

## Short Birding Notes



### Sighting of Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo* at Rajkot

On the 24th of November 2022, Dr. Ketan Bavishi and I went to Vagudad village road for birding. While returning from there around 8.30 AM, I watched a raptor bird on a light pole and suddenly found it a Eurasian Hobby (*Falco subbuteo*). We stopped there and took some photos and videos. The bird was sitting for a long time there, and Black Drongo (*Dicrusus macrocerus*) came to disturb it, and then Hobby flew away very far. This is probably the 2nd record of the Eurasian hobby in Rajkot this season known to me. As per status, Uncommon/rare passage migrant. Sight reports from Little and Greater Rann of Kutch and other areas in Saurashtra and Gujarat.

**Priyank Dhami:** Rajkot



### Western Marsh Harrier feeding on a Demoiselle Crane

On 21st March 2023, I was alone birding in the Vadla area, Nalsarovar. I saw a Western Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*) feeding on a Demoiselle Crane (*Grus virgo*). There were three Greater Spotted Eagles (*Clanga clanga*) nearby. Two were near the kill and one was sitting a little far. I observed the event for 20 minutes and took photos and videos using my P900. This was 1st time I saw a Marsh Harrier feeding on a Demossile Crane. Previously I have seen Marsh Harrier feeding on Little Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*). This is a noteworthy feeding behaviour of Western Marsh Harrier.

**Sabbir Belim:** Nalsarovar.



### Sightings of Indian Spotted Eagle *Clanga hastata* near Porbandar

Indian Spotted Eagle *Clanga hastata* is sighted regularly at Mokarsagar Wetland (Gosabara Wetland), situated near Porbandar. We watched the Indian Spotted Eagle from 2015 to 2022 at the Mokarsagar. This wetland is a well-known place for bird watching, attracting a large number of birds in the winter. The last sighting of an Indian Spotted Eagle Near Porbandar was on February 23, 2022, at around 11:30 hrs. One adult Indian Spotted Eagle was seen soaring in the sky. It went out of sight in a few minutes. There were marshes nearby, which are a preferred habitat for the Indian Spotted Eagle. Indian Spotted Eagle *Clanga hastata* is status is 'vulnerable' and thought to have a small and declining population, threatened by the conversion and disturbance of forested habitats within its range (BirdLife International 2023). It is thought to be uncommon to a rare resident in India, patchily distributed from the Gangetic Plains, south to Gujarat and Maharashtra, Central India, eastern and Northeast India (Naoroji 2006). It is rare to uncommon in various parts of Gujarat, but it is possible that it could be breeding in south Gujarat (Mori 2018 & Ganpule et al. 2022).

**Punit Karia & Konark Karia:** C/o Mijbani Caterers, "Nirant", Bungalow No. 27, Jalaram Colony, National Highway, Porbandar 360575. Email: Konark.karia@yahoo.in



### **Sighting of Indian Vultures (*Gyps indicus*) at Kadana Dam, Mahisagar**

Long Billed Vulture also known as the Indian Vulture (*Gyps indicus*). The population of vultures is in decline, and very few are spotted this year at Kadana Dam, Mahisagar. The Kadana Dam site is the nesting place for these birds. There were around 7-8 birds spotted on 4th April during the vulture census 2022. And recently on date 7th April 2023, we spotted a chick of Indian vulture during our last visit to the same spot. It was covered in white feathers and one parent was there with the baby bird. There are a few gaps and cracks which these birds use for nesting. Indian Vulture breeds mainly on cliffs in south and central India. The sighting of this offspring has given new hope to bird watchers and vultures enthusiasts. The cliffs of Kadana Dam provide a perfect habitat for this critically endangered bird.

**Mayur Prajapati:** mayurpcamps@gmail.com



### **A large flock of White-rumped Vultures *Gyps bengalensis* near Surendranagar**

On 13th May 2023, during routine birding in the outskirts of Surendranagar, at around 09:00 hrs, I observed many White-rumped Vultures (*Gyps bengalensis*) flying at low height, by the roadside near Modhvana Village of Surendranagar district. Initially, 22 birds were seen in flight and they were descending towards a nearby lake. The lake was well concealed with no direct visibility from the road and therefore, I parked my car on the roadside and walked towards the lake. I was pleasantly surprised to see a big flock of perched vultures on the grass bed of the lake. The water had receded due to the summer heat. I counted 51 vultures and all the birds were White-rumped Vultures and the flock consisted of birds of all ages (including juveniles, sub-adult and adult birds) (Photo 1). I had to make a difficult trek through *Prosopis juliflora* covered surrounding the lake and had to wade through water in a few patches of the lake to reach a decent vantage point with appropriate lighting conditions and managed to take a few pictures. There were 22 adult birds, 10 juveniles and 19 sub-adult vultures in the flock. To see such a large flock of these critically endangered birds in Surendranagar is always special. There are a few regular nesting sites with 7-10 active nests each season in the nearby vicinity and sporadic sightings of similar numbers of vultures from the region have been observed here (Chiku Vora and Faruk Chauhan, pers. Comm.). The last time I had seen large numbers of vultures in this area was in July 2016 when 80 White-rumped Vultures were seen in another nearby lake bed. The Forest Department conducts regular vulture censuses and many proposals for vulture conservation are yet to be implemented. Management of vulture feeding sites with water availability with the help of local villagers, under the observation of the Forest Department and with the help and assistance/ advice from NGOs might turn out to be helpful for conservation of these few surviving scavengers which once soared in the skies of Gujarat in large numbers.

**Nirav Bhatt:** Wadhwan, Surendranagar. birdwatchernrb@gmail.com



### **Sighting of Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus* at Surendranagar**

While I was birding at Bhogavo River at Surendranagar On March 2, 2021, around 07:00 hrs, a Brahminy Kite started (*Haliastur indus*) calling in flight and took photographs from a distance. It is an adult bird with a white head and belly and black wingtips. After the second sighting, on March 5, 2021, around 8:30, I saw a Brahminy kite some distance away from the first one. I've never seen this species in the Surendranagar region previously. It is certainly a new record for the area. According to Ganpule et al. (2022), this species is common in most of the state's coastal belts but uncommon inland. The aerial distance between the two spots is less than one kilometer, and they are both near the Bhogavo River, Surendranagar.

**Devvratsinh Mori:** Ahmedabad University, Ahmedabad - 380009. devvratsinhmori@gmail.com



### **Sighting of Amur falcon *Falco amurensis* at Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary**

On April 13, 2019, around 17:15 hrs. We were on a bird-watching trip to Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary. We observed the Collared Pratincole *Glareola pratincole*, the Yellow Bittern *Ixobrychus sinensis*, the Cinnamon Bittern *Ixobrychus cinnamonneus*, the Black Bittern *Ixobrychus flavicollis*, the Red-necked Falcon *Falco chicquera*, and other waterfowls. While returning to the Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary check-post, around 18:45 hrs. We saw unidentified small falcons circling in the sky. Using binoculars, we discovered twenty-one Amur Falcons, including three adult males, seven adult females, and eleven juvenile males or females. Although falcons were observed from a very far distance, the first author observed five Amur at one location, Little Rann in Kachchh, earlier in 2012. In Gujarat state, it was an amazing and significant sighting to see twenty-one Amur at one time.

**Devvratsinh Mori:** Ahmedabad University, Ahmedabad - 380009. devvratsinhmori@gmail.com

**Kasam Sama Sidani:** bird guide at Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary.



### **Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* near Morbi**

On 20 May 2023, I visited the area behind Machchhu-II Dam. There is a carcass dump near this site. I saw a vulture in flight which I thought was an Egyptian Vulture (*Neophron percnopterus*) but I could not get good photographs. I informed about this sighting to Prasad Ganpule, who told me that this was a rare sighting in Morbi District. This species was seen here after more than 15 years. To get a better photograph and further confirm the sighting, I visited the site for three consecutive days. On 22 and 23 May 2023, the vulture was not seen. However, on 24 May 2023, I was lucky and saw the vulture well and took some good photographs. It was probably an immature bird or sub-adult bird. The sighting of an Egyptian Vulture here in late May suggests that this was a bird from the resident population in Gujarat. The Egyptian Vulture is now rare and this sighting is thus significant for our district.

**Bhavya Vamja:** Morbi. bhavyavamja9@gmail.com



### Sighting of Indian Shaheen or Black Shaheen *Falco peregrinus peregrinator* in Kheda and Anand District

Indian Shaheen (*Falco peregrinus peregrinator*) is an uncommon to a rare resident in some hilly parts of the state, with isolated records from elsewhere (Ganpule et al. 2022). This bird is found widely across the state mostly nearby hilly forests including some city records. Looking at to map of distribution, the bird is not sighted in an area like Kachchh, Surat, Anand, Kheda, Rajkot, Porbandar, Dwarka, Amreli districts, etc (Mori & Joshi 2017). Indian Shaheen breeding records are at Girnar Hills, Pavagadh Hills, Jessor Hills and Palanpur outskirts (Bhatt 2022). I sighted a single bird on 26 May 2021 and 8th July 2021 on an electric pole at Vastana, Kheda district. Another sighting was at Sojitra, Anand district, perched a single bird on a tree on date 19th October 2022. My sightings of Indian Shaheen in both Anand and Kheda districts are adding to its distribution. This is possible that birds may come here from the nearby Vadodara area where many sightings occurred.

**Vishal Mistry:** vmistryvaso@gmail.com



### Sighting of Amur Falcon in Rajkot

April is the month when bird watchers in Rajkot need to keep their eyes and ears open. One may be lucky to spot passage migrants on their way back home! We got lucky on Wednesday, 26th April 2023. As we were driving through the new ring road, we noticed a small raptor sitting on the electric fence looking down maybe for insects. On closer look, it looked like a Falcon. As it was getting dark, we clicked a picture to identify the bird, and to our astonishment, it was a male Amur Falcon (*Falco amurensis*). After our sighting, there was another sighting of a female Amur falcon by Dipen Tretia and Ketan Ba visit to Khirasara grassland on date 29th April, 2023 (Social media and ebird). Amur falcons are the longest migratory birds flying from Siberia and northern China to Southern Africa via India (Naoroji 2006). The one-way journey is around 20,000 km and they do it twice a year. The possibility of spotting this bird increases in the early morning or late evening is the foraging time for the falcon. The route taken to return to their breeding ground in China and Siberia runs slightly northwards. Gujarat (Ganpule 2011) is one of the major entry points for Amurs on their return migration, especially Saurashtra and Kutch, which are waypoints on the flight route.

**Siddharth Kaul & Madhumita Kaul:** kaulsm@hotmail.com

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