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Sighting of Black-headed Ibis *Threskiornis melanocephalus* with red patch on lower hind neck from Vadodara district of Gujarat, India

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Photos: Anika Tere

Photo 1: An adult with red patch on hind neck feeding in a pond surrounding nesting site.

Introduction

Colourful plumage plays a vital role in the bird's life cycle, such as species recognition, predator escape and camouflage (Savalli 1995; McQueen *et al.* 2019). Many species of Ciconiiformes, including ibises, egrets, and herons show both plumage and bare part colour changes during the breeding season (McVaugh 1972; Rodgers 1980). Plumage colour acts as a signal for health quality and mate choice (Hill & McGraw 2006; Cuthill *et al.* 2017). Females of some species often choose males with bright colours over duller males (Blount *et al.* 2003). Rapidly changing integument or bare part colours signal readiness to breed, especially in birds nesting colonially or asynchronously (Baltz & Clark 1996).

Colour changes during breeding season are recorded in the Black-headed Ibis, also known as Oriental White Ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*). It has white body, unfeathered black head and neck with a black curved long beak. During breeding season, a blood-red flushing on the flanks, underwing, legs and feet is reported for a brief period at the

onset of breeding (Hancock *et al.* 1992; Matheu & Del Hoyo, 1992). Black-headed Ibis is a residential species of Indian subcontinents (Ali & Ripley 1978). It inhabits fresh water, seawater wetlands, and garbage dumping sites (Hancock *et al.* 1992; Sundar 2006; Koli *et al.* 2013). It is a protected species under Wildlife Protection Act, 1972. Its population is declining due to habitat loss and degradation, hunting and predation, and so it is categorised as a "Near Threatened" species according to the IUCN Red List (Nanda 2006; BirdLife International 2023).

The occurrence of breeding plumage with a red patch on the lower hind neck of Black-headed Ibis is a rare phenomenon. There are only a few published records of its sighting. Kannan *et al.* (2010) sighted a bird with red patch among the 200 nesting birds at the colony at Nelapattu Bird Sanctuary, Nellore district, Andhra Pradesh. On inquiry he found that similar red coloration on the hind neck was also observed by A. Rajaram in July 2003 in the Ranganathittu Bird Sanctuary, Karnataka. On examining the old photographs of the same species B. R. Sykes found images of two separate birds with

Black-headed Ibis....

red patches at different localities viz. Bharatpur on 21 August 2005 and Basai, Gurgaon on 21 March 2010 (Kannan *et al.* 2010). After Kannan *et al.* (2010), Guptha *et al.* (2012) recorded a single bird with red patch on the hind neck for three successive breeding seasons at the same nesting site of Nelapattu Bird Sanctuary. All these records are from Andhra Pradesh, Haryana, Karnataka and Rajasthan. Here, I present similar observation from Vadodara district of Gujarat.

Study area

The Goriyad village (22° 11' 47.38"N; 73° 05' 12.47"E) is located in Padra Tehsil of Vadodara district in central Gujarat, India. It is 12km southwest to Vadodara city, 5km south to Padra village and 6.5km southeast to Ranu village. It contains semi-arid climate with three distinct seasons viz. summer, monsoon and winter.



Photo 2: Five birds with red patches were spotted on 10.5.22. An adult with red patch on hind neck (center), another with a small red patch (left) and a bird with red dot (behind the centered bird).



Photo 3: Five birds with red patches were spotted on 10.5.22. Fifth bird with small red patch in the form of three dots (top, third from right) and a bird with red spot on leg (between first and second birds from left).

The village has a pond (0.47km perimeter, 0.01 sq. km area) at the edge of a road connecting Padra to Goriyad. The pond is surrounded by tall trees including Neem (*Azadirachta indica*), Banayan (*Ficus benghalensis*) and Babul (*Acacia nilotica*). One of its side is occupied by human habitations. Surrounding the pond are agricultural fields. The site was visited weekly and the observations were taken by binocular during morning between 08:00 and 10:30am. Photographic evidences were collected by Nikon D500 and Sony HX400.

Observation

A regular bird survey was conducted in Padra tehsil of Vadodara district since 2019. As a part of a heronry survey, Goriyad village was visited on 10 May 2022. A heronry comprising mainly of Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*) along with few Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*), Median Egret (*Ardea intermedia*) and Great Egret (*A. alba*) was observed on three *Acacia* trees. The trees were located at the edge of the village pond among the human habitation. A flock of 13 Black-headed Ibises was observed perching on one of the three *Acacia* trees preoccupied by Cattle Egrets with about 20 nests. The Black-headed Ibis had congregated on the tree and were preening but did not initiate building the nests. Five birds in the flock caught my attention as they possessed red patches on their necks. A careful observation revealed that two birds were having large and prominent red patches extending to their lower hind necks, the third bird has small red patch consists of three dots, the fourth one had a small red patch and a fifth bird was having red dot in a flock of nine birds. (Photo 1, 2 & 3). The remaining birds of the group did not have such a red patch. However, many of them had whitish patches on their bills (Photo 4). One ibis was noted with red patch on a leg also (Photo 4).

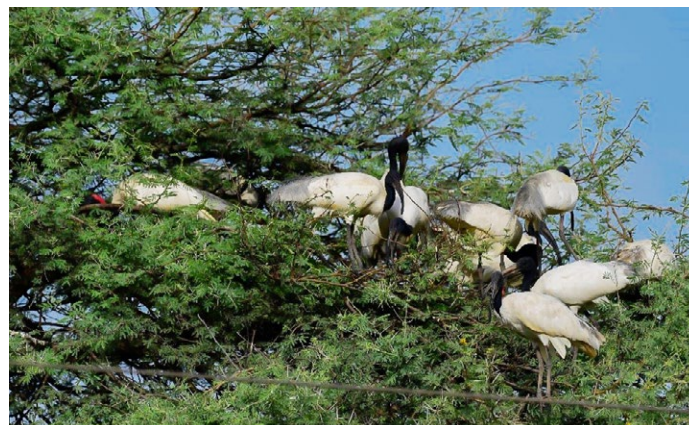


Photo 4: A few birds in the flock were spotted with whitish dull color at the base of their bills on 10-5.22. Another bird with large red patch on hind neck in the same group (on the left).

The site was revisited on 16 May 2022. The ibises have shifted to another Acacia tree having nests of Cattle Egrets, Median Egrets and Little Egrets. They started building nests. A total of 22 adult birds were observed on the tree, while four birds were feeding in surrounding areas within 500m of nesting trees. Total 8 nest were recorded built in two groups. Four birds were recorded with red color on hind neck in one group of nests. Of these, two birds possessed larger red patches on their necks while two had small red patches (Photo 5). Extending my observation to another group of nesting birds on the same tree revealed two more birds with small red patches. All of them were engaged in nest building activities. Few more nests were added to the existing one when the site was visited on 2 June 2022. A few pair were at the nests involved in nest building, courtship and mating while other birds were feeding in surrounding pond and heaps of organic manures. In one such pair involved in courtship, a male with a small red patch was identified by its body and bill size. Total six individuals were observed with red patches, three with large patches covering the hind neck and other with reduced patches.



Photo 5: The ibises started building the nest when the site was visited on 10-5.22. Three birds with red patches.

Discussion

The Black-headed Ibis with red patch on lower hind neck is recorded in past from Andhra Pradesh, Rajasthan, Haryana and Karnataka states of India. It is reported for the first time from Gujarat. The previous records include one bird with such a patch in a huge colony, however in the current observation the number of birds with red patch is high *i.e.* six birds among the group of only 26 birds only, with variations in the deposition of red color on hind neck.

Beside Black-headed Ibis, Kanan *et al.* (2010) also describe the occurrence of red patch on hind neck of other species of same genus *viz.* captive female of Madagascar Sacred Ibis

(*T. bernieri*) and Australian White Ibis (*T. molucca*) from Walsrode and Australia respectively. It seems that the developing extra coloration during breeding season is a frequent phenomenon in different species of Ibis, however it is neither displayed by all the individuals of the same colony nor exhibited at all regular nesting sites throughout its breeding range. In the current study, a bird with the red patch was confirmed to be a male. However, it is not known whether such coloration is restricted to one sex only. More observations can improve our understanding about this phenomenon. Citing of birds with red patch during the breeding season might have some significance of conveying signal for readiness for breeding, synchronization in nesting, attracting mate or displaying health conditions etc. Coloration in bare parts is due to the deposition of carotenoid pigments that are obtained in the diet (Fox 1976, Hill; 2010, Amat & Rendon 2017). However, the color of bare parts changes more rapidly than feather and it is under the effect of blood circulation, hormones and nutrition (Heath & Frederick 2006; Negro *et al.* 2006). A detailed study on availability of food making carotenoid rich diet of birds and other factors causing such color development during breeding season is needed to enhance our understanding about the it.

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Records of Nesting of Indian Pied Myna *Gracupica contra* on silk cotton *Bombax ceiba* tree in Jambuvai, Vadodara

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Photos: Sugandha Pandit

Photo 1: Asian Pied Starling collecting nesting material from garbage

Indian pied myna (*Gracupica contra*) is a residential insectivorous species of Indian Subcontinent (Ali and Ripley 1987, BirdLife International, 2023). Pied Myna breeds from late February to August and huge dome made of materials such as thin twigs, stems, grasses, creepers and even cellophane wrappers, paper pieces, etc., with a cavity in it. The pair mixes with the flock once the breeding ends (Tyagi & Lamba 1984; Kumari et al. 2018).

As a part of a Sarus crane survey, Jambuvai village (22° 20' 08.04N; 73° 19' 12.30E) was visited on 15th May 2021. Jambuvai village is located about 2.25km south of Nimeta, Waghodia tahsil of



Photo 2: Nest of Indian Pied Myna on Silk cotton tree.

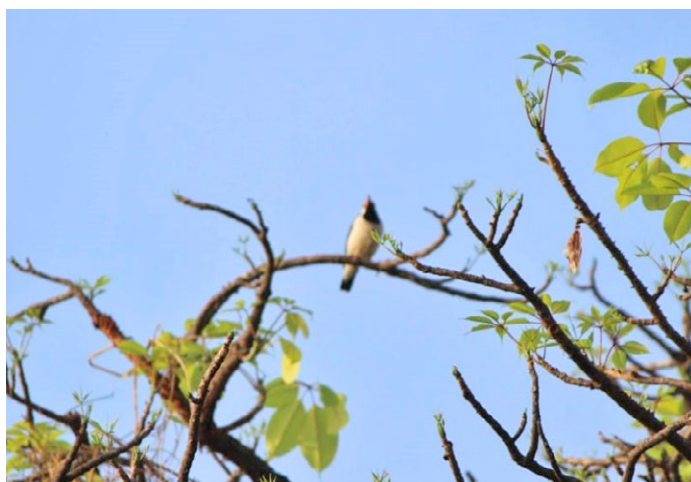


Photo 3: Indian Pied Myna perching on a Cotton silk tree.

Vadodara district. It has a pond of about 0.22 sq. km area. A Pied Myna caught our attention at the bank of the pond, among the few local bird species. It was searching for nesting material among the garbage (Photo 1). It started pulling the thread from the grain bag made of plastic and flew towards a tree. Careful observation revealed a nest in its initial stage of construction on a branch of a silk cotton tree (*Bombax ceiba*) where another bird was perching (Photos 2 & 3). The nest was about 5 m in height from the ground.

Pied mynas are commonly seen in various places of Vadodara district viz. Timbi, Vadhvana and surrounding places (Thakker 2022). It has been recorded nesting at Timbi in Vadodara district (Vyas & Upadhyay 2022). We bring into the notice of their presence and nesting a few kilometers away from the previously recorded sites by Vyas & Upadhyay (2022). Neem (*Azadirachta indica*), Beri (*Zizyphus mauratiana*), Kikar/Baval (*Acacia nilotica*), Peepal (*Ficus religiosa*), Banayan (*Ficus benghalensis*), Mulberry (*Morus alba*), Poplar (*Populus nigra*), Mango (*Mangifera indica*), Guava (*Psidium guajava*),

Jamun (*Syzygium cumini*), Nilgiri (*Eucalyptus* sp.), Dhrek (*Melia azedarach*), Kadam (*Neolamarckia cadamba*), Siris (*Albizia lebbek*) etc. (Sharma 2004, Kumari et al 2018, Vyas & Upadhyay 2022). However, in our observation they were found nesting on a Silk cotton tree, which is not reported in earlier studies.

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Unusual behavior of two Green Sandpipers *Tringa ochropus* at Pariej, Kheda

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Photos: Ashit Gandhi

On 24 September 2023, early morning at 7:15 am, we started our birding trip at Pariej Lake, Kheda. Our first visit was towards the far side of the Pariej Lake. We were hoping to sight some passage migrants like Spotted Flycatcher, *Muscicapa striata*, European Roller *Coracias garrulus*, and Jackals, usual sightings here in this season. While driving, we noticed some activity on the road ahead and were surprised to see two Green Sandpipers on the road.

One Sandpiper was crouching/sitting on the road while the other circled around it. The Sandpiper, which was circling, intermittently flapped its wings and took alternate clockwise and anti-clockwise circles around the crouching bird. This behavior continued for about 10 minutes. It ended when both birds departed separately from that place. We could not understand the behavior of these Sandpipers. We thought it might be courtship behavior. We captured this behavior in still pictures, and the second author Mr. Pinak Vashi, took a video.

I posted some of these pictures on a Wildlife Whatsapp Group, and in response, I was approached by Mr. Ashok

Mashru requesting more information and a video of the observation. Mr. Ashok Mashru sent the pictures and the video to more knowledgeable naturalists, including Mr. Prasad Ganpule and well-known bird expert Dr. Taej Mundkur.

Mr. Prasad Ganpule concluded that this was a dominant display, not courtship behavior. The circling bird was dominating the sitting bird. Dr. Taej Mundkur opined 'It is a very odd time of the year for courtship behavior so long after the breeding season. It seems more likely a dominance behavior, and I recall observing different dominance behaviors in different shorebird species, although most often, these were of two birds standing up and trying to peck at the other individual or where while flapping their wings, they are sticking out their feet at each other'.

In an article 'Visual Displays' on various bird displays, posted on the Stanford University website, the dominant display is defined as 'In established dominance hierarchies, dominant birds often use threat displays against subordinates.

Subordinates signal their submission with other displays in passerines often by crouching with feathers fluffed and head withdrawn' (Ehrlich *et al.* 1988).



The dominant display is usually used during mate selection in the breeding season or establishing feeding territories in the non-breeding quarters. Here, it was likely that the crouching sandpiper was signaling submission to the dominant individual.

(Observations such as this offer insights into bird behavior, and we encourage others to report if they have similar encounters-Eds)

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Sighting of probable Pale Crag Martin *Ptyonoprogne obsoleta* at Hathab, Bhavnagar

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Photo: Kandarp Andharia

On 17 June 2023, at around 18:00 hrs, I, along with Rajveer Vala, went to Koliyak-Hathab coastal area to see if there were any pelagic birds due to the aftermath of the cyclone 'Biparjoy'. It is well known that many pelagic birds are wind-blown towards the coast after a cyclone. We saw Persian Shearwater (*Puffinus persicus*), which was a first record for Bhavnagar, a few Common Terns (*Sterna hirundo*) and other wader species.

After around 18:30 hrs, Rajveer checked for any tern activity near the seashore. At that time, I saw two birds near the shore, which seemed to be martins (*Ptyonoprogne* sp.). Their flight was very speedy, and they flew very close to the shore and also near the surface. I somehow managed to take a few photographs of one bird, and after some days, while checking the photos, I had a doubt about the identity of these martins. I initially believed that these were Eurasian Crag Martins (*P. rupestris*) as the birds were pale and different from Dusky Crag Martins (*P. concolor*), which is seen here. These birds looked overall washed-out, giving the impression of pale greyish-brown upperparts. The rump was pale, and the throat looked pale in some photos, while in a few other photos, the side of the throat had a black mark. It was unclear whether this black mark was due to missing feathers or something else. The underparts were white, but the vent was not visible. The lack of throat streaking in a few photos suggested the identification as a Pale Crag Martin (*P. obsoleta*). However, underwing-coverts, which are important for identification, were not

visible in the photos. All photos of this bird are uploaded on the following eBird checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S141848244>

I sent the photos to Prasad Ganpule. He suggested that this was a likely Pale Crag Martin due to the pale rump, lack of streaking on throat, and structurally, the tail looked short. He opined that since this sighting was after a cyclone and on the coast, it was more likely that a wind-blown Pale Crag Martin would be seen there since the Eurasian Crag Martin would be in its breeding range in the Himalayas in late June. Due to the inclement weather, this species was likely seen in the area. A post-cyclonic, coastal sighting of a Eurasian Crag Martin would be unlikely in Gujarat. However, he suggested that since the photos were unclear, it was difficult to conclude it was a Pale Crag Martin.

The status of the Pale Crag Martin in India is interesting. It is not listed in the India Checklist (Praveen & Jayapal 2023). However, this species is listed for Gujarat in the recently published field guide of the state (Ganpule *et al.* 2022), with a single record given for Kachchh. The rationale for accepting this species to the Gujarat checklist is given in Ganpule (2017) and this record is a historical record.

This sighting is interesting and it is very likely that this is indeed a Pale Crag Martin. To further take opinions regarding the identification of this martin species, Prasad Ganpule sent the photos to Abolghasem Khaleghizadeh, a member of the

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

We express our sincere gratitude to Mr. Shivam Bhatt for accurately identifying this bird among numerous possibilities. He cross-checked the subspecies multiple times to eliminate the chance of errors. We thank the chief facilitator in arranging the jungle trail where this record was discovered, the Sky Forest Youth Club, the organizer of the Nature Education Camp, who facilitated the efforts of Mr. Bhavesh Trivedi.

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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. □

Sightings of Indian Shaheen *Falco peregrinus peregrinator* at Timbi lake Vadodara and preying on Eurasian Hoopoe *Upupa epops*

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Photo: Pinak Vashi

Timbi Lake has been a hotspot for birders in and around Vadodara and it never ceases to surprise. On date on date 5th November 2023 morning. First Author visited Timbi Lake near Vadodara. For regular bird watching along with Ashit Gandhi, Pranav Maggon and Nagardas Gandhi. At about 9.45 am, He pointed out a falcon on the high-tension electric tower (Photo 1). After a few minutes, the falcon flew off, and Ashit Gandhi took photos in flight. After seeing the photo, I concluded that it was Peregrine Falcon. Later on, consulting bird watcher Mr. Ashok Mashru, the falcon was identified as Indian Shaheen (*Falco peregrinus peregrinator*).

On 25th November 2023, second author went to explore the areas around Timbi Lake along with bird watcher friend's friend Mohammad Anees early in the morning. After nearly an hour of photographing small birds along the road, he suddenly saw a bird just swoop down into the farms at a distance. The next moment, it carried something and sat high above a distant electricity tower (Photo 1). He shot some pictures. Initially, he thought it was a Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus*, to be corrected later by my expert birding fraternity as a rare Shaheen Falcon, *Falco peregrinus peregrinator*. The falcon was very far off, and he could get some distant shots of the hunter and the prey, which turned out to be a Common Hoopoe *Upupa epops* (Photo 2 & 3). It merely took the Shaheen a little

over seven minutes to finish its prey they were extremely lucky to have witnessed this. Later, they met Manish Sitlani and shared this with him, and he also observed the bird.



Photo: Soumya Chandan Panda



Photo: Soumya Chandan Panda

It's possible that both birds sighted are the same bird visiting the Timbi Lake area for food. On searching references in year 2018, Mr Kartik Upadhyay regularly saw Indian Shaheen roosting at a high water tank in Vadodara city. Another sighting was at Sindhrot in the year 2021, near Vadodara, by Ms Rajvi Parikh (2022).

Reference

Parikh Rajvi. 2022. Sighting of Indian Shaheen at Sindhrot, Vadodara. Flamingo Gujarat 7: 18 □

Observation of roosting behaviors of Eurasian wryneck *Jynx torquilla* Amreli, Gujarat

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Photos: Viral Joshi

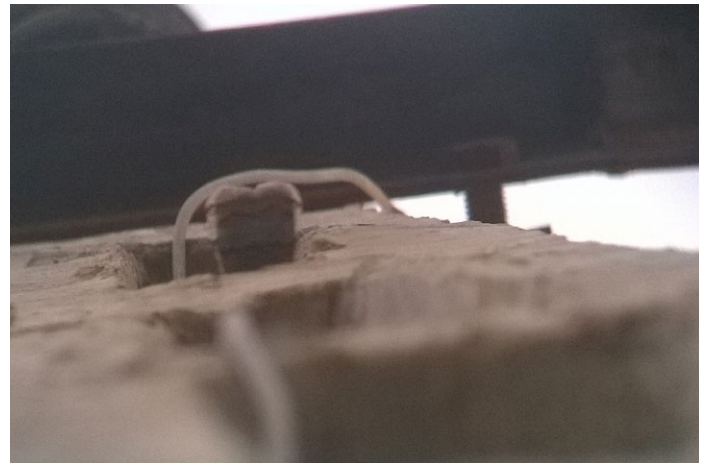
Visible tail of Eurasian wryneck in Electric poll

Observation

Eurasian wryneck *Jynx torquilla* is a migratory species belonging to the woodpecker family (Grimmett et al. 2016). Breed in temperate habitats of Europe and West Asia. One race, *Jynx torquilla himalayan*, breeds in the western part of the Himalayas, Winter in Africa, parts of southern Asia and the Indian subcontinent (Ali 1996). It's bred in secondary cavities made by other species of woodpecker. Ali (1996) mentions using natural cavity willow, chenar and mulberry trees or old nests of Brown fronted woodpeckers. In Italy, it is known to accept the next box and Pipe for a nest in a vineyard-dominated agroecosystem (Assandri et al. 2018). Population accelerated decline is likely attributed to the extensive utilization of pesticides and herbicides on a large scale (Winker et al. 2020).

On October 7, 2014, while birding at Saladi, Amreli, Gujarat, I observed one Eurasian wryneck perched on top of an electric pole, seemingly feeding on something. However, after a few minutes, it settled into the crevices on the electric pole's top. I waited a bit longer to understand the situation, but the fading light hindered my visibility. Despite not wanting to disturb it, I managed to take a blurry picture of the Wryneck in the crevices. A similar incident occurred on September 25, 2020, when I spotted a Wryneck with small crevices near an electric pole. Intrigued, I decided to investigate further. I selected a habitat stretch with electric poles adjacent to a road in a degraded scrub habitat near agricultural fields. Covering a 5km stretch, I observed approximately 3 days around 200+ electric poles. As a result, I noticed a total of three Wryneck individuals using the top shelf of the electric poles specifically as roosting sites. Previous studies have shown that Wrynecks utilise

artificial nest boxes and pipelines for breeding in vineyards, but observing this behaviour of using concrete electric poles as roosting sites in winter was particularly fascinating, as there is limited information on the species' roosting behaviour in the literature. This fascinating behavior, where birds utilise man-made structures for roosting, is highly intriguing. It demonstrates their intelligence in finding safe havens to survive during winter ground and migration in different parts of the world.



View from Bottom Rooting Eurasian wryneck on electric poll

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Short Birding Notes



Sighting of Blue-capped Rock Thrush *Monticola cinclorhyncha* at Rajkot

On 8 October 2023, We were on our regular Sunday birdwatching program near Nyara village, Rajkot. This place is located adjoining the Nyari River, having a small good patch of planted jungle. The patch mainly has trees like Gando Baval, Desi Baval, many tall trees of Nilgiri, and some other trees. There is also agricultural land around this jungle. We spotted a flycatcher-like bird on a dense tree, but the size of the bird was larger. We photographed it and looked through camera screen, to our surprise. It was identified as a Blue-capped Rock-Thrush (*Monticola cinclorhyncha*). The bird was moving between trees to catch insects. After viewing an image on a computer, the bird has molting feathers and a yellow line extending from beak to jaw. So, we concluded that the sighted bird was a juvenile immature first winter bird. This was probably first sighting near Rajkot City. On the ebird website, there are sightings at Hingolghadh sanctuary and the Bhutnath temple area nearby, but they are around 70 and 50 km from Rajkot. The status and distribution of Blue-capped Rock Thrush is an uncommon winter visitor in some well-wooded parts of Gujarat. Isolated Records elsewhere' (Ganpule et al. 2022).

Niraj Jadav, Sunil Moteria, Ashok Mashru, Pilu Sitapara, Jignesh Rathod, Piyush Shrimankar: Rajkot, Gujarat. Email: nirajjadav@yahoo.com



Sightings of White-naped Tit *Machlolophus nuchalis* near Ranitook hill, Palanpur

Ranitook hill is 40 km far from Palanpur city, Banaskantha. There is the Dantiwada dam on the left of this hill and on the right side Sipu dam. The terrain at the base of Ranitook Hill comprises small hills of sand with a good cover of small trees, bushes and grass around. There are primarily trees of Berry, Babul and other scrub vegetation. I usually visit this area often for bird watching. I have sighted and photographed White-naped Tit (*Machlolophus nuchalis*) 3 times here on dates 23 August 2019, 09 June 2020 and 19 September 2022 during my bird-watching trip to this area. Here is the perfect habitat for scrub jungle preferred by White-naped Tit. I have also observed Rufous-tailed Scrub Robin (*Cercotrichas galactose*) in this area. According to Ganpule et al. (2022), the status and distribution of White-naped Tit are 'Rare residents in Kachchh and North Gujarat'.

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First sighting of Trumpeter finch *Bucanetes githagineus* at Timbi, Vadodara, as other than Kachchh

On the evening of 11 November 2023, I went for birding near Timbi lake near Vadodara. I was looking for birds and suddenly saw a different-looking bird. It was a little smaller than Sparrow. I zoomed my camera and observed it. On looking at its small, thick yellowish bill, it seems of a finch family. On seeing its big gray head with cream-colored body, and blackish stripes at the end of its wings, I assumed it was a Trumpeter finch. I took some photos and sent a photo to bird experts Ashok Mashru and Rahul Bhatt to confirm the identification. They confirmed it as Trumpeter finch (*Bucanetes githagineus*). Usually, it is found in a small flock in desert arid areas, but there was a single bird. The next morning, I went there again but did not find it. According to Ganpule et al (2022), it is a rare winter visitor in Kachchh, Gujarat. The present sighting of Trumpeter Finch at Timbi Wetland is the first sighting record from an area other than Kachchh. It is a noteworthy and very important sighting for knowledge about its new distribution.

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Sighting of Asian Desert Warbler *Curruca nana* near Vadodara city

On 5th November 2023, I went birding at Mahisagar River, near Kotna village, Vadodara. A small prinia-sized & rufous colored bird was seen in the dry bushes a short distance away from the river bank. When I went for birding, a small bird came from the green grassland and sat on the dry bushes near the river bank. The bird was searching for food and quickly changed location in the dry bushes. I took photographs of it. Later on, I identified it as the Asian desert warbler *Curruca nana*. I have searched on the ebird website for its record in Gujarat. I found the nearest record in Khambhat, Anand district (Theba 2017). This is the first time I have seen this bird in the Vadodara district.

Anish Khira: A/40, Alif Bungalows and Heights, Near Amrapali Soc. Opp. of Hussaini Park, Gorwa, Vadodara 390016. Email: khira.anish1985@gmail.com



Sighting of Spotted Dove *Streptopelia chinensis* near Rangpar, Jamnagar

On the morning of 14th November 2023, I went to my village for bird watching, Village Rangpar, Lalpur Taluka, Jamnagar district. I saw near my farm for birding two dove birds on the wall of the farm well. I photographed them. One was the laughing dove, and another looked different. It was a Spotted Dove *Streptopelia chinensis*. Ganpule et al. (2022), mentioned its status and distribution, 'Common resident and winter migrant in some parts of state, Vagrant in Kachchh'. But Spotted Dove is a less sighted bird in this area, and I saw it first time. It might be migrated from nearby habitat. On searching eBird website, I found only 3 handful photo records in Jamnagar Districts. So, Spotted Dove is rare in this area.

Anish Khira: A/40, Alif Bungalows and Heights, Near Amrapali Soc. Opp. of Hussaini Park, Gorwa, Vadodara 390016. Email: khira.anish1985@gmail.com



Sighting of Leucistic Indian Robin *Saxicoloides fulicatus* at Khambahala, Rajkot

I was on usual bird watching at Khambhala village near Rajkot city on morning of 1st October 2023 along with my fellow birdwatcher friends Jaymin Panchasara and Dharmarajsinh Jadeja. My attention was drawn towards a whitish bird perched on a bush. I took photographs and saw on the screen that the bird's head was completely white and other whitish parts in black body also. The behavior of bird was like that of an Indian Robin (*Saxicoloides fulicatus*), with an erecting tail and a reddish rump. I could see a female Indian Robin nearby. Looking at its behavior along with that of the female Indian Robin, I concluded that the bird was a partially leucistic male Indian Robin. This is the first time I saw it while birdwatching around Rajkot.

Pinkesh Tanna: Madhav 7 - B, Harihar Soc. St. No-1, Opp. Swaminarayan Mandir, Kalawad Road, Rajkot. Email: pinkeshtanna99999@gmail.com



Sighting of White-bellied Drongo *Dicrurus caerulescens* at Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary

On 13th October 2023, at 08:43, we were on a field trip for bird-watching at Nal Sarovar Sanctuary, where we encountered a delightful array of passerine birds. Among them, a Drongo caught our attention as it gracefully took flight, skillfully capturing insects in its wake. Intrigued, we devoted 30 minutes to careful observation, confirming it to be the White-bellied Drongo (*Dicrurus caerulescens*) a species previously unseen in this locale. The White-bellied Drongo was distinguished by its deeply forked tail, glossy upper parts, brownish-black throat and breast, and a striking white belly and undertail-coverts. We documented this remarkable sighting with a series of record photographs.

Ramzan Kasam Sama & Ekbal Rajlani: Bird Guides at Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary.



Greater Coucal *Centropus sinensis* preyed on Northern Palm Squirrel *Funambulus pennantii*

On 24th October 2023, it was Dushera, I was birding in my locality, Tandalja Vadodara. I was surprised to observe Greater Coucal (*Centropus sinensis*) feeding on the Northern Palm Squirrel, known as the Five-striped Palm Squirrel (*Funambulus pennantii*). I promptly took a few pictures. I searched the literature on diets of the Greater Coucal. It is a carnivore (insectivore) bird. These large birds take a wide range of insects, caterpillars, snails, and small vertebrates, including Saw-scaled vipers. They also eat bird eggs, nestlings, fruits, and seeds. I also came across a publication, that shows Greater Coucal is preying on Five-striped Palm Squirrel *Funambulus pennantii* (Chauhan & Srivastav 2020). So, this uncommon behavior of Greater Coucal feeding/preying on Indian palm squirrels is noteworthy.

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Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis* at Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary Outskirts

On 4th of October 2023, at 17:00 hrs., we engaged in bird watching near the Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary outskirts. While observing various Bunting species, including the Striated Bunting *Emberiza striolata* and Grey-necked Bunting *Emberiza buchanani*, that time we encountered a warbler-like bird perched on Babul tree. We promptly captured a record shot. Upon encountering uncertainty regarding the bird's identification, we sought the expertise of ornithologists Devratsinh Mori and Sunil Kini. Both experts independently confirmed the bird species to be the Common Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*. In Gujarat, the Common Whitethroat is noted as a common to uncommon passage migrant in the Kachchh area and some parts of Saurashtra (Ganpule et al. 2023). This sighting marks the first record from the Nal Sarovar region.

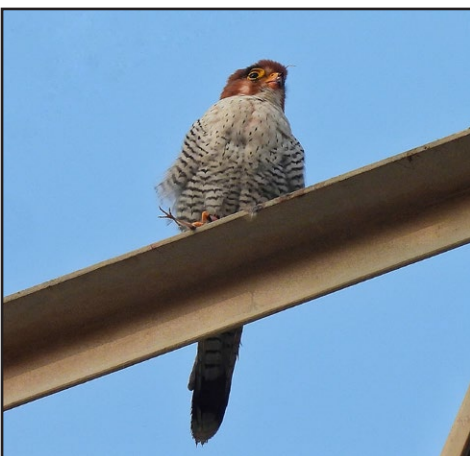
Kamrudin Alvani & Latif Alvani: Bird Guides at Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary



Sighting of Amur Falcon *Falco amurensis* in Ahmedabad

On 2nd Dec'23, we were on a regular birding trip on Thol-Bhadaj road. We started around 7.30 am in our car and around 8.30 am we found a raptor sitting on a perch of a tree at a very good height. We casually thought would be a Shikra *Accipiter badius* so we didn't take our cameras. While looking through the binoculars, we were thrilled to see a Male Amur Falcon *Falco amurensis* so we quickly took out the camera and clicked it from a far distance. It's a record shot however a lifer for both of us, and it was an amazing sighting. Within a minute, it flew away. We tried the next day, also around the same time, but could not find it.

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Sighting of Red-necked Falcon *Falco chicquera* at Timbi Lake, Vadodara, Gujarat

Timbi is a birder's paradise all around the year. There are a variety of birds like Red Munia *Amandava amandava*, Baya Weaver *Ploceus phillippinus*, Black winged kites *Elanus caeruleus*, Sarus Crane *Antigone antigone*, and many other wetland birds. It gets special in winter, the season of migratory birds. It was Sunday, 7th Jan 2024. I set out for a weekend birding trip to Timbi. I met many known birders from the GJ Wild Whatsapp group, Vivekananda Swaminathan, Sujata Talegaokar, and Satish Patel. They were all gathered at high-tension towers and clicking a pair of raptors. I also took a few pictures. It was a pair of Red-necked falcon *Falco chicquera*. One of them was feeding on an unidentified small bird. We were there for about half an hour, watching the activities of a Falcon. There was also nesting. As one of the falcons would go nest, it was shooed away by crows.

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Author Guidelines

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To contribute, please submit your submission (Full-length article/short note/short birding note) in accordance to the following guidelines:

When a bird species is first mentioned, both the English and scientific name must be given; thus, “Laggar Falcon *Falco jugger*”, thereafter, only the English name, thus, “Laggar Falcon” will suffice. English, Scientific names (Italic) and Birds Classification should follow the South Asia Checklist, or Please refer to “A field guide to the birds of Gujarat. Bird Conservation Society, Gujarat.”

1. Manuscript Format:

- Prepare your manuscript in English.
- Submit your article as a Microsoft Word document.
- Maintain a justified alignment for the entire text.
- Include images in .jpeg format with captions (e.g., Image 1, Image 2).
- Specify latitude and longitude coordinates in the format "27.807°N, 74.094°E."
- Provide the corresponding author's postal address, telephone number, and email address.
- Use Times New Roman font with the following sizes:
 - Main title: 12 bold
 - Author's name, address and email: 11
 - Text (including references, bibliography, etc.): 12
 - Section titles (e.g., Introduction, Results, and Discussion): 12 bold
 - Caption text below figures/photos: 11
 - Contents of tables: 11
 - Line spacing: 1.15

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- Send your manuscript as an email with a cover letter along with all necessary attachment: editor@flamingogujarat.com or devvratsinhji.flamingogujarat@gmail.com

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- The Editor-in-Chief makes the final decision on acceptance or rejection.

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- Ensure compliance with ethical standards.

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References

- Mori, D., Vyas, R., & Upadhyay, K., 2017. Breeding biology of the Short-toed Snake Eagle *Circaetus gallicus*. *Indian BIRDS* 12 (6): 149–156.
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- Provide illustrations/ Photographs/ Images (minimum 300 dpi) as separate JPEG/TIFF files (Image 1, Image 2...3).
- Number illustrations and cite them in the text (e.g., Fig. 1, Fig. 2).

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