

FLAMINGO *Gujarat*

Bulletin of Gujarat Birds

ISSN: 2583 - 2050



Vol. VII 1&2 Jan - June 2024

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|----------------------------|---|
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| Layout and design: | Pugmark Qmulus Consortium, Ahmedabad |

Contents

| | |
|---|----|
| Note on <i>Riparia</i> species in Gujarat | 1 |
| Nesting attempt of Lesser Flamingos <i>Phoeniconaias minor</i> in urban areas of Bhavnagar, Gujarat..... | 5 |
| Sighting of Pied Wheatear <i>Oenanthe pleschanka</i> at Chhari-Dhandh, Kachchh: An addition to the Gujarat avifauna..... | 8 |
| Unusual Encounter between Parasitic Jaeger <i>Stercorarius parasiticus</i> and Great Crested Tern <i>Thalasseus bergii</i> in Gujarat | 9 |
| Sighting of Red Throated Pipit <i>Anthus cervinus</i> near Vadi Lake, Navsari District, South Gujarat..... | 10 |
| Sighting of Yellow-breasted Bunting <i>Emberiza aureola</i> at Nalsarovar: A Second record from the state..... | 11 |
| Sighting of Grey hypocolius <i>Hypocolius ampelinus</i> in the Little Rann of Kutch..... | 12 |
| Sighting of Grey-headed Lapwing <i>Vanellus cinereus</i> at Pavagadh, third photographic record..... | 13 |
| Sighting of Saker Falcon <i>Falco cherrug</i> in Amreli district, Gujarat..... | 14 |
| Brown Crake's <i>Zapornia akool</i> diet menu includes Wafer: A opportunistic feeder..... | 15 |
| Sighting of Red-throated pipits <i>Anthus cervinus</i> near Bhavnagar city..... | 15 |
| Sighting of Sooty Tern <i>Onychoprion fuscatus</i> at Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary | 16 |
| Announcement: "Wader Special Issue"..... | 17 |
| "Amur Falcon Watch 2024" - A Triumph of Conservation and Discovery..... | 18 |
| Short Birding Notes..... | 19 |
| Author Guidelines..... | 22 |

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Cover Photo: 'Pied Wheater' by Bharat Kapdi

ISSN: 2583 - 2050

Date of publication: 5 May, 2024



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Note on *Riparia* species in Gujarat

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Introduction

Riparia Forster, T., 1817, is a genus of the family Hirundinidae. The genus is often collectively referred to as 'Sand Martins'. The taxonomy of this complex is tricky and frustrates quite many birders, and it is only recently that their threads have

been untangled to some extent. The Gujarat checklist (Ganpule 2016) mentioned three species of *Riparia* occurring in Gujarat – Plain Martin (*Riparia paludicola*), Sand Martin (*R. riparia*), and Pale Martin (*R. diluta*). Table-1 summarizes the names used now with the recent taxonomic changes.

Table-1: Annotated list of the revised name(s) of *Riparia* species [Details collected from Grimmett et. al (2011) and Ganpule et. al (2022)]

| | Name as per Ganpule 2016 | Name as per Grimmett et al. 2011 | Name and taxonomy as per Ganpule et al. 2022 | Comments |
|---|---|---|--|--|
| 1 | Plain Martin (<i>Riparia paludicola</i>) | Plain Martin (<i>Riparia paludicola</i>) | Grey-throated Martin (<i>Riparia chinensis</i>) | Taxonomy updated as per recent changes |
| 2 | Sand Martin (<i>Riparia riparia</i>) | Sand Martin (<i>Riparia riparia</i>) | Sand Martin (<i>Riparia riparia</i>) | No change |
| 3 | Pale Martin (<i>Riparia diluta</i>) | Pale Martin (<i>Riparia diluta</i>) | Pale Martin (<i>Riparia diluta</i>) | No change |

Status of *Riparia* species in Gujarat

All three species mentioned in the Gujarat checklist and the field guide are seen across Gujarat, majorly across wetlands and rivers. Table 2 tries to summarize the distribution of the three species within Gujarat using some well-acknowledged literary sources.

Table-2: Ranges of the species across Gujarat. [Details collected from Grimmett et.al (2011) Rasmussen & Anderton (2012), Ganpule 2016, and Ganpule et.al (2022)]

| Source | Grey-throated Martin | Sand Martin | Pale Martin |
|--|--|---|---|
| Ganpule 2016 | Common resident. Sightings from Saurashtra and Gujarat. Also from Kachchh | Uncommon winter visitor. Sightings from Saurashtra and Kachchh. Common in Banni area in Kachchh. Also in Gujarat, but probably rare | Common winter visitor. Sightings from all over the state |
| Grimmett et al. 2011 | Shown to be resident in almost all of Gujarat | Isolated winter record shown for Gujarat with the comment that range confused with Pale Martin | Shown to be a common winter visitor to Kutch and Saurashtra |
| Rasmussen & Anderton 2012 | Resident across Gujarat; Rivers and earth cliffs | Little-known range; photographed in Gujarat | Probably seen in Gujarat (no specific mention about Gujarat in text) |
| Ganpule et al. 2022 | Uncommon resident in some parts of the state | Common to uncommon winter visitor to some parts of the state | Uncommon winter visitor to some parts of the state |
| Author's comments (via eBird data and personal communication with birders) | Resident. Common across riverine habitats and large waterbodies. Rare/absent from Kutch, Saurashtra (except Jamnagar) and South Gujarat. | Winter visitor. Widespread across wetlands (coastal too). Absent (?) from Junagadh and Amreli. | Winter Visitor. Rare/uncommon. Sightings mainly from Kutch and Ahmedabad districts. No reports from South Gujarat and rare in Saurashtra (a few reports from Jamnagar and Bhavnagar). |

Riparia....

Below are some pictures selectively picked from Citizen Science website, eBird, wherein the identification markers are carefully shown and explained.



Picture-1: Grey-throated Martin (*R. chinensis*) from Vadodara, Gujarat by Dr. Pankaj Maheria. Note the grey-brown throat and no apparent breastband.



Picture-2: Grey-throated Martin (*R. chinensis*) from Gandhinagar, Gujarat by Saswat Mishra

Often, the throat will not be prominently dark due to wear in the plumage and it seems that the bird possesses a breast band. But, it clearly has brownish marks on the throat that point towards Grey-throated Martin.



Picture-3: Sand Martin by Sriram Reddy at Ahmedabad



Picture-4: Sand Martin by Dipayan Chakraborty at Ahmedabad. Note that the bird in picture 4 shows quite clearly demarcated ear patch and dark breast band.



Picture-5: Sand Martin (*R. riparia*) from Kerala (extralimital) by Abhinand Chandran. Note the prominent dark and contrasting breast band.



Picture-6: Pale Martin (*R. diluta*) from Ahmedabad by Vyom Vyas. Note the diffuse and less prominent breastband as compared to that of Sand Martin. This identification is tricky since immature Sand Martins are often known to exhibit similar breast band and facial pattern. Note that ear coverts

show clear-cut border. Presumed to be Pale Martin but Sand Martin cannot be ruled out. Biometrics / DNA analysis is required to confirm such individuals.



Picture-7: Pale Martin by Vyom Vyas at Ahmedabad
‘Textbook’ Pale Martins often show indistinct half collars, diffuse ear-coverts and a pale-greyish plumage as in Picture 7.

Table-3: Examples of individuals of each species from Gujarat.

| | Macaulay Library Link | Observer(s) |
|---|---|---------------|
| Grey-throated Martin (<i>R. chinensis</i>) | | |
| Sant Sarovar, Gandhinagar | https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/583539381 | Saswat Mishra |
| Juna Pungam, Bharuch | https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/459065291 | Jugal Patel |
| Pale Martin (<i>R. diluta</i>) | | |
| LRK, Kutch | https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/379352161 | J.P. Suman |
| Nalsarovar, Ahmedabad | https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/407225031 | Vyom Vyas |
| Nalsarovar, Ahmedabad | https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/415993401 | Dhiren Shah |
| Sand Martin (<i>R. riparia</i>) | | |
| Nalsarovar, Ahmedabad | https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/530129061 | Sudip Simha |
| Mahuva, Bhavnagar | https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/441221841 | Mahendra Bhil |

Discussion regarding distribution

The comparison done here is based on records from eBird and personal observations. Simultaneously, while writing and researching on this, some individuals were found to be mis-identified on eBird.

Grey-throated Martin – As per Ganpule 2016, these are common across Saurashtra and Gujarat with sightings from Kutch. Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) have just mentioned it to be present in Gujarat as a resident with no more details. Grimmett et. al (2011) showed them to be resident across Gujarat except in parts of North and East Gujarat where no

occurrence was shown. Ganpule et. al (2022) mentioned these to be resident across Gujarat but uncommon in some parts. Thus, there is no clarity regarding the status and distribution.

As per current status, Grey-throated Martins are almost completely absent from western Kutch and there are only a handful of sightings from LRK. It is quite spread across the riverine belts of Gujarat (Sabarmati and Narmada tributaries being the major strongholds). Reported frequently from Jamnagar, but rare/absent across rest of Saurashtra. Also absent/unreported from south Gujarat. Breeds in riverine cliffs or sand-banks.

Riparia....

Sand Martin – Ganpule 2016 states it as an uncommon winter visitor but common in Banni (Kutch) and probably rare in Gujarat. Grimmett et. al (2011) as well as Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) mentions only a sighting from Gujarat. Ganpule et. al (2022) have mentioned these (to be a) as common to uncommon winter visitors across various parts of Gujarat.

As per the current status, these are quite regular winter visitors in Kutch and Ahmedabad (Nalsarovar), Vadodara and the coastal belt. Rare/absent from central Saurashtra (?). Scarcely in east Gujarat.

Pale Martin – Thought to be a common winter visitor across the whole state by Ganpule (2016). While there is no mention of Gujarat, Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) said that these might winter and be widespread across India. Grimmett et. al (2011) showed these to be winter visitors to Kutch and Saurashtra. Ganpule et. al (2022) mentioned it to be winter visitors, though uncommon in some parts. The findings of this paper does not quite align with the ones that of Ganpule et al (2022).

As per current status based on reports from eBird and from personal observations, Pale Martin is uncommon when compared with its congeners in Gujarat. Most of the sightings are of single individuals that were found in flocks of other Hirundinids like Barn Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*). A handful of sightings across Kutch, Ahmedabad, Vadodara and Bhavnagar are reported on eBird. Thus, the distribution is not as widespread as indicated.

The reason for the lack of sightings might be:

(A) More studies are still required to fully untangle the identification of this group. Difficulty in identification could be a major issue.

(B) Martins are often hard to photograph when they're flying since these birds are agile and hard to focus on.

(C) Lack of adequate documentation of *Riparia* martins from various regions.

It should be noted that this is just a baseline data provided here. Since there are many misidentifications on eBird and since the field identification of this taxa is difficult, the true status of these species in Gujarat is not clear. Birders visiting areas with various swallow/martin species are requested to document as many individuals as possible and upload them on citizen science websites in order to assess the status of this group. Though this still remains a topic of discussion, proper knowledge of the status and distribution of these species can be collected by studying the birds in the field and documenting them over a long period of time.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank all the photographers (P. Maheria, S. Mishra, S. Reddy, V. Vyas, D. Chakraborty and A. Chandran) who contributed the media required for the making of this note. I would also like to thank Sunil Kini and Prasad Ganpule in helping me make this manuscript.

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Nesting attempt of Lesser Flamingos *Phoeniconaias minor* in urban areas of Bhavnagar, Gujarat

Kandarp Andharia and Prashant Andharia: Plot No: 55, Ishavasyam, Maruti Tenaments, Subhashnagar, Bhavnagar 364001.



Photo: Prashant Andharia

Introduction

The distribution of the Lesser Flamingo *Phoeniconaias minor* includes Asian and African regions (Del Hoyo *et al.* 1992) with an estimated total non-breeding population of more than 2.6 million individuals (Childress *et al.* 2008). Lesser Flamingo populations show a globally decreasing trend and are thus considered “Near Threatened” under the criteria A2c+3c+4c, (BirdLife International 2009). The species breeds regularly at only five colonies in India, Namibia, Botswana and Tanzania, while other locations host only occasional or suspected breeding attempts, such as Mauritania (Childress *et al.* 2008).

Ali (1945) recorded a huge flock of 100,000 Lesser Flamingos including adults and juveniles of 2-3 months, on the muddy expanse of shallow Banas River, near its mouth opposite Dhutari bet in Little Rann of Kachchh, Gujarat. In 1974, about 2000-5000 Lesser Flamingos were counted nesting at Flamingo City. In 1998, a total of 20,000 chicks and 30,000 adult Lesser Flamingos were recorded at the central part of Wild Ass Sanctuary, near Zinzuwada in Little Rann of Kachchh, Gujarat (Singh *et al.*, 1999).

The instances of Greater Flamingos breeding far from the traditional nesting sites have been reported frequently. Thakker (1983) observed about 70-80 nests at Thol tank (now Thol Wildlife Sanctuary) in 1981. The Greater Flamingos once were observed attempting to nest at

Shahwadi in the urban areas of Ahmedabad also (Tatu 1997). Recently Parasharya and Gadhi (2019) reported successful nesting of Greater Flamingos from the salt pans near Bhavnagar, which is quite far from the traditional nesting areas of the species.

Lester (1904), for the first time, suspected that Lesser Flamingos might have bred somewhere in Kachchh. His speculation was doubted by Salim Ali as there were no known reports of the breeding of Lesser Flamingos within Indian limits at that time. Later on, Ali (1954) himself agreed with Lester's speculation when he observed 1,00,000 adults and juveniles. The first confirmed report of the nesting of this species was given by Ali (1974) at the Flamingo City.

Since then, there have been no records of Lesser Flamingos breeding at the Flamingo City, but there have been ample suggestions of their breeding somewhere around. Mundkur *et al.* (1989) suspected that the actual “identified” Flamingo City was abandoned and Lesser Flamingos had started breeding elsewhere in Little or Great Rann of Kachchh, in Gujarat. The first evidence of Lesser Flamingos breeding in the central part of Wild Ass Sanctuary in Little Rann of Kachchh was gathered by Uday Vora on January 8, 1985 (Parasharya and Tere 2006). A colony of 10,000 nests was observed at the salt pans about 10 km north of Koparani village, which was spread over 3.5 km² area. It was presumed that Lesser Flamingos had bred there, in 1983 and earlier years also, as they could identify

Lesser Flamingo....

a few old nests in the colony (Vaishnav *et al.*, 2005). Lesser Flamingos had been also reported breeding on the mudflats of Purabcheria, in Little Rann of Kachchh. It was presumed that the birds were nesting at this site regularly for many years, however, the site was only known after 1989, when it was surveyed for three successive years from 1986 to 1988 (Mundkur *et al.*, 1989). The recent records of Lesser Flamingo nesting colonies with more than 30,000 nests were reported in the eastern parts of the Little Rann of Kachchh (Rathwa, 2022).

However, there are scanty reports of the lesser Flamingos attempting breeding or nesting in the other areas of Gujarat except the above mentioned traditional nesting sites. Lesser Flamingos attempted nesting at Porbandar City in 1991, although, it was an unsuccessful attempt (Khacher, 1994). Hundreds of young brown chicks (probably couple of months old) were seen at Kumbharwada area in Bhavnagar city during November 2001 (Parasharya D. personal communication). The observations reported here are first of its kind where the flock of Lesser Flamingo attempted to nest in saline shallow waters near the Airport of Bhavnagar.

Observations

Authors visit the site behind the Bhavnagar airport (21°45'41.64"N 72°11'23.37"E) regularly for birding. The area is about 1.5 km². The part of the site (0.5 km²) is a shallow wetland mainly formed due to water overflowing of salt water from the nearby Saltpan pumps (Image 1). Along-with Flamingos, waders such as sandpipers, redshanks and godwits are frequent visitors of the site. On 5th October 2021, the authors reached the site at around 4.30 pm. While scanning the site, an unusual behaviour of Lesser Flamingos was observed. Few birds were sitting on a mound like structure (Image 1 and 4), whereas few birds were digging out the soft mud and putting it on mounds (Image 3). At least eight birds were giving the mud deposition a round shape by encircling the mud mound with its beak. About 70 to 90 birds were actively involved in this activity. The observations of all the activities of these birds were recorded (Table 1). About 19 nests were complete and the birds were sitting on these nests. Few individuals were also engaged in completing the remaining nests which were about 56. The authors clicked the photographs and for further confirmation sent them to Mr. Uday Vora and Dr. Dishant Parasharya who had witnessed such nesting activities in past at traditional nesting areas. Both of them confirmed it to be the nesting activity of Lesser Flamingos. They suggested to monitor this breeding colony regularly and note the observations. The authors tried to observe the possibility of the eggs from an elevated space

through a spotting scope, but could not find any in either of the nests.



Table 1: Observations of nesting activity at Bhavnagar Airport site

| Sr. No. | Date | Time | Population | Total nest in preparation | Complete nest | Birds sitting on completed / partially completed nest |
|---------|------------|---------|------------|---------------------------|---------------|---|
| 1 | 05-10-2021 | 4:45 PM | 3500 | 56 | 19 | 39 |
| 2 | 06-10-2021 | 4:30 PM | 3500 | 56 | 19 | 30 |
| 3 | 07-10-2021 | 4:15 PM | 3500 | 56 | 19 | 22 |
| 4 | 08-10-2021 | 5:00 PM | 3500 | 50 | 20 | 28 |
| 5 | 09-10-2021 | 4:30 PM | 3500 | 44 | 25 | 37 |
| 6 | 10-10-2021 | 4:30 PM | 3500 | 35 | 35 | 42 |
| 7 | 11-10-2021 | 4:45 PM | 3500 | 28 | 42 | 48 |
| 8 | 12-10-2021 | 7:30 AM | Nil | 28 | 42 | Nil |
| 9 | 13-10-2021 | 7:30 AM | Nil | 28 | 42 | Nil |
| 10 | 14-10-2021 | 7:30 AM | Nil | 28 | 42 | Nil |
| 11 | 15-10-2021 | 4:30 PM | Nil | 28 | 42 | Nil |
| 12 | 16-10-2021 | 4:30 PM | Nil | 28 | 42 | Nil |

The authors observed the site for almost 8 subsequent days. On 12th October there was not a single Lesser Flamingo at the site. The entire area was deserted, and only a few waders were observed. There must have been some disturbance due to which they had evacuated the site. Surprisingly there was

no damage to the mounds constructed by the birds. We visited the site for next four days and the conditions were same and no Lesser Flamingos were observed. To evaluate the water quality we also took the water sample and analyzed the primary Physical properties of water (Table 2).

Table 2: Physical properties of water

| Sr. No. | Date | Time | pH | Salinity (ppt) | TDS (ppt) |
|---------|------------|---------|------|----------------|-----------|
| 1 | 11-10-2021 | 4:45 PM | 7.49 | 52 | 1.05 |

Discussion

Lesser Flamingos build mud-mound nests similar to but smaller than those of the Greater Flamingo (Brown 1971). They nest only when the inundation of the area occurs. In this area, the saline water was dumped through the water pumping station used by salt pans. However, the volume and duration of pumping such water is not fixed and hence the area remains partly inundated. Thus it would have served as a temporary nesting ground for the flamingos to initiate nesting. However, the depth of the water did not increase above 1 ft thus the feral dogs would have approached the nest and or birds. After establishing a colony, Lesser Flamingos can abandon the nests, if conditions do not remain favorable to continue (Parasharya and Tere 2006), which can be the cause of deserting the area after nest making on 12th October 2021. This attempt of nesting by Lesser Flamingo is more than 300 km away from its traditional nesting grounds, which itself is a record except Porbandar (Khachar 1994). Salt pans of Bhavnagar are an IBA and host thousands of birds during migratory season. Such nesting attempts increase its conservation value with reference to avifauna.

Acknowledgement

We thank Mr.Uday Vora, Dr. Dishant Parasharya and Janki Teli for their help and guidance in this work. We are thankful to Dr. Dishant Parasharya for helping in preparing the manuscript also.

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Sighting of Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka* at Chhari-Dhandh, Kachchh: An addition to the Gujarat avifauna

Bharat Kapadi: Epicenter Home Stay, Hobay-Lodai Road, Near Kasvati Dam, Lodai, Kachchh. epicenterhomestay@gmail.com



Photo: Tushar Majethia

On 26 February 2024, I was on a regular birding trip at the Chhari-Dhandh area in Kachchh, along with Tushar Majethia. I saw an unusual wheatear (*Oenanthe* sp.) on a bush top and took some photos. I checked the images online and to my surprise, found that it was a Pied Wheatear *Oenanthe pleschanka*. More photos of this individual can be found in the eBird checklist: <https://ebird.org/checklist/S162992669>. Interestingly, this was a Pied Wheatear of the scarce *vittata* morph, which is white-throated with the black eye mask continuing the neck sides. The crown was extensively black-tipped. It is possible that this was a first-summer bird.

This is the first photographic record of the species from Gujarat. Later, senior birdwatchers also made me aware that it is also an addition to the Gujarat avifauna. On searching references, I found that the Pied Wheatear is included in the 'hypothetical or unconfirmed' section in Appendix 2 of the recently published 'A Field Guide to Birds of Gujarat' (Ganpule *et al.* 2022). The species is given as 'possible in Gujarat. Could occur in the state as a vagrant during passage. A few claimed sight records are treated here as unverified'.

Thus, this sighting confirms the occurrence of the Pied Wheatear in Gujarat. This sighting is in late February and

could indicate early spring passage. Pied Wheatears breed from Central Asia up to the NW Himalayas and migrate to Africa. Hence, it is possible that during return migration, few individuals pass through Gujarat. It is stated that the *vittata* morph is more prevalent in the eastern part of the species' range, and there are reports of this morph in India (from Himachal Pradesh). For western India, there is only one record of the Pied Wheatear from Maharashtra in eBird, which is

of the normal morph. Thus, this is a rare sighting of the Pied Wheatear of the *vittata* morph from Gujarat.

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Unusual Encounter between Parasitic Jaeger *Stercorarius parasiticus* and Great Crested Tern *Thalasseus bergii* in Gujarat

Vyom Vyas: 8, Jayantilal Park, Ambli-Bopal Rd., Ahmedabad 380058. vyomvyas2004@gmail.com (GM: Gaurav Mehta, PS: Pratham Shah, VC: Vyom Chaudhari)

On the morning of February 3, 2024, VC, GM, PS, and I were birding in a small unnamed wetland near the coastline (21°36'10.8" N, 69°38'24.0" E) in Porbandar, Gujarat. Afterwards, PS, VC, and I proceeded towards the sea, hoping to find Sandwich Terns *Thalasseus sanvicensis*. Along the coast, we saw many Gull-billed Terns *Gelochelidon nilotica* and a lone Caspian Tern *Hydroprogne caspia* but no indication of Sandwich Terns.

At about 08:30 hrs, VC sighted a plastic float deep in the sea. On the float was a large Tern with a big yellow beak and a grayish back. Despite the immense distance, these field identifiers helped us to narrow down to the Great Crested Tern *Thalasseus bergii*, which marked the twelfth record for Gujarat (eBird, Feb 2024). The Great Crested Tern is a large tern with a glossy black cap, long crest, gray upper wing and back, black legs, and a chrome-yellow bill. Already elated by the sighting, I clicked many photos of this bird. As I clicked, a large brown bird swiftly appeared in the frame. Due to its sheer speed and size, we knew we had a Skua. The following moments showed a midair tussle between the Tern and the Skua, probably for food, but we were too distant to conclude this. After confirming with Kunan Naik and Nikolas Haass, we deduced Parasitic Jaeger/ Arctic Skua due to the location, behavior, and white outer primaries. This bird was the seventh record for Gujarat (eBird, Feb 2024). The Parasitic Jaeger is tricky to identify due to its similarities with the other closely related species and complex variation and molting patterns. The juveniles are variable in plumage with inconsistent amounts of brown upper parts, barred uppertail, and undertail coverts. The central rectrices extend slightly beyond the others. About half of all birds show orangish brown barring on the back and wash on the neck and head.

Such unusual instances depict the immense potential of Gujarat's coastline, as much of the unexplored region could harbour various elusive species.



Photo: Vyom Vyas

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Sighting of Red Throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus* near Vadi Lake, Navsari District, South Gujarat

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Photo: Kavya Shah

On the 30th of December, 2023 my team and I were exploring Vadi Lake in Navsari District of South Gujarat when we came across this beautiful passerine bird called Red Throated Pipit *Anthus cervinus* wading in the grass along with the flock of Painted Storks, Indian Pond Heron and Purple Heron near the wetland. We came across this unusual bird during Bird Census 2023 organized by Gujarat Forest Department. Members of Navsari NGOs were with us. The bird was later identified by expert birders as Red throated Pipit (how can a pipit wade). We observed this individual at around 7.30 am searching for food in the short grass near a wetland at Vadi Lake. It was constantly moving along the edge of the wetland. This is probably the first record from South Gujarat and we assume it might be a winter visitor. We visited the same location on the following day (31st December 2023) but it was not observed.

More than 40 species of *Anthus* pipits are currently recognized worldwide (Tyler 2004). Many are long-distance migrants and most are difficult to identify in the field (Hall 1961, King 1981). About 14-15 cm in size, it is a distinctive pipit with seasonal differences in plumage. Male in breeding plumage has deep buffish-pink supercilium, buffish-brown lores and ear-coverts; pale brown upperparts with broad blackish-brown streaking, paler margins of mantle feathers usually forming double "V" or "braces"; primaries and secondaries are blackish-brown with narrow buff edgings, tertials and greater and median wing-

coverts dark brown with buffish-white tips and edges, lesser coverts dark brown with paler brown edges. Breeding female differs from breeding males in having pink breasts and heads less intensive and less extensive, and upper breasts usually buff and more heavily streaked; non-breeding females resemble males but lack a pink tinge on the supercilium and throat.

Its diet mainly consists of insects, other invertebrates, and some vegetative matter. Forages on the ground, often in muddy areas, and among the seaweed on the seashore; adopts horizontal posture, walks quickly, and wags tail often. Usually in small, loose flocks outside the breeding season.

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Sighting of Yellow-breasted Bunting *Emberiza aureola* at Nalsarovar: A Second record from the state

Sabbir Belim, Latif Belim: Bird Guides at Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary.



On 28 January 2024, we were birding with Mr. Ram Chandra and Mrs. Roopa at the outskirts of Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary. We sighted a flock of Red-headed Buntings *Emberiza biceps* and started taking photographs there. Among this flock, we came across one different-looking individual which was strikingly yellow. It had a deep yellow throat, breast and underparts, whitish-yellow supercilium, dark chestnut breast band, ear coverts and crown, darker upperparts with white shoulder patch and white wing bar. It was not that shy and allowed us to be relatively close. We took several pictures of this bird. Later on, while sharing the pictures with many birder friends on social media, we learned that It was a Yellow-breasted Bunting *Emberiza aureola* male.

There is only one previous record of this species from Gujarat. (Mengar 2019 and Ganpule et al. 2022). Hence the present sighting can be treated as a second record of this species from the state and is worth publishing.

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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 (2nd 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⁽¹⁾ 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⁽²⁾⁽³⁾ and vagrants have been noted as far south as Kihim near Bombay.⁽⁴⁾ 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.⁽⁵⁾⁽⁶⁾

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.⁽⁷⁾

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.

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Sighting of Grey-headed Lapwing *Vanellus cinereus* at Pavagadh, third photographic record

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On the 11th of February 2024 afternoon, I went for birdwatching & photography of waterbirds at Vada Talav near Pavagadh, Ta. Halol, Dist. Panchmahal. I have seen many birds there like Great Egrets, Open-billed Stork, Spoonbills, Sandpipers etc, During that time I saw a Godwit-like bird and took few photographs and on checking the screen, we found, it was a Lapwing but a different one the Red-wattled Lapwing and Yellow-wattled Lapwing, which usually are sighted here. I tried to get near it, but it flew away. This lapwing was more shy than our resident lapwings. Later, I tried to identify this bird through Google Lens, using the on screen image. It was a rare Grey-headed Lapwing. Considering the plumage of the bird, it was an immature individual.

On searching earlier records I found that my sighting was essential to establish further that it's a winter visiting bird in Gujarat as a vagrant. My record is the third photographic record in the State. "This species has been recently photographed twice in Gujarat; once in Timbi Irrigation Reservoir near Vadodara (Chandrarao et al. 2021) and once at Nava Talav near the Little Rann of Kachchh (see eBird checklist: (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S97459214>) the Grey-headed Lapwing may be a winter vagrant, visiting suitable habitats in the state." (Ganpule 2021)

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Photos: Jayesh Dumadiya

Sighting of Saker Falcon *Falco cherrug* in Amreli district, Gujarat

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Photo: Kaushal Sharma

On the 29th of December 2023, I was returning from Jafrabad after sighting some waders and going to Rajula to observe more salt pans near Victor Port. En route to Rajula, I observed a red-necked falcon *Falco chicquera* on top of a high-tension line near Lunsapur village. Beneath the Red-necked falcon, I also observed a large raptor. For the confirmation of that unidentified raptor, I took a photograph. After taking one shot of the unidentified raptor, I approached that tower for a clear shot, but the bird looked very shy and flew away to the next tower. Before moving closer to the tower, I clicked the picture because the bird was visible to identify. For clicking more pictures, I approached there but the bird took a long flight and disappeared.

The crown of the bird was pale brown with whitish supercilium, most of the upper parts were rufous brown and the tail-tip was off-white and large buff with dark primaries in flight. I have seen dark underwing coverts heavily striking underparts even flight was lazier than Peregrine falcon *Falco peregrinus* also larger bulky body suggests its Saker falcon *Falco cherrug*. This rare and powerful bird of prey is known for its impressive speed and aerial prowess. This is the first-ever sighting in this region of a Saker Falcon.

In Gujarat around 60 sightings of this phenomenal bird have been recorded by ornithologists. Most of them were from the Greater Rann of Kachchh, Little Rann of Kachchh and Nal Sarovar region because of the suitable habitat and

prey availability. One of the reasons behind this sighting in Amreli district is the landscape, which features dry scrubland and salt pans. Such habitat hosts flocks of larks, such as the sand lark, greater short-toed lark, and other lark species. Additionally, spiny-tailed lizards and gerbils are present due to the dry arid land.

The presence of Saker Falcon highlights the ecological richness of the area which is significant for the local biodiversity. Birdwatchers and researchers alike are excited, as this sighting expands our understanding of this region's bird species. It also contributes to our understanding of the distribution of this species in India, given its preference for open grasslands and semi-desert regions. The presence of this species in the Amreli district highlights the importance of conserving diverse habitats to support a range of avian species. This finding further contributes to the ongoing efforts to assess and protect raptor populations in the region.

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Brown Crake's *Zapornia akool* diet menu includes Wafer: A opportunistic feeder

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Photo: Ashok Mashru



Photo: Dipen Tratia

On 1 July 2021, I was birding at Hanumandhara temple near Nyari 2 dam with co-birder Jignesh Rathod. I observed two Brown Crakes on the causeway made over the stream, of which one was foraging. Carrying the food in the bill, it went off the causeway down the stream. I had clicked few photographs and found that it has picked up potato chips. This area, being a picnic spot, is visited by many people and thus someone might have thrown the packet of chips on the road.

The diet of Brown Crake usually includes "Worms, Molluscs, adult and larval insects and seeds of marsh plants" (Taylor 2020). On further discussing this observation I came to know that a birder friend Mr. Dipen Tratia has recently observed and photographed Brown Crake eating Ganthiya at the same place. On 20th February 2012, I observed 5 Brown Crakes together collecting shells and feeding on residual meat in shells opened and discarded by an open-billed stork (Mashru 2013). Thus, it proves that Brown Crake is prone to adopt opportunistic feeding.

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Sighting of Red-throated pipits *Anthus cervinus* near Bhavnagar city

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Photo: Kandarp Andharia

On the 26th of February 2021 afternoon the first author went birding at Avaniya Lake, about 10 km from Bhavnagar city.

He observed some common birds along with three Jack snipes. He also came across one pipit near the reed beds on the muddy area of the lake. The pipit was heavily streaked on the breasts till the flanks. It clearly looked different from tree pipit. After reaching home he forwarded the record shots of the pipit taken on the field to Mr. Prasad Ganpule. He confirmed it as a Red-throated Pipit. It was the first record of red-throated pipit in the Bhavnagar area. Later in the same season on date 12th April 2021, Dr P. P. Dodiya, Vishal Makwana and Aamir Matli recorded a single Red-throated Pipit at a different location at city pond Bortalav (Gaurishankar Lake).

On the morning of 28th January 2024, the second author and Jigar Vakani went for routine birdwatching at city pond Bortalav. They saw an unusual pipit foraging near Lake. He

Red-throated Pipit...

clicked some pics and realized that it was a Red-throated Pipit. He observed this beauty for 1.5 hours. Red-throated pipit is an unmistakable bird because of its red throat and rusty red face. The back is heavily streaked with black, white, and brown, and the rump is also streaked. Few days later both the authors along with Ashok Mashru, Prashant Andharia and Raj found three individuals at the same place. In these three individuals two pipits were in partial breeding plumage while the third individual was with a rusty face and a red throat. Also in the same season on 7th February 2024, the second author observed four individuals of Red throated pipits at the same place at Bortalav Lake.

Red-throated pipit is very rare in Gujarat. Its status and distribution is "Vagrant. Winter Isolated records from many parts of the State". (Ganpule et al, 2022).

On the ebird website, some previously isolated records exist in Kachchh and Amreli districts. But this year, single bird was first recorded at Nalsarovar on 7th January 2024 by Kamrudin Alvani, Taiyab Alvani, and Esha Munshi. See the bird link (<https://ebird.org/india/checklist/S158492957>). Two more individuals were sighted at Nalsarovar by other bird watchers few days later.

So this can be considered as a significant observation as it was the first time that three and four individuals of Red throated pipits were observed at their respective areas.

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Sighting of Sooty Tern *Onychoprion fuscatus* at Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary

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Photo: Vyom Vyas

Sooty Tern *Onychoprion fuscatus* is an aquatic bird with a jet-black back, black cap, and crisp white forehead. The immatures are dark overall, with white spots on the wings and a white undertail. It is very similar to the Bridled Tern, but a few features, like a darker black back, darker underwing feathers, and narrow white edges to the tail, separate it from an adult Sooty Tern. [Fig:1]

On June 18, After the cyclone Biparjoy, We (Bhaarat Vyas, Kamrudin Alvani, Akshay Jethi, and Vyom Vyas) visited the Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary in search for pelagics that might have blown inshore due to cyclone Biparjoy as we heard the news of the sightings of Brown Noddies at Jamnagar and Porbandar coasts. It was a cloudy morning with a lot of bird activity. We noted species like Little Tern, Kentish Plover, Graylag Goose and Collared Pratincole.

At around 9, while waiting for our boat to arrive, we observed a mixed flock of birds, primarily Terns, near the main boating point. Among them, we saw a bird of black and white color dart across the sky. Its flight pattern was quite elegant and distinct, unlike the Whiskered Terns which were chasing it. We were lucky to get some good images of the bird in flight. This was helpful in identifying its field marks. Later during the discussion, we confirmed that the bird was a Sooty Tern. The distinguishing features to confirm the identification were the jet-black back, black cap, crisp white forehead, and white undertail. We ruled out the Bridled Tern as it has the short supercilium and a more sooty-gray back. Furthermore, the distinct flight pattern and an elongated structure were accounted for confirming.

Our record is the first county and the fourth state record (Ebird, 2023) as of June 18, 2023.

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Announcement

“Wader Special Issue”



Call for Submissions: Special Issue on The Waders of Gujarat!

Publication: October-December 2024

Bulletin: FLAMINGO GUJARAT – Bulletin of Gujarat Birds

Publisher: Bird Conservation Society, Gujarat

Dear Researchers, Bird Enthusiasts, and Observers,

We are delighted to announce the forthcoming publication of a special issue within FLAMINGO GUJARAT, focusing on the avifauna titled "The Waders of Gujarat." This initiative, undertaken by the Bird Conservation Society, Gujarat, aims to provide a platform for disseminating scholarly research, short articles, and birding notes accompanied by relevant imagery.

We invite submissions that delve into various aspects of wader ecology, behavior, conservation, and distribution in the Gujarat region. Whether you have conducted rigorous scientific research or possess anecdotal observations of these avian species, we encourage you to contribute to this scholarly endeavor.

Submissions can be forwarded to the designated email address: devvratsinhji.flamingogujarat@gmail.com

FLAMINGO Gujarat periodically curates special issues, each focusing on distinct themes within avian studies. We aspire to unearth hidden research findings and observations through this initiative, enriching FLAMINGO Gujarat's readership with diverse perspectives and insights.

We extend our heartfelt appreciation to all contributors for their valuable contributions, efforts, and support. Together, let us advance our understanding of Gujarat's waders and foster a deeper appreciation for the region's avian biodiversity.

Thank you for your participation and enthusiasm. Let us unite in our shared passion for avian conservation and research!

Devvratsinh Mori

Associate Editor

FLAMINGO GUJARAT - Bulletin of Gujarat Birds

“Amur Falcon Watch 2024”

A Triumph of Conservation and Discovery



From the 26th to the 28th, the Bird Conservation Society of Gujarat orchestrated a three-day event dedicated to observing the remarkable return migration of Amur falcons from Africa. Celebrated for their extraordinary long-distance journeys spanning continents, this event was tailored to witness the majestic Amur falcons' pilgrimage back to their breeding grounds in Mongolia and eastern China.

The inaugural sessions on the 26th saw participants congregating in a hall, where Viral Joshi, the program coordinator, extended a warm welcome to all. This was followed by enlightening addresses from the Bird Conservation Society, Gujarat (BCSG) President Shri Dr Bakul Bhai Trivedi and Secretary Shri Uday Bhai Vora, shed light on the significance of the event and the intricacies of Amur counting. Renowned Scientist Dr R Suresh Kumar from the Wildlife Institute of India (WII), Dehradun then captivated the audience with an expert discourse on species migration, focusing mainly on the Amur falcons and the ecological relevance of their remarkable journey, drawing insights from a decade's worth of satellite-tagged data. The evening culminated in a heartfelt tribute to Shri Batuk Bhil, lauding his invaluable contributions to Gujarat Ornithology.

Following dinner, teams were assigned to designated points stretching from Gopnath to Dharabandar, encompassing 12 Strategic locations across Mahuva in the Bhavnagar district and Rajula in the Amreli district. Covering a span of 100 kilometres along the picturesque Saurashtra coast.

On the morning of the 27th, teams set out to their designated points, fueled by a quick breakfast and packed lunch, eagerly anticipating the spectacular sight of Amur falcons gracing the skies. As the day progressed, excitement grew with each sudden burst of falcons spotted in the sky. Reports flooded in from various points, with Gopnath reporting over 100 birds, sparking lively discussions during dinner. The following day,

teams embarked on the second counting day, the morning count. The program concluded with a closing ceremony, leaving participants with cherished memories to look back on. Teams eagerly set out again on the 28th for the final counting day, filled with fresh energy. The program ended with a heartfelt closing ceremony, leaving everyone with cherished memories.



Besides marvelling at the Amur falcons' migration, the event also focused on conservation efforts:

- **Learning Together:** Participants joined in educational activities to learn about bird migration, especially the incredible journey of Amur falcons.
- **Helping Science:** The event helped gather important information about Amur falcon migration, behavior, and populations, which can guide conservation efforts.
- **Getting Communities Involved:** By including locals, students, and nature lovers, the event encouraged everyone to care for the region's birdlife.
- **Bringing People Together:** The event provided a space for different groups like Bird watchers, conservationists, scientists, wildlife photographers and policymakers to work together towards protecting migratory birds and their habitats.

Amur Falcon Watch 2024 brought 35 people from busy streets to university halls to appreciate Gujarat's birds. As it ended, everyone felt grateful for the chance to experience nature's wonders firsthand.

Viral Joshi: Member, BCSG

Devvratsinh Mori: Executive member, BCSG

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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Book & Book Chapter

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