, for example, the record of a Fieldfare from North Gujarat in the latest Newsletter for Birdwatchers. Among the several species I can immediately think for such treatment are:

Bearded Vulture-Sindh border-P. S. Thakker.
Flamingo 3(2), 2005

Fieldfare-Banaskantha District-Justus Joshua
NLBW. 45 (4), 2005

Slenderbilled Curlew-Porbandar-Bharat Rughani
Flamingo 3(2), 2005

Spoonbilled Sandpiper-Porbandar-Bharat Rughani
Flamingo 3(2), 2005

Kashmir Flycatcher-Dangs-Self

As editor you will have to be rather firm, if nothing else, indicating a measure of questioning. This is the only way "Flamingo's" credibility -and yours, will be established.

-Lavkumar Khacher, Rajkot

FROM THE PRESIDENT

If our water bodies are badly damaged and their biology stifled if not entirely obliterated, the destruction to the grooves of tree bordering them or growing on islands have received little attention. Entire colonies of nesting egrets, herons, ibis and storks have been obliterated especially so in the Saurashtra and Kachchh regions. Fortunately, these birds tend to be opportunistic making the best of situations under drought or deluge that characterize the climate of our region. Unfortunately, they do need trees to shift to and it is the loss of trees that has generated a serious threat to their very existence. We shall discuss the threats later when dealing with each group.

The destruction of large trees across the country side has generated unimaginable survival pressures on a very wide range of species. Apart from colonial tree nesting water birds, raptors big and small have been extirpated over vast areas. The latest outcry at the decline in the numbers of vultures is quite amusing had the poignancy of extermination of common birds not been there. But what of other species of birds nesting in cavities in old trees—the Rollers and the Nukta our resident duck? I see the wide dispersal of Nukta during the height of SW monsoon not something to get excited about rather their circling Hingolghadh and landing on its turrets should be recognized as flights in desperation. I would also caution against any jubilation when species normally spaced out during nesting start showing a tendency to congregate into few locations. Alarm signals should start ringing.

The damage to our coastal mangroves has paralleled inland groves and jungles. With them several pullulating heronries are but place names. "Bagla Beli" is one such mangrove heronry near Jamnagar which I know personally of. As "recent" as 1970 I spent a night in an anchored "machchhwa" surrounded by mangroves loaded with nests of an assortment of species. As darkness fell, the foraging birds returning to their hungry nestlings brought to mind a marine Keoladeo Ghana. I also remember a heronry on mangroves bordering the Harshad creek. Even as we monitor the inland wetlands, a survey of the entire Gujarat coastline must be undertaken to identify existing colonies and a very strict, public control be exercised. Enthusiastic local birdwatchers have a tremendous role to strengthen vigilance.

If all this makes depressing reading, there are several developments that are fit to point things in the right direction. Indubhai C. Patel of Saiyaji Iron and Engineering, Vadodara has flooded his old quarries and converted them into verdant paradises. Egrets and storks had started roosts some two decades ago. They should be now thriving waterbird nesting colonies. A "Talavadi" near Nal Sarovar has a stand of "Babool" in it and there we have a great mixed heronry. The Marine Park authorities have converted the sea front of Sikka into a vast mangrove plantation, which is coming up vigorously. Of note is the new method of planting mangrove seeds on raised mud platforms, which are showing vigorous germination. In years to come this stretch may well become a new "Bagla Beli".

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