

Short Birding Notes



Large-billed Crows *Corvus macrorhynchos* preying on cicadas (Cicadidae)

On 1 April 2023, I was visited the Gir National Park with bird watchers Gaurang Bagda and Jignesh Miyatra. We are birding inside the park on route 2, and it was late in the evening. While moving around, we observed that there were many cicadas (Cicadidae) present on trees in different parts of the park. At around 18:45 hrs, while returning, we saw an unusual spectacle. A group of Large-billed Crows (*Corvus macrorhynchos*) was actively preying on the cicadas present on the trees. There were about 12-15 crows, which were flying into the trees and flushing the cicadas, which were then caught by other crows. We witnessed this scene for a few minutes and took some photographs of the crows preying on these cicadas. It was apparent that the crows were hunting in a group. We observed that in a short time, many cicadas were caught and consumed. While it is known that crows prey on insects, and even on cicadas (Pons 2020), we had not observed this hunting behaviour in the Large-billed Crows in Gujarat. It appears that the Large-billed Crows takes advantage of the temporary abundance of cicadas in the area.

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Sightings of Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* at Bhavnagar

On November 5th, 2023, my colleague Raj Vala and I set out on a birding expedition to Avaniya Lake, located in Bhavnagar. Our goal was to observe and document the diverse bird species present in the area. While scanning the lake around 6:35 p.m., we noticed a group of waterfowl and common birds congregating near the water's edge. Among them, we spotted a solitary plover and three little ringed plovers *Charadrius dubius*. We were immediately struck by the distinct orangish legs and thick collar of this particular plover, which lacked the yellowish eyerings typical of the little ringed plovers. Recognizing the significance, we quickly photographed the bird and later identified it as the Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*. This sighting is the first-ever photographic record of the Common Ringed Plover in Bhavnagar. It is uncommon to rare for this species to be seen as a winter visitor in certain coastal regions of Gujarat (Ganpule 2022).

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Sighting of Red-throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus* at Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary

On January 7, 2024, Esha Munshi, Sumitee Saharan, Latif Alavani, Akabar Alavani, Latif Belim, and I went on a boat trip to Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary for bird watching and photography on the small islands nearby. While we were there, we took pictures of birds like the Common Ring Plover *Charadrius hiaticula*, and Little Pratincole *Glareola lactea*. Suddenly, we saw a pipit that looked different from the others. When we looked closely at the photo we took, we realized it wasn't a tree pipit *Anthus trivialis*. After some online searching, we found out it was a red-throated pipit *Anthus cervinus*, which was the first time it had been seen at Nalsarovar. Later on, other bird watchers also saw two of these birds in the same area. Red-throated pipits are very rare in Gujarat, usually only seen in certain parts during the winter. This sighting adds to our knowledge because it's the first time they've been spotted at Nalsarovar. We also found out from eBird that they've been seen in places like Kutch and Amreli before. So, this sighting helps us understand more about where these birds go beyond their usual spots.

Kamruddin Alvani, Tayab Alvani & Ramzan Sama: Bird Guides at Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary.



Sighting of Great Bittern *Botaurus stellaris* in Vadodara

On 21 January 2024, JS was exploring the areas on the outskirts of Vadodara. The location had extensive reed cover and marshes. Common species, such as Herons, Storks, and Egrets, were plentiful in the area. At around 0930 hrs, a large bird, about the size of a Purple Heron (*Ardea purpurea*), flew over the reeds. It had a prominent build, a yellowish-black body, and strong wings. After clicking a few record shots, the bird was identified as a Great Bittern (*Botaurus stellaris*). VV and RK later confirmed the identification. Later, on 17 March 2024, When RK was exploring the same area. At around 0800hrs, he obtained fantastic views and photographs of the Great Bittern *Botaurus stellaris*. The bird was said to be as large as a Purple Heron owing to its massive size and long neck. Its habitat was secretive as it tend to stay in the reedbed. The great Bittern is a regular but uncommon visitor to Gujarat. This is noteworthy as it adds more information regarding its status and distribution.

Jenny Samuel, Ravi Kelkar, Vyom Vyas



Sighting of Brahminy kite *Haliastur indus* near Ahmedabad

Starting as a novice birder, my interest blossomed during the COVID-19 lockdown when I noticed 30 bird species visiting our terrace. In December 2020, I began weekly birding trips around Ahmedabad's outskirts, eventually making it a daily routine. On October 15, 2022, at a water body along the Sarkhej–Bavla highway, I spotted a Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus*, a rarity in the area, marking my lifer. Despite the initial difficulty, I managed to capture clear shots of it on subsequent visits, noting its close association with other water birds.

Ami Bhatt: Amateur Bird Enthusiast.



Sighting of Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus* at Nalsarovar

On August 16th, 2022, Kamrudin Alwani and Anwar Bhai set out on a birdwatching adventure from the picnic area of Nalsarovar Sanctuary in Gujarat. To their surprise, their excursion led to an extraordinary sighting. While navigating the calm waters of the sanctuary, their attention was captured by a solitary figure perched on Bor Island. It was a Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus*, a coastal bird that is rarely seen in inland freshwater environments like Nalsarovar. The pair quickly recognized the significance of their finding and carefully photographed the sandpiper. The sighting of a coastal species within the sanctuary's boundaries in August is particularly noteworthy, as it suggests an early arrival for the migratory season. It is possible that this Terek Sandpiper made a brief stopover at Nalsarovar before continuing its southward journey. This discovery highlights the importance of Nalsarovar as a vital habitat for a diverse array of bird species, both resident and migratory.

Kamrudin Alwani & Anwar Bhai: Bird Guides at Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary, Gujarat.



Sighting of Black-bellied Tern *Sterna acuticauda* at Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary

On December 12, 2023, in the afternoon, we were searching for the Greater White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons* and Lesser White-fronted Goose *Anser erythropus* amidst a flock of Graylag Geese *Anser anser* and Bar-headed Goose *Aser indicus* on the outskirts of Nalsarovar Sanctuary. At that moment, two terns flew over our heads with black bellies and landed some distance away. Intrigued, we approached and managed to photograph these terns, later identified as black-bellied terns *Sterna acuticauda*. This marked the first recorded instance of this rare bird species at Nalsarovar, a significant observation. Subsequently, these birds were observed in the surrounding area for a few days. Considering its status as a "rare resident with isolated records from the state" (Ganpule et al., 2022), this sighting holds particular importance. An article published in Flamingo Gujarat discussed its status and distribution in Gujarat (Mori and Upadhyay, 2022), revealing sighting records in districts such as Jamnagar, Porbandar, Surat, Bharuch, Gandhinagar, Kachchh, Vadodara, and Dahod. The sighting at Nalsarovar adds to this distribution map, marking a new area of sighting within the Ahmedabad district.

Kamrudin Alwani & Tayab Alvani: Bird Guides at Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary.



Sighting of Pallid scops owl *Otus brucei* at the Ahmedabad University campus

On the evening of November 18th, 2023, at approximately 18:00 Hrs, I received a call from a security guard informing me of an injured owlet found at the main gate No. 10 of Ahmedabad University. I immediately went to investigate and was surprised to see a Pallid scops owl *Otus brucei* at the AU campus. As we regularly organizes bird walks on the campus, we have recorded over 80 species of birds. This sighting was a noteworthy addition to our university checklist, especially given that it occurred in the middle of the city. Upon closer inspection, I noticed that the bird had an injury in its right eye, which may have been caused by a conflict with other raptors. Unfortunately, the bird was unable to fly due to its injury. Without delay, I contacted the Forest Department and Jiv Daya for treatment and arranged for the bird to be sent there for further care.

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