

Flamingo



Newsletter of the Bird Conservation Society, Gujarat

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EDITORIAL

At last 'Chhari dhandh' in Kachchh is declared as a 'Conservation Reserve' by the Gujarat Government on 11th July 2008, but the visionary of the concept, to declare the site as a 'Bird Sanctuary', Shri M. K. Himmatsinhji is no more with us to share the joy and satisfaction. He consistently pursued the State Government till his last breath on 22nd February 2008, to take adequate measures for conservation of Chhari dhandh and its fauna.

Kachchh is the only district in the Country for which at least three books on birds are published – two editions of 'Birds of Cutch' by Palin and Lester and 'Birds of Kutch' by Salim Ali. After Salim Ali's monumental work published in 1945, Shri Himmatsinhji added quite a good number of species to the checklist of the birds of Kachchh. He had exhaustive material to publish even one more book on 'Birds of Kachchh'; unfortunately his work remains incomplete.

In past, bird watching was considered to be a 'royal hobby' or 'arm chair hobby'. He changed this mind set. He traveled extensively in the field to watch the birds and encouraged many enthusiasts

from Kachchh like N. N. Bapat, S. N. Varu, M. B. Khatri, Ashwin Pomal, R. D. Jadeja, Kavi Tej, J. K. Tiwari and others to take up birdwatching as a serious hobby. He was very polite and humble to every one who approached him. These qualities earned him a great respect among the birdwatchers.

He introduced birdlife of Kachchh to the world by writing articles in the Journal of Bombay Natural History Society, Hornbill, Newsletter for Birdwatchers, Flamingo and Vihang. In his writings clarity, accuracy, perfection and absolute neutrality were always reflected. His publication list is given in the current issue of this newsletter.

BCSG honoured him on 19th September 2004. He always encouraged the Society's activities and publication of the Society's newsletter 'Flamingo'. With his sad demise, we have lost a great ornithologist and an humble human being. He will always be remembered by one and all, when it comes to birdwatching and bird conservation. We on behalf of birdwatcher of Gujarat, pay heartiest tribute to Shri M. K. Himmatsinhji.



Photo: Ashwin Pomal

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BCSG and Flamingo

Bird 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. NLBW 42 (3): 1-35. If the nomenclature is adopted from other source, full reference should be given.

TRIBUTE

A Tribute to M. K. Himmatsinhji

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“Hallo, this is Himmatsinhji from Bhuj” a soft voice utters in response to my ‘hallo’; that affectionate voice enquires about ‘Vihang’, “How many of my articles do you have, how long those will last?” etc. He comments on articles published in the previous issue. He politely draws attention to shortcomings in articles. Along with he also discusses in detail the current issues regarding environment. Whenever we had telephonic conversations respected Bava saheb always told me “You must feel free to call me anytime without any hesitation”. However, I rarely got that chance; mostly he only would call up.

I had the privilege of meeting him only twice; once in a seminar organized by Bombay Natural History Society at Mumbai in 2003 and next time in 2006 at his residence at Bhuj. He would be extremely polite, soft and brief in his talk. Reflection of royalty and nobility would always be visible. He would be clad in plain white or light hue trouser and shirt. Similar extreme simplicity and tranquility would be

reflected in his speech and thoughts.

He had great attachment and soft corner for ‘Vihang’. He would regularly contribute his articles for ‘Vihang’; he never let me starved of these. It was a matter of privilege to read his articles. Though his education was through English medium, his command over Gujarati language was laudable. His writing had a unique style; which I loved the most. I took great care to retain that style while editing his articles. His articles reveal his in-depth knowledge about bird life of Kachchh and concern about its environmental problems.

Birdwatchers of Gujarat benefited from the great naturalist’s thoughtful writing, regularly published in *Vihang*. With his demise, ‘Vihang’ has lost a friend, philosopher and guide; the loss just can not be made good. ‘Vihang’, on behalf of the entire birdwatcher community pays the heartiest tribute to M. K. Himmatsinhji.

(With courtesy from ‘Vihang’ 2(2), 2008; Translated by Satish Jai)

Late Shri M.K. Himmatsinhji – Glimpses of His Life

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Maharaj Kumar Himmatsinhji was the youngest of three sons of H. H. Vijayrajji, the Maharao of Kachchh. With his sad demise on 22nd February 2008, Kachchh has lost the ‘peoples prince’ and India a great naturalist.

Born at Bhuj on 9th October 1928, Himmatsinhji’s education began in the royal family and later he studied at Rajkumar College, Rajkot. He had an in depth knowledge about history, geography, geology and environment of Kachchh. Ornithology was his favourite subject; rather he inherited this from his grandfather Maharao Khengarji, who was also a high ranking naturalist. In fact, breeding of Flamingoes in the Great Rann of Kachchh was discovered in 1893 by H. H. Khengarji.

Himmatsinhji had keen interest in bird behaviour. His detailed and authentic knowledge

regarding the birdlife of desert area was acclaimed at international level. He had recorded a number of bird species in Kachchh for the first time, of which sighting of Spangled Drongo (*Dicrurus hottentottus*) is noteworthy. He had traveled extensively in Kachchh accompanying (late) Dr. Salim Ali. Apart from ‘Vihang’, his valuable observations and articles have been published in ‘Flamingo’, ‘Newsletter for Birdwatchers’, ‘Hornbill’, ‘Quarterly Journal of Bombay Natural History Society’ etc. He was a source of inspiration for birdwatcher and nature lovers of Kachchh.

Though not a politician, he was elected as a member of the parliament in 1962 from Kachchh constituency under the banner of ‘Swatantra Party’ of C. Rajgopalachari and served as a member till 1967.

He was much concerned about security of Kachchh and the nation at the times of foreign invasion. He was the one amongst those who recommended formation of a special wing like "Border Security Force" (BSF). He had served the Worldwide Fund of Nature (WWF) and had been President of its Rajkot Unit. He had keen interest in welfare of the people of Kachchh. He used to ponder difficulties faced by common men and used to write and participate in efforts to resolve such issues without being bothered about belonging to Royal family. In his writings clarity and balanced thinking, command over language and absolute neutrality were always reflected.

He was all the time very much concerned about the environment of Kachchh. In his opinion, if proper conservation measures are taken, Chari dhandh located at the farthest end of Banni area of

Kachchh, would prove to be superior to famous Bharatpur Bird Sanctuary.

He would express his point of view with due clarity on various environmental issues; be it declaring Chhari dhandh a protected area, nuisance of invasion of *Prosopis juliflora*, destruction of mangroves, adverse effect to indigenous flora on account of its usage for charcoal making or any other issues pertaining to the environment of Kachchh. On the eve of his death, he expressed concern about conservation of Chhari dhandh and hoped that fishing in that area should be banned.

The proper tribute to such a great naturalist would be to work as mission to realize his expectation about conservation of environment.

(With courtesy from 'Vihang' 2(2), 2008; Translated by Janki Teli)

Life Sketch of M. K. Himmatsinhji

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Shri M. K. Himmatsinhji was born on October 9, 1928 at Bhuj, Kachchh. He was the youngest son of H. H. Vijayrajji, the Maharao of Kachchh. He got his primary education at home from Mr. Spark, a well known naturalist who recorded Sociable Lapwing at Mandvi in Kachchh in 1947. He then joined Rajkumar College, Rajkot and completed studies up to Senior Cambridge. He developed keen friendship with Lavkumar saheb; the duo served the environmental front of Gujarat and India.

He served as a member of the parliament from Kachchh area from 1962 to 1967. He represented environmental issues at international level as well.

His hobby was to study nature, especially birds. He inherited this hobby from his great grandfather, H. H. Pragmalji who was a bird lover. Maharao Pragmalji had planned to establish Natural History Museum in Kachchh which as Himmatsinhji told, remained unfulfilled because of his early demise. His Grandfather, H. H. Khengarji was also a well known naturalist. He was the first to report breeding of Greater Flamingo in the Great Rann of Kachchh in 1892; the information was published in the Journal of BNHS. During his rule, scientific studies on birds were undertaken in Gujarat,

especially in Kachchh. Dr. Ferdinand Stoliczka, a geologist, was evidently the first person to make systematic collection of birds in Kachchh as early as 1872. His records of birds, lizards and snakes are very useful even today. The first edition of a book on "Birds of Cutch" was prepared by Mr. Hugh Palin in 1878. This landmark in the history of Kachchh was revised and republished by Captain Lester in 1904. This book was once again revised and published by his father Shri Vijayrajji by inviting Dr. Salim Ali to undertake a detailed study on the birds of Kachchh. Shri Himmatsinhji met Dr. Salim Ali in 1944-45 during the survey in Kachchh. The bondage grew stronger. Himmatsinhji used to remain present during the frequent visits by Dr. Salim Ali in Kachchh for bird ringing programmes. Shri Himmatsinhji was in touch with Shri Dharmakumarsinhji, a senior ornithologist from Bhavnagar. Shri Shivraj Kumar Khachar of Jasdan was his good friend. He visited Hingolghadh quite often.

He was guide to many of birdwatchers from Kachchh like S. N. Varu, Naveen Bapat, Ashwin Pomal, etc. He used to help us in preparing notes of our significant bird sightings. He inculcated in us the habit of maintaining accuracy in bird identification

and recording every minute details like time, date place of sighting, habitat type etc. He used to advise us to refer to the field guides/ books. Present day passion to discover something new brings adverse outcomes. He used to explain birdwatchers how sightings made by people coming from outside Kachchh, "discovering" new species following the faulty maps and reference books prepared by the English people were erroneous and creating confusion. He used to say that this was not an appropriate approach to scientific studies on birds. A system was developed in Kachchh to declare a record of new species after observing it minutely by Himmatsinhji and other members of Pelican Nature Club. Photography and video recording was also being done.

When I first recorded Stoliczka's Bushchat (*Sexicola macrorhyncha*) in 1999 with photographic evidence, Himmatsinhji opined that it was more like the female of Pied Bushchat. He was so obstinate for accuracy that when I showed the photographs to him In December 2001, he was not ready to accept it as Stoliczka's Bushchat. But as per his nature, he did not let me be discouraged. On 6th January 2001, he came personally to me with S. N. Varu and said that he was extremely happy on my sighting of Stoliczka's Bushchat, which he did not observe in his 55 years' long career in Kachchh. He congratulated me for re-discovering the species after 128 years. He asked me to show the old photograph which I had shown him earlier. At that time he told me that had not given his opinion about the species without verification, though he doubted it to be a Stoliczka's

Bushchat. The note on this sighting has been published in the Journal of Bombay Natural History Society of 2004 volume 101 (2): 323-324. This species was first collected from Raper tahsil by Dr. F. Stoliczka and published the paper in the Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal in 1872.

Late Himmatsinhji had keen interest in behavioural patterns of birds. He had recorded several new species of birds in Kachchh; important ones being Hair-crested Drongo or Spangled Drongo. His several notes have been published in the Journal of Bombay Natural History Society and Newsletter for Birdwatchers.

He was a founder president of Pelican Nature Club of Bhuj. He was an adviser to the Gujarat Institute of Desert Ecology (GUIDE). He was also associated with several social/religious organisations like Lion's club, Rural bank, Madansinhji Rajput Chhatralaya, Matano Madh etc.

He used to write about birds and other environmental issues in the 'Kachchhmitra' - a Gujarati daily published from Bhuj. He was well aware of the history of Kachchh. Two years ago he published details about Kori Creek on international border in 'Kachchhmitra' and made people aware of the facts. This resulted into discussion with the officials of military and systematic presentation before the international commission.

With his demise, we have not just lost a great ornithologist but also a master of history, geography and culture of Kachchh.

(Translated by Dr. Mahendra Chotaliya)

Memories of Shri M. K. Himmatsinhji

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M. K. Himmatsinhji was Ornithologist of International repute. His in-depth knowledge of Ornithology of Kachchh is reflected in his field notes published over the years in the Journal of Bombay Natural History Society. He was the first to tell that the calls of Grey Francolin (Katilak Katilak.....) are the calls made by both male and female simultaneously. Dr. Salim Ali encouraged him to write note on his observations about this behavior.

I first met M. K. Himmatsinhji at Rajkot in December 1989 during the Asian Crane Congress. His constant wish to start a Bird Migration Project in Kachchh was materialized then and as a result we were at Kachchh on 3rd January 1990. The BNHS Bird Migration Study Project started in Kachchh; Mr. S. A. Hussain was the Principal Co-ordinator of the project. A field station was established at Fulay village in Banni.

Ever since I got hooked to Kachchh, Bava Saheb (we affectionately addressed him so) used to visit Fulay to see our work. I had the opportunity to publish two research papers with Bava Saheb on the subject of Grey Hypocolius in Kachchh; S. N. Varu was one of the co-author.

We had traveled together to Kuar Bet, Shakti Bet and Sardar Post to study flooding of the Great Rann and the bird concentration there.

M. K. Himmatsinhji always inspired all young birders in Kachchh and Gujarat. His writings in Gujarati daily *Kachchhmitra* kept the people of Kachchh informed about the environmental problems of the district including problems of mangrove destruction to *Prosopis juliflora* invasion. His readings and writings were duly updated.

Bava Saheb, inspite of his ill health, visited my Wildlife Photo Exhibition at Nakhtrana on 2nd October 2007, which was the last occasion when I met him.

I acknowledge with respect that if Bava Saheb was not amongst us, we would not have been in Kachchh. The credit for my settling down in Kachchh goes to Bava Saheb.

M. K. Himmatsinhji's contribution to Indian Ornithology will always be cherished. We, the birdwatchers of Kachchh, strongly feel that to honour Bava Saheb "Chhari-Dhand" should be declared as "Himmat Bird Conservation Reserve".

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(Abbreviations:

- JBNHS = Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society**
NLBW=Newsletter for Birdwatchers)

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- M.K.Himmatsinhjini Kalame (2008) Vol. 2 (1): 21.
- M.K.Himmatsinhjini Kalame (2007) Vol. 1 (3): 21.
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- Patra setu:"Tirumpti" na lekh badal abhinandan (2007) Sr. issue 30: 17.
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- Patra setu: Dudhraj rang avashya badale chhe (2004) Sr. issue 23: 18.
- Nirikshan nondh:Chas, Popat, Chibari (2004) Sr. issue 23: 16.
- M.K.Himmatsinhjini Kalame Serial (2004) Sr.issue 22: 26.
- M.K.Himmatsinhjini Kalame (2004) Sr. issue 21: 38.
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- Patra setu: Kachchh ma Hanjnu prajanan tatha apamrutyu (2004) Sr. issue 22: 23.
- M.K.Himmatsinhjini Kalame (2003) Sr. issue 20: 27.
- Patra setu:Pakshi nirikshanma choksai jaruri (2003) Sr. issue 20: 22.
- Patra setu: a few random comments (2003) Sr. issue 19: 27-28.
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- Patra setu: Shaheri pakshioni doddham (2002) Sr. issue 15: 22.
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- Nirikshan nondh: Kachchhma safed surkhab (2001) Sr. issue 14: 7.
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- Tetar vishe (2000) Sr. issue 7: 5.
- Patra setu: Tilor (Houbara) saame jokham (1999) Sr. issue 4: 15.
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ARTICLES

Sightings of Painted Sandgrouse from Kachchh

S. N. Varu

Junavas, Temple Street, Madhapar, Tal. Bhuj, Kachchh- 370 020

Painted Sandgrouse (*Pterocles indicus*) is a resident species of Northern Pakistan and India (Ali and Reply 1983; Grimmett *et al.* 1999). However, Kazmierczak (2000) has shown in its distribution map as a species having former distribution in India without any recent records. Considering this fact, Mavadia (2006) described sighting of this species at Sardar Sarovar dam in Narmada district of Gujarat as an important record for Gujarat. Till the publication

(Mavadia, 2006). I was not aware about the scarcity of published records of this species from India in recent past. Though this species is not frequently recorded, I have seen it on several occasions in Kachchh district of Gujarat State. I am quite sure that other birdwatchers of Gujarat would have seen it in other parts of the state too. My records of Painted Sandgrouse in Kachchh district, Gujarat are listed below and shown on a map.

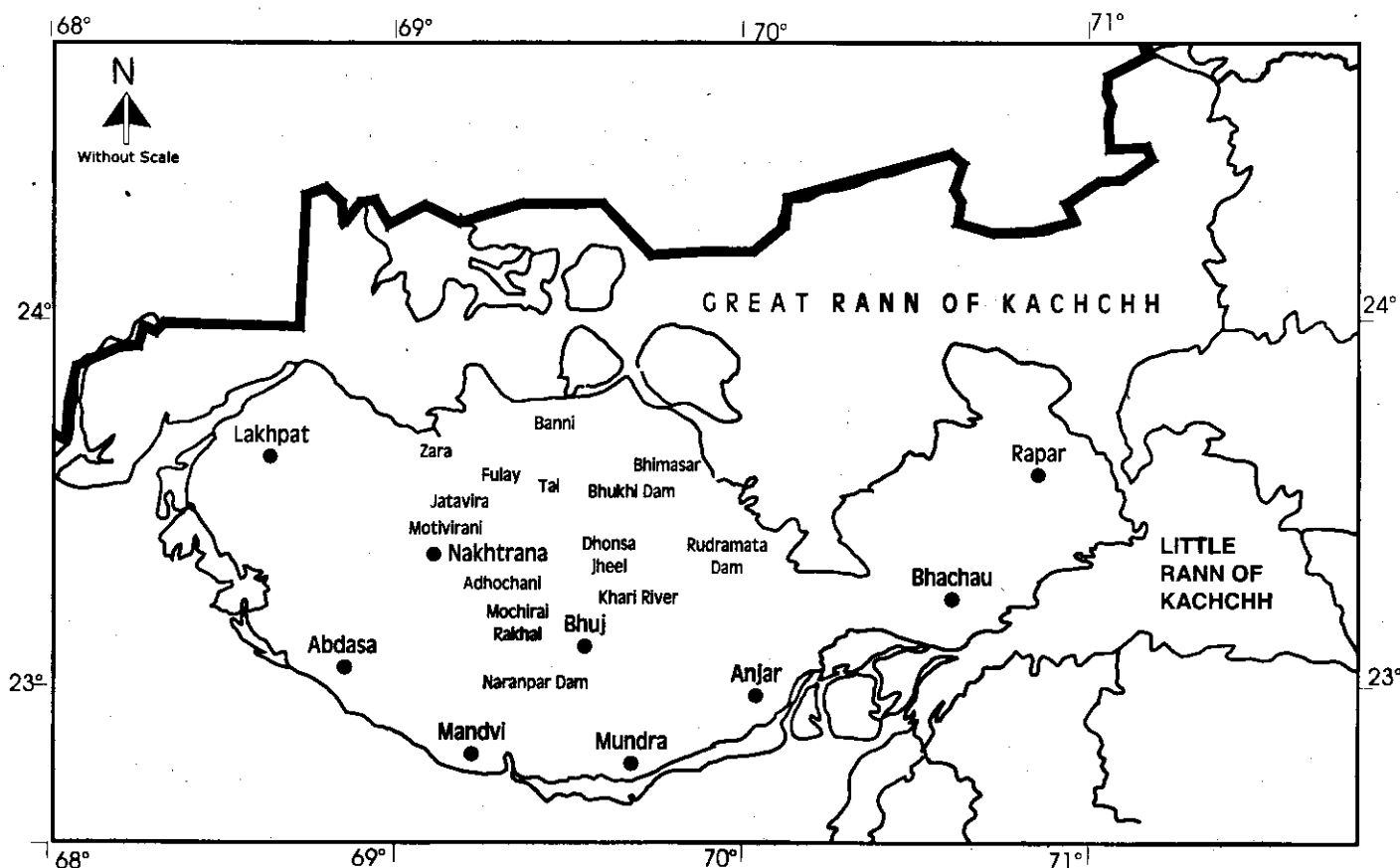


Figure 1 : Records of Painted Sandgrouse in Kachchh

Table-1: Sightings of Painted Sandgrouse in Kachchh

Sr. No.	Date	Place	Taluka	Number
1	16-07-1977	Khari River	Bhuj	01
2	16-07-1977	Mochirai Rakhal	Bhuj	01
3	13-08-1977	Khari River	Bhuj	01
4	05-05-1986	Dhonsa Jheel	Bhuj	50
5	21-09-1986	Adhochani Reservoir	Nakhatrana	02
6	08-11-1987	Bet. Bhuj & Khari River	Bhuj	02
7	22-12-1987	Rudramata dam	Bhuj	06
8	22-12-1987	Bet. Bhuj & Rudramata dam	Bhuj	02
9	16-01-1988	Rudramata dam	Bhuj	03
10	07-04-1989	Naranpar dam	Bhuj	03
11	15-10-1989	Pond at Tal village	Bhuj	03
12	16-12-1990	Bet. Jatavira-Moti Virani	Nakhatrana	03
13	14-04-1994	Pond at Fulay Village	Nakhatrana	04
14	07-05-1994	Dhonsa Jheel	Bhuj	01
15	24-11-2002	Zara Village	Lakhpat	06
16	16-02-2003	Bhukhi dam	Nakhatrana	02
17	16-02-2003	Bhimsar	Nakhatrana	02
18	02-06-2007	Bet. Loria-Bhirandiari	Bhuj	02
19	20-12-2007	Bitra	Abdasa	10
20	09-03-2008	Palarghuna	Nakhatrana	01

During these 31 year's records, frequency of sightings were maximum in Bhuj taluka followed by Nakhatrana, Abdasa and Lakhpat taluka (Table 1, Figure 1). It is also true that field visits were maximum in these talukas only and the same is reflected in the sighting records. Since the species is recorded in all north-western talukas of Kachchh, it is likely to be occurring in other talukas of Kachchh too; however, supporting records are required. Ali (1945) considered it as a fairly common species in Kachchh. Ali (1954) had collected specimens at Chaduva Rakhal (Bhuj), Mata-no-Madh and also noted species at Nakhatrana and Bhujia Fort (Bhuj). He had also recorded breeding in the month of March; however, there is no recent breeding record.

Water holes are the right place to watch sandgrouse in arid and semi-arid areas. Usually, two or three birds used to be sighted near the water source, but once I saw 50 birds at Dhonsa Jheel in mid summer.

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Grimmett, R., Inskipp, C. and Inskipp, T. (1999). Birds of the Indian Subcontinent. Oxford University Press, Delhi.

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

Mavadia, D. (2006). Painted Sandgrouse at Kevadia colony, Gujarat. *Indian Birds* 2(1): 23.

[In recent past, the species has been reported in the bird checklist of Hingolghadh Nature Education Sanctuary (Naik R. M., Murthy M. S., Rao Y. N., Mundkur T. and Praveez, R. 1990. Ecology of Hingolghadh Nature Education Sanctuary. Dept. Biosciences, Saurashtra University, Rajkot, India) as well as Gir National Park (Singh, M. (-)). Biodiversity of Gir. Gir Welfare Fund. Sasan Gir). These reports are in limited circulation and hence not easily available. Several birdwatchers have sighted this species in the Gir forest and their sightings have been appeared on internet. Such sightings have not been published in reputed journals/newsletters, hence incorrect distribution is reflected in the map by Kazmierczak (2000).-Eds.]

BIRDING NOTES

Sighting of Merlin at Kumbharia Check Dam

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I went on a birding trip with my brother Rohit to Kumbharia Dam, near Tikar, district Surendranagar, on 15th January 2006. The site is located 45 km north-east to Morbi town at the edge of the Little Rann of Kachchh. During the trip we saw a small falcon sitting on a *Prosopis juliflora* tree. We took photograph and observed the bird for a few minutes. It had dark grey upperparts with black streaks and streaked underparts. A black sub-terminal tail bar was also visible. The size was small. It flew towards a wheat field and caught an insect on wing. It flew with short wing beats.

We enlarged the original photograph for better identification. The black margins on face and tail bar were visible. It had grayish upperparts. Its size was an important factor for its identification. It

was smaller in size and also the overall 'Jizz' of the bird was not like that of either a Red-headed Falcon (*Falco chicquera*) or the Common Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*) or any other Falcon. Based on this, the bird was identified as Merlin (*Falco columbarius*). Merlin is shown as rare winter visitor to north-western India by Kazmierczak (2000) and Naoroji (2007). Hence sighting of Merlin at Kumbharia check dam is a noteworthy record for Gujarat.

References:

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

Naoroji, R. (2007). Birds of Prey of the Indian Subcontinent. Om Books International, New Delhi.

White-rumped Shama at Girnar Hills, Junagadh

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I visited 'Jatashankar', a sacred place on the Girnar Hill, Junagadh with my friend Arjun Virani on 17th February, 2008. From 'Jatashankar' steps lead towards 'Bharatvan' and 'Sheshavan' forest areas. This path is frequently visited by people during monsoon who enjoy bathing in small waterfalls amidst the dense plant growths. I saw a bird on a *Karanj* (*Holoptelia integrifolia*) tree with black head, rufous belly, white patch on wings and a long black tail. I had not seen this bird ever in 28 years of my birdwatching. When we referred the field guide it was identified as White-rumped Shama (*Copsychus malabaricus*). Unfortunately, I did not carry camera and hence was unable to record photographic evidence. To my knowledge, White-rumped Shama is not recorded earlier at Girnar or Gir National Park and Sanctuary. Hence, this is perhaps the first report of White-rumped Shama from Gir Protected Area and Saurashtra region. On the way up, we also saw a pair of Asian Paradise-Flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi*) (male with white plumage), Indian Treepie (*Dendrocitta vagabunda*), Oriental White-eye (*Zosterops palpebrosus*), Tickell's Blue-Flycatcher

(*Cyornis tickelliae*) and Great Tit (*Parus major*) to complete a very enthralling bird watching session. At 10:30 hrs, we stopped near a small pond where we saw a Bluethroat (*Luscinia svecica*) actively feeding on insects. This was an excellent birding trip to Girnar where some rare birds were sighted.

[White-rumped Shama is not recorded earlier in Gir or Girnar area. Dharmakumarsinhji, (1955) or Ali (1954, 1955) has not recorded its presence in Saurashtra region. Even, checklist of the birds of Gir National Park and Sanctuary, prepared by WWF - India, Rajkot Branch (1985) or State Forest Department does not mention record of this species. However, there is an indirect record of its occurrence in Gir Forest. Shri Bhanubhai Adhvaryu (Vihang, Shishir 2006, Serial Issue No. 27, page 19) described this species that he saw at Hanuman gala, in the eastern fringe of Gir in Amreli district on 5th May 2005 but could not identify it as White-rumped Shama. Certainly, White-rumped Shama might be very rare with restricted distribution in Gir Forest. - Eds.]

Status of Eastern Calandra-Lark in Kachchh

S. N. Varu

Junavas, Temple Street, Madhapar, Tal. Bhuj, Kachchh- 370 020

The Eastern Calandra-Lark (*Melanocorypha bimaculata*) was sighted first time in Kachchh by M. K Himmatsinhji on 05.02.1960 at Bada, Ta- Mandvi. Thereafter it has been recorded regularly as winter visitor in Kachchh. I have seen these birds at following places in Kachchh:

Rudramata dam, Ta –Bhuj	09.01.88	10
Chhari Dhandh, ta –Nakhatrana	25.12.92	10-12
Chhari Dhandh, Ta –Nakhatrana	12.12.93	07-08
Chhari Dhandh, Ta –Nakhatrana	13.12.93	03

There is good rain in Kachchh this year (2007). Birds were recorded at following places:

Fatehgadh bid to Rapar	27.01.07	06
Bhanada, Ta-Abdasa	31.01.07	05
Kunathia, Ta –Abdasa	01.02.07	25

Thus, this bird visits Kachchh in good year and not regularly.

Reference:

Himmatsinhji, M. K. (1960). The eastern Calandra Lark in Kutch. *J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* 53: 408-409.

Good Number of European Rollers in Kachchh-Saurashtra

S. N. Varu

Junavas, Temple Street, Madhapar, Tal. Bhuj, Kachchh- 370 020

There was good rain during 2006 in Kachchh. Ample grasses and shrubs emerged which helped multiplication of insects/ small reptiles and ultimately attracted many birds. One of them is European Roller

(*Coracias garrulus*) which is an autumn passage migrant in Gujarat. Information on my sightings of European Rollers in Kachchh –Saurashtra during September to November 2006 is given bellow:

03.09.06	Chitrod, Ta –Bhachau	01	01.10.06	Between Loria –Bhirandiyara, Banni	03
03.09.06	Nanda bet (Little Rann of Kachchh)	04	06.10.06	Between Loria –Bhirandiyara, Banni	06
09.09.06	Between Bhachau –Dhrangadhra	03	15.10.06	Mangavana (Ta –Nakhatrana) to Nalia to Narayan sarovar –Koteshwar (on 26 places)	137
10.09.06	Between Halvad –Maliya	07	12.11.06	Between Shervo –Hodka dhandh, Banni	03
17.09.06	Don dam Ta-Mandvi	04	14.11.06	Kiro Hill, Fulay, near Chhari dhandh	01
17.09.06	Between Don dam –Mandvi	05			
30.09.06	Devaliya, Ta –Anjar	01			
30.09.06	Between Ratnal –Kurma, Ta –Bhuj	03			

Corrigendum

Last sentence of the article on “Larks of Kachchh” published in *Flamingo* Vol 4 (1 & 2) 2006 “I sighted Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark at Kuar Bet of Great Rann in 1960 and at Nalia in 2003” should be read as “Black-crowned Sparrow-Lark was recorded and some birds were ringed by BNHS at Kuar Bet of Great Rann in 1960. It was recently sighted by Shri R. D. Jadeja at Nalia in 2003”.

VULTURE UPDATE

VULTURE AWARENESS PROGRAMME AT MORBI.

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Morbi is the only town in Rajkot district where Indian White-backed Vulture (*Gyps bengalensis*) breeds at present; however, their number is declining. Number of birds sighted during 2004 was around 45; in 2005 it was 17, in 2006 just a single and in the current year 7 birds with one successful nest. They are using for their nesting and roosting, old Peepal (*Ficus religiosa*) trees of about 70 feet height situated in police residential quarters area in the middle of city.

An awareness programme on vulture conservation was held on 26th May 2007 evening at Morbi. School children and residents of this area were explained about importance of vultures and the crisis they are facing. A slide show of photographs of

vultures and the film "Vanishing Vulture" dubbed in Gujarati were screened just under the roosting trees. It was followed by question-answer session. It was revealed during discussion that though residing in their vicinity, people here were unaware of struggle of vultures for survival. The booklet "Gidh Bachavo", published by Surat Nature Club, was distributed to the participants and it was appealed to to save trees of where vultures nest and roost.

This programme was arranged by Professor Maruti and Shri Narendra Doshi of Mayur Nature Club, Morbi. Shri Rajdeep Jhala helped in this programme. Police sub-inspector Mr. Pathan remained present in programme on our invitation. We were satisfied with the response of the participants.

Report on Vulture Conservation Programme

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Vulture population has declined drastically in a very short period through out the country. Major causes for this decline are intoxication due to Diclofenac –a pain killer drug present in animal carcass given as treatment to sick animals, non-availability of food due to change in animal disposal system, presence of large number of feral dogs at carcass dumping site driving away the vultures from feeding, destruction of large trees –their roosting and nesting sites, poisoning due to pesticide sprayed over the dead bodies of the animals died in natural calamities, injuries to birds in flight due to kite thread during kite festival, disease outbreaks etc. BCSG Surat chapter and Surat Nature Club have initiated Vulture Conservation Project in the areas where the vultures are still surviving. Surat harbours good number of vultures in coastal area near Hajira. Villages in this area –Suvali, Junagam, Rajgiri, Damka, Hajira and Mora are covered under this project.

A vulture feeding site near Hajira is created to provide Diclofenac-free food to vultures. Several

meetings were arranged with almost all the shepherds in nearby area and explained them the role of vultures as scavengers and cause of their deaths. We explained them how Diclofenac is dangerous to the vultures. They were convinced and agreed to give carcass for vultures as and when their cattle die. They inform us about the death of their animals. We collect the carcass as early as possible and carry to the feeding site. A butcher immediately skins it and leaves the carcass for vulture feeding. Initially 4 to 5 vultures used turn up at feeding site. As the days passed, more and more vultures got attracted; now a days, 40 to 60 vultures are regularly visiting the site.

We have also arranged several meetings with veterinary practitioners in Surat district and briefed about the side effects of Diclofenac to vultures when given to sick animal as pain killer. We request them to use Meloxicam –an alternative to Diclofenac. In fact Meloxicam is very expensive to Diclofenac (almost three times) but we supply them at subsidized rate (at a rate equivalent to that of Diclofenac) in sufficient quantity whenever they need. So far, more

than 2000 bottles of Meloxicam have been distributed.

All these activities are also extended to Mahuva, Rajula and Kodinar. Apart from this, many of the Panjarapoles have also been contacted and informed about the deadly effect of Diclofenac and requested not to use it for treating sick cattle but to use Meloxicam instead.

Awareness programmes are conducted in these villages. A film on 'Vanishing Vultures' dubbed in local language is shown to them. T-shirts and booklets with slogan 'Chalo Gidh Bachaviye' are distributed. Several primary and secondary schools in this area are approached and students are explained the role of vultures in our ecosystem and need to

conserve them. Similar programmes are also carried out at other vulture harbouring pockets viz., Mahuva, Kodinar and Rajula in Saurashtra. There is a good response from villagers and school children. They informed us about the dead or sick vultures which fell down from the nest or roosting tree. Sick and injured vultures are rescued and released back in the nesting area. Serious cases are transferred to Junagadh, with the help of forest department officials.

We also conduct vulture counts at regular interval at various places near Hajira and the Dangs in south Gujarat. Vulture population at Surat seems quite steady, thanks to all these efforts.

RECENT PUBLICATIONS ON BIRDS OF GUJARAT

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- Khacher, L. (2007). A flight down memory lane 2: Photographing birds in the Ninteen-forties. *Indian Birds* 3(1): 36-39.
- Khacher, L. (2007). The sky scan. *Indian Birds* 3(1): 33-34.
- Sunder, K. S. G., Deomurari, A.; Bhatia, Y. and Narayanan, S. P. (2007). Records of Blacknecked Stork *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus* breeding pairs fledging four chicks. *Forktail* 23: 161-163.
- Tere, A., Upadhyay, K. and Pathak, P. (2007). An unusual mating behaviour of Blue Rock Pigeon *Columbia livia*. *Indian Birds* 3(4): 151.
- Varu, S. N. and Pomal, A. S. (2007). Occurrence and breeding of Black-necked Stork *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus* in Kachchh district, Gujarat, India. *Indian Birds* 3(3): 104-105.

SOME INTERESTING BIRD SIGHTINGS

1. Eurasian Curlew (*Numenius arquata*) - 3000+ on 22nd January 2006 on muddy coast near Juni Akhol, Taluka Khambhat, District - Anand. B. M. Parasharya & P. D. Chavda, Anand.
2. Painted Stork (*Mycteria leucocephala*) nests - 45+ destroyed due to uprooting of nesting tree (Banyan) at Luna colony, Dist. Vadodara on 26th September 2007. -Kartik Upadhyay, Vadodara.
3. A Common Pochard (*Aythya ferina*) at Devsar Dam, near Billimora on 27th January 2008. First record for this area. -Mohammed Jat & Jignesh Joshi, Valsad; Rajendra M Desai & Subhashbhai Shah, Navsari.
4. A pair of Red-headed Falcon (*Falco chicquera*) seen on an electrical poll, 20 km NE on Surendranagar-Malvan Road on 23rd February 2008. The same pair was seen matting on 25th, 26th & 29th February 2008 during our visit to the place. -Vishal Thoria, Chiku Vora and Faruk Chauhan, Surendranagar.
5. Red-headed Falcon (*Falco chicquera*) nests -2 near Surendranagar on 21st February 2008. - Chiku Vora, Surendranagar
6. Sarus Crane (*Grus antigone*) - 11 at Machhu River, Morbi, Dist. Rajkot on 8th April 2007. - Ashok Mashru, Rajkot.

7. Water Pipit (*Anthus spinoletta*) - 60+ at Chhari Dhandh, Kachchh on 13th February 2007. -J. K. Tiwari, Moti Virani, Kachchh.
8. Bronze-winged Jacana (*Metopidius indicus*) - 1 at Ranjitsagar dam, Near Jamnagar on 28th January 2007. -Suraj P. Joshi, Jamnagar.
9. Black-breasted Weaver (*Ploceus benghalensis*) at Ranjitsagar dam, Near Jamnagar on 28th January 2007. -Suraj P. Joshi, Jamnagar.
10. Caspian Plover (*Charadrius asiaticus*) at Hodka Thath, Banni, Kachchh on 14th February 2007. -J. K. Tiwari, Moti Virani, Kachchh.
11. Common Buzzard (*Buteo buteo*) at Sarvo Dhandh, Kachchh in February 2007. -J. K. Tiwari, Moti Virani, Kachchh.
12. Sand Martin (*Riparia riparia*) -5000+ at Chhari Dhandh and other nearby wetlands during November 2006 to March 2007. J. K. -Tiwari, Moti Virani, Kachchh.
13. Crab-Plover (*Dromas ardeola*)- 60 seen near Mundra coast, Kachchh, on 29th January 2008. -J. K. Tiwari, Moti Virani, Kachchh.
14. A pair of Laggar (*Falco jugger*) with nest on Khijri (*Prosopis cineraria*) tree at Mandav veedi near Than, district Surendranagar on 26th January 2008. -Vishal Thoria, Chiku Vora and Faruk Chauhan, Surendranagar.
15. Alpine Swift (*Tachymarptis melba*) - 600 on migration in Banni - seen on 25th January 2008. -J. K. Tiwari, Moti Virani, Kachchh.

Tanzania Defends Tata's Soda Ash Plant

TANZANIA'S state-run National Development Corporation (NDC) has brushed aside concerns raised by conservation groups that Tata Chemical's proposed soda ash plant would threaten Lesser Flamingos (*Phoenicopterus minor*) visiting lake Natron. It now plans to shift the plant 35 km from the lakeshore and says this would help preserve the pink flamingos, a major tourist attraction. Conservationists argue the move will not help because the plant will continue to extract water from lake

The lake is the breeding ground for about three-quarters of the world's lesser flamingos. Tata Chemicals in collaboration with the Tanzanian government plans to extract water from lake Natron to produce soda ash for industrial use (see 'Bird hit', *Down To Earth*, September 30, 2007).

The Lake Natron Consultative Group—an umbrella group of environmental organization—fears that the industrial extraction will affect the delicate mineral balance in the lake, killing the algae which the lesser flamingos feed on. It says the flamingos could become extinct in five years if their habitat is destroyed. NDC on the other hand is trying to prove scientifically that the lake has renewing ability and industrial extraction will not affect its ecology.

In a temporary reprieve, the plant was put on hold in November 2007 when the Tanzanian Government asked Lake Natron Resources (a firm jointly owned by Tata Chemicals and the Tanzanian government) to produce a new environmental management plan and consider other sites for soda ash extraction.

From: Down To Earth, 13 July 2008

VULTURE CELL – BCSG

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

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Shri Kartik Shartri, Ashokwadi, Panchvati, Ellisbridge, Ahmedabad- 380 006. e-mail: 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;

FROM THE PRESIDENT

Playing the Devil's Advocate helps to clarify considerable confusions, just like separating butter from milk which involves a great deal of agitation or, being more modern and updated, like the process which separated the various oils from crude to produce petrol, diesel, aviation fuel, etc.; in the same manner, all people are aware of birds around them, some more than others perhaps; some among them spend time watching them and often go to considerable expense and 'discomfort' in the pursuit of what would seem to be a rather idle pastime; half a century earlier to our times, individuals went with a gun to bring back partridges and ducks for food, today, the "sportsman" of earlier times goes out with a camera to 'shoot' birds; individuals with a literary bend of mind would write books and those with artistic tendencies, paint them. Earlier still in time men circumvented birds to collect them for food for themselves and for sale; in our times, the great experiences of such men have helped immensely in the much publicized bird banding for scientific purposes even as we frown on their activities. Areas were set aside for the pleasure of a few privileged to indulge in extravagant shoots and as often as not, wild animals, birds among them, were the property of the aristocracy: most of our present day sanctuaries and national parks were earlier game preserves of the Maharajas or favored shooting blocks of the British; restrictions and regulations of those times spawned the wildlife and associated legislations of our times; the "man animal conflicts" of our times are the continuation of those times. Birds were kept as pets and a thriving trade existed that continues to be a matter of serious concern today.

Birds lived their lives and men theirs and

there was plenty of space for mankind and birds to flourish, often enter into conflict and, in the case of wildlife, sought after for various reasons to sustain economical pursuits. All the varied facets of interaction down the ages are today still operating and generating concerns among those interested in birds and; there is great confusion. All those of us concerned about conservation of birds will have to define these conflicting trends and evolve very clear action plans since, with the degradation of the environment on every side, birds are being extirpated. In the democratic milieu of our times, we have very a significant and defining role to play. Birdwatching and bird photography are self indulgences unless there is concern for the welfare of the objects of pursuit. Concern also is not enough, it has to be translated into personal understandings and life styles that will help iron out the conflicts and create a world where mankind and birds can live in harmony. The irony is that this is absolutely possible since birds need space to lead their lives and providing them space is possible even in the smallest of homes.

Can we come together and develop a pressure group that would influence the powers that be to resolve conflicts? But even as we tilt our lances and charge against the windmills like the Don Quixote, how many of us are examining our own motives in pursuing our hobby? Do we have any vested interests? Are we attempting to provide salve to our egos? Is some economic element involved in what we are doing? Is professional advancement involved? I pray I have the capacity to generate a "Samudra Manthana" that will separate the "Veesha" from the "Amrita".

-Lavkumar Khachar..

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