

## Sighting of Red Knot *Calidris canutus* in Jamnagar

**Yashodhan Bhatia:** 'Birding or Nothing' Bhatia Stores, Old Station Road, Nr Teen Batti, Jamnagar 361001, Gujarat. Email: jamnagarbirds@gmail.com

The coastal landscapes of Jamnagar are a vital wintering ground for countless migratory shorebirds that traverse vast distances along global flyways, seeking refuge from unforgiving Arctic winters. Species like Bar-tailed Godwit (*Limosa lapponica*), Black-tailed Godwit (*Limosa limosa*), Greater and Lesser Sand Plovers (*Charadrius leschenaultii*) and *Charadrius mongolus*), Little Stint (*Calidris minuta*), and Great Knot (*Calidris tenuirostris*) flock to these rich intertidal zones. Among these, the Red Knot (*Calidris canutus*) is an elusive visitor, with only scattered records along the Gujarat coastline, primarily in Saurashtra (Ganpule et al., 2022).

On the morning of January 2, 2023, while birding at Balachadi, we lay flat on the beach, scanning a group of Great Knots, hoping to spot "6Z" — a tagged individual ringed in Russia, which has been a regular winter visitor since 2019. The tide was in our favor, and the knots steadily moved closer, probing the wet sand for prey as the waves ebbed and flowed. Amidst the flock, a single bird stood out: slightly smaller, paler, with a shorter bill. We immediately shifted our focus, capturing as many photographs as possible. With each frame, our excitement grew, and after careful observation, we confirmed the bird as a Red Knot in non-breeding plumage — a rare find for this region.

Red Knots are sturdy, medium-sized waders, easily mistaken for their larger cousin, the Great Knot. In non-breeding plumage, they exhibit a plain grey back with subtle white feather fringes, a whitish underside, and fine grey streaking on the breast (van Gils et al., 2020). Their short black bill and relatively short greenish legs further distinguish them. While Red Knots are renowned for their spectacular gatherings in the Western Hemisphere, where they form dense flocks during migration, their presence on India's western coast remains sporadic and poorly documented.

Globally, the Red Knot is classified as Near Threatened on the IUCN Red List, with populations declining due to habitat loss, human disturbance, and climate change affecting both breeding and stopover sites (BirdLife International, 2023). The subspecies (*Calidris canutus rogersi*) migrates along the East Asian-Australasian Flyway (EAAF), journeying from Siberian breeding grounds to Australia and New Zealand (Battley et al., 2012). Gujarat's coastline, with its expansive mudflats and sheltered roosting sites, provides critical stopover habitat along this route — yet detailed observations of rare shorebirds remain limited.

These ecosystems offer abundant food resources and relative safety, serving as crucial refueling stations for migratory

shorebirds. Yet, systematic monitoring efforts are sparse, and the presence of species like the Red Knot often goes unnoticed.



Photo: Yashodhan Bhatia

Though not the first record for the region, our sighting stands as one of the clearest and most detailed observations of a Red Knot in Gujarat. It highlights the ecological significance of these coastal landscapes and underscores the need for sustained monitoring, collaborative research, and conservation action to protect these vital habitats and the migratory birds that depend on them.

### References

- Battley, P. F., Rogers, D. I., & Piersma, T. (2012). Migration and Conservation of Red Knots in the East Asian-Australasian Flyway. *Emu - Austral Ornithology*, 112(4), 318-325.
- BirdLife International. (2023). Species factsheet: *Calidris canutus*. Retrieved from BirdLife International.
- Ganpule, P., Varu, M., Trivedi, B., & Raina, A. D. (2022). *A Field Guide to the Birds of Gujarat*. Bird Conservation Society, Gujarat.
- Kumar, A., Jha, R., & Singh, P. (2021). Shorebird Migration Patterns in Western India. *Journal of Avian Research*, 12(3), 45-56.
- Van Gils, J., Wiersma, P., & Kirwan, G. M. (2020). Red Knot (*Calidris canutus*). In J. del Hoyo, A. Elliott, & D. A. Christie (Eds.), *Handbook of the Birds of the World Alive*. Lynx Edicions.
- Wetlands International. (2023). East Asian-Australasian Flyway Partnership. Retrieved from Wetlands International.