The first breeding record of the Asian Brown Flycatcher *Muscicapa dauurica poonensis* in Rajasthan, India

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Distribution

The Asian Brown Flycatcher *Muscicapa dauurica poonensis* winters in peninsular India (primarily south of the Vindhya range), Sri Lanka, Andamans (at least South, Middle, associated islets, Barren and Narcondam islands) and Nicobars (at least Car and Central) in low country up to 1000 m. On passage the species has been recorded through much of the Indian Peninsula and rarely east to Meghalaya and north-east Bangladesh (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005).

It is a summer visitor to the Himalayan foothills from the Murree Hills (Pakistan) to Nepal and perhaps Bhutan, and locally in hills of central India, breeding at 1,200–2,600 m. A third disjunct population is resident (or summer visitor) and breeds locally in the Western Ghats and its associated ranges, and probably the Satpura Hills and Eastern Ghats ranges (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005).

In Gujarat it was recorded in the Dangs forest (Ali 1955), near Sasan in the Gir forest in March 1966 (Raol 1966), and on the grounds of Vijay Vilas Palace, Mandvi, on 21st–22nd November 1967 (Himmatsinhji 1968).

There are no documented records of its occurrence in Rajasthan prior to 2001 (Ali & Ripley 1996; Grimmett *et al*. 1998). However, one bird was recorded at Mount Abu, Sirohi district on 25th March 2001 (Sangha & Devarshi 2004); on 28th May 2002 another was observed in the Range Forest Office, Kotra, Udaipur district by Dhirendra Devarshi and HSS; and a third was present on 3rd July 2002 in the Forest Research Farm, Banki (Sisarma) in Udaipur district (Sharma 2002).

Breeding

The peninsular breeding range of the Asian Brown Flycatcher is poorly known (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005). Whistler & Kinnear (1932) presumed that a male (5th June 1929) and a female (1st June 1929), collected at 610 m in the Chitteri range (Tamil Nadu), were in their breeding quarters. Jackson (1971) found nests in March, April, and May, and observed young being fed in June in the Vandiperiyar-Peermade area (*c*. 914 m), Kerala. More recent breeding records are from the neighbourhood of Chennai (Tamil Nadu) where 'juvenile birds with spotted plumage' were seen on at least two occasions in July 1984 and 1990; from Rishi Valley, Chittoor district, Andhra Pradesh where juvenile birds were seen in July–August 1999 and June–July 2000; and from Peechi-Vazani Wildlife Sanctuary where a nest was found in March 1993 and a juvenile, with spots, seen in August 1991 (Santharam 2003). An adult was observed feeding a 'fledgling capable of flying' in Amla and Khokra forest blocks of the Gir Lion Sanctuary (Gujarat) on 28th May 1988 (Mundkur 1990). In Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh, Pittie (2000) recorded a young bird in June. Probably based on Ghorpade's (1974) observations that it is an uncommon resident in Sandur, eastern Karnataka, Grimmett *et al* (1998) have presumed that it breeds there.

Breeding record from Rajasthan

This note documents a previously unpublished breeding location with aspects of the site, situation and construction of two nests in Rajasthan. There is no previous information on these nidification details from Rajasthan.

Two active nests were found in Poonga Talab area (24º04′N 74º34′E) near Dhariawad in Sitamata Wildlife Sanctuary, Rajasthan, in quite dense forest comprising teak *Tectona grandis*, bahera *Terminalia behlerica*, tendu *Diospyros melanoxylon*, dhak *Butea monosperma*, gurjan *Lannea corromandelica* and salar *Boswellia serrata*, with *Lantana camara* bushes dominating the middle level vegetation, and ponwar *Cassia tora* covering the ground. Both the nests were observed on 28th June, 3rd July and 18th July. We went to the site again on 9th August but did not see the birds.

A nest on a teak tree was *c*. 5 m above the ground and placed on the trifurcated forks of a branch *c*. 45 cm from the trunk of the tree. On 28th June and 3rd July the eggs were being incubated. Both parents were observed feeding three altricial nestlings in the nest on 18th July.

Nest of Asian Brown Flycatcher *Muscicapa dauurica* on teak.

The second nest was in the lower canopy of a bahera tree *c*. 5.5 m above the ground. It was placed on a bough and more or less wedged where it divided into four branches. On 28th June a bird was found incubating the eggs. On 3rd July both parents were observed feeding three chicks in the nest and on 18th July

the family was seen *c.* 70 m away from the nest. Between 1525 hrs and 1556 hrs both the parents fed the chicks 14 times on 3rd July. During the period of observation on 3rd July, four faecal sacs were also removed.

Nest of Asian Brown Flycatcher *Muscicapa dauurica* on bahera.

In both the trees the nests were similar in size and structure. The loose and untidy cups were composed of grasses, petioles, small pieces of dead leaves, and fine rootlets and were copiously lined with spiders' webs. The two nests were less than 24 m apart from each other. The pair nesting in the bahera was sharing the tree with a breeding pair each of an Indian Golden Oriole *Oriolus kundoo* (in middle canopy) and a Black-headed Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina melanoptera* (in top canopy).

Although Ali (1999) erred in stating that the nesting of the Asian Brown Flycatcher was 'not yet recorded' in Kerala[1], Whistler & Kinnear (1932), Jackson (1971), Mundkur (1990), Pittie (2000), and Santharam (2003) have all separately indicated the breeding of the species from various parts of India. However, all have omitted details of breeding behaviour. Therefore, we have compared our observations with those given by various observers in Baker (1933). The first record of its breeding in India is that of Lt. B. A. G. Shelley (1894) who recorded it, along with Sgt. Kemp, in the Vindhya Range near Mhow (Madhya Pradesh) in June. With one exception they found all the nests on dwarf teak trees. Kemp described them as cups of moss and lichen, lined with roots and fibres and a few feathers, placed on horizontal boughs of small trees growing in forest nullahs. Davidson (1898) described the nest as a large, solid one, composed of green moss and lichen and with a few fibres and a few feathers, mostly orioles'. However, Brig. Gen. Bentham, who also collected nests from Mhow (Madhya Pradesh) in June and July, wrote to Baker (1933; 2: 217) that the birds bred on biggish trees about 30 feet (c. 9 m) or so from the ground and nests were made of moss, moss-roots, and lichen and lined with roots, and feathers.

Discussion

The two nests of Asian Brown Flycatcher in Sitamata were different from those described in Baker (1933). Shelley found the nests on 'dwarf teak trees' and Kemp (*in epist*. to Baker 1933) on 'small trees'. In Sitamata one nest was on a teak tree and another on a bahera tree. Shelley, and Kemp, found the nests in forest nullahs but in Sitamata the nesting trees stood on fairly flat and open land. Interestingly, both the nesting trees in Sitamata were quite close to the busy Pratapgarh–Dhariawad road, the teak being *c.* 4 m and the bahera only *c.* 3.20 m from it. Moreover, the Sitamata nests comprised grasses, petioles, small pieces of dead leaves, and fine rootlets. There was no moss or lichen on either. The nest on the teak tree was copiously bound on the outside with spiders' cobwebs—moss and lichen not being available at this altitude and climate. The Sitamata nests were lower (5 m & 5.5 m) than those described by Bentham (*c.* 9 m). The nests in Sitamata were less than 24 m apart whereas del Hoyo *et al*. (2006) have reported that three pairs in a plantation were spaced at a distance of not less than 500 m. Cramp & Perrins (1993) mention that the breeding population in India lives between *c.* 900 m and 1,800–1,900 m alt. in hill forests. However, in Sitamata the breeding birds were at *c.* 624 m.

The paucity of records indicates that the species is sparsely present in Rajasthan and possibly the birds found breeding in Sitamata and those recorded during March (Sangha & Devarshi 2004), and May and July (Sharma 2002) are resident or arrive in Rajasthan in March–April and depart by September–October like the birds in the Himalayas and the Vindhya Range, to their migrating grounds in southern India.

[1] This is really the oversight of R. Sugathan, who revised and enlarged, and J. C. Daniel, who edited, Ali's work.

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