

Iranian Bird Records Committee and someone familiar with the Pale Crag Martin in Iran, who agreed that this was Pale Crag Martin and it was unlikely for it to be a Eurasian Crag Martin. Thus, expert opinion also supported the identification as a Pale Crag Martin.

However, due to the difficult conditions and the late evening light, it is better to err on the side of caution at present and treat this record as a 'probable' Pale Crag Martin. Since the photos are posted on eBird, it is hoped this record will be relooked at in the future by more experts and confirmed. This sighting will be useful in making bird watchers in Gujarat

aware of this species and search for the Pale Crag Martin near the coastal area in Kachchh and Saurashtra.

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First sighting record of Ashy Drongo *Dicrurus leucophaeus leucogenis* in Gir, Gujarat, India

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Photo: Bhavesh Trivedi

Introduction

The Drongo family also known as the *Dicruridae*, consists of 30 species, found in tropical regions of the world, including Africa's southern Sahara, the Indian Ocean islands, India, East Asia, and Australasia. In the Western Palearctic region, only two species are known to occur as rare visitors, Black Drongo and Ashy Drongo (*Dicrurus leucophaeus*). The Ashy Drongo (*D. leucophaeus*) has 15 subspecies, including *Dicrurus leucophaeus leucogenis* (del Hoyo & Collar 2016).

This subspecies breeds in central, north, and east China and travels to Cambodia and Malaysia during its non-breeding season (Brazil 2014). The Ashy Drongo is a small bird with glossy black plumage and a distinctive forked tail. The white eyebrow of the *Dicrurus leucophaeus* found in the Himalayan region of India is a notable feature. This bird feeds on insects and other small prey and is known for its aggressive behavior toward other birds, chasing them away from its territory (Ali & Ripley 1978).

Identification

A typical *Dicrurus leucophaeus leucogenis* is pale gray and has a large white oval patch around its eye. *Dicrurus leucophaeus salangensis* is much darker and has a reduced and less well-defined facial patch. Both have a red iris. There are fewer known details about this subspecies. (Brelsford 2016).

When identifying the Ashy Drongo, one should look for its distinctive white eyebrow, forked tail, and glossy black plumage (Haas 2017). Many times, the moult in Drongos is not fully understood. In both cases, Black Drongo can be ruled out based on especially differences involving the underparts rather than lower parts. The observed individual showed a glossy, black nape and cheek contrasting with matt greyish breast and belly (Eriksen & Victor 2017). An immature Black Drongo would show an obvious black throat and breast with a slight gloss, apparently contrasting with a pale belly with extensive off-white fringing. The belly is thus the palest area of an immature Black, while the spotted undertail-coverts are the palest area of an Ashy (Grimmett et al. 1999). At first glance, matt, greyish breast (Ashy) or near-glossy black breast (Black) gives a very good specific indication. Also, the lack of a white spot at the base of the bill is a good indication of Ashy. Finally, the bright red eye of Ashy is diagnostic because, although adult Black can show reddish eyes as well, this would be highly unlikely in a first-winter bird (Grimmett et al. 1999; Moran 2007; Porter & Aspinall 2010; Ayé et al. 2012, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Ashy Drongo has not only many races but also can show considerable color variation within each race (Robson 2005). The Drongos shown here were photographed within a few hundred meters of each other in June in the province of Henan.

Distribution and earlier records

Ashy Drongo breeds in the Himalayas from eastern Afghanistan east over India, Nepal, Bhutan and China through south-eastern Asia to Sumatra, Java, Borneo, Bali, Lombok and south-western Philippines. Northern populations winter south to tropical latitudes. The species is found in abundance in almost all parts of India excluding western Rajasthan (Viswanathan 1983). In Gujarat it is evidently recorded south Gujarat, Saurashtra, north Gujarat but less occurrence in Kutch (Ganpule et al. 2022). Generally, the species is common in its range although continuing habitat loss in India may threaten some island subspecies (Rocamora & Yeatman-Berthelot 2018). Subspecies *Dicrurus leucophaeus leucogenis* is witnessed in central, north and

east China in its breeding ranges but there is no record in India during non-breeding ranges. Occurrence to the north of its range is extremely rare (Iran Bird Records Committee 2018). There are two records from the far east of Russia, both in Primorye, on 7 June 2011 and on 3 and 16 July 2016 (Gluschenko & Korobov 2012).

Sighting record in Gujarat

As mentioned earlier there is no earlier record of sighting of subspecies *D. l. leucogenis* of Ashy Drongo (*Dicrurus leucophaeus*) observed in Gujarat or India. The first author (BT) observed an individual in Gir National Park and Wildlife Sanctuary. BT was at Batheshwar campsite, Jamvala, Gir (West). In the morning trail with the camp participants, they moved with Shingoda river. A Bird-like Black Drongo moved above them and settled on the branch of a tree near them at Jamvala forest range (21.012867N, 70.766415E), Gir-West. As it had an inverted V-shaped tail at its end, it was identified as Drongo but as it was grey in color it was not a black Drongo. BT could manage to take some record shots of the individual (Image 1) with help of digital camera equipment (Canon R6, Canon EF 100-400mm lens). It was searching for food hence it didn't settle calmly but looked here and there. It didn't make any call nor it was sensitive to human presence. After 10 days (from 26 January to 28 January 2023), We both visited this area again but the bird was not found. The species of Ashy Drongo was identified with detailed investigation and related documentation (Ali & Ripley 1978; Blair et al. 2017). The behavior and overall impression were perfectly resembling with Ashy Drongo (*D. l. leucogenis*)

Conclusion

Ashy Drongo (*Dicrurus leucophaeus*) has frequently been recorded in the area and surrounding regions. However, this would be the first record of subspecies *D. l. leucogenis* from Gir region. This finding is expected to inspire further research and the discovery of more individuals in the area. According to Klunderud et al. (2016) and Browne (2015), the presence of this subspecies may be due to the availability of suitable habitats in the Gir forest and human-influenced landscapes, such as farmlands, mature trees and water catchment areas, as these are the typical habitats in which Ashy Drongos are recorded during the same period of this discovery. It has been increasing in the number of Ashy Drongos in the area (as reported in eBirds and personal observations) over the last 2-3 years. The ranges of *D. l. leucogenis* is quite similar to those of Ashy Drongos hence

their presence in the area may not be surprising. The most suitable areas to find Ashy Drongos in Gir National Park and Wildlife Sanctuary include Kamleshwar Dam, Batheshwar Jamvala, Devaliya, Chodavadi, and some areas of Jashadhar and Savarkundla. Some parts of Girnar Sanctuary also have similar habitats. Various factors influence this bird's presence, which merit further investigation.

Acknowledgements

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Editor's Note: We have accepted this note as per the author's request. Although the authors likely identified the bird correctly as *D. leucogensis*, conclusive identification is not possible without a photo of underwing-coverts. Given the similarity between *D. leucogensis* and *D. salangensis*, consider using a slash (*leucogensis/salangensis*) for a more appropriate representation. □