

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.

References

- Ganpule, P., 2017. First update to the Gujarat checklist: December 2017. *Flamingo* 15 (4): 17-20
- Ganpule, P., Varu, M., Trivedi, B., & Raina, A. D., 2022. *A field guide to the birds of Gujarat*. Bird Conservation Society, Gujarat. Ahmedabad. 448pp.
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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).