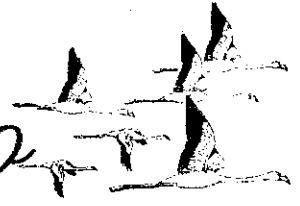




# Flamingo



Newsletter of the Bird Conservation Society, Gujarat

Vol. 5, No.3 & 4 (July - Dec.): 2007

## EDITORIAL

On 19<sup>th</sup> November 2006, Mr. Roger Clarke – a known birdwatcher located a flock of 19 Sociable Lapwings in Dasada Tahsil. The news of this very important sighting spread immediately as the species is classified as Critically Endangered under IUCN Red List criteria. Such a large flock was not recorded in India in recent past. Presence of the lapwings is being by Shri Yogendra Shah and his colleagues and a brief report of the same is published in this issue of 'Flamingo'. We are happy to learn that in the current winter (2007-08) too, the Sociable Lapwings are being sighted in much bigger number at the same site. Thrilling news came from Birdlife International about sighting of 3000+ Sociable Lapwings in Turkey in October 2007 (see report in this issue).

We were totally unaware (?) about the presence of globally threatened species around us. In the recent past Pamela Rasmussen had showed us the presence of Forest Owlet (*Heteroglaux blewitti*) in our own environment.

This is the second incidence that a foreigner has showed us the presence of a globally threatened species in our territory. Since both the species are recorded in fairly good number, they must be inhabiting the area since long. Question is then "why we could not identify the species in spite of our routine bird-watching?" We are well equipped with optical instruments as well as good pictorial field guides and yet we could not notice the presence of these species! Probably, our hobby of birdwatching is not developed systematically and scientifically. We fail to compare topographical characters of a bird in question with the picture given in the field guide. Rarely we read the description and compare it with the bird in view.

Let us make our birdwatching more systematic to make it meaningful rather than just pastime hobby. We may be rewarded with many new species or establish range expanses of some species.

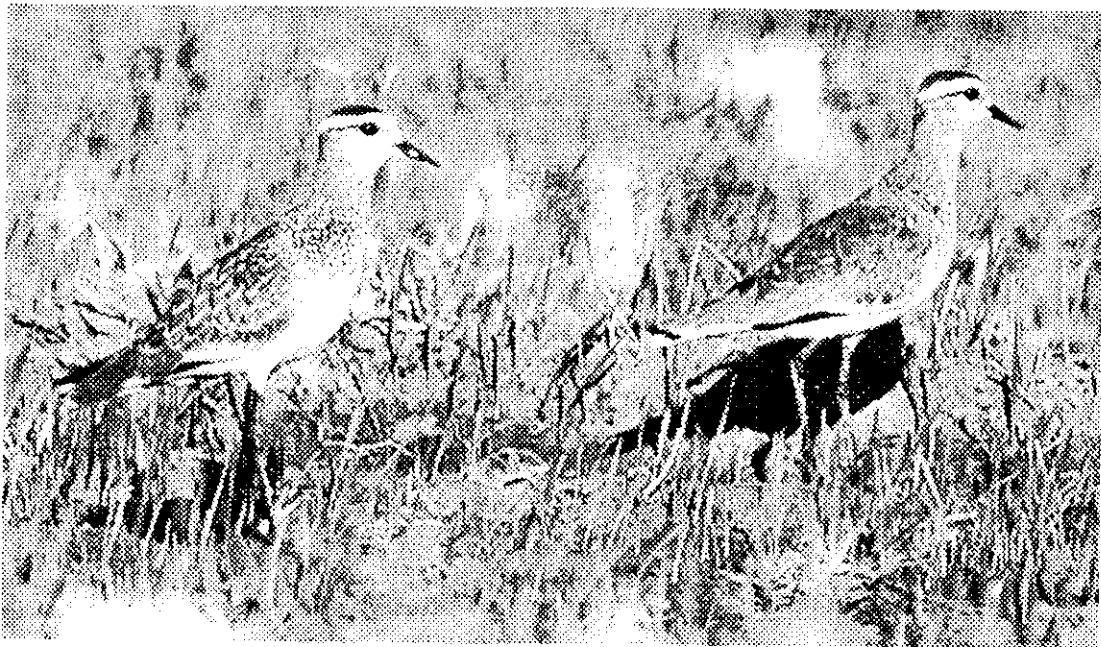


Photo: Yogendra Shah

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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 mentioned for the first time and later on the common English name only. Common English names and scientific names should follow Manakadan, R. and Pittic, 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

**An Intriguing Episode of Sociable Lapwing in Surendranagar, Gujarat**  
 Yogendra Shah<sup>1</sup>, Faruk Chauhan<sup>1</sup>, Sapna Surendran<sup>2</sup>, Mahavirsinh Parmar<sup>1</sup> and Prashant Chauhan<sup>1</sup>

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A flock of lapwings was observed foraging in the agricultural fields on Dasada - Becharaji road, about 90 km north-west to Surendranagar town, in the early morning hours on 19<sup>th</sup> November 2006 by Mr. Roger Clarke –who was a guest at Rann Rider Tours and Travels. The flock of lapwings were identified to be the critically endangered Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarious* (Pallas, 1771).

Owner of Rann Rider Travel, Mr. Mujahid Malik informed us about sighting of Sociable Lapwing in our area. We started monitoring their activity and number the next day onwards. On 27<sup>th</sup> November 2006, there were 27 birds – the highest number for the season. A total of 10 adults and 17 immature lapwings were observed foraging in freshly sown wheat fields. Resembling the other lapwings with long black legs and a short black bill, conspicuously marked plover had yellow cheeks beneath a black stripe running from the black beak through the eye. On closer observations we could clearly see white stripe above eye and a black cap on the crown. The wings, chest and tail were pale brown, with a dark brown, red and white underside. Juveniles were distinguished by pale brown plumage with a streaked black belly. Furthermore its long black legs, white tail with a black terminal band and distinctive brown, white and grey wings make it almost unmistakable in flight.

The Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarious* is classified as Critically Endangered (CR A3bc) on the IUCN Red List of 2004 and is listed on Appendix I of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS or Bonn Convention). It is also listed on the African-Eurasian Migratory Waterbird Agreement (AEWA). These birds are known to migrate south through Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan, Armenia, Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia, Syria and Turkey, to key wintering sites in Israel, Eritrea, Sudan and north-west India.

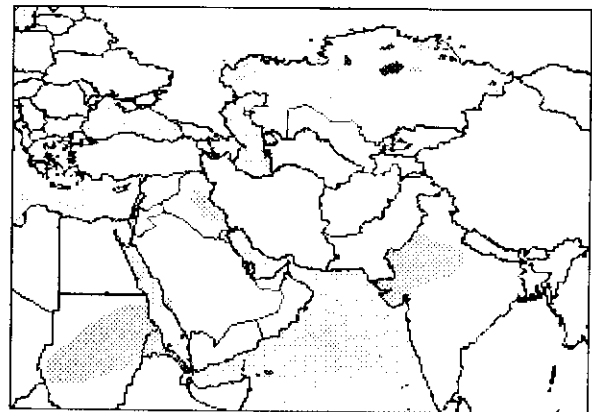
In 2004, Birdlife International categorised this bird as critically endangered, due to a rapid population decline for poorly understood reasons.

The current population was estimated to be between 600 and 1800. Recent estimates suggest that the breeding population of the Critically Endangered Sociable Lapwing is now as low as 200-600 breeding pairs.

Previous records reveal that the Sociable Lapwing is known only as a winter visitor and wanderer in the Asian region, with wintering regularly only in India and occasionally in Pakistan, with a few stragglers reaching Mongolia, China, Sri Lanka and the Maldives; there is also an unconfirmed historical record from Bangladesh.

The main wintering range in India lies in the north and west of the country, with small numbers occasionally straggling as far south as Kerala. Apart from some untraced and unconfirmed records, the only recent records are from Haryana and Rajasthan. Records from Gujarat are from the following places: Deesa (Disa), October 1875 (two females in BMNH, Butler 1875-1877); Kutch (Kachchh), undated (Stoliczka 1872); in Kathiawar, specifically at Wadhwan ("Wodwan"), c.1870 (Lloyd 1873) and "Gondud" (possibly Gondal), c.1870 (Lloyd 1873).

Referring to this data, what we observed in Dasada Tahsil gave us immense thrill to continue observations at the same site as long as the birds were sighted. The following are the number of birds sighted on the given dates:



Map showing wintering areas of Sociable Lapwing (Map from Birdlife Species fact sheet).

December onwards, their number decreased gradually. Last three birds were seen on 16<sup>th</sup> April 2007. We have seen lapwings in same area this winter (2007-08) too. On 4<sup>th</sup> November 2007, initially 3 immature were recorded and the number increased to 45 birds on 29<sup>th</sup> November 2007. They have settled in the same area. Later on Shri Chiku Vora (*Pers. Comm.*) informed that he had recorded 58 lapwings in the same area on 24<sup>th</sup> December 2007.

The flock was picking insects and other small prey from grassland and wet soil of crop field. In the crop fields, they had preference for freshly irrigated fields. This activity was continuous throughout the morning hours from 07:00 hrs till 10:00 hrs. In the evening, they were seen in the crop fields during 16:00 to 18:00 hours. The other bird species which synchronised with the behaviour and activities of the Sociable Lapwing were the Red-wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*) and Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*). Apart from foraging, the predominant activity of the flock was tussling for food and chasing each other (to drive away). They were also shunting from the agricultural fields to a nearby water-body situated around 5 km away.

The RSPB in collaboration with the Association for the Conservation of Biodiversity in Kazakhstan (ACBK); UNEP/AEWA; Russian Bird Conservation Union (RBCU); Doga Derneği; Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) have formed a team to develop effective mechanisms and capacity to improve the conservation status of the Sociable Lapwing. This project started in the month of May 2006 which will continue till the March 2009. One of the clauses of the project is to identify the breeding and wintering populations and distribution and to chart out migratory routes. Our observations and this data can provide a very interesting and intriguing resource for steering the project of conservation of the Sociable Lapwing in India and Asian region and the world.

**References:**

BirdLife International (2006). *Vanellus gregarius*.  
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 IUCN 2006. Retrieved on 11 May 2006.  
 Red Data book©2003 BirdLife International.

Dt of Obs.	19-11-06	20-11-06	21-11-06	22-11-06	23-11-06	24-11-06	25-11-06	26-11-06	27-11-06	28-11-06	29-11-06	1-12-06	2-12-06	4-04-07	16-04-07
No.	19	19	24	27	27	23	23	23	23	23	23	23	24	3	3

**Largest Flock for 100 Years: Sociable Lapwing Lives up to its Name**

Thanks to a single satellite tag, a 3,000-strong flock of Sociable Lapwing has been discovered in Turkey – the largest seen for more than 100 years. “By tracking a single bird from its Kazakh breeding grounds, we have found the location of most of the world population of these birds in Turkey,” announced Guven Eken, Executive Director of Doga Derneği (BirdLife in Turkey).

The finding represents another significant rise in fortune for the Critically Endangered bird: almost five years ago, as few as 400 Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* were thought to exist globally. The birds were found in the Ceylanpınar district of south-eastern Turkey after a satellite tag was fitted to one of the birds migrating from breeding grounds in Kazakhstan earlier this year. The tagged bird covered 2,000 miles, flying north of the Caspian Sea, then down through the Caucasus and south into Turkey, where it effectively stopped. The tagged bird was part of a flock of 1,800 other lapwing. The following day a staggering 3,200 Sociable Lapwing were observed at the site.

“This discovery is something we didn’t dare dream of,” said the RSPB’s Dr Rob Sheldon, responsible for tagging the bird in Kazakhstan. “The Sociable Lapwing is one of the rarest birds on earth and suddenly it’s been found in these large numbers.” “It shows just how important both Kazakhstan and Turkey have become for the survival of this species. The next step is to protect the bird, both on its breeding grounds and at all the key sites on its migration route.” Where the birds go next is unclear: The tagging project is partly paid for by the UK government’s Darwin Initiative and conservationists from Britain and Kazakhstan hope to win new funds to tag more birds next summer.

(Source: BirdLife International News Alert, Dated: 19-10-2007)

**Additions to the Birds of Kachchh: *Rallus aquaticus* Linnaeus, *Halcyon pileata* (Boddaert) and *Monticola saxatilis* (Linnaeus)**

**Raghuvendrasinh D. Jadeja<sup>1</sup> and Tejpal Dharmshi Shah (Kavi Tej)<sup>2</sup>**

<sup>1</sup>Range Forest Officer, Forest Colony, Jungleshwar Temple, Naliya – 370655, Ta: Abdasa, Kachchh

<sup>2</sup>Near Jain Derasar, Naliya-370 655 Ta: Abdasa-- Kachchh.

Kavi Tej (KT), saw a bird being pecked and worried by house crows while on his usual early morning outing on 13<sup>th</sup> October 1993 near Naliya in western part of Kachchh. He picked up the wounded bird and brought it to Naliya and photographed it at a local studio. On examining the specimen and consulting the references, KT came to a conclusion that it was a Water Rail (*Rallus aquaticus*). The identification has recently been confirmed by BNHS.

Raghuvendrasinh D. Jadeja (RJD), saw a Black-capped Kingfisher (*Halcyon pileata*) at a garden in Naliya in western Kachchh on 17<sup>th</sup> December, 2001 and took a photograph. The bird was present there till 10<sup>th</sup> March 2002. Later, he came across the same species on 26<sup>th</sup> October, 2002 and again at Kosa creek in Jakhau on 13<sup>th</sup> April 2003 (Jadeja and Varu, 2004). It was earlier seen by KT in the western mangrove at Jakhau an year back, although he could not confirm the identity. According to Ripley (1961), the species is found in Mumbai and is a cold weather visitor to the places as far north as Surat and the Dangs in South Gujarat. As per Ali and Ripley (1983), this species is not common in western seacoast but frequently seen at western seaboard southwards to Mumbai. M. K. Himmatsinhji opined that it has not been recorded in Pakistan at least till the publication of "The Birds of Pakistan" in the early nineties. The mangrove creeks of western Kachchh are not far from Naliya and so this bird could have strayed from there, thus apparently the Black-capped Kingfisher has extended its range far north of Mumbai.

On 1<sup>st</sup> October 1998, KT thought he saw a male Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush but could not confirm the identity. On 17<sup>th</sup> October 2000, we both came across a female of the species (it could have been a juvenile male also) which we identified in the field as *Monticola saxatilis*. The bird was photographed on the basis of which, the identity of the species was confirmed by Dr. Unnithan at BNHS. Later, on 17<sup>th</sup> October, 2002, RDJ came across a female (it could be juvenile male) at Suthari forest area near Naliya. Thus, this bird was seen thrice in

the Naliya area. According to Ali and Ripley (1983), it is a fairly common autumn passage migrant mostly in the hilly regions of north Pakistan.

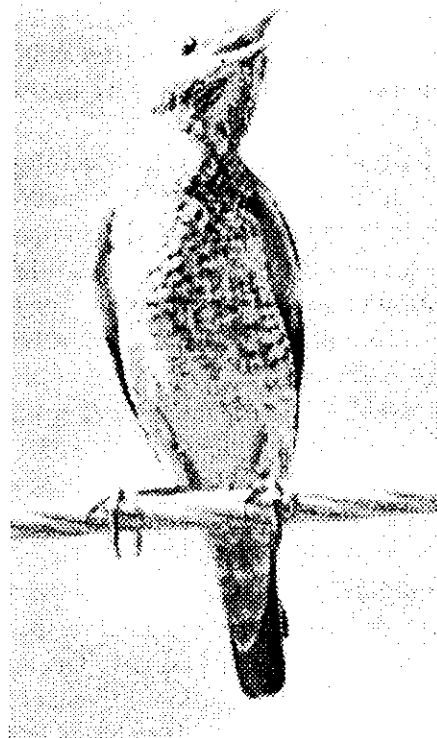


Photo: R. D. Jadeja

Ali (1945) had not come across any of these species in Kachchh. Thus, these three species, Water Rail, Black-capped Kingfisher and Rufous-tailed Rock Thrush are the new records for the Kachchh.

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**BIRDING NOTES**

**Sighting of Cream Colored Courser in Kachchh**

**Bharat Jethva and Sandeep Munjpara**

GEER Foundation, Gandhinagar-382 009

I had recently been to Kachchh near Naliya area which is primarily a grassland, interspersed with small thorny scrub patches. I was on a field trip for a research project on Great Indian Bustard. We were looking for Great Indian Bustard (*Ardeotis nigriceps*) and Indian Coursers (*Cursorius coromandelicus*) near Bhanada 'Doan' (Grasslands). During the survey, we encountered number of flocks of Indian Courser. On 28th July 2006 at 8:55 AM while watching them we observed a pale yellow colored courser-like bird which was slightly smaller than the Indian Courser. At first go, we thought that it was a juvenile of Indian Courser, but after careful observations we confirmed that it was a Cream Colored Courser, which we had never seen earlier. The Cream-coloured Courser (*Cursorius cursor*) was distinguished from juvenile of Indian Courser by its pale uniform color on upper part, and white under body part. The Indian Courser juveniles which we saw at the same time had streaked plumage pattern resembling small-sized Stone-Curlew (*Burhinus oedipnemus*) and brown and black patches on body parts. We searched desperately for more birds but we could not find any. The association of both Indian and Cream Colored Courser has been mentioned in Ali and Ripley, "Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan". The association of both the coursers in breeding season suggests that the Cream Colored Courser may be breeding in Kachchh. However its confirmation is required.

During the 6 days visit, apart from GIBs we saw the following interesting birds.

1. Cream coloured Courser (*Cursorius cursor*)
2. Indian Coursers (*Cursorius coromandelicus*) -Not less than 600 !
3. Tawny Eagle (*Aquila rapax*) breeding pair
4. Laggar (*Falco jugger*), breeding pair with young
5. Red-headed Falcon (*Falco chicquera*)
6. White-eyed Buzzard (*Butastur teesa*)
7. Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse (*Pterocles exustus*)
8. Indian White-backed Vulture (*Gyps bengalensis*) (10)
9. Eurasian Eagle-Owl (*Bubo bubo*)
10. Marshall's Iora (*Aegithina nigrolutea*)

While coming back, we saw several waders and other birds at Surajbari Creek that includes.

1. Curlew Sandpiper (*Calidris ferruginea*)
2. Kentish Plover (*Charadrius alexandrinus*)
3. Eurasian Curlew (*Numenius arquata*)
4. Great Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) (11)
5. Common Redshank (*Tringa totanus*)
6. Ruff (*Philomachus pugnax*)
7. Greater Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus ruber*)
8. Lesser Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus minor*)
9. Eurasian Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*)

We also saw a pair of Sarus Crane (*Grus antigone*) near Shankheshwar (Patan district).

We were accompanied by Ms Anjali Sharma.

**Strange Mating Behaviour of Blue Rock Pigeon**

**Navneet Bhatt**

24, "Matru-smriti", Bank society, Subhashnagar, Bhavnagar -364001

Meeting at Bahucharaji temple, Diamond Chawl has become our daily routine. On 16<sup>th</sup> March 2007 at the time of meeting, I saw a pair of Blue Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*) in courtship behaviour in balcony of a flat opposite to our meeting place. After usual courtship display, the male mounted over female and copulated. But after a little while the female mounted over male. This was repeated twice in 45 minutes. I informed about this behaviour to Shri

Vishubha Raol. He informed that he too had seen such behaviour in pigeon. He had photographed the unusual mating behaviour of pigeon. He further informed that such behaviour is also seen in other members of dove family. To further confirm this, I enquired with Shri Lalsinhbhai. He told me that he had been informed once about such mating behaviour by his friend.

## Rescuing a Short-toed Snake-Eagle

Yagnesh N. Bhatt

Azad Chawk, Near Post Office, Dharmaj-388 430, Dist.-Anand

I was informed by my friend on 1<sup>st</sup> October 2005 that there was an eagle at his farm since last 10 days, on the ground and was unable to fly. I visited the farm. It was Short-toed Snake-Eagle (*Circaetus gallicus*). I caught the bird and found that it had no external injury. I brought the bird to my house. It was very weak and inactive and suffering from diarrhoea. It probably had some gastric problem. I offered a boiled egg and it accepted the food. Assuming that the bird has some gastric infection, I started giving antibiotic powder 1/6 and B-complex in the food. I was offering boiled egg and chicken meat twice a day. The bird was responding positively to the treatment. Diarrhoea got controlled within 2 days. I started taking the bird to the terrace and giving wing exercise. After 10 days of treatment and care the bird was looking more active. It was trying to jump and fly over the other branch when placed on a bamboo tree, as if it was learning to fly. On 14<sup>th</sup> October, it made its "first" flight. When I took it to the terrace, it first jumped over and perched on parapet. From there it perched on to a nearby date palm tree like a crashing plane making an emergency landing. Babblers, mynas and other birds started making noise. After half an hour it took a small flight to a varandah of the next house. I could realize that the bird was not yet fit for release. I brought it back and continued the treatment. Once I offered a dead squirrel to it, it immediately captured the squirrel by toes, took it to a corner. It was slowly gaining the strength and "wilderness" back. It was now trying to defend and attack by toes and beak as I approached it. On 18<sup>th</sup> October I received a message that there was a cobra in a

tobacco godown at a farm. I took the eagle to that godown and released to observe its reaction to its pray. To my surprise, it immediately attacked and killed the snake. It even consumed little flash and

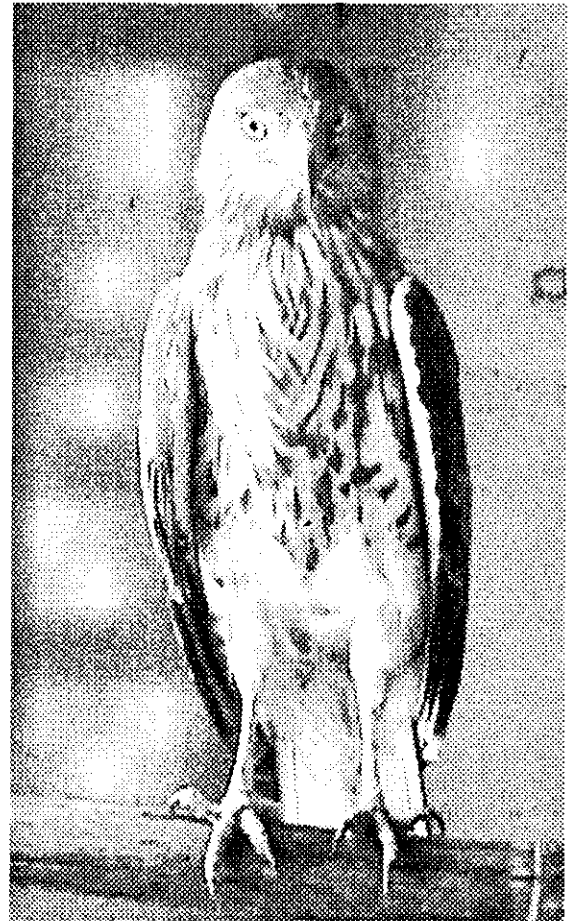


Photo: Yagnesh Bhatt

flew to water drain in the farm. I was now convinced that it was fit for returning to nature. After taking water it made its "final voyage" to wild. I watched it disappearing in the horizon. We bid farewell to the eagle with full satisfaction.

## Birdwatching at Rajula-Jafarabad Coastal Area

Ajit Bhatt

"Bhardwaj", Sardamagar -I, Near S. T. Depot, Dhari -365 640

We visited coastal area around Rajula and Jafarabad for birding on 11<sup>th</sup> January 2006. It is a safer area for the birds. We could cover Sankrodiya Hanuman, Bherai Talav, Babarkot Talav, Pipavav Port Khadi and Lunsapur Pond.

At Lunsapur we were surprised to see House Crows fishing like River Tern from the talav. At Bherai local people also accompanied us. We explained them importance of bird conservation.. Around 800 Demoiselle Crane (*Grus virgo*) were

there in the pond. There were other migratory birds also. At Sankroliya Hanumn: Northern Shoveller (*Anas clypeata*)-200, Common Crane (*Grus grus*)-5, Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*)-7, Pied Avocet (*Recurvirostra avosetta*)-10-12, Painted Stork (*Mycteria leucocephala*)-10.

Pipavav Port Khadi: Great White Pelican (*Pelecanus onocrotalus*)-10-15, Greater Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus ruber*)-30-35, Western Marsh-Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*)-5, Common Redshank (*Tringa totanus*)-3.

Bherai Talav: Demoiselle Crane (*Grus virgo*)-700-800, Common Crane-5, Brahminy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*)-20-25, Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*)-4.

Pond of Babarkot near L & T Cement : Black tailed Godwit-20-25, Red-wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*)-35, Pied Avocet (*Recurvirostra avosetta*)-

15, Slender-billed Gull (*Larus genai*)-50-75, Northern Pintail (*Anas acuta*)-5, Great White Pelican -5, Western Marsh-Harrier -1, Black Ibis (*Pseudibis papillosa*)-10.

Lunsapur Pond: Eurasian Wigeon (*Anas penelope*)-200-250, Northern Shoveller -75, Comb Duck (*Sarkidiornis melanotos*)-15, Northern Pintail -25, Purple Moorhen (*Porphyrio porphyrio*)-2, Spot-billed Duck (*Anas poecilorhyncha*)-30, Oriental White Ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*)-10, Western Marsh-Harrier -5, Common Moorhen (*Gallinula chloropus*)-3, Gadwall (*Anas strepera*)-25, Short-toed Snake-Eagle (*Circaetus gallicus*)-1.

On 30<sup>th</sup> January 2006 we sighted at many places in Gamaniya bet Crested Bunting (*Melophus lathami*)-8 and a pair of Painted Sandgrouse (*Pterocles indicus*). Dr. Snehal Pandya, Shri Rasik Chavda, Shri Bakubhai and his family joined the programme.

## Birdwatching at Khijadiya and Thol Bird Sanctuary

K. D. Nimavat

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I Visited the Khijadiya Bird Sanctuary (KBS) and Thol Bird Sanctuary (TBS) on 26<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> November 2006 respectively. My sightings of species are as under:

### Khijadiya Bird Sanctuary

Great Crested Grebe ( <i>Podiceps cristatus</i> )	8
Asian Paradise-Flycatcher ( <i>Terpsiphone paradisi</i> )	(Male) 1
Little Grebe ( <i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i> )	2
Darter ( <i>Anhinga melanogaster</i> )	35+
Little Cormorant ( <i>Phalacrocorax niger</i> )	60+
Lesser Pied Kingfisher ( <i>Ceryle rudis</i> )	2
Comb Duck ( <i>Sarkidiornis melanotos</i> )	40+
Common Coot ( <i>Fulica atra</i> )	52
Common Moorhen ( <i>Gallinula chloropus</i> )	9
White-breasted Waterhen ( <i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i> )	5
Western Reef-Egret ( <i>Egretta gularis</i> )	1 at salt works side
Common Crane ( <i>Grus grus</i> )	12 at salt work side

These were the observations made from a single point only (Dhunvav watch tower). Total bird count and species number is likely to be much higher. Common Crane is the migratory species, rest of all are resident breeding species. Great Crested Grebe was recorded breeding at KBS in 1984 and since then several records of its breeding from the same area are available. Common Cranes and Demoiselle Cranes come for night roosting at KBS in thousands, hence count done during day time does not reflect the actual number utilising the wetland.

### Thol Bird sanctuary

Ruff ( <i>Philomachus pugnax</i> )	1000+
Common Crane ( <i>Grus grus</i> )	400+
Greylag Goose ( <i>Anser anser</i> )	140+
Oriental White Ibis ( <i>Threskiornis melanocephalus</i> )	8
Northern Pintail ( <i>Anas acuta</i> )	150+
Common Pochard ( <i>Aythya ferina</i> )	100+
Brahminy Shelduck ( <i>Tadorna ferruginea</i> )	250+
Northern Shoveller ( <i>Anas clypeata</i> )	15+
Common Teal ( <i>Anas crecca</i> )	20+
Tufted Pochard ( <i>Aythya fuligula</i> )	4
Little Grebe ( <i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i> )	1
Darter ( <i>Anhinga melanogaster</i> )	2
Little Cormorant ( <i>Phalacrocorax niger</i> )	60+
Great Cormorant ( <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i> )	1
Small Blue Kingfisher ( <i>Alcedo atthis</i> )	1
Comb Duck ( <i>Sarkidiornis melanotos</i> )	50+
Common Coot ( <i>Fulica atra</i> )	10
Eurasian Spoonbill ( <i>Platalea leucorodia</i> )	10
White-throated Munia ( <i>Lonchura malabarica</i> )	15+
Pipit unidentified	6

In TBS also, bird sighting recorded represents only a fraction of actual number and bird species present. Total bird count and species number is likely to be much higher. The sighted number of Ruff is exactly 1% geographic population of the species. In past (September, 1999), flocks of more than 60,000 birds have been recorded here by Trivedi *et al.*



## Eurasian Scops Owl and Eurasian Eagle-Owl at Surendranagar

Dr. Yogendra Shah

Yogendra Shah

Dr. F.

"Anand" Opp. Anrutkunj Society, Jintan Road, Surendranagar-363 001. E-mail: ymshah55@yahoo.com

219810

Eurasian Scops Owl (*Otus scops*) was seen by our group at Wadhvan-Vagehela road during last year (see Flamingo Vol. 3 (1): 2005). It was sighted again in the same area on 22<sup>nd</sup> November 2005. I was moving across the mines searching for the Eurasian Eagle-Owl (*Bubo bubo*). It was evening time around 5:30 pm. One small owl-like bird suddenly flew and settled on a nearby *Presopis juliflora*. The flight of the bird was like owl, but the bird was slightly smaller. So, I went closer to identify the bird and it was again Eurasian Scops-Owl. The light was too dim to take a picture.

There are many man-made mines near Wadhvan town. It is the most important site of our area because it is the home of 7 Eurasian Eagle-Owls. We have seen 7 adult birds till day. I am not declaring exact area because of the threat on this species. On 26<sup>th</sup> November myself, Chiku Vora, Prashant Chavda, Vishal Thoria and Uday Vora visited the place. There was a nest of Eurasian Eagle-Owl with 5 eggs. I think it is very rare in this species. I referred to the books to confirm clutch size. The maximum reported clutch size is 4 eggs. On that day we saw 7 Eurasian Eagle-Owl adults.

Some interesting observations on clutch size and diet of this species in last 2 years of study and monitoring are as follow: The clutch size was observed to be 3, 4 and 5 in the year 2003, 2004 and 2005 respectively. Different food items in the diet of Eurasian Eagle-Owl were identified from the pellets and distinct evidences. We found more than 14 different species of mammals, birds and insects in their diet.

1. Mammals: Black-napped Hare, Field mice and Hedge hog
2. Reptiles: Lizard
3. Birds: Pigeons, Dove, Kingfisher, Larks, Robin, House Crow (*Corvus splendens*), Sandgrouse, Partridges/ Quails, Indian Pond-Heron (*Ardeola grayii*).
4. Insect: Beetles

During non-breeding season, we did not find many variations in their diet but during chick-rearing period, both chicks and parents consumed variety of food items. During breeding, its main food items were the field mice or rat, Some time pigeons and doves were also consumed but in less number.

Some pairs used the same nest site again in 2005 for nesting. In November 2004, we saw 4 eggs in same places and a few of them had survived and chicks flown away from nests. May be, using the same place is the sign of protection and safety of the nest and chicks. We used to monitor the site and ensured that nobody come there and harm the nest. All group members, Myself, Chiku Vora, Faruk Chauhan, Vishal Thoria, Prashant Chavda and Sumit Shah and Shri Bhavanisinhji also looked after the nest and its safety.

We also saw a Besra Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter virgatus*), 5 Eurasian Eagle-Owl (*Bubo bubo*), 1 Shikra (*Accipiter badius*) and 1 White-eyed Buzzard (*Butastur teesa*) and many small birds like Desert Wheatear (*Oenanthe deserti*) Female, Common Crested Lark (*Galerida cristata*), Ashy-crowned Sparrow-Lark (*Eremopterix grisea*), Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse (*Pterocles exustus*) etc. at the same place.

### VULTURE CELL - BCSG

The BCSG is running a 'Vulture Cell' and publishing a newsletter "Gyps" dedicated to vulture conservation. For further details please contact:

**Shri Snehal Patel**, 81, Sarjan Society, Athwa Lines, Surat. e-mail: [snehalpatel81@rediffmail.com](mailto:snehalpatel81@rediffmail.com), 9825110283 OR

**Shri Kartik Shartri**, Ashokwadi, Panchvati, Ellisbridge, Ahmedabad- 380 006. e-mail: [kartikshastri@hotmail.com](mailto:kartikshastri@hotmail.com)

### VULTURE HELP LINE

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

Surat: Snehal Patel -9825110283; Ahmedabad: Kartik Shartri 98240 25045; Bakul Trivedi 98256 29587;

Mahuva: Ruchi Dave- 9998047755; Bhuj: S. N. Varu 99257 30354; Rajkot: Ashok Mashru 98797 58818;

Bhavnagar: Indra Gadhvi 94271 82755 Anand: Dhaval Patel- 9898142170;

**VULTURE UPDATE**

These are some of the sighting of vultures in Kachchh recorded by Shri S. N. Varu, Ashwin Pomal and others during 2005.

29.09.05	Poladia, Ta -Mandvi	WBV -20	Feeding on carcass	S. N. Varu, J. K. Tiwari
29.09.05	Dumra, Ta -Abdasa	WBV-01	soaring	S. N. Varu, J. K. Tiwari
04.11.05	Moti Mau, Ta -Mandvi	WBV -08	Resting on tree (banyan, coconut), some nesting	S. N. Varu, Ashwin Pomal
4.11.05	Poladia, ta -Mandvi	WBV -09, EGV -05, EV -05	Near carcass	S. N. Varu, Ashwin Pomal
4.11.05	Kothara, ta -Abdasa	WBV -33, LBV -01, EGV -02	Soaring, near carcass and some WBV nesting	S. N. Varu, Ashwin Pomal
04.11.05	Suthri, Ta -Abdasa	WBV -13	soaring, nesting on building	S. N. Varu, Ashwin Pomal
04.11.05	Jakhau, Ta -Abdasa	WBV -08	Nesting and Resting on Banayan tree	S. N. Varu, Ashwin Pomal
04.11.05	Palarghuna, Ta -Nakhatrana	LBV -04	Nesting	
22.12.05	Poladia, Ta- Mandvi	WBV-100	Near carcass	S. N. Varu, M. B. Khatri, Ashwin Pomal
22.12.05	Poladia, Ta- Mandvi	EGV-150	Near carcass	S. N. Varu, M. B. Khatri, Ashwin Pomal
22.12.05	Poladia, Ta- Mandvi	KV-01	far from carcass	S. N. Varu, M. B. Khatri, Ashwin Pomal
22.12.05	Poladia, Ta- Mandvi	EV-01	Far from carcass	S. N. Varu, M. B. Khatri, Ashwin Pomal
01.01.06	Palar Ghuna, Ta- Nakhatrana	LBV-05	Nesting site	S. N. Varu, T. B. Chhaya, S. B. Hathi
01.01.06	Dumra Ta Abdasa	WBV-01	Nesting site	S. N. Varu, T. B. Chhaya, S. B. Hathi
01.01.06	Suthri Ta Abdasa	WBV-36	Nesting site and near carcass	S. N. Varu, T. B. Chhaya, S. B. Hathi
01.01.06	Jakhau, Ta Abdasa	WBV-06	Nesting on building and tree	S. N. Varu, T. B. Chhaya, S. B. Hathi
29.01.06	Jakhau, Ta Abdasa	WBV-07	Nesting on building and tree	S. N. Varu, T. B. Chhaya
29.01.06	Kothara	WBV-16	Nesting on trees	S. N. Varu, T. B. Chhaya
29.01.06	Suthri	-06	Nesting on trees and buildings	S. N. Varu, T. B. Chhaya
29.01.06	Poladia	WBV-40, EGV-30, LBV-02	near carcass	S. N. Varu, T. B. Chhaya
29.01.06	Palar Ghubna	LBV-02	Nesting	S. N. Varu, T. B. Chhaya
12.03.06	Moti Mau, Ta Mandvi	WBV-02	Nesting in vadi on coconut tree	S. N. Varu, A. S. Pomal, M. B. Khatri, J. A. Parmar
12.03.06	Bet Moti Mau- Poladia, Ta Mandvi	WBV-02	overhead flying	S. N. Varu, A. S. Pomal, M. B. Khatri, J. A. Parmar
12.03.06	Poladia, Ta Mandvi	EGV-12	overhead flying and near carcass	S. N. Varu, A. S. Pomal, M. B. Khatri, J. A. Parmar
19.03.06	Kothara, Ta Abdasa	EGV-02	overhead flying	S. N. Varu, A. S. Pomal
19.03.06	Kothara, Ta Abdasa	WBV-19	overhead flying and nesting in vadi	S. N. Varu, A. S. Pomal
19.03.06	Suthri, Ta Abdasa	WBV-02	nesting on beds	S. N. Varu, A. S. Pomal
19.03.06	Jakhau, Ta Abdasa	WBV-05	nesting on beds and on tree	S. N. Varu, A. S. Pomal
19.03.06	Dumra, Ta Abdasa	WBV-02	nesting on coconut tree	S. N. Varu, A. S. Pomal
19.03.06	Sandhan, Ta Abdasa	WBV-03	nesting on coconut tree	S. N. Varu, A. S. Pomal

## Vulture survey in May 2006

Anil Jivanlal Patel

B/26, Shayona Society, Detroj road, Kadi-382 715

On 5<sup>th</sup> August 2006 I received news from Forest guard that very large number of vultures are seen near Virpur Mahajan Panjarapole, Virpur, Ta Viramgam, Dist Ahmedabad. To confirm the news, I visited the Panjarapole on very next day at 03:00 p.m. and received first hand news about vultures from watchman. I reached the place as per his guidance, passing through water logged grassy land. I was astonished to see the hundreds of vultures there. I counted the soaring vultures first and then those roosting on *varakhada* tree and lastly vultures sitting on ground around 50 meters away from me. I also counted separately the Egyptian Vultures present there in good numbers. I also saw around 140 White Ibis and large number of Cattle Egrets present there.

I visited the Panjarapole and talked to Takhatsinh, the manager and Mukeshbhai, the Chamar. They informed me that these vultures are not afraid of human presence. Enough food is

available here and there is restricted entry in the grassland area of the Panjarapole. Hence, they are safe here. When a dead animal is brought to the open ground for dressing in the morning between 9-10 a.m., around 500 vultures come here for food. The number is less in the evening hours. As per my opinion they are not residing here but must be visiting from far off places. There are 4 Panjarapoles in this area within 40 km range. It is learnt that vultures are also visiting these Panjarapoles.

Details of vultures sighted at Virpur Mahajan Panjarapole are as under:

White-backed Vulture-84-Soaring

White-backed Vulture -57-Roosting on *Varakhada* tree

White-backed Vulture -126-On the ground in group  
Egyptian Vulture-46-Roosting on trees near the edge of talav and distributed on ground

A total of 313 vultures were sighted here.

## BCSG EVENTS

### Rosy Pastor Watch at Vadodara

Rosy Starling or Rosy Pastor (*Sturnus roseus*) is one of the most common and abundant migratory species in north-western India. During March/ April they congregate in very large number at their night roost. One such night roosting site of Rosy Pastors was identified at T. B. Hospital Campus, near Gotri in Vadodara city.

A programme to watch Rosy Pastors at T. B. Hospital Campus was organized on 1<sup>st</sup> April 2007. Members of the society and birdwatchers of Vadodara and Anand were invited in the Rosy Pastor watching programme. Around 50 participants from Vadodara and Anand attended the programme. Dr. Geeta S. Padate, R. V. Devkar, Raju Vyas, Kartik Upadyay, Dhurjati Vaishnav of Vadodara; D. N. Rank and B. M. Parasharya of Anand interacted with the participants and appraised the urbanites who stopped to watch the displaying birds. As it turned dark, the birds settled and stopped chirping. Although it was not possible to count the birds, every one agreed to the figure around 100,000

birds! Dr. Geeta Padate is keeping track of this species to determine its departure date. Shri Manoj Thaker offered tea and light refreshment to the participants. Media persons from local television channels captured the event and telecasted a story on Rosy Pastors for next two days. A report of the event was also published in Indian Express daily on 2<sup>nd</sup> April.

[Dr. Tarun Joshi and family watched about 200,000 to 250,000 Rosy Pastors at Piplata near Nadiad, Dist. Kheda on 15<sup>th</sup> April 2007. On same date Dr. P. S. Thakker and B. M. Parasharya watched about 200,000 birds roosting near IIM campus, Ahmedabad. Dr. Thakker informed that there are several satellite roosting sites in Ahmedabad city and therefore the population size could be much bigger in Ahmedabad alone. If we identify all important roosting sites of Rosy Pastors particularly during their return migration –in early April, their approximate numbers visiting Gujarat could be estimated.-Eds.]

## RECENT PUBLICATIONS ON BIRDS OF GUJARAT

Joshua, J., V. Gokula and S. F. Vesly Sunderraj (2007). Status of Pied Tit *Parus nuchalis* in Narayan Sarovar Sanctuary, Gujarat, India. *Indian Birds* 3(3): 91-93.

Khacher, L. (2007). A flight down memory lane – the little brown puzzles. *Indian Birds* 3(2): 74-75.

Parasharya, B. M. and A. Tere (2006). Lesser Flamingos in India: A Knowledge Update. Anand Agricultural University, Anand, India. 28pp.

Singh, A. K. (2007). Wild Ass Sanctuary. *Sanctuary Asia* 27(2): 60-65.

Kathju, K. (2007). Observations of unusual clutch size, re-nesting and egg concealment by Sarus Cranes *Grus antigone* in Gujarat, India. *Forktail* 23:165-167.

## SOME INTERESTING BIRD SIGHTINGS

Following are the important bird sightings in Kachchh recorded by Shri S.N. Varu

No	Date	Name and number of birds	Place
1	24-09-05	Pied Tit ( <i>Parus nuchalis</i> ) (02)	At Chaduva Rakhal, Ta. Bhuj
2	24-09-05 09-02-06	Great Indian Bustard ( <i>Ardeotis nigriceps</i> ) (01 Female) Great Indian Bustard ( <i>Ardeotis nigriceps</i> ) (07)	At Nalia grassland Kunathia Dhufi Grassland
3	22-10-05	Eurasian Golden Oriole ( <i>Oriolus oriolus</i> ) (01 female)	At Madhapar, Bhuj
4	26-11-05 15-01-06	Red-headed Falcon ( <i>Falco chicquera</i> ) (01) Red-headed Falcon (01)	Khadir bet. Great Rann Bita, Ta. Abdasa
5	26-11-05	Common Swallow ( <i>Hirundo rustica</i> ) (> 400)	Between Kharoi-Kundisar, Ta. Bhachau
6	26-11-05	Common Crane ( <i>Grus grus</i> ) (>200)	On high altitude at Dudhai, Ta. Bhachau
7	11-12-05 19-03-06	Steppe Eagle ( <i>Aquila nipalensis</i> ) (>35) Steppe Eagle (03)	At Chhari Dhandu (dry), Ta. Nakhatrana Nalia Grassland
8	11-12-05 19-03-06	Tawny Eagle ( <i>Aquila rapax</i> ) (01) Tawny Eagle (03)	Near nest at Chhari Dhandu (dry) Nalia Grassland
9	11-12-05 14-01-06 15-01-06 08-02-06 08-02-06 12-3-06	Hypocoleus ( <i>Hypocoleus ampelinus</i> ) (40) Hypocoleus (05) Hypocoleus (01) Hypocoleus (09) Hypocoleus (02) Hypocoleus (04)	At Fulay, Ta. Nakhatrana Chhari Dhundh Chhari Dhundh Chhari Dhundh Fulay Rakhal Chhari Dhandu
10	25-12-05	Desert Courser ( <i>Cursorius cursor</i> ) (01)	Vighakot, Great Rann of Kachchh
11	25-12-05	Greater Hoopoe-Lark ( <i>Alaemon alaudipes</i> ) (01)	Between Karim sahi and Vighakot
12	11-01-06	Dalmatian Pelican ( <i>Pelecanus crispus</i> ) (14)	Hamisar tank of Bhuj
13	11-01-06	White-tailed Lapwing ( <i>Vanellus leucurus</i> ) (02)	Devisar tank, Ta. Bhuj
14	15-01-06	Eurasian Wryneck ( <i>Jynx torquilla</i> ) (01)	Bita, Ta. Abdasa
15	15-01-06	Montagu's Harrier ( <i>Circus pygargus</i> ) (01)	Lala Bustard Sanctuary
16	15-01-06 09-02-06 19-3-06	Stoliczka's Bush Chat ( <i>Saxicola macrorhyncha</i> ) (02) Stoliczka's Bush Chat (02) Stoliczka's Bush Chat (01 male, 01 female)	Lala Bustard Sanctuary Nalia Grassland Lala Bustard Sanctuary
17	22-01-06	Black-necked Stork ( <i>Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus</i> ) (01)	Ganga creek, Mandvi
18	26-01-06	Cotton Teal ( <i>Nettapus coromandelianus</i> ) (01)	Mavdi Talavadi
19	09-02-06	Eurasian Eagle-Owl ( <i>Bubo bubo</i> ) (01)	Between Kothara Vindhau, Ta. Abdasa
20	09-02-06	Booted Eagle ( <i>Hieraaetus pennatus</i> ) (01)	Mothala, Ta. Abdasa
21	21-01-06	Great Crested Grebe ( <i>Podiceps cristatus</i> ) (03)	Kukma villege tank
22	21-1-06	White-bellied Minivet ( <i>Pericrocotus erythropygus</i> ) (01 male)	Lair reservoir, Ta. Bhuj
23	12-03-06	Tickell's Blue-Flycatcher ( <i>Cyornis tickelliae</i> ) (01 male)	Chaduva Rakhal
24	12-03-06	Black-naped Monarch-Flycatcher ( <i>Hypothymis azurea</i> ) (01 male)	Chaduva Rakhal
25	12-03-06	Asian Openbill-Stork ( <i>Anastomus oscitans</i> ) (02)	Pragsar, Tanko, Chaduva
26	19-03-06	Darter ( <i>Anhinga melanogaster</i> ) (01)	Khatri pond, Ta. Bhuj
27	12-03-06	Osprey ( <i>Pandion haliaetus</i> ) (01)	Pragsar, Tanko, Chaduva

Following are the important bird sightings shared by the members

1. Red-headed Falcon (*Falco chicquera*) -1 at Amod. Dist. Bharuch on 17<sup>th</sup> July 2007. Dishant Parasharya, Vadodara.
2. A pair of Spotted Munia (*Lonchura punctulata*) nested two feet away from my head end of bed on 14<sup>th</sup> October 2007, Piyush Patel, Valsad.
3. Collared Pratincole (*Glareola pratincola*) - 600 and Small Pratincole (*Glareola lactea*) -3 at Nava Talav, Ta. Patadi, Dist. Surendranagr on 24<sup>th</sup> October 2007. Chiku Vora, Surendranagar.
4. Slender-billed Gull (*Larus genei*) -11 pairs nested at Charakla Salt pans, Ta. Dwarka. Dist. Jamnagar on 8<sup>th</sup> May 2007. Satish Trivedi, Mithapur.
5. Slender-billed Gull (*Larus genei*) - 5000+ in water, north to Suigam-Nadabet Road, Ta. Vav, Dist. Banaskantha on 16<sup>th</sup> October 2006. B. M. Parasharya, Anand.
6. Sarus Crane (*Grus antigone*) nest with two eggs at Malanpur, near Santrampur, Dist. Panchmahal on 24<sup>th</sup> September 2007. Mahadik Shivajirao S., Santrampur.
7. Ultramarine Flycatcher (*Ficedula superciliaris*) at Ratanmahal Wildlife Sanctuary on 20<sup>th</sup> February 2007. Bakul Trivedi - Ahmedabd.
8. Jerdon's Chloropsis (*Chloropsis cochinchinensis*) at Anand on 1<sup>st</sup> November 2006. N. A. Thakor, Anand.
9. Stone-Curlew (*Burhinus oedicephalus*) - 50+ at Anand on 31<sup>st</sup> December 2006. N. A. Thakor, Anand.
10. Stone-Curlew (*Burhinus oedicephalus*) - 51 near Pij. Ta. Nadiad, Dist. Kheda at 12:30 hrs on 26<sup>th</sup> December 2007. Tarun Joshi, Nadiad.
11. White-necked Stork (*Ciconia episcopus*) -1 nest in urban area of Kadi, Dist. Mehsana on 4<sup>th</sup> October 2007. A. J. Patel, Kadi.
12. Eurasian Eagle-Owl (*Bubo bubo*) - 3 nests, each with 5 eggs at Surendranagar on 10<sup>th</sup> November 2007. Chiku Vora, Surendranagar.
13. Sociable Lapwing (*Vanellus gregarius*) -25 near Bechraji, Dist. Mehsana on 29<sup>th</sup> November 2007. Uday Vora, Gandhinagar.
14. Sociable Lapwing (*Vanellus gregarius*) -13 near Vav, Dist. Banaskantha in last week of January 2007 seen by Mohit Andharia and N. Sethna. U. A. Vora, Gandhinagar
15. Houbara (*Chlamydotis undulata*) -5 and Short-eared Owl (*Asio flammeus*) -5 in Little Rann near Bajana. Ta. Patadi, Dist. Surendranagar 17<sup>th</sup> November 2007. Chiku Vora, Surendranagar.
16. Common Raven (*Corvus corax*) -1 at Boru village, near. Suigam, Ta. Vav, Dist. Banaskantha on 15<sup>th</sup> October 2006. B. M. Parasharya, Anand.
17. Blue-cheeked Bee-eater (*Merops persicus*) - 1000+ on roadside electric wire on Suigam-Nadabet Road, Ta. Vav, Dist. Banaskantha on 16<sup>th</sup> October 2006. B. M. Parasharya, Anand.
18. Indian Plaintive Cuckoo (*Cacomantis passerinus*) first call for the year around Valsad heard. Piyush Patel, Valsad.
19. Dalmatian Pelican (*Pelecanus crispus*) -20 and Great White Pelican (*Pelecanus onocrotalus*) - 300 in salt pans near Malia, Dist. Rajkot on 19<sup>th</sup> October 2006. B. M. Parasharya and N. A. Thakor, Anand.
20. Whiskered Tern (*Chlidonias hybridus*) - 300+ (at least 50% birds in breeding plumage) at Falku dam near Dhrangadhra, Dist. Surendranagar on 28<sup>th</sup> June 2006. B. M. Parasharya and N. A. Thakor, Anand.
21. Small Pratincole (*Glareola lactea*) nest with 4 eggs at the edge of Kadana dam near Bugad village, Ta. Santrampur, Dist. Panchmahal on 29<sup>th</sup> May 2006. B. M. Parasharya, Anand.
22. Greater Painted-Snipe (*Rostratula benghalensis*) pair on water pool near Dholera, Dist. Ahmedabad on 9<sup>th</sup> June 2006. B. M. Parasharya, Anand.
23. Red-crested Pochard (*Rhodonessa rufina*) -3 at Wadhvana Tank, Ta. Dabhoi, Dist. Vadodara on 26<sup>th</sup> January 2007. Geeta Padate, Vadodara.
24. Collared Scops-Owl (*Otus bakkamoena*) young one found at Vadodara on 29<sup>th</sup> September 2007, maintained on lizards and gecko and released back to nature. Kartik Upadhyay, Vadodara.

## LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

• Received "Gyps", the Newsletter of the BCSG Vulture Cell. Congratulation to all of you for efforts to save vultures.

I remember that Shri Bakulbhai and myself wrote to Lavkumarsaheb and Lalsinhbhai around 10 years back regarding declining vultures in Bhavnagr city. WBV and EV used to nest in Bhavnagar upto 1990. Then number of vultures and nests declined and totally vanished since last 10 years.

I attend forest camps in GNP even today as resource person. Vulture fisting on *maran* (lion kill) and soaring in the sky, which used to be a common scene earlier, is now totally disappeared. It is felt that not only vultures but crows, kites, myna etc. are also decreasing day by day. What are the factors responsible for this decline? –is a question not only to me, but also to many of us.

Traces of drug present in meat of dead animal treated with Diclofenac which when consumed through meat are toxic to birds –is projected as prime cause of vulture deaths. But then is it toxic to only vultures and not to other birds feeding on carcass of dead animals? I have seen cattle egrets, crows and kites feeding on dead animals (recently at Vasna barrage, Ahmedabad). I have also seen cattle egrets feeding on carcass of dogs. I have seen Painted Stork occasionally eating rotted meat.

In '80s I have recorded around 300 bird species in Bhavnagar. The list is published in our society magazine. Since last 10 years kites, WBV, EV etc. have disappeared. Kites, crows, sparrows, myna are seen very less frequently. I have recorded more than 60 bird species here in my residential plot. Earlier crows, sparrow, babblers, bulbul, Indian Robin, myna (all 3 species), Golden Oriole, woodpecker, koel etc. were seen very frequently. Now only tailorbird, bulbul, treepie, Koel, coucal, peacock are only regular visitors of my residential plot.

Compared to Bhavnagar, Ahmedabad is much more populated and polluted city. It is probably the most polluted city of the country. Still kites, WBV nest in the middle of busy city areas of Ahmedabad. It is a matter of pride that diversity of the bird species and population in Ahmedabad is much greater than Bhavnagar. I have recorded a couple of years back, 62 bird species in Vasna barrage area alone

(Flamingo vol 4 (1-2), 2006). I have seen nests of Yellow-legged Green-Pigeon, White-browed fantail-Flycatcher, roller, Golden Oriole, in Vasna barrage area. Pray birds like shikra, Red-headed Falcon were also sighted there. Crows, sparrows, myna, babbler etc. are good in numbers in Ahmedabad while they are declining in Bhavnagar. What is the factor that is present in Bhavnagar but absent in Ahmedabad?

- Navneet Bhatt, Bhavnagar

• This has reference to the BCSG Vulture Workshop held at Ahmedabad on 9<sup>th</sup> December 2006.

Every one was worried about the birds' death toll at Mahuva. Is it '*diclofenac*' responsible for it? No body knows. Neither the department nor any NGO is sure about the exact cause of vultures' deaths at Mahuva. Many samples were taken, results must have been received, and still no one was in position to declare the exact cause. I agree, we can not cast the responsibility of this mysterious decline on the forest department, but an effective conservation plan, has to be worked out and implemented within very short time. Otherwise all the monitoring done so far will remain on papers only and there will be nothing left for future monitoring.

Lots of discussion took place on '*diclofenac*' ban and we congratulated each other for persuading Government to ban the '*diclofenac*' in veterinary medicine system. It might have been more helpful if Dr. Vibhuprakash would have enlightened all the participants about the legal status of the so-called 'ban'. As far as I know the so called 'ban' on *diclofenac* is mere a letter dated 11th May 2006 of the Drug Controller General (India) requesting all State Drug Controllers to implement the decision to withdraw the veterinary formulations of *Diclofenac*. Can it be called a legal ban or a prohibition on *Diclofenac*? In my humble view its not. A ban or prohibition on some drug can be imposed only when it has been declared a prohibited drug under the Drug and Cosmetic Act 1940 by the issuance of necessary notification. So for the import, of the drug is not prohibited under section 10 of the said Act. Mere controlling or withdrawing manufacturing licenses will not phase out the drug from the veterinary market completely.

Veterinary medicine experts are of the opinion that the non-steroidal anti-inflammatory drug *diclofenac* is a boon for the veterinary practice. No doubt its side effect on vultures is fatal, but the drug is very useful medicine for the livestock and very cheap too. It is not logical to think that each and every animal administered with the drug is going to die and being feed upon by the vultures. Unless and until the animal which is administered with the drug *diclofenac* dies and its carcass is exposed to vultures to feed upon it, the drug *diclofenac* is no danger for the vulture. Why livestock owners and their sick animals from such areas where vultures do not occur at all, are to be deprived from the use of otherwise very much useful, effective and cheap medicine. In workshops like we organized on 9th December 2006, experts from the veterinary medicine practice field – were required to be invited to put their stand forward.

We all were and are very firm to fight the *diclofenac* world wide, though it is not the apparent and obvious danger. On other hand we are ignoring apparent, obvious and evident (direct) dangers to vultures, which are cropping up in disguise of development, eco tourism, and religion. Helicopter services on Gimar, wind-mill constructions in Kachehh, Torrent plant near Surat, kite festivals in Ahmedabad, ropeway on Pavagadh etc are such direct dangers to vultures. If we want to fight and protest *diclofenac*, we must protest all these factors, which are dangers, to vultures too. We all must decide first that we are representing VULTURES and not the development, ecotourism or religion which adversely affect the bird. We must persuade State Government and forest department to work out an effective conservation plan for the vultures. As far as funding is concerned many international NGOs, State and Central Governments can help in implementing the conservation plan. Panjrapols are major reservoirs for vulture but on other hand they are major fear factors too as they are meant for sick cattle. Our main conservation centers are to be these panjrapoles.

- Jaidev Dhadhal, Patan

• The mynas referred to in our note published in Vihang and you were inquiring about, were Grey-headed Starling (*Sturnus malabaricus malabaricus*), about 400-500 in number in Gir Forest. We had seen its white-headed subspecies (*Sturnus malabaricus blythii*) in large numbers at Mudumalai and Annamalai Wildlife Sanctuaries in South India. We were visiting Gir Forest in March –April during 1980-1990s. At that time, we used to see Grey-headed Starling in large numbers making *Kalbalat* during roosting time in bushes on the banks of Shingoda River near Kankai temple. We used to sit on river bank waiting for the mynas arriving for roosting in evening hours. Plum-headed Parakeet (*Psittacula cyanocephala*) also used to roost with them. These mynas were seen less frequently after 1990. I have seen them at Chhodavdi, Janvadla and at several other places in Gir on the banks of rivers and streams, however, not in such a large number. Once we had seen these mynas at Kileshwar in Barda Wildlife Sanctuary during March on *Ficus* tree.

During April 1987, the draught year, we had seen Black Bittern (*Dupetor flavicollis*) in Shingoda River near Kankai temple. We have also seen Little Green Heron (*Butorides striatus*) several times in Gir Forest but Black Bitterns less frequently. The Black Bitterns were also seen twice on river bank near Kankai temple and once at Sasan behind ITDC bungalow. Black Bittern can be easily identified by prominent reddish bill with a yellowish tip. Yellow Bittern (*Ixobrychus sinensis*) were also sighted near ITDC bungalow at Sasan and on river bank behind Adholiya bridge. Both these bitterns are very shy of human presence.

-Sudha Mehta and Taru Mehta, Bhilvasi, Dist-Narmada

(This information was provided by the authors in a letter dated 8<sup>th</sup> August 2000 in response to a query made by the editors. Since the information is quite valuable, it is published here.-Eds).

**FROM THE PRESIDENT****To My Naturalist Friends; Old and Young**

Yesterday evening, as I stood up to address the audience assembled at the Balar's book release function, my mind was in considerable turmoil. I was overwhelmed with the respect accorded to me and to my long standing companion and friend Lalsinhbhai. What should I say? What could I say? What should I not say? And what could I not say? The dilemma continues to nag. At the function were present the two Honorary Editors of Newsletters, one in Gujarati and the other in English, being brought out for the very audience present and for very many more across the State. Both were expecting me to send in something for their next issues and, here I was standing up to deliver an address! So much expected of me and so little being made available! It is this sort of failure to concentrate on one's personal responsibilities that underscores the failure of mankind as a whole coming to terms with its unique destiny.

How can a collective destiny be realized if we fail to have clarity for our own individual destinies? Individual destinies have build up into the collective destiny. We who are fortunate (or unfortunate) enough to have developed a feeling and a concern for the environment must concern ourselves in how best we can, not only advance our own programs and ambitions, but in doing so come closer and closer together to generate a force that provides direction to what is a popular will. If we fail to achieve, speaking in a physicist's jargon: critical mass, all this awareness will be swept away before the strong gales of selfish avarice, exploitations for personal gains, which are influencing democratic compulsions appearing as

they do the popular wish. Hingolghadh then, is the right place from where I start writing these letters to you all, and in the process, crystallizing my own thoughts. It was here, as a child I developed my abiding love for the wilderness, and it was here that the Youth Education Movement was initiated. So, using the popular cricketing jargon, it is fitting that I start the final innings in the form of these serialized letters to rally the "faithful" to the cause of bird conservation from my home pitch.

Over the long years, I have come to realize that we all will have to work out ways and means to generate a strong unity. We just cannot hope to save anything against what would seem is a mindless force which by its mindlessness has the power to overwhelm everything in its path. Individuals, howsoever influential just cannot stand against its constant pressures for long. This force which seems mindless, many would like to consider it evil, is biological and as much a part of Nature as everything else. Individuals have necessarily to worry about daily needs. We all are concerned about the immediate security of our families. How can then, declining numbers of insects or of vultures take any precedence over human needs? What meaning does bird watching have in a highly competitive world? Are any of us able to provide clear answers? I regret the conservation groups have totally failed to provide reasonable answers. Nor, for that matter, have we been able to evolve demonstrable models proving that our concerns are not esoteric but highly pragmatic. In these letters, then, I will play the devil's advocate.

**-Lavkumar Khachar..**

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