

Short Birding Notes



Sighting of Greylag Goose *Anser anser* at Rajkot

On the afternoon of 21 February 2023, we visited Aji 2 Dam near Rajkot to go birdwatching and to search for White Storks (*Ciconia ciconia*). After spotting six White Storks, I observed a large bird swimming in the water alongside Eurasian Coots (*Fulica atra*) and Northern Shovelers (*Spatula clypeata*) through my binoculars. Given its considerable size and distance, I initially presumed it to be a species of goose. Upon capturing a photograph and zooming in, I identified the bird as a Greylag Goose (*Anser anser*), with four individuals present together. Rajkot is not a regular wintering site for this species. Previously, on 22 December 2001, Rajdeep Zala and I had recorded two Greylag Geese near Rajkot at Nyari-1 Dam, a sighting documented in the Gujarati bird newsletter *Vihang*. This recent observation, occurring after a gap of 22 years, is significant and contributes to understanding the species' recent distribution in the region.

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Sighting of Yellow-legged Buttonquail *Turnix tanki* on the outskirts of Ahmedabad

A rare and elusive bird, the Yellow-legged Buttonquail (*Turnix tanki*), was recently observed in the semi-urban landscape of Bopal-Ghuma, Ahmedabad. On the evening of June 23, 2024, while walking through a grassy patch near a farm, I flushed a small, quail-like bird that flew a short distance into a nearby bush. I managed to get a few photographs before it disappeared again. Something about it seemed unfamiliar. Later, while reviewing the images, I realised it was not one of the usual buttonquails seen in Gujarat. After consulting a bird expert, Ashok Mashru, the identification was confirmed: it was indeed a Yellow-legged Buttonquail. A check of eBird confirmed what I had suspected. There were no records of this species from Ahmedabad. Its presence here is not just unexpected but significant. Sightings of this bird are uncommon across India and even rarer in urban or semi-urban landscapes. This observation highlights how even small patches of habitat around our cities can harbour surprising biodiversity and reinforces the need to protect and study these remaining natural spaces more seriously.

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Sighting of Spotted Dove *Spilopelia chinensis* in Rajkot.

On August 17, 2024, after evening rains during a routine birding drive on Vagudad Road, I spotted a dove that looked different from the commonly seen species in Rajkot. A record shot confirmed it to be a Spotted Dove (*Spilopelia chinensis*), a species rarely reported from this area. On checking eBird, the only previous record near Rajkot was from Khirasara Vidi by Shri Mehul Patel, which lacked a photo. Other sightings are from Hingolghadh Sanctuary (~70 km away) during May–August. Thus, this is the first photographic record of the species near Rajkot. According to Birds of Saurashtra (Dharmkumarsinhji, 1955), this species shows local movements, especially after the monsoon (August–November). My sighting, along with those from Hingolghadh, supports the idea of post-monsoon local migration, but more observations are needed to confirm this pattern.

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Sighting of Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio* near Velavadar

On September 17, 2024, during one of my regular birding trips along the Narmada Canal just outside Velavadar, I recorded a notable sighting of a Red-backed Shrike (*Lanius collurio*). I visit this area every 10–15 days, as the mix of farmland and scrubland provides excellent habitat for various bird species, especially during migration periods. On previous visits, I had observed 5–6 Eurasian Rollers, numerous Blue-cheeked Bee-eaters, and even a Common Cuckoo—all strong indicators of migratory activity during the passage season. Around 5:30 PM, I noticed a shrike perched at a distance. As I tried to get closer, it flew off. I decided to wait in the same spot, and about 15 minutes later, the shrike returned and perched on an electric wire. I photographed it, and after consulting with birding experts, the bird was confirmed to be a Red-backed Shrike. A rarely seen passage migrant in Gujarat. Later, the shrike moved to a nearby Acacia branch where it remained until sunset. According to available literature and local observations, the Red-backed Shrike is considered an autumn passage migrant in Gujarat, with most records coming from Kachchh and some parts of Saurashtra (Ganpule et. al., 2022). A search on eBird revealed only one prior record from Bhavnagar district in 2021, documented by Vivek Upadhyay and Kandarp Andhariya. Interestingly, this year, a few other birders have reported sightings of this species from nearby areas around the same time, indicating a possible passage movement through this region also.

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Sighting of Western Crowned Warbler *Phylloscopus occipitalis* in Gandhinagar

On 2 October 2024, we explored Punit Van for migratory species. We encountered several singing Greenish Warblers (*Phylloscopus trochiloides*), Hume's Warblers (*Phylloscopus humei*), and a perched Common Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*). At around 08:30 hrs, we heard a distinct, repetitive, and sharp song. We immediately identified it as the song of a Western Crowned Warbler (*Phylloscopus occipitalis*). Since this species was most likely a passage migrant through the Ahmedabad and Gandhinagar districts, we were keen on obtaining documentation. Further down the track, we located two more individuals vocalising. We managed to document one of the three individuals and obtain recordings and photographs. We uploaded the documentation to our eBird checklist (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S197203950>). In our photographs, we observed distinctive features such as a long pale yellow supercilium, double wing bar (More prominent on the greater coverts than on the medians due to it being in worn plumage), indistinct crown stripe, olive lateral crown stripes, dark olive lores and eyestripe; bright olive-green upperparts, whitish underparts, and a prominent orange-yellow base of lower mandible. Our record marks the second sighting of this species in the Gandhinagar district, the first being by Naushad Theba in 2014 (<https://ebird.org/checklist/S162323163>). This record highlights the importance of consistent observations during migration season. Although the Western Crowned Warbler is considered a rare to uncommon winter visitor in Gujarat (Ganpule et. al., 2022).

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Sighting of European White Stork *Ciconia ciconia* in the Urban Area of Ahmedabad.

On Saturday, 17 November 2024, at around 12:30 PM, a rare and remarkable sighting of a White Stork (*Ciconia ciconia*) was reported from Chandola Lake, located in the urban area of Ahmedabad. The observation occurred during a routine drive when the observer noticed a distinctive object and decided to take a closer look using binoculars. While Asian Openbills and Painted Storks are commonly seen at Chandola Lake, the White Stork is an uncommon to common winter visitor to Gujarat (Ganpule et al., 2022). This species is a winter migrant, known for its impressive size, measuring approximately 100-110 cm. It has predominantly white plumage with striking black primary feathers on the wings and a black tail. Males are generally larger than females. The presence of such uncommon species highlights the importance of Chandola Lake as an important habitat for migratory birds during the winter months.

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Sighting of Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis* at Timbi Lake, Vadodara

On 3 December 2024, Ravi Kelkar and I visited Timbi Lake near Vadodara city for birdwatching. While searching for Isabelline and Brown Shrikes, we suddenly noticed a few eagles take off from the ground and land nearby. Initially, we assumed they were Greater Spotted Eagles, as this species has been regularly wintering at Timbi for the past three years. However, upon closer observation, we identified one of the birds as a Steppe Eagle (*Aquila nipalensis*), roosting alongside two Greater Spotted Eagles (*Clanga clanga*). One dark morph and one fulvescens morph. Interestingly, the fulvescens Greater Spotted Eagle closely followed the Steppe Eagle wherever it went, almost as if they were companions. Since this sighting on 3 December, we have been visiting Timbi Lake daily. However, there have been no further records of the Steppe Eagle. This sighting marks the first photographic record of the Steppe Eagle from Timbi Lake. Due to newly created water channels, the roosting site was inaccessible in the first half of December 2024. Despite this, the dark morph Greater Spotted Eagle was consistently seen at the same spot on the ground each day. However, there were no sightings of the Steppe Eagle or the fulvescens morph of the Greater Spotted Eagle during this time. Once the water levels receded and the area became accessible again, the dark morph Greater Spotted Eagle shifted its roosting site from the ground to nearby trees.

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First Record of Oriental Scops Owl *Otus sunia* from Kachchh

The Kachchh region, known for its rich biodiversity, continues to surprise with new avian records. On 8th December 2024, while birdwatching near Kotdi village, I was accompanied by young birder Romanch Nimavat. The area comprised typical scrub forest with Babul (*Venchellia nilotica*), Gorad (*Senegalia senegal*), and Khair (*Senegalia catechu*), a habitat that supports owls such as Spotted Owlet (*Athene brama*), Pallid Scops Owl (*Otus brucei*), Barn Owl (*Tyto alba*), and Indian Eagle-Owl (*Bubo bengalensis*). While exploring a rocky riverbed, we spotted several species, including the Sulphur-bellied Warbler (*Phylloscopus griseolus*). Around 10:30 hrs, we noticed a small rufous-colored bird flying between trees. Its flight pattern and size suggested it was an owl. The bird eventually perched on a Gorad tree, allowing us to observe and photograph it. Based on its appearance and behaviour, we identified it as an Oriental Scops Owl (*Otus sunia*). After sharing the sighting with experienced birders and checking eBird data, we confirmed that this is the first documented sighting of the Oriental Scops Owl in the Kachchh region. Previously, it was recorded from districts like Bhavnagar, Gandhinagar, Mehsana, Navsari, and Dang. The species is uncommon in well-wooded parts of Gujarat (Ganpule et al., 2022). This observation adds a new location to the species' known distribution and highlights the ecological importance of Kachchh's diverse habitats.

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Sighting of Laggar Falcon *Falco jugger* at Timbi Lake, Vadodara

On the morning of 7 December 2024, after a long birding trip, we decided to visit Timbi Lake. A well-known birding site near Vadodara city, renowned for its rich avifauna and picturesque sunrise views. We spent around 90 minutes at the lake and observed several species, including three species of munias: the Red Avadavat (*Amandava amandava*), Tricoloured Munia (*Lonchura malacca*), and Indian Silverbill (*Euodice malabarica*). Other notable species included Bluethroat (*Luscinia svecica*), Pied Cuckoo (*Clamator jacobinus*), and Brown Crake (*Zapornia akool*), among others. Parag suddenly spotted a falcon perched atop an advertisement board on our way home. I quickly took a couple of photographs from our car, followed by a few more precise shots before the bird took off. Initially, I believed it to be a Red-necked Falcon (*Falco chicquera*). However, after sharing the images with birder Vivekanand Swaminathan, he suggested that the bird might be a Laggar Falcon (*Falco jugger*). I contacted Nirav Bhatt to confirm the identification, and he verified that the individual was a fully adult Laggar Falcon. According to Ganpule et al. (2022), the Laggar Falcon is considered an “uncommon to rare resident and local migrant” in Gujarat. Regular sightings have been reported from the Great Rann of Kutch, Little Rann of Kutch, Dahod, Kheda, Lakhtar, and Velavadar (Bhatt et al., 2018). The species has, however, been previously recorded in nearby districts such as Anand and Kheda (Mistry, 2023). This is likely the first documented record for the Vadodara district. Classified as Near Threatened, the Laggar Falcon is believed to be undergoing a moderately rapid population decline due to various threats. This makes our observation particularly important from regional biodiversity monitoring and conservation perspectives.

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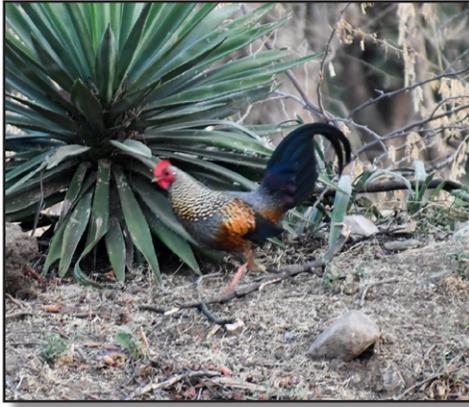
Sighting of Pied Cuckoo *Clamator jacobinus* in December: Late Migrant to Africa or South India?

During a birdwatching and awareness camp at Mithapur (Devbhumi Dwarka) on 22 December 2024, a sub-adult Pied Cuckoo (*Clamator jacobinus*) was sighted by the first two authors. This was unexpected, as the species is typically a monsoon visitor and departs by November. Separately, a sub-adult Pied Cuckoo was also observed by the third author at Timbi Lake, Vadodara, on 16 November and 6 December 2024. These sightings raise questions about delayed migration or possible southward movement to peninsular India. While eBird data show a sharp decline in Gujarat sightings after October, sightings continue year-round in Karnataka and Kerala. Combined with satellite tagging data showing winter migration to Africa, this suggests multiple migratory pathways or overwintering strategies. Further studies, particularly those involving tagging in southern India, are necessary to advance understanding of these patterns.

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Sighting of Grey Junglefowl *Gallus sonneratii* at Jessore Wildlife Sanctuary

On 23rd February 2025, I, Dr. Tarun Sutariya, Dr. Sumit Chadokhiya, and Rameshbhai Bhatiya were birding in the lowland areas of Jessore Wildlife Sanctuary when we observed a pair of Grey Junglefowl (*Gallus sonneratii*) quietly foraging near a flock of Chokhara, the local name for Red Spurfowl (*Galloperdix spadicea*). The Grey Junglefowl is an uncommon resident in South Gujarat (Ganpule et. al., 2022), and while it has been previously reported from Jessore, such sightings remain relatively uncommon, making this a valuable addition to field records from the area. The team also recorded a Forest Wagtail (*Dendronanthus indicus*) during the same visit. All three species typically prefer dense, wooded cover, and it is always a rewarding experience.

[Jessore Wildlife Sanctuary has been a favourite birding destination for many years, and several observers have seen species like the Red Spurfowl and Grey Junglefowl over time. However, very few of these sightings have been formally published, and the sanctuary has seen little representation in ornithological literature. This brief note marks the first formally published record of the Grey Junglefowl in Jessore. It was important to feature it in *Flamingo Gujarat* to emphasise the value of consistent fieldwork and the need for more systematic documentation from this biologically rich yet underreported site: Editor's note]

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