



Photo: Sumil Kini



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Acknowledgments

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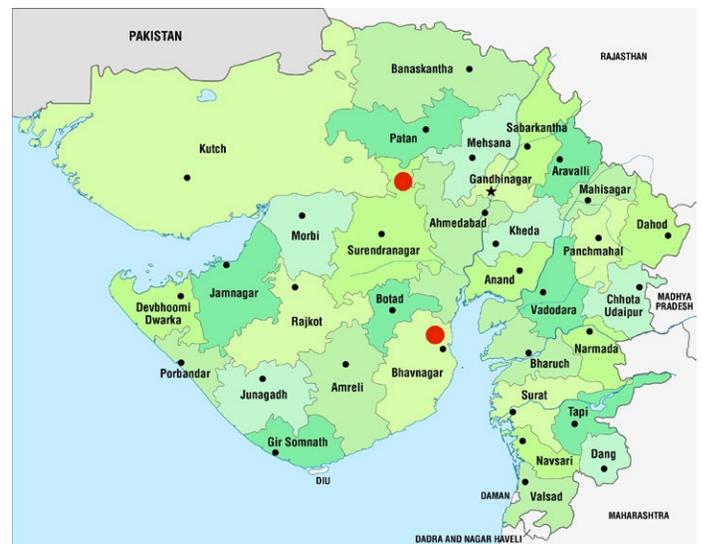
Sighting of Yellow-eyed Pigeon *Columba eversmanni* at Blackbuck National Park, Gujarat

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The Yellow-eyed Pigeon (*Columba eversmanni*), also known as the Pale-backed Pigeon, is a winter migrant to India, with Gujarat being a state where it has been noted as a vagrant. Once widespread across the arid and semi-arid landscapes of Central Asia, its populations have sharply declined due to hunting along migratory routes and the loss of steppe habitats (BirdLife International, 2024).

In Gujarat, the species is considered vagrant (Ganpule et al. 2022). It was first added to the Gujarat checklist following a sight record from the Little Rann of Kachchh in October 2006 (Malik, 2010). However, a photographic record from the same region, taken in December 2005, was later published (Cooper and Kay 2021). This photographic documentation of three individuals confirmed its occurrence in Gujarat and validated its inclusion in the state's bird checklist.

The Yellow-eyed Pigeon is distinguishable from the widespread Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*) by its paler plumage and striking yellow iris. Gujarat lies along an important migratory corridor connecting Central Asia with peninsular India, making the



Map 1. Map showing reported locations of Yellow-eyed Pigeon (*Columba eversmanni*) within Gujarat.

state significant for monitoring this species. Globally, the bird has suffered steep declines and is now classified as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List (BirdLife International, 2024). Occasional

sightings from the Little Rann of Kachchh, the Thar Desert fringe, and semi-arid agricultural landscapes further emphasize the conservation value of these habitats (Praveen et al., 2016).

On 27 January 2025, during a field visit to Blackbuck National Park, Velavadar, Gujarat, I observed a Yellow-eyed Pigeon. At approximately 16:30, I noticed a mixed flock of about 35 doves perched on a leafless Acacia tree near the grassland's edge. The flock primarily consisted of Red Collared-Doves (*Streptopelia tranquebarica*) and Eurasian Collared-Doves (*Streptopelia decaocto*). Among them, a slightly larger bird with distinct features caught my attention. Its pale yellow iris contrasted sharply with a dark orbital ring. The head and underparts were greyish, while the upperparts had a warmer brown tone. A dark subterminal tail band with a paler edge and a faint greenish neck sheen were visible under afternoon light. These features confirmed the identification as a Yellow-eyed Pigeon.

The bird was photographed and observed for nearly ten minutes as it perched calmly, preening occasionally, before flying off with the flock deeper into the park. This represents the second photographic record of the species in Gujarat and the first confirmed record from Blackbuck National Park. The Yellow-eyed Pigeon breeds in Central Asia and migrates southward in winter. While rare in India, recent sightings have been reported from Rajasthan and Punjab. This new record highlights Velavadar's importance as a habitat for uncommon/vagrant winter migrants.

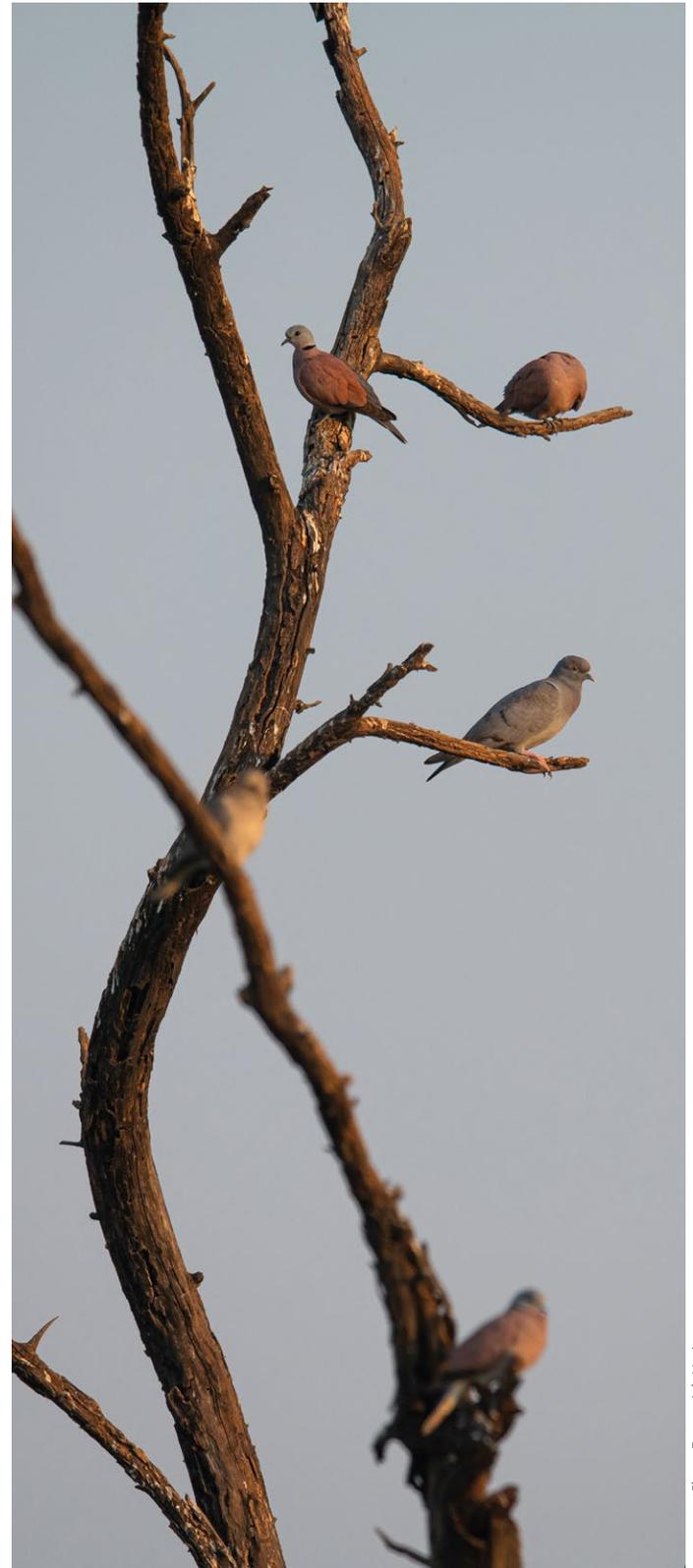
Acknowledgment

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The Yellow-eyed Pigeon (*Columba eversmanni*) perched with Red Collared-Doves (*Streptopelia tranquebarica*) on a dry tree.

Photo: Dewratsinh.Mori