

Red-headed Bunting....

breeding grounds in late March and early April. Thus, they migrate twice a year between breeding and wintering grounds, i.e., autumn and spring migration (Kumar et al. 2021). They breed in open scrubby areas, including agricultural land, and lay three to five eggs in a nest built in a tree or bush. Food habits include millets/cereals/plant seeds and insects (Patel 2010; Patel et al. 2022; Ganpule et al. 2022). Total 868 observations of red-headed buntings are on E-Bird recorded from Gujarat, five from Mehsana, 11 from Kachchh, and two from Patan. Despite these extensive records from Gujarat and nearby districts, there is no E-Bird record of sightings from Banaskantha and Sabarkantha. However, it has been recorded from Mount Abu on E-Bird. After discussing with fellow birders, I learned they observed these beautiful birds around Ranitook village near Dantiwada Dam a few years ago. However, this is the first sighting of red-headed bunting from Dantiwada, Banaskantha, being recorded on E-Bird.

References

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The thrill of sighting Indian Shaheen *Falco peregrinus peregrinator* with its mating and Indian Long-billed Vulture *Gyps indicus* breeding at Pavagadh, Vadodara

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Photo: Rajvi Parikh

For birding in nearby places of Vadodara or in Vadodara, we never have advance planning. If we have the right time and good company, we plan out immediately. Sometimes, we plan and go for targeted bird's species otherwise, we wander along the bird's trail and may find something. On 6th February 2021, both authors and Vatsalbhair Patel, went for a routine birding. To gain knowledge from the second author (KU), who is an experienced birder and intellectual person we planned a birding trip to Pavagadh.

Pavagadh is the gateway to the Panchmahal district. The location of hilly areas around Halol provide good scenery and many scenic trails are there to climb, including waterfalls during monsoon time. Champaner, Pavagadh Hill forms the Champaner-Pavagadh Archeological Park, a UNESCO World Heritage Site.

There was a lot of rush in Pavagadh and the ropeway had long queues as it was Saturday, weekend time. Soon after reaching there, we came to know that, the weather was very windy and the wind speed was high. Hence for safety reasons, the ropeway was closed and there was no certainty when the authorities would start the ropeway again. We discussed it for a few minutes and decided to climb Pavagadh. Slowly and gradually we started climbing. On the way, we came across small lakes where we saw Northern Shoveler, Black-winged stilt, Pond Heron, Red Shank, etc. While climbing KU shared his knowledge about the place, habitat and the types of birds that stay in these surroundings. Around 8.30 to 9 am, we reached the hill top. We were just looking around, and all of a sudden a bird flew away who was very close to us. Not so sure, it might be Red necked falcon (*Falco chicquera*). We walked down till Navlakha Kothar. Navlakha Kothar is situated on the edge of Navlakhi Valley, and it was used for food storage in ancient times (Highest peak of northern side). It is one of the best examples of Mughal architecture.

We were searching for birds in this area. KU was observing the surroundings with the help of binoculars while we were using our camera lens as binoculars. All of a sudden Kartikbhai's experienced eyes found a falcon sitting on the mountain cliff. We immediately clicked a photograph of the falcon and showed it to Kartikbhai and he confirmed that it was a Shaheen falcon (*Falco peregrinus peregrinator*). The falcon was sitting on the edge of the cliff. We saw white droppings on that rock. The falcon might have been here for approximately 30 minutes and it was preening every few minutes. We all were observing the falcon from a distance and all of a sudden, another falcon came from the opposite direction (the falcon's speed was incredible) and it approached the cliff and sat on

the first falcon. On seeing this, I realized that the sitting falcon was the female falcon and the one who swooped down on her was the male falcon. We could click 4-5 pictures of their mating. The male falcon flew away immediately while the female falcon sat there for some time and then flew away. We spent the whole afternoon in search of other birds. The heat was intense and our eyes saw Blue Rock Thrush (*Monticola solitarius*), Brown Rock Chat (*Oenanthe fusca*), White-eyed Buzzard (*Butastur teesa*), Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*), and Laughing Dove (*Spilopelia senegalensis*), Crested bunting (*Emberiza lathami*) on the dried spiny branches of Babool trees. We even saw many Eurasian Crag Martin (*Ptyonoprogne rupestris*) over there. They were flying overhead and all would go and sit in the small cavities of the mountain. At approximately around 2 pm, we happened to see a falcon sitting in the corner on another side of the mountain. The falcon must have been sitting there since long and we might have not noticed it or else it just came and we noticed it. We are not sure whether we saw one of the previous falcons or the third falcon but we did see a lot of white droppings here also. From these observations, falcons do have a specific and a fixed place to sit. Around 3 pm or so, a Long-billed Vulture (*Gyps indicus*) soared high from the valley side near to us. The vulture swooped down and sat near a cavity in the mountain. It sat there for a while and then went inside the mountain cavity and we could no longer see from our side. We all waited for it to come out. After about an hour or so, another vulture landed at the same mountain cavity. On the arrival of second vulture, the first vulture came out of the cavity and flew away while the second vulture went into the cavity. On seeing this, we felt that the mountain cavity was a nesting place of the vultures and there would have been eggs too! However, there is earlier records of Long-billed Vultures are breeding on Pavagadh (Valodkar et al. 2018). It was an exciting day and we were all exhausted due to the afternoon heat so we returned back home.

Reference

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