



# Flamingo



Newsletter of the Bird Conservation Society, Gujarat Vol. 4, No.1 & 2 (Jan - June): 2006

## EDITORIAL

Are we really worried about the drastically declining population of the vultures in Gujarat? This is a question being asked by several of us.

Indian Wildlife Board took decision to ban use of Diclofenac as veterinary drug and consequently Inspector General - Drugs issued necessary orders. We should not believe that such a decision is enough to solve the vulture crisis. Though hormone like 'Oxytocin' and pesticide like 'DDT' are banned from use, they are easily available in our market. Hence, it would be extremely difficult to replace a drug like 'Diclofenac' from the market having one-third price of its alternate drug-Meloxicam. So, it may take long time to remove it from the market.

To start a vulture-breeding center could be an alternative to save the vultures-it is believed. But that is also a long-term project. At present we need some immediate action to save the remaining population of vultures in Gujarat.

In a statewide survey conducted in 2005,

GEER Foundation estimated only 2647 *Gyps* vultures in Gujarat. The number itself is alarming. In spite of knowing the crisis, no concrete measures were taken to save the remaining population. Reports of vulture deaths keep on pouring from Mahuva, Ahmedabad and Surendranagar. At Mahuva, at least 117 vultures have died in last two years. If the trend continues, entire population will be lost shortly. Mortality rate at Ahmedabad is also very high, particularly during the kite-flying festival in January as revealed from the report in this issue. The causes of mortality at two colonies are quite different but the fact is the same-we are losing vultures at very fast rate. If immediate actions are not taken, we will lose both the resident *Gyps* species from Gujarat. It is high time that the state government recognizes the crisis and 'State's Conservation Action Plan' is prepared and implemented on priority basis. Our society has already started a programme and other NGOs may also join in this task; but it is the state government, which needs to take immediate action.

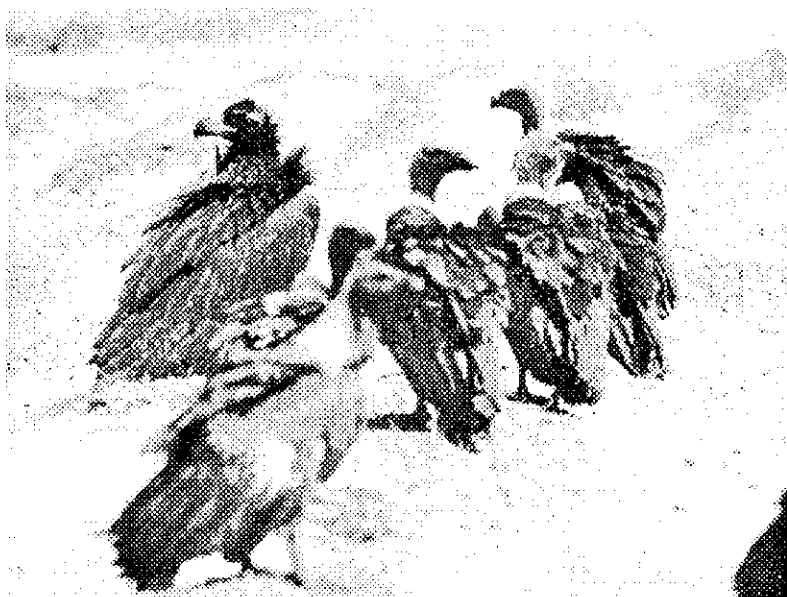


Photo: Ashwin Pomal

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**BCSG and Flamingo**

**B**ird Conservation Society, Gujarat (BCSG) was founded in 2000 with the objective 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/appeal regarding conservation issues, field programme reports related to Gujarat State are published in the Flamingo. For publication of articles/notes in the Flamingo, both the common English and scientific name must be given when a bird species is mention for the first time and later on the common English name only. Common English names and scientific names should follow 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.

ARTICLES

**A Visit to Wadhavana Tank**

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A visit to Wadhavana Tank was arranged for M. Sc. students of Department of Zoology, M. S. University of Baroda on 23<sup>rd</sup> December 2005 by Forest Department, Wildlife Circle, Vadodara. It is an irrigation tank located about 50 km south-east of Vadodara city and 10 km north of Dabhoi town in Central Gujarat. Shrimant Maharaja Sir Sayajirao Gaekwad constructed the dam in the year 1909-1910 having a spread of 1430 acres. Ornithology students of M. S. University visit the earthen dam annually since more than a decade. Many other birdwatchers also visit the area frequently. The site is declared as Nationally Important Site in January 2005. Two papers have been presented at national level seminars on the importance of this wetland for migratory birds (Padate and Sapna, 2002; Deshkar *et al.*, 2005). 76 species of waterbirds were listed by Padate and Sapna (2002). In last decade, 30,000 to 40,000 resident and migratory birds have been observed regularly during peak migratory season (winter) but this year exceptionally high aggregations amounting to 100,000 birds have been observed.

The highlight of this visit was presence of 7 Bar-headed Geese (*Anser indicus*). A Bar-headed Goose has been reported in Vadodara, only once (Padate *et al.*, 2001). Further, this year's exceptional aggregation included large number (about 2500) of Greylag Geese (*Anser anser*). Out of 18 species of ducks listed by Padate *et al.* (2001) in Vadodara district, 14 species were present with 10 migratory (about 10,000), of which about 5000 were Common Teal (*Anas crecca*) and 4 resident (about 1000), of which more than 250 were Comb Duck (*Sarkidiornis melanotos*). As the dam was full of water, wader population was comparatively low and many of them, which were present in the grasses on northern part of the reservoir, could not be spotted. Important among the waders was the sighting of 8 White-tailed Lapwings (*Vanellus leucurus*). Out of 9 species of waders (about 1500), 7 were migratory and 2 resident. The main aggregation of waders was of Ruff

(*Philomachus pugnax*) (about 1000) and Little Stint (*Calidris minuta*) (about 250). Thousands of Ruffs roost in the shallow waters of the reservoir during nighttime. Amongst herons, egrets, storks, ibises and spoonbills, 13 species of resident and resident migratory birds', aggregations amounted for 2000 individuals, of which more than 1000 were Glossy Ibises (*Plegadis falcinellus*). Grebes, cormorants, coots, moorhens and jacanas (6 species) amounted for 12000 individuals. In this group majority were Common Coots (> 12,000) followed by Little Cormorant (>1000), Little Grebes (>200), Common Moorhen (>250) and Pheasant-tailed Jacana (about 50). At least 2 species of birds of prey, Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) and Western Marsh-Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*) have always been found in the area and these were present this time too. Three species of kingfishers were also present. The number of terns was low probably because of high water level with no islands exposed for roosting. Amongst other birds, 20 species of terrestrial birds were observed outside the tank area.

There was heavy rain this year (Monsoon 2005) and many water bodies were full of water, however, few important earthen dams, like Shripur Timbi, Pratappura and Masar have been washed away which were important from bird point of view. As there was less water stored in these water bodies, birds had probably shifted to Wadhavana.

Wadhavana is developing as an important picnic site and a village committee has been formed which takes care of birds and caters the needs of visitors too, if informed in advance. The efforts of villagers needs to be appreciated as that will help in conservation of birds in the area.

**Birds sighted at Wadhavana on 23<sup>rd</sup> Dec. 2005**

Little Grebe (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*)-150  
 Little Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax niger*)-1000  
 Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*)-20  
 Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*)-200  
 Indian Pond-Heron (*Ardeola grayii*)-25  
 Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*)-200

Large Egret (*Casmerodius albus*)-15  
 Median Egret (*Mesophox intermedia*)-100  
 Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*)  
 Asian Openbill-Stork (*Anastomus oscitans*)-500  
 Oriental White Ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*)-100  
 Black Ibis (*Pseudibis papillosa*)-20  
 Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*)-1000  
 Eurasian Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*)-50  
 Greater Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus ruber*)-1  
 Greylag Goose (*Anser anser*)-2500  
 Bar-headed Goose (*Anser indicus*)-7  
 Lesser Whistling-Duck (*Dendrocygna javanica*)-250  
 Brahminy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*)-100  
 Northern Pintail (*Anas acuta*)-1000  
 Common Teal (*Anas crecca*)-2500  
 Spot-billed Duck (*Anas poecilorhyncha*)-50  
 Gadwall (*Anas strepera*)-150  
 Eurasian Wigeon (*Anas penelope*)-150  
 Northern Shoveller (*Anas clypeata*)-100  
 Common Pochard (*Aythya ferina*)-100  
 Tufted Pochard (*Aythya fuligula*)-200  
 Cotton Teal (*Nettapus coromandelianus*)-50  
 Comb Duck (*Sarkidiornis melanotos*)-500  
 Western Marsh-Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*)-3  
 Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*)-1  
 White-breasted Waterhen (*Amaurornis phoenicurus*)-5  
 Common Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*)-25  
 Purple Moorhen (*Porphyrio porphyrio*)-20  
 Common Coot (*Fulica atra*)-10,000  
 Pheasant-tailed Jacana (*Hydrophasianus chirurgus*)-30  
 Bronze-winged Jacana (*Metopidius indicus*)-50  
 White-tailed Lapwing (*Vanellus leucurus*)-8  
 Red-wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*)-20  
 Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*)-100  
 Common Redshank (*Tringa totanus*)-15  
 Marsh Sandpiper (*Tringa stagnatilis*)-10  
 Common Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*)-15  
 Little Stint (*Calidris minuta*)-100  
 Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*)-1000  
 Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*)-  
 Gull-billed Tern (*Gelochelidon nilotica*)-4  
 Blue Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*)

Little Brown Dove (*Streptopelia senegalensis*)  
 Spotted Owllet (*Athene brama*)  
 Lesser Pied Kingfisher (*Ceryle rudis*)-1  
 Small Blue Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*)-1  
 White-breasted Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*)-2  
 Small Bee-eater (*Merops orientalis*)  
 Indian Roller (*Coracias benghalensis*)  
 Lesser Golden-backed Woodpecker (*Dinopium benghalense*)  
 Common Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*)  
 Wire-tailed Swallow (*Hirundo smithii*)  
 Bay-backed Shrike (*Lanius vittatus*)  
 Eurasian Golden Oriole (*Oriolus oriolus*)  
 Black Drongo (*Dicrurus macrocercus*)  
 Brahminy Starling (*Sturnus pagodarum*)  
 Common Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*)  
 Bank Myna (*Acridotheres ginginianus*)  
 House Crow (*Corvus splendens*)  
 Jungle Crow (*Corvus macrorhynchos*)  
 Common Babbler (*Turdoides caudatus*)  
 Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*)  
 Black-headed Yellow Wagtail (*M. f. melanogrisea*)  
 Citrine Wagtail (*Motacilla citreola*)  
 White Wagtail (*Motacilla alba*)

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## Glossy Ibis Nesting at Thol Bird Sanctuary

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Thol Bird Sanctuary is located in Kadi Tahsil of Mehsana District of Gujarat State between 23° 15' to 23° 30' N and 72° 30' to 72° 45' E. The construction of an earthen bund running around the

eastern, southern and western sides of the basin was done nearly a century ago under the then Gaekwad dispensation as a means to prevent flooding and store water for irrigation. Since then the water body has

catered water for the agricultural needs of the surrounding farmlands.

With the Thol wetland situated in a region that falls on the Indus flyway for wintering birds, the water body attracts huge numbers of migratory waterfowls. It was its significance as an important bird area that resulted in Gujarat Government declaring it a sanctuary in 1988.

Thol wetland has thus served the dual purpose of a bird sanctuary as well as an irrigation reservoir. While it continued to attract a large number of resident and migratory waterfowls, the demand of water for irrigation and the uncertain and erratic nature of the southwest monsoon, invariably resulted in the rapid drying up of the waterbody, months before the departure of the migrants from this part of the country.

The release of the Narmada waters in the Thol Bird Sanctuary since September 2002 dramatically alerted the bird life of the sanctuary. With the sanctuary having now become a virtual perennial water source, species of birds seldom seen during earlier years have now become a common feature in the avifaunal roster that is on display.

Additions in the resident contingent are best represented by the Darter (*Anhinga melanogaster*), Common Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*), Purple Moorhen (*Porphyrio porphyrio*) and Little Green Heron (*Butorides striatus*). The Greater Painted-Snipe (*Rostratula benghalensis*) is another species, although nowhere common is nevertheless regularly sighted here.

Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*), Eurasian Curlew (*Numenius arquata*), Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*) and Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) can be seen well during May, as indeed can the Common Greenshank (*Tringa nebularia*), Common Redshank (*Tringa totanus*) and the Spotted Redshank (*Tringa erythropus*) in all its bejeweled finery. The influence of the Narmada waters on resident species could prove an interesting study. With cormorants, egrets, herons and storks accounting for over 15 resident tree-nesting species, the thick closely packed plantation of Babul *Acacia nilotica* on the northern borders of the Thol Bird Sanctuary has provided a favourable site for a thriving heronry.

Unhappily, during the pre 2002 scenario, a multitude of factors precluded this; the main reason

ofcourse being the lack of water. The basin would actually be bone dry from early March and even with a good monsoon the demands of the *Rabi* crops would ensure rapid drainage.

The regular availability of water from September 2002 and fresh fish stock introduced subsequently resulted in the build up of a nesting population of egrets, Black-crowned Night-Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*), Eurasian Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*) and Oriental White Ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*) in 2004. Year 2005 saw a full-fledged and vibrant heronry teaming in diversity and members. The single patch of plantation monitored recorded 790 nests (total nests estimated were over 1500). The species involved being Black-crowned Night-Heron, Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*), Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*), Median Egret (*Mesophoyx intermedia*), Large Egret (*Casmerodius albus*), Little Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax niger*), Indian Shag (*Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*), Eurasian Spoonbill and Black-headed Ibis. Asian Openbills were seen carrying nesting materials but no nest was spotted.

The most interesting addition to this list is Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*). The status of this species has been described as partly resident and nomadic with their numbers being augmented by winter birds from southern Europe, and Central Asia (Ali and Ripley, 1983)). This ibis is a common bird in these parts of central Gujarat with thousands being sighted at Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary. Records at Thol Bird Sanctuary too have their figures running in hundreds.

Despite the abundant sightings, nesting of this species has remained an enigma. Nesting data sourced from past literature describe records from Sindh, Oudh, Orissa, Assam and Manipur (Ali and Ripley, 1983). No breeding data from Saurashtra were detailed although the possibility of the bird nesting has been acknowledged (Dharmakumarsinhji, 1955). Its nesting has recently been reported from Bhavnagar, Gujarat (Gadhvi and Raol, 2003). It was reported nesting at Luna Jheel in Kachchh (Tiwari and Rahmani, 1998). Subsequently its nesting has also been reported at Kiro hills near Chhari Dhandh and at Luna in Kachchh (Pomal and Varu, 2003; Pomal, 2003; Varu, 2004).

Glossy Ibis carrying nesting material were noticed in June 2005 and this led to the discovery of

the nesting colony at Thol wetland. During August 2005, chicks varying from downy to those standing erect in more than 20 Glossy Ibis nests were counted among the throng of other nests in the heronry. The black tipped orange bill with black band running across the upper and lower mandibles was clearly noticeable in the younger chicks.

With area being converted into a successful heronry this year, it is anticipated that Thol wetland will become a regular nesting site of Glossy Ibis, adding yet another feature to Thol Bird Sanctuary as an important bird area.

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## BIRDING NOTES

### Birding During the Wild Ass Census

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Members of the Dharmakumarsinhji Nature Conservation Society got an opportunity to participate in the 5<sup>th</sup> Wild Ass Census from 31<sup>st</sup> January to 1<sup>st</sup> February 2004. The Wild Ass Sanctuary (WAS) encompasses an area of 4953.70 sq. km of the Little Rann of Kachchh and its peripheral areas in Surendranagar, Rajkot, Patan and Kachchh Districts. The sanctuary area is characterized by vast salt-impregnated, sun-baked mudflats dotted with small patches of raised ground (locally known as 'bets', meaning islands). These 'bets' support scanty xerophytic vegetation cover and the fauna has adapted to the prevailing water scarcity and saline conditions.

A variety of resident and migratory birds belonging to at least 178 species occur in the sanctuary (Singh, 2001). In a study carried out by Shah *et al.* (1995), 82 species of terrestrial and 59 species of aquatic birds were identified, whereas Singh *et al.* (1999) have recorded a total of 81 terrestrial bird species belonging to 28 families and 97 waterbird species belonging to 17 families.

As the WAS covers a large area, many volunteers were involved in the census work along with the staff of the Forest Department. Different areas were allotted to various teams to census. We

were entrusted the southern fringe of the WAS, extending from Tikar to Jat Ni Pipli on the first day and the section along the eastern fringe from Bajana to Zinzuvada on the second day. Along with the census, we enjoyed watching the birds in the Rann. The most interesting sightings were, a Saker (*Falco cherrug*), which was an addition to the checklist of the Sanctuary, 2 Indian White-backed Vultures (*Gyps bengalensis*), 3 Sarus Cranes (*Grus antigone*) near Nirali and 6 Houbara (*Chlamydotis undulata*) at Odu ni dhasi. In all we saw 101 species of birds belonging to 45 families.

#### Acknowledgements

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## Sightings and Distribution of Owls in and around Rajkot City

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Owls rank among the top predators in the world of birds and thus can be placed at the peak of food web. Unfortunately being nocturnal and secretive by day, very little is known about them. We noted 3 species of owls namely: the Barn Owl (*Tyto*

*alba*), the Eurasian Eagle-Owl (*Bubo bubo*) and the Spotted Owlet (*Athene brama*) in and around Rajkot city in our observations during the last four years. They are tabulated below.

### (1) Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*)

Date	Time	Place	Situation
1997	-	G. T. Sheth School, Kalawad Road	Sitting in a corner of the school ground being mobbed by crows
3-10-02	9:00 p.m.	Avath, outskirts of city on Kalawad Road	Two owls were sitting on pillars along road-side
20-06-03	9:30 p.m.	Near G. T. Sheth School, Kalawad Road	Flying near the same place where it was first sighted in 1997
05-11-04	10:00 p.m.	Jubilee Chowk Telephone Exchange Building	Three owls are regularly sighted here
14-12-04	7:45 p.m.	Kotecha Chowk, Kalawad Road	Flying over very busy & populous road
28-10-05	9:00 p.m.	Virani Science College, Kalawad Road	Flying overhead

### (2) Eurasian Eagle-Owl (*Bubo bubo*)

Date	Time	Place	Situation
13-8-2000	5:00 p.m.	Khirasara vidi, Kalawad Road	Two owls roosting on a cliff. They have been regularly sighted in the "vidi".
Feb. 2001	-	Khirasara vidi, Kalawad Road	A nest in a burrow of the cliff with a juvenile
18-10-01	10:00 a.m.	Near Ishwariya Lake	The owl was disturbed by us and flew towards a distant hill.
15-7-04	7:30 p.m.	Near Nyari Dam	Observed flying above us near the road

### (3) Spotted Owlet (*Athene brama*):

This is the commonest of all our owls, omnipresent in the city. Once, it was observed nesting in an electric box.

## Birding around Jamwala in Gir

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December 11<sup>th</sup> to 13<sup>th</sup> 2004 was the memorable period that, I spent at Batheswar, Jamwala in Gir at the Forest Nature Camp organized by Sky Forest Youth Club, Keshod.

Tents were pitched between the gushing Shingoda and Dhatarwadi Rivers. A huge, tall Charal tree (*Holoptelia integrifolia*), the heart of campsite, was totally dry but still had not lost its beauty. The tree trunk along with its branches transformed it into

a stunning piece of natural beauty with the touch of first rays of light at dawn. This dry tree throbbed with life with the sudden arrival of a Yellow-legged Green-Pigeon (*Treron phoenicoptera*). Later the Charal tree was honored to be the host of a glistening Black-headed Oriole (*Oriolus xanthornus*). The black marking on its golden wings hypnotized me. Both species were very punctual to visit the tree every day. The dry Charal tree still serves as a high perching place to many other birds.

My mornings started with a visit to the fast flowing Dhatarwadi River. Rising vapours from the surface of the river added to the beauty of dangling bushes at the riverside. The riparian jungle is the pearl of the Jamwala forest and the most striking part is the birdlife it harbours. I was lucky enough to witness some memorable sightings of a colourful Tickell's Blue-Flycatcher (*Cyornis tickelliae*), vigorous aerial swoops of a White-browed Fantail-Flycatcher (*Rhipidura aureola*), aerial sorties by glistening Small Bee-eater (*Merops orientalis*), the blue detached from the sky of a Verditer Flycatcher (*Eumyias thalassina*), rusty flickering of the tail of the Black Redstart (*Phoenicurus ochruros*), the diving splash and sharp chatter of a Small Blue Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*), the statuesque fricze of a Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*), the purposeful walk of a White-breasted Waterhen (*Amaurornis phoenicurus*), incessant tail-wagging of the Grey Wagtail (*Motacilla cinerea*), the brilliant red bill poised for the kill of a White-breasted Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*), the Indian Pond-Heron (*Ardeola grayii*)

sitting in 'Dhyan', and finally the wavering silvery-white ribbons of an Asian Paradise-Flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi*). During the treks into the forest we came across several birds of prey. The Changeable Hawk-Eagle (*Spizaetus cirrhatu*), Booted Eagles (*Hieraaetus pennatus*), Crested Serpent-Eagle (*Spilornis cheela*) and Oriental Honey-Buzzard (*Pernis ptilorhynchus*) drew attention by their distinctive calls. We also saw Black-shouldered Kite (*Elanus caeruleus*) and an Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) sitting at the top of a dry tree at the river bank. We saw a Brown Fish-Owl (*Ketupa zeylonensis*) perched on an overhanging branch.

One just can not fail to notice the noisy Jungle Babblers (*Turdoides striatus*) or be attracted by the distinctive calls of the brightly coloured Lesser Golden-backed Woodpecker (*Dinopium benghalense*) and the Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos nanus*). Swallows, swifts and martins were in constant flight.

Our birding was very delightful in company of birdwatcher friends Dr. Bakul Trivedi, Dr. Samiksha Trivedi, Ms. Manisha Rajput, Shri Darshak Karia and Shri Jayesh Shah. One evening Shri Bharat Pathak, Conservator of Forests, addressed the participants and responded to our questions regarding the Gir. The campfire during chilly nights was a memorable experience. Shri Revtubha Rajjada and Shri Govindbhai Vekaria managed camp activities well with the help of forest officials. The experience was truly memorable.

## Birding in Vasna Area of Ahmedabad

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During my two years stay at Ahmedabad, I have recorded 62 species of birds in Vasna barrage area, where I was residing. In spite of Vasna barrage being one of the most polluted and populated areas of Ahmedabad, I could record such a high number in small area of just 4 km<sup>2</sup>. What an amazing bird diversity in an area of human affluence!

I have seen a Jungle Crow (*Corvus macrorhynchos*) carrying material for nest building in February and a pair of Indian Rollers (*Coracias benghalensis*) in courtship display in the beginning of

April. I have seen nests of Black Kite (*Milvus migrans*) and Yellow-legged Green-Pigeon (*Treron phoenicoptera*) among trees in this area. I have noticed Indian Rollers and Yellow-legged Green-Pigeons waging their tails as is done by Black-shouldered Kites (*Elanus caeruleus*) during their courtship. I have enjoyed listening to an Oriental Magpie-Robin (*Copsychus saularis*) mimicking Spotted Owlets (*Athene brama*) and White-breasted Kingfishers (*Halcyon smyrnensis*). It is really pleasure to hear a chorus of Common Ioras



(*Aegithina tiphia*), Oriental Magpie-Robins (*Copsychus saularis*) and Yellow-legged Green-Pigeons (*Treron phoenicoptera*) all at the same time sitting in the Vasna barrage garden.

On 20<sup>th</sup> March 2003, I saw around 150 Black Kites soaring in the sky above Sabarmati River. It was my first experience to observe kites in such a huge number. I was surprised to see Cattle Egret feeding on a carcass\*. Some important sightings in the Vasna area were raptors like Black Kites (*Milvus migrans*), Indian White-backed Vultures (*Gyps bengalensis*), Shikras (*Accipiter badius*), Red-headed Falcons (*Falco chicquera*) and Oriental Honey-Buzzard (*Pernis ptilorhynchus*). There were the waterbirds like Common Coots (*Fulica atra*), Little Cormorants (*Phalacrocorax niger*), Little Grebes (*Tachybaptus ruficollis*), Eurasian Wigeons (*Anas penelope*), Sarus Cranes (*Grus antigone*), River Terns (*Sterna aurantia*) and Common Sandpipers (*Actitis hypoleucos*). Amongst the garden birds were

the Plum-headed Parakeet (*Psittacula cyanocephala*), Large Grey Babbler (*Turdoides malcolmi*), Black Redstarts (*Phoenicurus ochruros*), Red-throated Flycatchers (*Ficedula parva*), an odd Tickell's Blue-Flycatcher (*Cyornis tickelliae*), White-browed Fantail-Flycatcher (*Rhipidura aureola*), Coppersmith Barbets (*Megalaima haemacephala*), Common Ioras (*Aegithina tiphia*), Yellow-fronted Pied Woodpecker (*Dinopium benghalense*), Common Hoopoes (*Upupa epops*), Spotted Owlets (*Athene brama*), Yellow-legged Green-Pigeon (*Treron phoenicoptera*), Brainfever Bird (*Hierococcyx varius*), Eurasian Golden Oriole (*Oriolus oriolus*), Oriental White-eye (*Zosterops palpebrosus*), Rufous-backed Shrike (*Lanius schach*) and Wire-tailed Swallow (*Hirundo smithii*). These are just some of the more regular birds sighted which come easily to mind. [\* Cattle Egrets usually feed on maggots and flies on and around the carcass-Eds.]

## A Visit to Navagam-bara Check Dam Near Khambhat

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Ten members of Vidyanagar Nature Club visited Navagam-bara – a newly constructed check dam near Khambhat, Dist. Anand at 6:00 in morning on 4<sup>th</sup> December 2005. We reached Kanewal Tank where a few Common Coot (*Fulica atra*) and Purple Moorhen (*Porphyrio porphyrio*) along with Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*) were spotted. We went further to Navagam village via, Khaksar, Roni and Lunej. We stopped to feast our eyes on lotus filled pond at Lunej. Our onward journey was full of excitement as we saw large flocks of birds in the fields and also flying overhead. Navagam-bara is a check dam restraining fresh water drained to Gulf of Khambhat. There we saw thousands of waders and a flock of Greylag Goose (*Anser anser*). Several

hundred Common Cranes (*Grus grus*) were also seen flying overhead. We snapped an individual goose and to our surprise it turned out to be Bar-headed Goose (*Anser indicus*). So this flock was a mixed one, of Greylag and Bar-headed Geese. Other important sightings were that of Greater Spotted Eagle (*Aquila clanga*), Eastern Imperial Eagle (*Aquila heliaca*) and Rufous-tailed Shrike (*Lanius isabellinus*). We went further to Vadgam village and reached to the temple at the seacoast, 4 km from the village. We saw several Pelicans (largely Great White Pelican (*Pelecanus onocrotalus*) with a few Dalmatian Pelican (*Pelecanus crispus*) and several other birds. Checklist crossed tally of 70 birds species (identified) and few unidentified ones.

## Heronries Around Rajkot City

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A study of heronries around Rajkot city was undertaken during August to November-2005. The details are shown in the table.

Twelve heronries were studied situated nearby the water body except one, which was formed on the tall trees of Govt. Office. i. e. GEB Aji Sub-division. A total of 770 nests spread in twelve heronries covering 12 species of birds were observed. The nesting bird species found were 1) Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) 2) Black-crowned Night-Heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*) 3) Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*) 4) Little Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax niger*) 5) Great Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) 6) Indian Shag (*Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*) 7) Eurasian Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*) 8) Median Egret (*Mesophoyx intermedia*) 9) Oriental White Ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*) 10) Indian Pond-Heron (*Ardeola grayii*) 11) Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*) and 12) Darter (*Anhinga melanogaster*).

The species of trees where nesting was found, were 1) Neem (*Azadirachta indica*) 2) Ambli (*Tamarindus indica*) 3) Borsali (*Mimusops elengi*) 4) Peltaphoram (*Peltaphoram pterocarpum*) 5) Araduso (*Alianthus excelsa*) 6) Rambaval (*Parkinsonia aculeate*) 7) Gorus Ambali (*Pithecellobium dulce*) 8) Subaval (*Leucaena gluca*) 9) Gandobaval (*Prosopis chilensis*) 10) Desibaval (*Acacia nilotica*) 11) Badam 12) Pipar (*Ficus sptila*) 13) Pipal (*Ficus religiosa*) 14) Nilgiri (*Eucaliptus alba*).

Bird-watchers, Rajdeep Jhala, Dhaivat Hathi and Darshak Karia helped me in studying these heronries.

**Important features of the heronries were as under:**

- Year 2005 had a good monsoon and all the reservoirs were almost filled.

- On inquiry we came to know that, out of twelve, six heronries existed since at least last 10 years. Other six heronries were established in the current year in later part of the season. Because of heavy rain in the September, trees on the fringe of waterbody got submerged in water and became safe for nesting. Waterbirds took advantage of the favorable situation and established the heronries.
- Heronries had all stages of breeding and chicks from incubation to grown up stage were observed when visited during different period of August-October.
- The main threat to the eggs and chicks were the House Crows.
- Nesting of Median Egret and White Ibis was recorded for the first time in Rajkot. Four nests of Purple Heron at Lalpari tank and a single nest at Nyari-1 were found in the mixed heronry.
- Total nests observed among 12 heronries were 770.
- The largest heronry was at TB hospital (190 nests) followed by GEB- Aji Substation (153 nests) and one near Aji-II dam (175 nests). The Cattle Egrets were the main occupant at all the three heronries.
- The Cattle Egret was the dominant species (66 %) followed by the Black-crowned Night Heron (12 %).
- Eurasian Spoonbill nesting is not frequently recorded hence current record of nesting at Nyari – 1 and Kunwadwa pond are important records. The Eurasian Spoonbills are known to breed at Nyari-1 since 1984-85.
- Heronries in urban area were 30 to 1000 m away from the waterbodies whereas those at the dam or check dams were in middle of water.

Donation given to Bird Conservation Society, Gujarat (BCSG) is exempted from Income Tax under section 12-A, 80-G of Income Tax Act. Your generous support is needed to achieve the objectives of the Society.

Table 1. Heronries around Rajkot during 2005																
Place & Date of observation	Tree species and numbers	Tree height (m)	Bird species & number of nests with status													Total Nests
			POH	S	PH	CE	LE	NH	LC	D	SB	GC	ME	WI		
Jilla Garden, 13.08.05	Borsali-2	8														
	Nilgiri-1	5	0	0	0	10 c	0	6 i	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	
	Aambali-1	20														
T.B. Hospital 13.08.05	Arudaso-3	22														
	Kasid-6	15														
	Limdo-2	15	0	0	0	160 c	2 c	26 i/nb	2 i	0	0	0	0	0	0	190
	Peltaforum-1 Rambaval-5	15 15														
Railway Workshop & around 13.08.05	Ambo-2	22														
	Aambli-3	22	0	0	0	35 c	1 c	23 na	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	59
	Peltaforum-1	18														
Nr. Aji-II dam 14.08.05	Peltaforam-6	25														
	Kasid-2	20														
	Goras Aambli -1	15	0	0	0	119 c	6 c	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	125
	Rambaval-1	15														
Ishwaria Check dam 14.08.05	Desi Baval-2	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	6 c	0	0	0	0	0	0	6
Nyari-I dam- West 20/08/05 04.09.05	Gando Baval Patch	3	0	25 i	1 c	0	0	0	4 i	1 i	10 i	5 i	0	0	0	46
Nyari-I East 06.09.05	Desi Baval--2	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	3 i	0	2 i	0	0	0	0	5
Check dam Nr. Nyari-I 20.08.05	Desi Baval-5	3	1 i	0	0	18 i	23 i	0	12 i	0	0	0	1 i	3 i	0	58
GEB-Aji Sub Dn. 21.08.05	Pipal-4	25														
	Vada-1	25														
	Borsali--2	25														
	Ambali-1	25	0	0	0	108 c	4 c	38 c	3 c	0	0	0	0	0	0	153
	Pipalo-1 Limdo-1	25 22														
Aji-I zoo, 21.08.05	Pipalo-2 Rambaval-1	10 8	0	0	0	58 c	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	58
Lalpari tank 02.10.05	UI-2	3	0	0	4 c	0	0	0	0	0	0	20 c	0	0	0	24

**Abbreviations**

**Species:** PH-Purple Heron, CE-Cattle Egret, LE-Little Egret, NH-Black-crowned Night-Heron, POH-Indian Pond-Heron, LC Little Cormorant, D- Darter, S-Indian Shag, SB-Eurasian

Spoonbill, GC- Great Cormorant, ME- Median Egret, WI-Oriental White Ibis

**Status:** c-Chick, i-Incubating, nb-Nest building, na-Not available

## Alexandrine Parakeet Feeding on Fruits of Siven

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The Alexandrine Parakeet (*Psittacula eupatria*) is a resident breeding species in Gujarat (Ali, 1954; Grimmett *et al.*, 1998; Kazmierczak, 2000). Though originally distributed in northeastern and southern districts of Gujarat State (Ali, 1954), its distribution range is recently extended to Vadodara, Anand, Kheda, Ahmedabad and Bhavnagar districts (Mukherjee *et al.*, 2003; Tere and Parasharya, 2006). It is known to feed on fruits, vegetables, seeds of all kinds, wild or cultivated, also cereals like maize, wheat and paddy. It feeds avidly also on the nectar of *Salmelia*, *Butea*, *Erythrina* and other such flowers, but biting off and discarding (sometime eating) petals and floral parts to reach the liquid, thus evidently not useful in cross-pollinating (Ali and Ripley, 1983). It also causes damage to agricultural crops like maize, sunflower, mango fruits etc. (Ali and Ripley, 1983; Dhindsa and Saini, 1994; Mukherjee *et al.*, 2003).

On 3<sup>rd</sup> April 2002, a pair of Alexandrine Parakeet was observed feeding on the fruits of Siven (*Gmelina arborea*), located in the campus of Anand Agricultural University, Anand. They were observed on the same tree for several days. The tree was 4 m in height and of 25 m circumference. The parakeets were observed feeding on the same tree regularly. Total number of fruits falling under the tree were collected and counted for three alternate days (Table 1). As the area under the tree was cleaned on every alternate day, the count of fallen fruits was not repeated. Large numbers of fruits were fallen on the ground under the tree, most of which were almost eaten away (75.99 %) while a few were slightly damaged (5.11 %). Of the total fruits, 18.90 % were intact, which might have fallen due to mechanical

disturbance by the parakeets while feeding on other fruits.

The data shows that very large numbers of tender fruits were damaged by the parakeets, leaving very few fruits on the tree to mature. It is not clear whether the species has special preference for Siven fruits. It regularly feeds on Siven fruits at Bhavnagar also (I. R. Gadhvi, *Personal Communication*). It is also possible that at the time of observation there might be paucity of alternate food items in the environment and hence parakeet destroyed a large number of fruits of Siven tree.

Thus, the fruit of Siven is an addition to the diet spectrum of Alexandrine Parakeet. The Siven tree can be grown in the agricultural landscape to reduce dependency of Alexandrine Parakeet on the commercial agricultural crops.

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**Table 1. Number of fruits fallen on ground under Siven *Gmelina arborea*.**

Date	Fruit eaten by the parakeets		Intact Fruits	Total Fruits
	Almost eaten	Slightly eaten		
04-04-2002	1,120	96	380	1,596
06-04-2002	0876	71	279	1,226
08-04-2002	1,184	47	132	1,363
<b>Total</b>	<b>3,180</b>	<b>214</b>	<b>791</b>	<b>4,185</b>
<b>%</b>	<b>75.99</b>	<b>05.11</b>	<b>18.90</b>	<b>100</b>

## Grey-headed Flycatcher in Outskirts of Jamnagar City, Gujarat

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Grey-headed Flycatcher (*Culicicapa ceylonensis*) is said to be a common resident of the Indian subcontinent (Ali, 1996), an altitudinal migrant, breeds in Himalaya and wintering southwards (Kazmierczak, 2000). It is a winter migrant to Gujarat State during winter (Parasharya *et al.*, 2004) with a wide distribution over entire state (Parasharya and Rank, 2004).

We sighted a Grey-headed Flycatcher in outskirts of Jamnagar city on 8<sup>th</sup> November 2001, at around 01.20 p.m. The bird was calling from a small patch of *Acacia nilotica* in a close vicinity of agricultural field besides the main bund of Ranjitsagar Dam, south to Jamnagar city. We saw it sitting on a secondary branch of *A. nilotica* (Babul tree) tree in outer middle canopy. Later on, it got actively engaged in feeding activity alongwith five Oriental White-eye (*Zosterops palpebrosus*) and a Common Lesser Whitethroat (*Sylvia curruca*).

Thus the sighting of Grey-headed Flycatcher by us during November 2001 in Jamnagar area is much prior to its recent sighting from the same area during December 2004 by Jadeja (2005). Therefore,

our sighting of the species should be treated as a first record in Jamnagar area, followed by its subsequent report by Jadeja (2005).

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- [The authors are advised to read the note by Jadeja (2005) carefully where he has clearly mentioned that the species visits Kileshwar area of Jamnagar district regularly. He has not claimed his sighting as first record from Jamnagar district. In the same issue of *Flamingo* 3(1), occurrence of the species is recorded from Junagadh (Devkar *et al.* 2005) and Sabarkantha (Vora *et al.*, 2005) districts also substantiates the earlier conclusion about distribution of the species over entire Gujarat State during winter.- Eds.]

## Should the Indian Peafowl Population Nose-Dive Like that of the House Sparrow?

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Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*), our national bird since 1963 and protected under schedule I category under Wildlife Protection Act is relatively safer in the villages of Gujarat State as compared to many other Indian states. But the decreasing trend in their natural habitats year after year has forced them to depend more on our agricultural landscapes for their food and breeding grounds more on these days. Therefore, the future of this species depends heavily upon our attitude towards its activities and efforts in retaining whatever little of their habitats are left of as on today.

The Indian Council of Agricultural Research, New Delhi has sanctioned an *ad-hoc* project for research on the impact of the peafowl in the agricultural landscapes in Gujarat with an interest in reducing the conflict between farmers and the peafowl by evolving management strategies.

We have observed that by and large in most of the villages, people offer grains and water for the peafowl either at common feeding stations or even in their own courtyards. But a few marginal farmers in some villages rarely resort to poisoning the bird as they damage their field crops, especially during the sowing period. Though the bird is an omnivore, its

main dietary components are of plant origin. We have found them damaging vegetables, cereals, oilseeds, fodder crops, fibre crops and horticultural crops; comprising a total of 26 species in Jamnagar and Junagadh districts. Of course, it feeds on a large number of wild plants too.

Peafowl breed during monsoon, starting almost a month after the first good shower (in June/July). Mostly the eggs are laid on ground in the thicket of grasses and bushes. Nests in crop fields, on heaps of agricultural stubbles and rooftops are also not rare. Though several eggs are lost due to predation, some individuals of the poor sections of our society collect the eggs and poach the birds. This is done in secrecy, as the larger sections of the society believe it a heinous act. Adult birds, especially the males with long trail fall easy prey to several predators, even to stray dogs. Since it is a larger bird, some get electrocuted while on flight.

The natural roosting sites of peafowl are larger trees. About 29 species of trees are used for the purpose. Some of the major species are Banian (*Ficus benghalensis* L.), Coconut (*Cocos nucifera* L.), Neem (*Azadirachta indica* A.), Tamarind (*Tamarindus indica* L.), etc. They also use man-made structures like electric pylons and microwave towers for roosting. For mid-day resting they may either use thorny scrublands, which usually forms a part of the pasturelands at village levels, or trees. Larger trees provide them safety while roosting and taking mid-day resting. Tree felling is rampant in our villages,

especially the larger ones that are preferable to the bird. Scrublands provide them not only safe habitat but also food in the form of wild plants and other items of animal origin. These areas are encroached by the people for different purposes. These activities deprive the peafowl from their habitat requirement both in terms of space and quality. If we do not want the population of the peafowl in our villages to nose-dive like that of the House Sparrow, this would be the last opportunity to do them a favour.

In an effort to assess the current status of the Indian Peafowl and constrains to the peafowl, we have started collecting information on following aspects from the birdwatchers and volunteers: Approximate number of birds in the village, number of birds died with date, month, year and possible death cause, number of clutches observed with clutch size and number of eggs hatched in each clutch, chicks observed, if any -its detail, status of thorny scrubland/ pastureland in the village, status of species of trees used by peafowl in the village, do the farmers in the village consider the peafowl as a serious problem in agricultural production, season-wise major crops in the village, number of water sources perennial and seasonal. Readers of the "Flamingo" are requested to share the information on this aspect.

We would appreciate if you could provide us your observations on these aspects. Any other information that you feel worth sharing, kindly send e-mail to: mathewkuz@yahoo.com or write to Dr. K. L. Mathew or call on 9427425119.

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## My Experience at Nalsarovar Waterfowl Census, 2006

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Since long I have been hearing about bird census at Nalsarovar and taking part in it was a long cherished dream. Finally I got an opportunity to participate in the Waterfowl Census - 2006, on 4<sup>th</sup> and 5<sup>th</sup> February 2006.

During the census I came to know practical application of "Block Count" where the study area is divided into imaginary blocks and the bird population and diversity within such blocks is listed while passing through the area. I learnt about how blocks are made on such a huge water-body. It is said that 'two is crowd' for bird watching, and here there was

a gathering of more than 100 birdwatchers simultaneously counting in their respective blocks.

This was my first participation in the census at Nalsarovar. I had heard a lot about Nalsarovar. The image of Nalsarovar to me was crowded place, disturbed by lots of tourists and villagers. But it was the different Nalsarovar this time as sanctuary was closed for tourist during the census period. To my surprise there were many more birds inspite of high water level, at the Vekariya entry point of the sanctuary itself, thousands of ducks were spread on either side of the road.

On first day of the count i.e. 4<sup>th</sup> February, the Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary (NBS) was divided into several blocks and each block was allotted to different groups. I was lucky to be paired with one of the senior most bird watchers, Shri Jummadada - an experienced and retired person of Forest Department from Jamnagar. We were given zone no.18 covering around 3-5 km<sup>2</sup> from Sur-bet to Lasha-bet boundary and we were to count birds while moving in boat through open water and reeds.

There was a preliminary census during 4:00 pm to 6:50 pm. The final count was done the next day morning. We started in a boat at dawn at 5:20 am. It was a great experience boating silently in waters under open sky glittering with the stars. Again it was heart throbbing to see thousands of coots taking their flight as we approached near. We returned at nearly 10:30 am. All the participants shared at night their present and past experiences.

I can not however, forget to mention that I was shocked to find fishing nets in the sanctuary area. We came across three Common Coots, two of them died entangled in the net. We could save one. Other participants also reported fishing nets and entangled birds.

It was a great experience and I could see some of the bird species for the first time only because of expert identification by Jummadada. I am really thankful to my teacher Dr. G. S. Padate who favoured me to be a part of this census and also to Forest Department for giving me the chance.

#### Final birds count in my block

Dalmatian Pelican (*Pelecanus crispus*)- 06  
 Great Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*)-13\*  
 Indian Shag (*Phalacrocorax fuscicollis*)- 12  
 Little Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax niger*)-  
 Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*)- 03  
 Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*)- 05

Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*)-13\*  
 Large Egret (*Casmerodius albus*)-26\*  
 Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*)- 33  
 Asian Openbill-Stork (*Anastomus oscitans*)- 08  
 Oriental White Ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*)-04\*  
 Black Ibis (*Pseudibis papillosa*)- 01  
 Glossy Ibis (*Plegadis falcinellus*)- 01  
 Lesser Whistling-Duck (*Dendrocygna javanica*)-10\*  
 Brahminy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*)- 02  
 Northern Pintail (*Anas acuta*)- 175  
 Common Teal (*Anas crecca*)- 125  
 Gadwall (*Anas strepera*)- 1825  
 Eurasian Wigeon (*Anas penelope*)- 145  
 Garganey (*Anas querquedula*)- 54  
 Northern Shoveller (*Anas clypeata*)- 2100  
 Common Pochard (*Aythya ferina*)- 15  
 Purple Moorhen (*Porphyrio porphyrio*)- 01  
 Common Coot (*Fulica atra*)- 8283  
 White-tailed Lapwing (*Vanellus leucurus*)-02\*  
 Red-wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*)-02  
 Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*)- 02  
 Little Stint (*Calidris minuta*)- 95  
 Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*)- 17  
 Yellow-legged Gull (*Larus cachinnans*)- 02  
 Brown-headed Gull (*Larus brunnicephalus*)- 01  
 Slender-billed Gull (*Larus genei*)- 01  
 Whiskered Tern (*Chlidonias hybridus*)-415\*  
 Gull-billed Tern (*Gelochelidon nilotica*)-05\*  
 Montagu's Harrier (*Circus pygargus*)-  
 Western Marsh-Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*)- 03  
 Collared Pratincole (*Glareola pratincola*)- 05  
 Small Pratincole (*Glareola lactea*)- 03  
 Indian Great Reed-Warbler  
 (*Acrocephalus stentoreus*)- 10  
 Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*)- 67  
**Note:** Species with \* mark are those observed during preliminary count between 04:00 pm to 06:00 pm on first day

## Some Observations on Migratory Birds at Koyali Pond, Vadodara

Deepa J. Gavali, J. J. Lakhmapurkar, U. K. Wangikar and Rupal Soni

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Village Koyali is situated 11 km from Vadodara City and an oil refinery belonging to Indian Oil Corporation Ltd is at a distance of 0.5 km from the village pond. The village pond has an area of 8 ha and is used for the domestic purposes like washing clothes, cattle bathing and fishing. The vegetation along the bank comprises of trees like *Ficus bengalensis*, *Mangifera indica*, *Syzygium jambolina*, *Azadirachta indica*, *Ailanthus excelsia*, and *Streblus asper*. Other shrub species present along the edges of the pond are *Caltropis gigantean*, *Datura metal*, *Phyllanthus reticulata*, *Ipomea fistula*, *Croton bonpaladium* and *Cassia tora*.

During the routine collection of water samples from the pond on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2005, under a MoEF sponsored project, certain migratory birds were sighted along with the resident birds. The migratory birds included Little Stint (*Calidris minuta*) - 30, Wood Sandpiper (*Tringa glareola*) - 16, White Wagtail (*Motacilla alba*), - 6, Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*) - 4 and Grey Heron (*Ardea cinerea*) - 2. The resident birds sighted were Little Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax niger*) - 20, Black-winged Stilt (*Himantopus himantopus*) - 20, Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*) - 2, Asian Openbill-Stork (*Anastomus oscitans*) - 6, Small Blue Kingfisher (*Alcedo atthis*) - 2, Lesser Pied Kingfisher (*Ceryle rudis*) - 2, Red-wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*) - 20, Large Egret (*Casmerodius albus*), Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*) and Median Egret (*Mesophoyx intermedia*) - 6. Apart from the adult birds, juveniles of Black-winged Stilt were also observed on 9<sup>th</sup> January 2006. Two nests of Asian Openbill-Stork were recorded on Babul (*Acacia nilotica*) trees

nearby. The colony appeared to be active as the storks were seen visiting the nests after feeding in the pond. Even in July 2006, we saw chicks of Asian Openbill-Stork in the nests indicating that it is a regular breeding colony. Both the observations indicate that the pond provides favourable conditions required for breeding of these species.

The pond was revisited on 9<sup>th</sup> January 2006. During this visit, along with other birds, a solitary Caspian Tern (*Sterna caspia*) was sighted, initially flying above the water surface and later on feeding during the morning hours between 9 to 10 am. Caspian Terns generally prefer coastal wetlands and large inland wetlands (Grimmett *et al.*, 2001). But the sighting of only a single bird at Koyali pond indicates presence of wintering grounds of Caspian Tern nearby, which needs to be explored.

Occurrence of migratory birds along with nesting sites of the residents birds indicate that the pond provides a suitable habitat required by the birds. In view of the bird species recorded such habitat needs to be conserved. However, the dumping of solid waste by the locals is a major threat faced by the pond. If the dumping of solid waste continues at the same rate, the pond would be degraded soon resulting in loss of the birds' habitat.

The authors gratefully acknowledge the funding received from the Ministry of Environment and Forests under the Project (F. No. J-22012/57/2003 – W (CS).

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Grimmett R., C. Inskipp and T. Inskipp (2001). Pocket Guide to the Birds of Indian Subcontinent. Oxford University Press, Delhi. 384 pp.

## VULTURE HELP LINE

If you find an injured vulture, please contact following persons for rescue:

Surat: Snehal Patel -9825110283

Ahmedabad: Sohun Mukherjee- 9376121616

Anand: Dhaval Patel- 9898142170

Mahuva: Ruchi Dave- 9998047755



## Larks of Kachchh

S. N. Varu

Juna Vas, Temple Street, Madhapar, Bhuj-370 020.

Kachchh has several species of larks, both resident and migratory. Resident species recorded in Kachchh are as under:

- Singing Bush-Lark (*Mirafra cantillans*)
- Red-winged Bush-Lark (*Mirafra erythroptera*)
- Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark (*Eremopterix grisea*)
- Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark (*Eremopterix nigriceps*)
- Rufous-tailed Finch-Lark (*Ammomanes phoenicurus*)
- Greater Hoopoe-Lark (*Alaemon alaudipes*)
- Indian Short-toed Lark (*Calandrella rayata*)
- Common Crested Lark (*Galerida cristata*)
- Sykes's Crested Lark (*Galerida deva*)
- Eastern Skylark (*Alauda gulgula*)

Migratory species recorded in Kachchh are:

- Greater Short-toed Lark (*Calandrella brachydactyla*)
- Eastern Calandra-Lark (*Melanocorypha bimaculata*)

Place	Date	No.
Vekaria Dhandh of Banni, Kachchh	10-01-76	01
Between Dharamshala to		
Sardar Post, Great Rann	05-02-91	07
Medakbet, Little Rann of Kachchh	19-05-98	06
Dhut bet, Little Rann of Kachchh	20-05-98	02
Gindalan bet,		
Little Rann of Kachchh	24-09-98	01
Sadhara,		
Great Rann of Kachchh		
(Pachham bet)	28-03-99	02

Singing Bush-Lark, Sykes's Crested Lark, Common Crested Lark and Eastern Skylark can be seen in the Banni and the Naliya Grasslands. The Indian Short-toed Lark is a coastal species seen along the Gulf of Kachchh. Mundra seashore is the best to see the species.

The Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark is very common everywhere, while the Red-winged Bush-Lark is partial to stony pasture where it perches on shrub.

The Rufous-tailed Finch-Lark also occurs in stony land Greater Hoopoe-Lark is a bird of the Great Rann of Kachchh and the Little Rann of Kachchh favouring wide-open vegetationless desert. My sightings of Greater Hoopoe-Lark are as under

Eastern Calandra-Lark sporadically and occasionally visits Kachchh in winter. My sightings of this lark are as under:

Place	Date	No.
Rudramata dam	09-01-1988	10
Chhari Dhandh	27-12-1992	10
Chhari Dhandh	12-12-1993	08
Chhari Dhandh	13-12-1993	03

The Greater Short-toed Lark (*Calandrella brachydactyla*) is common everywhere. Huge flocks regularly arrive during the winter season. The Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark seems to be rare in Kachchh. I sighted it at Kuarbet of Great Rann in the year 1960 and at Naliya in year 2003.

### BCSG HOUBRA PROJECT

Gujarat Forest Department has given us an opportunity to assess habitat preference of a threatened species - the Houbara or Maqueen's Bustard (*Chlamydotis macqueeni*) in Gujarat. The important objectives of this project are: (1) To find out habitat preference of Houbara (2) Qualitative assessment of its habitat and (3) Estimate its population size in the state. Field survey will be carried out by members and thus contribute in scientific data collection. The Houbara Bustard is a winter migrant, occurring in the northwestern parts of the state. It occurs in gently undulating country, semi-desert with sand dunes and scarcely scattered hardy shrubs and sandy grasslands of North Gujarat, Kachchh and Saurashtra region of Gujarat. Throughout the range, its numbers have been in decline. Therefore it is necessary that its population size is determined, exact area of occurrence and habitat preference is worked out and the threats to the species or its habitat are identified. Such a study should help us in forming management strategies. Readers are requested to send current information about the sightings of Houbara or its past records any where in Gujarat, to Dr. I. R. Gadhvi, Bhavnagar (9427182755). Dr. Indra Gadhvi is a Principal Investigator for the project.

## BCSG EVENTS

1. A meeting of 'Vulture Cell-BCSG' was held at Mahuva, Dist. Bhavnagar on 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> March 2006. Shri Snehal Patel, Dr. Bakul Trivedi, Shri Kartik Shastri, Shri Jaidev Dhadhal attended the meeting. Local volunteers of Mahuva included Dr. P. P. Dodia, Shri Hakabhai and his friends, Shri Chirag Kotadia, Shri Bhavesh Baladhia, Shri Ramesh, Shri Himanshu, Shri Sandeep Vaghela and Miss Ruchi Dave. They visited the nesting site as well as Chhapariyali Panjarapol. Issues related to vulture conservation were discussed and a decision was taken to monitor the site regularly. Miss Ruchi Dave volunteered to coordinate vulture conservation activity at Mahuva and surrounding area.
2. A meeting of 'Vulture Cell-BCSG' was held at Rajula, Dist. Amreli on 4<sup>th</sup> June 2006. Committee members of 'Vulture Cell' and volunteers from Mahuva met the local people at Rajula. Members visited nesting sites of the vultures and assured active support for vulture conservation.
3. To initiate regional chapter at Junagadh, a meeting with local birdwatchers and nature lovers was held on 5<sup>th</sup> June 2006 at Sakkarbaug Zoo. Dr. Bakul Trivedi, Shri Snehal Patel, Shri Ashok Mashru, Dr. Indra Gadhvi and Ms. Ruchi Dave appraised the local volunteers about the aims and objectives of BCSG and importance of regional chapter. The programme was coordinated by Shri Bharat Pathak, CF-Wildlife, Junagadh.
4. A documentary on 'Vanishing Vultures' by Mike Pandey was received from BNHS. The CD was dubbed into Gujarati language and duplicated. The CD was distributed to several volunteers for large scale screening of the documentary to a mass of school and college students.

## BCSG PROGRAMMES

1. **Houbara Bustard Census:** A research project to determine habitat preference of the 'Houbara or Macqueen's Bustard (*Chlymydotis macqueeni*) is in its final stage. Its census is envisaged during 26<sup>th</sup> to 28<sup>th</sup> January 2007. Those who are interested in participating in the census programme should immediately contact Dr. Indra Gadhvi (0278-2565686 or 9427182755). Dr. Indra Gadhvi is Principal Investigator of this project.
2. **Asian Waterbird Census 2007:** The proposed dates for AWC 2007 are 6<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> January 2007. Normally we are extending the census dates up to 26<sup>th</sup> January to have additional advantage of a holiday. This year it can be extended even up to 28<sup>th</sup> January, as it is a Sunday. Regular contributors to AWC will get a separate circular and the count forms. Any one who is interested in participating should write to the editor or send mail to [parasharya@yahoo.com](mailto:parasharya@yahoo.com) or call 9825361036 (M).

## VULTURE UPDATE

### Vulture Crisis in Gujarat

Jaidev Dhadhal

Plot No. 8, Vrundavan Society, College Road, Patan – 384 265. e-mail: [jaidevjaidev@rediffmail.com](mailto:jaidevjaidev@rediffmail.com)

As we all know *Gyps* species of Vulture are bidding farewell to Gujarat. Are we are taking the steps effective enough to save them? After all these casualties, we even do not know the exact cause for the deaths of our vultures. Many samples are taken, analysis and tests are made and reports of the same might have been submitted to the Forest Department,

but bird lovers and NGOs working on and fighting for vulture conservation are not informed about it. Even policies and schemes worked out (if any) by the Gujarat State Forest Department to protect these birds, which is recently listed in schedule I of Wildlife Protection Act are not made public or shared

with bird lovers who are very much eager to work on any plan to save vultures.

The BirdLife International has listed all three species [Long-billed Vulture (*Gyps indicus*), Slender-billed Vulture (*Gyps tenuirostris*) and Indian White-backed Vulture (*Gyps bengalensis*)] as Critically Endangered in the Bird Red Data Book for Asia. IUCN also lists these species as Critically Endangered in the IUCN Red List 2004. Worried by the gloomy future of vultures, the World Conservation Congress at its 3<sup>rd</sup> Session in Bangkok, Thailand, 17-25 November 2004 called on all *Gyps* vulture range states to take necessary action for vulture conservation.

In my humble view, it is now high time that we, the bird lovers of Gujarat must establish a committee under the banner of BCSG to implement the South Asian Vulture Recovery Plan and work out

a Gujarat Vulture Recovery Plan. The committee may consist of individuals as members working on the vultures. The committee can make proper representation to the State and Central Governments for establishing a Vulture Rescue Center at Mahuva or Ahmedabad where vultures are dying constantly. Such a Vulture Rescue Center is established in Haryana by the Bombay Natural History Society, with the financial support of Darwin Initiative for the Survival of Species (Government of the United Kingdom), Royal Society for the Protection of Birds, Zoological Society of London and the Haryana State Forest Department. Suggestions can be sought from the bird lovers of Gujarat to work out a strategy for vulture conservation by making The South Asian Vulture Recovery Plan public through "Flamingo" and "Vihang".

Reference: <http://www.bnhs.org/article.php>

### Fate of Vultures at Mahuva

Jaidev Dhadhal

Plot No. 8, College Road, Patan – 384 265. e-mail: jaidevjaidev@rediffmail.com

Seven birds every month is the death rate of vultures at Mahuva, District Bhavnagar. As we all know, Mahuva is the town having the highest vulture population in the Saurashtra region. Shri Hakabhai, Chirag Kotadia, Bhavesh Baladhia and Sandeep Vaghela –members of Flamingo Nature Club have witnessed the sad and mysterious death toll of birds they love the most, the vultures. Total 82 vultures have died during January 2005 to January 2006. 79 White-backed Vultures and 3 Long-billed Vultures

have died so far. This is the number the members of FNC have personally verified. Actual tally could be still higher whose carcasses haven't been noticed by anyone. The date-wise death record is as under.

I think it is a high time now that the State Forest Department or NGO working on vultures should consider the issue more seriously and try to find out the actual cause of mysterious deaths of magnificent but helpless vultures of Mahuva, so that we can do some thing to save them.

Month and Year	No. of Dead White-backed		No. of Dead Long-billed	Total
	Adults	Juveniles	Adults	
Aug. 04	01	-	-	01
Jan. 05	07	-	-	07
Feb. 05	07	01	-	08
Mar. 05	02	-	-	02
Apr. 05	02	-	-	02
May 05	30	02	01	33
Jun. 05	14	03	-	17
Jul. 05	-	01	-	01
Aug. 05	01	-	-	01
Oct. 05	03	-	-	03
Nov. 05	02	-	-	02
Dec. 05	03	-	-	03
Jan. 06	-	-	02	02
<b>Total</b>	<b>72</b>	<b>07</b>	<b>03</b>	<b>82</b>

**Vultures Acquired by Animal Help Foundation, Ahmedabad in 2006****Soham Mukherjee**

Wildlife Incharge, Animal Help Foundation, 5, Retreat, Near Sahibag Underbridge, Ahmedabad-380004

No.	Date	Species	Place of Rescue	Injury/problem	Current Status
1	27.11.06	WBV	Behrampura	Kite string injury	Dead
2	27.11.06	EV	-	Curl-Toe disease	Dead
3	27.12.06	WBV	Shahibaug Underbridge	Kite string injury	Under treatment
4	04.01.06	WBV	Sabarmati	Kite string injury	Fit to be released in wild
5	11.01.06	WBV	Paldi	Kite string injury	Dead
6	13.01.06	WBV	Shahibaug Underbridge	Kite string injury	Under treatment
7	14.01.06	WBV	Shahibaug Underbridge	Kite string injury	Under treatment
8	14.01.06	WBV	Shahibaug Underbridge	Kite string injury	Fit to be released in wild
9	14.01.06	WBV	Shahibaug Underbridge	Kite string injury	Fit to be released in wild
10	14.01.06	EV	Jeevraj Park	Kite string injury	Fit to be released in wild
11	14.01.06	WBV	Shahibaug Underbridge	Kite string injury	Dead on arrival
12	14.01.06	WBV	Shahibaug Underbridge	Kite string injury	Under treatment
13	14.01.06	WBV	Shahibaug Underbridge	Kite string injury	Fit to be released in wild
14	14.01.06	WBV	Shahibaug Underbridge	Kite string injury	Dead on arrival
15	14.01.06	WBV	Shahibaug Underbridge	Kite string injury	Fit to be released in wild
16	14.01.06	WBV	Sola Road	Kite string injury	Fit to be released in wild
17	16.01.06	EV	Vastrapur	Kite string injury	Released
18	17.01.06	EV	Satellite	Kite string injury	Released
19	21.01.06	WBV	Ranip	Kite string injury	Under treatment
20	25.01.06	WBV	Paldi	Kite string injury	Under treatment
21	26.01.06	WBV	Shahibaug Underbridge	Partial Paralysis	Under treatment
22	27.01.06	EV	Vasna	Kite string injury	Fit to be released in wild
23	04.02.06	WBV	IIM	Kite string injury, Diseased	Dead
24	12.02.06	WBV	Shahibaug	Kite string injury, Diseased	Under treatment
25	16.02.06	WBV	Shreyas Foundation, Ambavadi	Diseased, Kite string Injury	Under treatment
26	21.02.06	WBV	Sabarmati	Kite string injury	Dead

**Abbreviations:** WBV – Indian White-backed Vulture (*Gyps bengalensis*), EV – Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*)

**VULTURE CELL – BCSG**

For more focused programme on vulture conservation, BCSG formed a separate 'Vulture Cell' under the able leadership of Shri Snehal Patel of Surat and expertise of Kartik Shastri of Ahmedabad.

The cell aims at establishing a consolidated network of birdwatchers for collection of authentic and scientific data on vultures and helping volunteers in conservation by providing expertise and other resources as per the regional needs. Priority will be given especially to locations where large nesting population of vultures exists over many years and the birds are facing multiple problems including unnatural deaths.

At present, special attention is being paid to Mahuva (Dist. Bhavnagar), Surat and Ahmedabad colonies. Under the awareness programme, a colourful pictorial guide entitled '*Chaalo Gidh Bachaviye*' is published in Gujarati and circulated amongst members of BCSG, readers of 'Vihang' and to the school children where the project work is initiated. Vulture Cell has also started publishing a newsletter "*Gyps*". We need support from all of you.

For further details regarding Vulture Cell, please contact **Shri Snehal Patel**, 81, Sarjan Society, Athwa Lines, Surat. E-mail: snehalpatel81@rediffmail.com, (9825110283) OR **Shri Kartik Shastri**, Ashokwadi, Panchvati, Ellisbridge, Ahmedabad- 380 006. E-mail: kartikshastri@hotmail.com

## RECENT PUBLICATIONS ON BIRDS OF GUJARAT

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## SOME INTERESTING BIRD SIGHTINGS

1. Streak-throated Swallow (*Hirundo fluviicola*) - 4, at Aji-II Dam, Rajkot on 25<sup>th</sup> April 2004 -Ashok Mashru, Rajkot.
2. Rufous-fronted Prinia (*Prinia buchanani*) -5, First time at Nyari dam-One was making nest. Nyari-I Dam, Rajkot August 2004 -Ashok Mashru, Rajkot.
3. Dalmatian Pelican (*Pelecanus crispus*) -8 at Randarda tank, Rajkot on 23<sup>th</sup> January 2005 and Dalmatian Pelican -17 at Ishwaria Pond, Rajkot on 26<sup>th</sup> January 2005-Ashok Mashru, Rajkot.
4. Brown Fish-Owl (*Ketupa zeylonensis*) -1 on Shingoda dam, Gir on 13<sup>th</sup> December 2004-Ashok Mashru, Rajkot.
5. Black-necked Stork (*Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus*) -1 Immature at Aji-II Dam, Rajkot 06.03.05-Ashok Mashru, Rajkot.
6. Asian Openbill-Stork (*Anastomus oscitans*)- 60 in besides tank near Khirasara Vidi on 15<sup>th</sup> February 2005 -Rajdeep Jhala, Dhaivat Hathi, Miraj Patel, Rajkot.
7. Asian Openbill-Stork (*Anastomus oscitans*), Crested Serpent-Eagle (*Spilornis cheela*), Changeable Hawk-Eagle (*Spizaetus cirrhatus*), Lesser Pied Kingfisher (*Ceryle rudis*), Asian Paradise-Flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi*), Eurasian Eagle-Owl (*Bubo bubo*), Oriental White-eye (*Zosterops palpebrosus*), Tickell's Blue-Flycatcher (*Cyornis tickelliae*), Great Tit (*Parus major*) - on 5<sup>th</sup> June, 2005 at Sasan Gir - Rajdeep Jhala, Rajkot.
8. Common Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*) -1 on electric wire, Eurasian Eagle-Owl (*Bubo bubo*) - 1, Eurasian Hobby (*Falco subbuteo*) -1 chasing a lark, Pallid Harrier (*Circus macrourus*) -3, Grey-necked Bunting (*Emberiza buchanani*) -1, Rain Quail (*Coturnix coromandelica*) -1 and Pied Bushchat (*Saxicola caprata*) -1 in Khirasara Vidi near Rajkot on 12<sup>th</sup> Oct. 2005- Rajdeep Jhala and Dhaivat Hathi, Rajkot.
9. Crested Serpent-Eagle (*Spilornis cheela*) -1, Short-toed Snake-Eagle (*Circaetus gallicus*) -1 at Khirasara Vidi, Rajkot on 25<sup>th</sup> September 2004 - Ashok Mashru, Rajkot.
10. Osprey (*Pandion haliaetus*) -1 each at Nyari-I dam on 20<sup>th</sup> March 2005; Randarda tank on 28<sup>th</sup>

- March 2005 and Aji II dam on 6<sup>th</sup> March 2005 - Ashok Mashru, Rajkot.
11. Bronze-winged Jacana (*Metopidius indicus*) -1 on check dam near Christ Church, Rajkot on 4<sup>th</sup> April 2006- Rajdeep Jhala, Dhaivat Hathi, Rajkot.
  12. Red-necked Phalarope (*Phalaropus lobatus*) -7 near Surajbari bridge, Ta. Bhachau, Kachchh on 20<sup>th</sup> December 2005 - Ashwin Pomal, Bhuj.
  13. Steppe Eagle (*Aquila nipalensis*)-12, Tawny Eagle (*Aquila rapax*)- 5, Long-legged Buzzard (*Buteo rufinus*)-5, Greater Hoopoe-Lark (*Alaemon alaudipes*)-1, Cream-coloured Courser (*Cursorius cursor*)-1 on the way between Sumarasar (Bhuj) and Vighokot (a location on north-western boundary on International border) on 25<sup>th</sup> December 2005 -Ashwin Pomal, Bhuj.
  14. Yellow-legged Green-Pigeon (*Treron phoenicoptera*) 150+ on Peepal tree in college compound, Petlad, Dist. Anand on 18<sup>th</sup> June 2006.- N. A. Thakor, Anand.
  15. Eurasian Eagle-Owl (*Bubo bubo*) feeding on dog carcass at Surendranagar on 17<sup>th</sup> June 2006 - Chiku Vora, Surendranagar.
  16. Bar-headed Goose (*Anser indicus*) - 523 at Tikar, Ta. Muli, Dist. Surendranagar on 14<sup>th</sup> March 2006 -Yogendra Shah, Surendranagar.
  17. Comb Duck (*Sarkidiornis melanotos*)-125 on village pond, Virsad, Ta. Borsad, Dist. Anand on 5<sup>th</sup> June 2005 -B. M. Parasharya, Anand.
  18. Great White Pelican (*Pelecanus onocrotalus*) - 250+ at Kumbharwada sewage, Bhavnagar on 15<sup>th</sup> December 2005 -Raju Chauhan, Bhavnagar.
  19. Dalmatian Pelican (*Pelecanus crispus*)-14, Great Crested Grebe (*Podiceps cristatus*)-9 at Bhaskarpura tank, Ta. Lakhtar, Dist. Surendranagar on 20<sup>th</sup> December 2005 -Yogendra Shah, Surendranagar.
  20. Grey-headed Flycatcher (*Culicicapa ceylonensis*), Asian Brown Flycatcher (*Muscicapa dauurica*), Red-throated Flycatcher (*Ficedula parva*) and Tickell's Blue-Flycatcher (*Cyornis tickelliae*) all together at one site, Rajkot on 7<sup>th</sup> December 2005 -Ashok Mashru, Rajkot.
  21. Greater Grey-headed Fish-Eagle (*Ichthyophaga ichthyaetus*) -1 at Kevdi Lake near Mandvi, Dist. Surat on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2006 -Mukesh Bhatt, Surat.
  22. White-necked Stork (*Ciconia episcopus*) - 22 at Thol Bird Sanctuary on 28<sup>th</sup> May 2006. Dhaivat Hathi, Ahmedabad and Rajdeep Jhala, Rajkot.
  23. Pied Crested Cuckoo (*Clamator jacobinus*)-1 at Madhapur, Bhuj on 25<sup>th</sup> August 2005. Ashwin Pomal and S. N. Varu, Bhuj.

### LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

• This is in response to 'Letters to the Editor' by Prasad Ganpule, Morbi; and your comments regarding this note, published in Flamingo Vol. 3 No. 2 April-June 2005 pp.15. Shri Ganpule might have seen juveniles migrated from their breeding areas to Gujarat with their parents. It is found from records that the breeding of Rosy Starling (*Sturnus roseus*) is extralimital (Salim Ali and Ripley, Vol. V, pp. 163-166). The breeding season is May-June in SE Europe (West of Hungary) and SW Asia (Asia Minor, Middle East countries, Russian Turkestan etc.). Rosy Starlings remain in the subcontinent from early July to mid May. I have seen these birds up to May end near Polytechnic College in Ahmedabad on a peepal tree in the old Panjarapole campus. Thus, Rosy Starling are absent from the subcontinent for less than two months each year.

There is a record of exceptional breeding of the Rosy Starling in Gujarat in the year 1985! On October 24<sup>th</sup> 1985, a person came to Sundarvan, Ahmedabad with five fledglings of Rosy Starling. They were approximately two inches in length. He handed them over to Shri Arvindbhai Chavda, the then caretaker of the bird section of Sundarvan. Unfortunately four out of five young ones died and one survived which became fully fledged to join the others of its kind, which had started arriving in July 1986. Some of them had already arrived in Ahmedabad during July 1986. This exceptional breeding of Rosy Starling in Gujarat, India needs to be on record specially so since their parents had bred during September-October. There are possibilities of the Rosy Starling nesting more regularly considering they are with us for much of the year.

- P. S. Thakker, Ahmedabad.

[A note by P. S. Thakker entitled 'Exceptional breeding of Rosy Pastor-Starling in India' was published in Newsletter for Birdwatchers 26(9-10): 18. in 1986. Eds.].

- Thanks for your kind letter with enclosed 5 additional count forms from Gujarat in 2003 and 2004. I will check on this and ensure these will be included in the AWC report.

I indeed highly appreciate your great effort in making such a successful AWC in Gujarat. It's fantastic! I thank you very much for all your strong support in the past; I hope that Gujarat AWC could establish a standard model of the AWC in India as well as for other countries. Therefore I would like to share with you of some general issues being identified in the AWC in many countries. The AWC has been running as a inventory programme instead of monitoring programme with different sites counted every year (with the overall 900 sites counted in India during 2002-2004, only less than 10% were surveyed for all three years). Data quality control in a number of states has been poor, survey area and method were inconsistent and internationally important sites were not surveyed therefore it's hard to analyse the status of trends of waterbirds. I hope with your effort and leadership in Gujarat, a standard model of AWC can be established as an example for other states and countries. Please let me know your kind comments.

- David Li, AWC International Coordinator.

- Though this letter is in general reference, it is in continuation regarding the sighting of Black-capped Kingfisher (*Halcyon pileata*) in Gujarat as well as many other species referred in various issues of 'Flamingo'.

I feel that one should try to develop understanding about distribution pattern of various species in terms of zoogeography or biogeography. This part was briefly mentioned by me sometimes back in 'Vihang'.

Distribution of many species usually occurs either in the form of continuous distribution or in the form of disjunctive distribution. Former pattern is more common and easy to understand while the later one is more complicated and involves many factors. Distribution patterns are easy to understand in case of plant life due to their limited range of adaptability, while in case of mammals it is little complex and to

me it is most complex in case of avifauna as the birds may halt at one place for a brief period even though the habitat conditions are not conducive.

I believe that most of the sightings /observations are required to be viewed in this context. I correlated this aspect when I spotted Black-backed (now Black-shouldered) Woodpecker near Ambaji. Prior to it I have seen this species at Shoolpaneshwar Wildlife Sanctuary and Dang forest at many places. But I am yet to see it in Ratanmahal (Panchmahal) or in Polo forests (Sabarkantha). However, I am now convinced (and why not?) that as per the principles of continuous distribution this species should be found in entire eastern belt of the state right from Dang to Jessor. This is likely to be true for many species.

Patchy or disjunctive distribution is relatively rare. It might have some linkages with factors like continental drift, ice age and after the melting of snow (i. e. Thar in Himalaya and Nilgiris) or in case of islands.

I feel that our friends will start observing this aspect also. At the same time I request all, especially well experienced seniors to throw more light in this regard (and correct me if my thinking is in a wrong direction).

- Uday Vora, Gandhinagar.

- I have a female Rose-ringed Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*) given by my friend before 5 years who found it injured and unable to fly. Last week, to my surprise the parakeet laid an egg on the 10<sup>th</sup> April 2006. The next egg was laid 4 days later and a third was laid on the 19<sup>th</sup> April and has been incubating it since then.

I am keeping the cage outside my house daily after cleaning it. During this time 25-30 parakeets would come and sit on its cage and this has become a daily routine for the past 5 years. I guess mating might have occurred during this meeting. But then why after 5 years?

-Chandeker Mario D. K., Junagadh.

[For egg formation and its laying, mating is not an absolute necessity. As in domestic hen, egg laying is induced by several factors. - Eds.]

## FROM THE PRESIDENT

### WE ALL SHOULD BE WORRIED

I have started to educate myself on a computer! Just as I was opening this file on the conservation of birds today (Sunday 10th September '06) I received an SMS from Mahuva which reads as follows:

*One more vulture died, when I don't know, but during the last 3 or 4 days. Gujarat losing vultures at the rate of 3 per day. Only 1 year left for Gujarat to be a vulture less State... ..*

I thought this should be worth using as an introduction. The situation is alarming not only for vultures, but for a very large number of species which were common not very many years back and for whom there had never been expressed any reason for alarm. Already things are critical and we are far too dangerously late in arousing a general concern. With so very many active birdwatchers in Gujarat, there are no reasons why a very strong public opinion cannot be developed that would initiate action. I see it as my duty as one among the senior most naturalists in the region to initiate the process through my regular letters appearing in the *FLAMINGO*.

As late as in the Fifties and Sixties of the last century we used to have a pair of Neophrons, and one of Laggars nesting on the Hingolghadh Castle. The Laggars finally chivvied the Neophrons away, but continued to nest each year well into the Nineties. Now, they have also gone! Why? There are plenty of pigeons and parakeets to prey off and certainly no disturbance to their nesting site. Strangely, a pair of Bonelli's Hawk Eagles is still breeding on trees overhanging the steep eastern slope of the large plateau nearby. The sky overhead here would invariably have had several vultures quartering it along with one or two species of eagles; today,

except for the circling House Swifts, the skies are empty! The decline was so sudden, that honestly, the near total crash in the general population of raptors left us stunned. Felling of traditional nesting trees, total degradation of the countryside, especially the rich grasslands, heavy disturbance of vultures at carrion by human beings and feral dogs, and the widespread use of pesticides can all be attributable reasons. The latest in the series of poisons are certain veterinarian medicines! What can we do aside from lamenting the loss?

Public opinion very carefully articulated is, to my mind, of very immediate importance. All of us need to evolve a common understanding to the dangers facing specific species and birdlife in general. Some prioritization has to be made of actions to be initiated. Above all we all must close ranks behind the professionals in the field of conservation and they in turn have to unhesitatingly involve enthusiastic amateurs in official and unofficial programs being belatedly initiated.

The many promising birdwatchers in Gujarat must start maintaining careful diaries of observations of all birds and compile species wise data. Given the simplification of tabulating data with the help of computers, it should be possible to develop an impressive information store from which trends in the populations of different species can be quickly charted and, action considered well in advance. We already do have considerable knowledge of species' requirements and even individuals can do a great deal to help birds in their neighborhoods. Food and water, nest boxes, planting of suitable shrubs and trees all can go a long way to help.

-Lavkumar Khacher

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