

## Sighting of Grey hypocolius *Hypocolius ampelinus* in the Little Rann of Kutch

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Photo: Aditya Roy

Photograph of Male Grey hypocolius foraging on Salvadora berries near Vachraj island, Little Rann of Kutch (2<sup>nd</sup> November 2023)

Grey hypocolius (*Hypocolius ampelinus*) is the only member of the monotypic genus Hypocoliidae. The grey hypocolius ranges through the Middle East, breeding in the areas of Iraq, Iran, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Turkmenistan<sup>(1)</sup> and wintering mostly near the Red Sea and Persian Gulf coasts of Arabia, including Bahrain. It is a vagrant to Turkey, Israel, Egypt and Oman. They are regular winter visitors to the Kutch and Jamnagar regions of western India<sup>(2)(3)</sup> and vagrants have been noted as far south as Kihim near Bombay.<sup>(4)</sup> It is found in woodland and scrub in arid and semiarid regions, especially river valleys near deserts, and in irrigated and cultivated areas with trees, sea coastal areas, palm groves and gardens.<sup>(5)(6)</sup>

Although the species has been reported from Gujarat's Kutch district regularly no sighting notes exist after 1996 from the Little Rann of Kutch which shares a similar habitat. As per my communication with Dr Nita Shah (Wildlife Institute of India, Dehradun), she had seen foraging Grey hypocolius (Single, two or three individuals at times) near Vachraj island (Little Rann of Kutch) every year in Jan-Feb between 1989-95 during her PhD fieldwork in the Little Rann of Kutch. The checklist was published in Pavo.<sup>(7)</sup>

On 2nd November 2023, while birding with Mr Juned Malik we saw a male and female *Grey hypocolius* on Vachraj island (N 23.425045, E71.442854) at 5:34 pm. Both the birds were seen foraging on Salvadora (*Salvadora persica* / *Salvadora oleoides*)

berries. These trees are native to this region and their berries are a favourite food for Hypocolius, bulbuls and many other birds. More and more propagation of such native flora by replacing invasive *Prosopis juliflora* is crucial for the biodiversity of Kutch's Little and Great rann.

### References

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