

Sighting of Red-naped Shaheen *Falco peregrinus babylonicus* in Little Rann of Kachchh, Gujarat

Prasad Ganpule

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On 18 November 2008 I was on a short birdwatching trip to the western corner of the Little Rann of Kachchh in Gujarat, near the village of Venasar ($23^{\circ}08'58''N$, $70^{\circ}56'48''E$). There is a freshwater lake in the western part of the area and water from a creek floods the area from the northern part making it an ideal bird watching site.

While scouting the landscape I noticed a pale falcon-like bird sitting near a small stream (a run-off from the lake), on the ground, at a distance of about 50 m. It was large in size (relative to a Red-headed Falcon *Falco chicquera*, or Merlin *F. columbarius*), had pale bluish-grey upperparts, whitish underparts, thin moustachial stripe, and barring on tail. I took a record photograph (Fig. 1) and referred to the field guide and identified the bird as a Red-naped Shaheen *F. peregrinus babylonicus*. Unfortunately it flew away on closer approach, as I was on foot. I then noticed another bird and the pair started hunting together. I could not follow, as the Rann was still wet. After coming home, I referred to the books and confirmed its identity.

A further visit to the site on 3 January 2009 was unsuccessful.

I revisited the site on 18 January 2009, early in the morning, and located the falcon almost immediately at the same place (Fig. 2). This time I could get much closer and obtained good photos including flight shots. The barring on the underparts, and the rufous-coloured nape and crown could be clearly seen.

The Red-naped Shaheen is known as an uncommon/rare winter visitor to our area with a possibility of its breeding in western Gujarat (Grimmett *et al.* 1998; Kazmierczak 2000; Naoroji 2006). I am not aware of recent records for Gujarat but as per my personal communication with senior birdwatchers here, it is very rare now with no records in the last few years.

Acknowledgements

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Fig. 1. Red-naped Shaheen *F. p. babylonicus* (18.11.2008).



Fig. 2. Red-naped Shaheen *F. p. babylonicus* (18.01.2009)

Photos: Prasad Ganpule

References

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Initial reactions

Very, very impressive indeed. — Edward C. Dickinson

This will prove to be immensely useful for ornithologists interested in South Asian ornithology! — Per Alström

You may not have idea of how big this is... for people in remote locations who do not have access to libraries or books or have good contacts. — Mohammed E. Dilawar