

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).

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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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