

the last years of his life. I would like to see the upgrading of the book by Jugal Kishore Tiwari who has been doing great work in popularising Kachchh as a birding venue, and who had the full appreciation of Himmatsinhji. Himmatsinhji encouraged a number of local birdwatchers in Kachchh, who are doing excellent field observations and regularly writing for *Vihang*. The baton has been effectively passed on from the royal to the plebeian bearers to keep Kachchh in the forefront of ornithology in the state of Gujarat, and in India.

Himmatsinhji was one year senior to me at the Rajkumar College, Rajkot, and the friendship we developed at school continued through life till his passing away. A month before his demise, he spoke to me on the ubiquitous mobile phone, from across the Gulf of Kachchh, as I was being shown a nesting pair of Black-necked Storks *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus* in the Khijadiya Waterbird Sanctuary near Jamnagar. He had been updating notes on that very species in Kachchh! While I can claim generating public awareness for the notification of the Marine National Park, and the Khijadiya Sanctuary, it is the present Jam Saheb Sataji who 'pointed' me to get the action started. It is a pity, the Jam Saheb has not written notes on the birds and other natural history of the erstwhile Jamnagar State, as his knowledge is unrivalled for its personal exposure. And as for me, I shall always consider whatever I saw and learnt in his 'territory' as material borrowed from him. Though after Dharmakumarsinhji and Himmatsinhji, I have the largest number of writings (see Pittie's bibliography later in this issue), I feel I have not done enough considering what I could have, had I followed Salim Ali's advise and maintained a regular and detailed diary through life. So, when I remonstrated with Himmatsinhji for not having written more, pat came his wry rejoinder, "A pot calling the kettle black!" It is fitting that I conclude this piece by referring to my cousin the late Durbar Shivraj Kumar Khachar of Jasdan for his very qualitative support to the cause of ornithology in Gujarat. Apart from a series of first records for our area in central Saurashtra appearing in the *JBNHS*, he has to his credit among

the very first photographs of the Great Indian Bustard and the Lesser Frigatebird to appear in that journal (in all he published 37 papers during 1949–1992). Both of us bird-watched together and developed a very close and affectionate association with Salim Ali. He underwrote the cost of intensive bird banding for the BNHS at Hingolghadh Sanctuary, Jasdan. He also participated in several bird banding camps with Salim Ali in Kachchh.

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Roosting behaviour of Franklin's Nightjar *Caprimulgus affinis*

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Introduction

Paneli vidi (22°49'N 70°56'E) is a scrub forest and grassland located near Morbi, my hometown, in Rajkot district, Gujarat. I have been observing a flock of roosting Franklin's Nightjars *Caprimulgus affinis* for the past one year. My observations are given here.

On an evening in late August 2008, while trying to photograph a Marshall's Iora *Aegithina nigrolutea* in breeding plumage, I stumbled upon a flock of Franklin's Nightjars that was roosting by the side of a road. The area was stony with sparse scrub. I almost walked right on to them before four birds suddenly flushed, and settled nearby. I scrutinised the ground carefully and found

ten birds roosting (including the four that had flown off) in a small area of c. 4.5 m². I regularly visited the site subsequently.

Identification

Identification of nightjars is often confusing and difficult. During the course of my observations, I had the opportunity to observe and photograph the birds. A brief description of the male, female, and juvenile birds is given below:

Male: General colouration is brownish-grey. The main identification marks of a male are the all white two outer tail feathers (Fig. 1). These are seen in flight but difficult to see when the birds are roosting. In flight, spots in middle of first four primaries are white. A clear buff-coloured 'V' is seen from shoulder to centre of back when roosting (Fig. 2). There is no marking/streaking on the head. Prominent, round buff-coloured spots are present on the coverts extending up to the secondaries. The bird in Fig. 3 is possibly a molting male.

Female: General colouration is greyish. Upperparts are mottled grey. Buff-coloured 'V' is not very prominent but seen clearly (Fig. 4). Outer tail feathers are mottled. In flight, spots on primaries are rufous buff in colour. Buff coloured spots on the coverts and secondaries are smaller and not prominent.

Juvenile: General colouration is brownish-grey. Upperparts are mottled. There is no 'V' on the upperparts. There are almost no spots on the coverts (Fig. 5).

Observations

I observed the site regularly from late August 2008 and the details are given below. Care was taken not to disturb the birds. All observations were duly recorded and I took numerous photographs of the birds.

The Nightjars changed their location once, to a new site about 30 m from the original. After that they were observed at this new site only. This area was almost identical to the earlier one, i.e., stony with sparse scrub. The birds seemed to be more wary at dawn and dusk, but were sluggish in the afternoon.

Behaviour

I first observed a total of ten birds. Some of them were roosting within 15 cm of one another, and another flock was roosting nearby within 60 cm of one another. All the ten birds were roosting in a small area of c. 4.5 m². There were three juveniles



Fig. 1. Male Franklin's Nightjar *C. affinis* showing white outer tail feather



Fig. 2. Male with rufous 'V' on back



Fig. 3. Moulting male?

/ immature birds in the group. The birds could be approached to within a distance of 1.5 m without disturbing them. When the birds changed their location to the new site, all were still roosting within a small area. Thus, communal roosting was observed at both the sites. When the number of birds was low, all the birds were observed to be roosting within 1.5 m of one another.

On 23 November 2008 a herd of goats came into the area where the nightjars were roosting. A goat passed within 10 cm of a roosting bird. The nightjar did not even flinch!

The absence of any birds in late May could be because of the complete drying up of a nearby lake, and could have been the reason for their dispersal.

After June 2009, when I observed the birds again, communal roosting was not observed. The birds were now roosting in pairs (Fig. 6). The pairs were scattered and were almost 9–12 m away from one another. This could have been due to the breeding season of the birds. In July, the birds had again started roosting in groups. This clearly indicates that these nightjars roost in pairs during the breeding season and in groups at other times.

Vocalisation

The birds could be approached to within 1.5 m without disturbing them. When the distance was less than that, they got alarmed and the closest bird uttered a soft 'chukp' call. All the closely roosting birds would then fly off with a small chuckle (again like a soft 'chukp'), and would settle at some distance (3–4.5 m). I did not hear any other call during my observations.



Fig. 4. Female Franklin's Nightjar *C. affinis*



PHOTOS: Prasad Ganpule

Fig. 5. Juvenile Franklin's Nightjar *C. affinis*

I believe this is a type of a warning call to the other birds nearby. This call is not described in the reference books and needs to be recorded and analysed properly.



Fig. 6. Franklin's Nightjar *C. affinis* pair

Conclusion

I wonder whether this type of communal roosting, within a small area, over a long period of time, is unique to Franklin's Nightjar?

Among all the other nightjars that I have seen i.e., Large-tailed *C. macrurus* (at Bharatpur), Grey *C. indicus*, and Indian *C. asiaticus*, only solitary roosting birds were spotted.

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Table 1.

Sl No.	Date	No of Birds	Time	Status	Observed with
1	23.viii.08	10	18:00	Roosting	Rohit Ganpule
2	30.viii.08	12	18:00	Roosting	
3	7.ix.08	8	18:00	Roosting	
4	21.ix.08	10	07:00	Roosting	
5	28.ix.08	6	07:00	Roosting	Rohit Ganpule, at new site
6	19.x.08	4	18:30	Roosting	
7	26.x.08	5	18:30	Roosting	
8	9.xi.08	8	10:00	Roosting	Jugal Tiwari
9	23.xi.08	4	09:00	Roosting	Ashok Mashru
10	28.i.09	4	18:00	Roosting	
11	15.ii.09	2	18:00	Roosting	R. B. Balar
12	11.iii.09	4	07:00	Roosting	
13	29.iii.09	3	18:00	Roosting	
14	12.iv.09	2	10:00	Roosting	
15	31.v.09	Nil	08:00	Roosting	
16	21.vi.09	2	08:00	Roosting	
17	5.vii.09	6	18:30	Roosting	
18	9.vii.09	3	07:30	Roosting	B. M. Parasharya
19	12.vii.09	8	18:30	Roosting	