

## Short Birding Notes



### Sirkeer Malkoha *Taccocua leschenaultii* nesting in Velavadar

For the past five years, a Sirkeer Malkoha has visited the Blackbuck Safari Lodge in Velavadar each monsoon. Usually a single bird was seen, but in May this year a pair arrived for the first time and remained for nearly two months. The habitat around the lodge appeared suitable, with abundant food such as grasshoppers, caterpillars, lizards, and butterflies. Soon after arrival, the pair began collecting nesting material. I located the nest in an almond tree, where three eggs were laid on 30 June. I monitored the nest daily. On 1 July the incubating bird briefly left to feed, while on 2–3 July a single bird remained in the nest continuously. On 4 July the bird returned with a fresh neem spring after a short absence. On 5–6 July, the male and female alternated incubation and feeding. On 7 July the nest appeared empty, but in the evening both birds returned and uncovered the eggs, which had been concealed beneath leaves. The pair remained attentive on 8–9 July. However, on 10 July the nest was abandoned, and the following day I found that all three eggs had exploded. Nesting attempts have occurred in previous years as well. In June 2024, a clutch of three eggs failed before hatching. In June 2025, the pair nested again in a Madras thorn tree about six metres above ground and laid three eggs. The chicks hatched on 1 July 2025, both parents sharing feeding duties, and all three chicks successfully fledged on 12 July.

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### Sighting of a European Roller *Coracias garrulus* in January

The European Roller (*Coracias garrulus*) is a passage migrant to northwestern and western India, occurring mainly between August and November before moving to wintering grounds in sub-Saharan Africa. During spring return migration, the species travels via the Mediterranean region, and winter records from India are therefore rare. On a January morning, while surveying vultures around Viraamgam, we (Jay Raval, Purvesh Mehta, and Nisarg Mehta) heard a roller call and initially assumed it to be an Indian Roller (*Coracias benghalensis*). We then observed a European Roller being chased by two Indian Rollers. The bird briefly perched on a neem tree (*Azadirachta indica*) before being repeatedly mobbed and forced to leave the area. This represents an unusual winter record for Gujarat. Possible explanations include delayed migration, navigational error, or physical limitations that prevented onward travel. Regardless of the cause, the sighting is noteworthy and adds to regional migration records.

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### Unusual feeding behaviour of Indian Golden oriole *Oriolus kundoo*

I was on my weekend birding trip to Kotna village on 12-04-2024. There is small pond in village. Spot-billed Duck, Indian pond heron, Red wattled lapwing, Common Sandpiper, Little Cormorant, Pied Kingfisher, Indian golden Oriole were sighted. Pied Kingfisher were hovering & diving into water to catch fish. I was taken by surprise, when I witnessed Indian Golden Oriole also diving into water to catch some food. I witnessed for half an hour, clicking pictures from long distance, trying to understand what was it catching because fish is not regular diet of Indian Golden Oriole. Later, I shared my sighting & pictures with Ornithologist Mr. Devvratsinh Mori. He told, catch might some insects in the pond. It's quite possible that there might be a nest nearby and it's collecting insects for fledgelings. Diving in pond and catching diet is unusual behavior for Indian Golden Oriole that was witnessed.

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### Very Large Flock of River Terns *Sterna aurantia* at the Great Rann of Kutch

The River Tern (*Sterna aurantia*) is a resident and very common waterbird in Kutch, Gujarat, and is usually seen in small groups at lakes and dhandhs across the region. Servo Dhandh, near Hodko in Kutch, is a large shallow rainwater wetland with extensive open water interspersed with patches of long grass. Typically, 20–30 River Terns can be seen here during October and November, along with other species such as the very common Whiskered Tern and the comparatively rare White-winged Tern. However, on 22 October 2024, while visiting the site with my son Nirav Parekh, I observed an exceptionally large aggregation of approximately 550–600 River Terns along the eastern edge of the dhandh. A few Whiskered Terns, Gull-billed Terns, and White-winged Terns were also present among them. At around 10:15 am, despite moderate temperatures, most of the birds were active and showing panting behaviour, holding their heads upward and rapidly moving their tongues. Some individuals appeared to be subadults. At intervals, small groups took short circular flights before landing again at the same location. Normally, only 10–15 River Terns gather at a single spot, so such a concentration of over 500 birds is highly unusual. This large aggregation raises the possibility of local nesting activity, as the area contains scattered patches of long grasses suitable for breeding. However, the dense vegetation made it difficult to confirm nesting even with high-powered binoculars. Further study is needed to understand the reason for such an unusually large flock in this area.

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### Sighting of Grey-necked Bunting *Emberiza buchanani* in Dang

On 1 January 2025, during an early morning survey in the Don Hills of the Dang region, we observed a flock of 4–5 sparrow-sized birds flying together. On closer observation, we noted distinctive features including a grey neck and a yellow moustachial stripe, confirming the identification as Grey-necked Bunting (*Emberiza buchanani*). To understand the population status and historical occurrence of this species in the region, we consulted *Birds of Surat–Dang: A Consolidated Checklist of 75 Years (1944–2020)* by Nikunj Jambu and Kaushal Patel, along with available eBird records. A review of these sources suggests that this represents the first documented record of Grey-necked Bunting from the Dang region.

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### Sighting of Grey-headed Lapwing *Vanellus cinereus* at Pariej Wetland

On the afternoon of 8 March 2025, I visited Pariej Wetland, Gujarat. During observations of mixed wader flocks in shallow marsh habitat, I noticed an unfamiliar bird foraging among Black-winged Stilts (*Himantopus himantopus*) and egrets. The bird was solitary and feeding calmly in wet grassy substrate. Photographs taken in the field showed diagnostic features confirming identification as Grey-headed Lapwing (*Vanellus cinereus*): a grey head, neck and upper breast, a distinct black breast band, white underparts, and a yellow bill with a dark tip. The species breeds in northeast and eastern China and typically winters in eastern and northeastern India, with occasional records from southern India. Vagrancy in Gujarat is poorly documented and rare. A review of available regional records suggests that sightings from Pariej Wetland are exceptional. This observation is an important addition to the site's avifaunal records and highlights the value of continued monitoring of Gujarat's wetlands.

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### Sighting of Indian Blackbird *Turdus simillimus* in Ahmedabad

On 13 April 2025, during a morning walk near Asarwa Lake, Ahmedabad, I observed a thrush-like bird briefly perched on a tree. Its posture and plumage appeared unusual, prompting closer attention. I managed to take two photographs before the bird flew away. Subsequent review of the images and consultation with experienced birder Dhyey Shah confirmed the individual as a female Indian Blackbird (*Turdus simillimus*). According to A Field Guide to the Birds of Gujarat (Ganpule et al. 2022), the species is an uncommon resident in the forests of South Gujarat and a winter/monsoon migrant in other parts of the state, with isolated records from North and Central Gujarat. A review of available eBird data did not reveal prior records from the Ahmedabad area, making this observation locally noteworthy.

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### Sighting of Oriental Pratincole *Glareola maldivarum* near Morbi

On 23 May 2025, I visited dried parts of the Machchhu - 2 dam near Morbi. I saw some movement in the dried muddy areas. I observed closely and noted 12 - 15 Oriental Pratincoles (*Glareola maldivarum*), which were perfectly camouflaged with the habitat. The identification was confirmed by the short tail (wing-tips extending far beyond tail tip), short tail fork and lack of white trailing edge to secondaries in flight. I informed Prasad Ganpule regarding this sighting and he also visited the same area on 2 June 2025 and saw 5-6 Oriental Pratincoles, including one juvenile. This indicates that this species breeds here in the dried parts of the dam in summer. Though widespread, the Oriental Pratincole is not common in Gujarat and there are very few breeding records of this species from the state. This sighting from Morbi thus adds to the locations where the Oriental Pratincole breeds in the state.

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### References

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