



Kukkarahalli Tank  
Broad-billed Sandpiper  
Forest Owlet

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editor.indianbirds@gmail.com

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PHOTOGRAPHER: Kallol Mukherjee

# Avifauna of Kukkarahalli Tank: Decline of species due to impact of ‘restoration’ work

M. K. Sapthagirish, Sukhprit Kaur & Honnavalli N. Kumara

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M. K. Sapthagirish, # F/34, New Sayyaji Rao Road, Fort Mohalla, Mysore 560004, Karnataka, India.

Sukhprit Kaur, Centre for Environment Education South 143, Kamala Mansion, Infantry road, Bengaluru 570001, Karnataka, India.

Honnavalli N. Kumara, Sálím Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History, Anaikatty P.O., Coimbatore 641108, Tamil Nadu, India.

E-mail: [honnavallik@gmail.com](mailto:honnavallik@gmail.com) [Corresponding author]

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## Abstract

Urban wetlands are, potentially, important bird habitats, but the impact that developmental activities around wetlands, directed at improving tourism, have on local bird diversity is poorly understood. Kukkarahalli Tank offers a unique opportunity to assess this. A checklist of birds of the area was completed in 1997, but development activities were completed during 2002–2004. We conducted bird surveys during 1999–2000 and 2006–2007, and compare the results with the 1997 checklist to understand if species richness, and number of breeding species, varied. 120 bird species were recorded in 1999–2000, and 104 during 2006–2007. The study results show a steep decline in avian species richness (41%), along with the displacement of several breeding species (32%), including those of conservation concern such as Spot-billed Pelican, Painted Stork, and Black-headed Ibis. The decline in diversity and breeding activities in the tank is attributed to the structural changes in the wetland ecosystem. This study provides strong evidence for the need for an ecological approach in other urban wetlands where planning to improve visitation rates are being made. Such planning can help limit the loss of important biodiversity that may already be using these wetlands.

## Introduction

Wetlands are one of the most diverse ecosystems on the planet, sustaining high species richness (Dugan 1990; Gibbs 2000; Sridhar *et al.* 2000). Lakes and tanks are the major inland wetlands persisting in urban areas and have been considered ecological security zones, and indicators of sustainable urban development (Gibbs 2000; Saunders *et al.* 2002). Urbanisation is responsible for biodiversity loss, and biological homogenisation, in many countries (Pauchard *et al.* 2006). Urbanisation that does not incorporate natural resource management and preservation has led to the decline of wetlands in cities due to encroachment for building constructions, and conversion to dump sites for solid wastes and sewage. Additionally, pollution via sewage and industrial effluents has caused increased eutrophication, causing deterioration in the quality of wetland habitats (Foote *et al.* 1996; Bedford 1999).

India has an estimated wetland cover of ~58.2 million ha (Directory of Indian wetlands: Anonymous 1993), which supports a huge biodiversity. Healthy wetlands are essential for the sustenance of India’s diverse populations of plants and animals, and they support a large number of wetland-dependent endemic species. Thousands of such wetlands are biologically important, but very few are brought under the umbrella of “protected area network”. Only 25 wetland sites in India are protected under the Ramsar Convention (Wetlands of India 2009), and some are designated as Important Bird Areas (IBA) under the Indian Bird Conservation Network (IBCN 2009). Karnataka State has about 11,024 inland water bodies (National Wetland Atlas 2010) of which only 36, including Kukkarahalli Tank, have been designated as IBAs (IBCN 2009).

Kukkarahalli Tank is situated in the heart of Mysore city and its birdlife has been well documented (Guruprasad 1997).

Over the years, the tank has faced continuous developmental pressures, but the impacts of these pressures are poorly understood (Guruprasad 1997; Ravikumar *et al.* 1999). Earlier, the Mysore Amateur Naturalists (MAN), a local non-government organisation, published a comprehensive avifaunal checklist of Kukkarahalli Tank, which was compiled over a period ten years (1987–1997), and reported 180 species (Guruprasad 1997). To assess whether the on going development activities had an impact on the birds, we monitored the species richness, and abundance, of birds from September 1999 to September 2000, and from December 2006 to November 2007. We hoped the results of our study would help guide future development plans of wetlands, especially those in urban areas. In our study we focus particularly on the changes in species assemblages. We also use the opportunity to underscore the importance of persisting urban wetland bodies like Kukkarahalli Tank.

## Materials & methods

### Study site

The Kukkarahalli Tank (12.30°N, 78.63°E; 760 m asl; Fig. 1) in Mysore, Karnataka, receives both, the south–western, and the north-east monsoons, with an average rainfall of 782 mm (Anonymous 2015; National Wetland Atlas 2010). At full tank level its water spread is ~0.39 sq. km, and maximum depth c. 08 m. On its western edge lie a horticulture seed centre, a teachers training centre, and an abandoned coffee plantation; a marshy stretch, overgrown with water hyacinth *Eichornia crassipes*, and grass species such as *Typha*, marks its northern edge. Large plantations of teak *Tectona grandis*, eucalyptus *Eucalyptus grandis*, and acacia species, interspersed with bamboo *Bambusa arundinaria*, lantana *Lantana camara*, and many shrub / weed



Fig. 1. Map of the Kukkarahalli Tank [Not to scale].

- (a) The bold green line indicates the jogging/walking path prior to development works.  
 (b) The Dotted green line shows the post development work were in the extension of the jogging/walking path all around the tank.  
 (c) Dotted red line indicates the proposed shifting of jogging/walking path.

species e.g., *Parthenium hysterophorus*, and *Euphorbia* species mark the well-wooded eastern side of the tank. The southern side has a jogging track on the upper end of the slope. The tank has an island, overgrown with acacia trees that provide roosting and nesting sites for many birds. However, the nesting birds' acidic droppings do not allow any undergrowth, which has resulted in erosion; the water even breaching it at certain points. Two boat jetties, on the eastern, and southern sides, are used by fishermen.

Kukkarahalli Tank was built in 1864, to provide drinking water to Mysore city, and came under the custody of the University of Mysore in 1960. The original catchment area of the tank was ~4.5 sq km. (Guruprasad 1997; Ravikumar *et al.* 1999). Expansion of the city led to the blockage of all feeder canals; urban sewage inflows becoming the main source of water. To control the putrefaction due to sewage water accumulation, tank restoration was initiated in 2002 with financial support from the Asian Development Bank. Walking pathways were laid around the periphery of the tank to encourage public recreation; some shrubs and trees on the bund, and along the periphery of the lake, were removed to accommodate these new paths. This has resulted in previously inaccessible areas of the tank now becoming accessible.

### Data collection

We conducted systematic surveys of birds in Kukkarahalli Tank from September 1999 to September 2000 and from December 2006 to November 2007. The rainfall during this period was 866.2 mm, and 836.3 mm respectively, while the rainfall during 1996–1997 was 1156.8 mm (Yogananda *et al.* 2015). However,

during our survey the water level in the tank remained constant as its major source is the sewage influx from the surrounding areas (from last two decades). The 'total count method' was employed for water birds. The 'encounter method' was used to monitor the non-wetland birds along two 1.2 km transects on the shore of the tank, including the vegetated area. During 1999–2000, the transects were walked during 0600–1000 hrs (N=21), 1100–1400 hrs (N=11), and 1600–1800 hrs (N=5). In 2006–2007 this was during 0600–1000 hrs (N=20), 1100–1400 hrs (N=5), and 1600–1800 hrs (N=5). The transect walks were spread out during the day to ascertain different species of birds utilising the tank during the daytime. The status of birds was ascertained based

on frequency of sightings, and sightings across the study period. We categorised them in the following manner: Very common (VC) when a species was recorded on 75–100% transects, or throughout the study period; Common (C) recorded on 50–75% transects; uncommon (UC) recorded on 25–50% transects; rare (R) recorded on <25% transects; very rare (VR) <5 individual sightings; and absent (AB) when sightings were zero. Birds were classified as Resident (r), winter visitor (W), and Visitor (V). The various ways in which birds used the tank were categorised as: Roost (Ro), forage (Fo), and breed (B).

We collated the data from all our transects to arrive at the numbers of species, and hatchlings of certain water birds, and the abundance of three breeding birds: Spot-billed Pelican *Pelecanus philippensis*, Painted Stork *Mycteria leucocephala*, and Black-headed Ibis *Threskiornis melanocephalus*, listed as Near Threatened (BirdLife International 2015; IUCN 2015). We compared the results of our study with Guruprasad's checklist (1997) to determine if bird communities changed over this period. To analyse any variations in species richness consequent to artificial manipulation of the tank, we classified the birds according to their habitat preferences into different guilds, namely, wetland guild (wetland birds), woodland guild (birds recorded in the wooded area), and others, which includes birds of the bush, and open lands.

## Results & discussion

### Species diversity

Appendix 1 summarises the occurrence and status of birds at Kukkarahalli Tank over three study periods. Guruprasad (1997) reported a total of 180 bird species, while we recorded 120 in 1999–2000, and 104 in 2006–2007—a significant decline in species richness (41%) in the decade 1998–2007 ( $\chi^2=51.43$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<0.01$ ; Fig. 2). Likewise, the number of breeding species declined by 32% during the decade ( $\chi^2=7.17$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<0.05$ ;

Fig. 2). The decline by guild, for this decade, was: wetland birds—37%, woodland birds—23.8%, and others—39% (Fig. 3).

Since the tank harboured a large number of wetland birds, data relating to them were analysed to understand changes in their diversity over the study period. Guruprasad (1997) had reported 62 species of wetland birds, of which 25 were recorded breeding. In comparison, we recorded 40 species in 1999–2000, of which 17 were breeding, and 39 in 2006–2007, of which 14 were breeding (Fig. 4). The number of wetland birds ( $\chi^2=16.34$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<0.01$ ) and the number of breeding species ( $\chi^2=7.40$ ,  $df=2$ ,  $p<0.05$ ), between the three study periods, were significantly different. A decline of 37% of wetland bird species and 44% of breeding bird species of wetland was recorded.

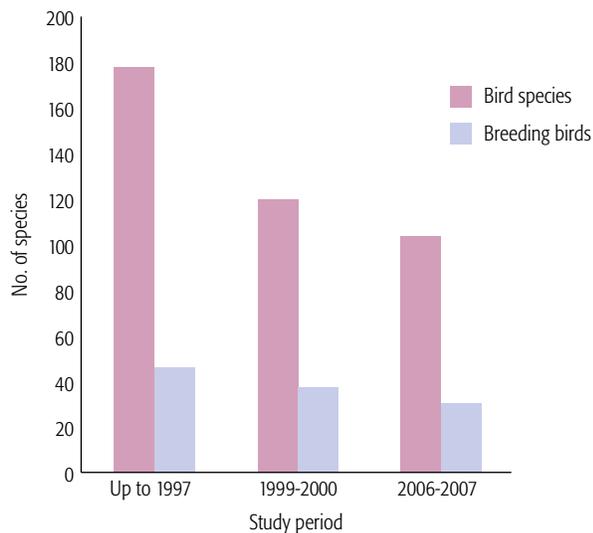


Fig. 2. Number of bird species and breeding birds in Kukkarahalli Tank between different study periods.

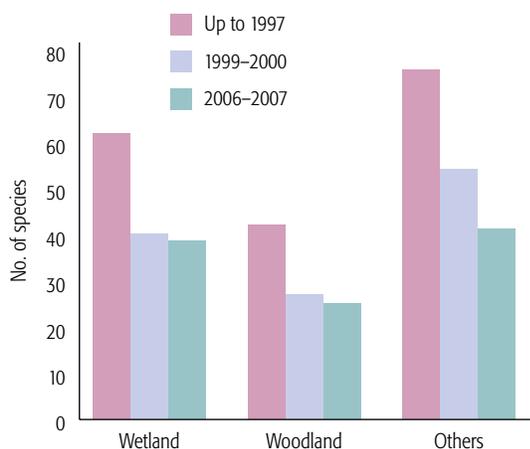


Fig. 3. Various guilds showing declines in bird richness over three-study periods i.e., up to 1997, 1999–2000, and 2006–2007.

### Comparison of breeding species

Painted Storks and Spot-billed Pelicans were seen in large numbers between winter and summer (January to May) of both the study periods. Black-headed Ibis arrived at the tank in March, their numbers increasing greatly in June. During 1999–2000 all three species were successfully breeding and had raised nestlings.

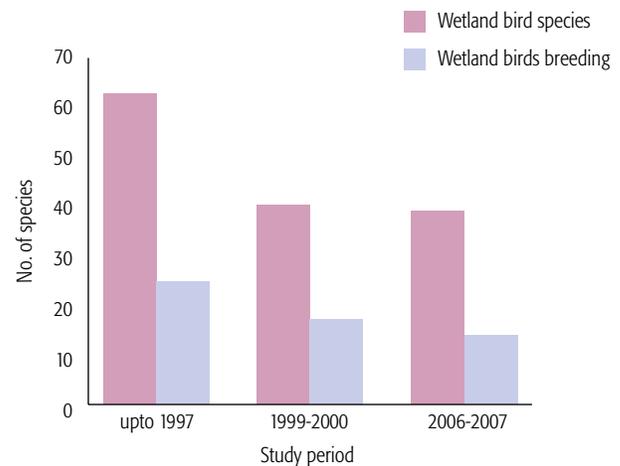


Fig. 4. Numbers of wetland bird species, and wetland birds breeding in Kukkarahalli Tank during different study periods.

The population status of adults and hatchlings for the periods 1999–2000, and 2006–2007, are shown in Fig. 5. However, in 2006–2007 only Painted Storks were seen with their hatchlings. The Spot-billed Pelican numbers soared to 180 in March 2007, when we observed some nest building activity; but these were later found abandoned. Black-headed Ibis started arriving to the tank in March 2007; however they did not nest due to loss of their regular nesting area, and only a few birds roosted on the island. A maximum of 60 birds were recorded for 2006–2007 as compared to 286 during 1999–2000 (Fig. 5).

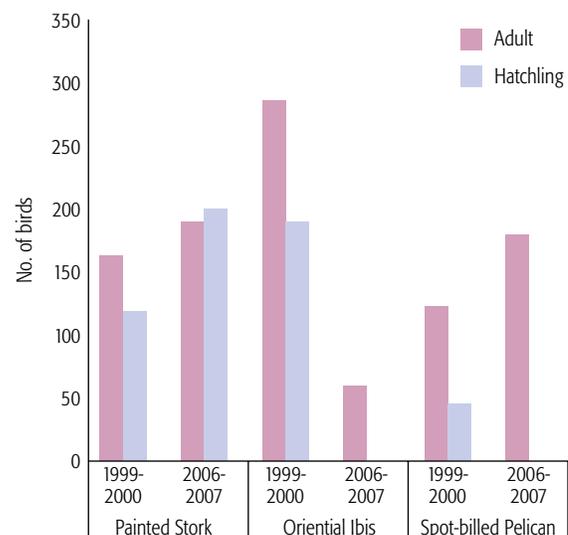


Fig. 5. Numbers of Painted Stork, Oriental White Ibis, and Spot-billed Pelican adults, and hatchlings during three study periods.

### New sightings

During our study, three species were added to Guruprasad's (1997) checklist of Kukkarahalli Tank, namely, Crested Serpent Eagle *Spilornis cheela*, Oriental Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus*, and Woolly-necked Stork *Ciconia episcopus*. These birds were extremely rare at the tank, Crested Serpent Eagle and Woolly-necked Stork were sighted only once, and Oriental Honey Buzzard was sighted twice.

### Development activities and their impact

Development is invariably associated with the loss of many avian species, particularly habitat specialists (Chace & Walsh 2006; Clergeau *et al.* 2006; McKinney 2006). It has been observed that the influence of human presence in urban areas decreases the breeding densities of birds (Evans *et al.* 2009). It is believed that many birds perceive humans as potential predators and respond in a way that leads to limiting their use of resources, such as nesting sites or food (McKinney 2006; Gill 2007; Holm & Laursen 2009). The breeding status, and diversity, of birds in Kukkarahalli Tank are directly influenced by the large crowds of people who use the tank site for jogging and walking during the day.

Kukkarahalli Tank, which was an important site for many birds, including a few migrants, is witnessing a decline in their numbers. Many birds, which bred here earlier, have either stopped breeding, or are completely absent from the area. Though some species adapt and co-exist with people, many bird species are very sensitive to changes in their habitat, and to human presence (Daniels 2008). Rampant developmental activities around the tank, in recent times, and 'human-centric' tank bund restorative works have led to considerable structural changes in the ecosystem of the tank, which in turn has affected the diversity, density, and breeding activities of the avifauna in the area.

During the post restoration study that was conducted in 2006–2007, Spot-billed Pelicans were observed constructing nests, which they ultimately abandoned. Black-headed Ibis, which started arriving in March 2007 were unable to settle down easily at their regular breeding sites in the tank, and didn't breed that year.

The increase of recreational activities (walking / jogging with loud music) was the likely reason that birds abandoned nesting here. Further, in order to appeal to the aesthetic sense of the people, trimming of bushes and reeds has become a routine management activity; this has brought down the number of bush-nesters like prinias and munias, and reed-nesters like Purple Swamphen *Porphyrio porphyrio*, Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*, and Common Coot *Fulica atra*. Also many ground birds like the Eurasian Thick-knee *Burhinus oedipnemus*, and Yellow-wattled Lapwing *Vanellus malabaricus*, which have bred earlier here, are not seen now. Clearly, the increased number of people has had apparent effects on bird species richness and behaviour, and may even cause the permanent displacement of species from this site.

The following management activities are suggested to help improve conditions for birds that use Kukkarahalli Tank.

- a. The perambulatory path, which criss-crosses the woodland, and the northern bund, could be shifted away from the tank, closer to the boundary wall (Fig. 1: dotted red lines).
- b. Fishing and any human presence near the breeding sites should be minimised during the peak breeding seasons.
- c. Routine clearing of bushes and reeds has to be regulated in an eco-friendly way with inputs from the conservationists and ecologists.
- d. Ecologists/conservationists should be involved in the developmental activities, and management of the tank.
- e. Imparting ecological value of birds to the public, through environmental education, can help minimize disturbance during the breeding season.

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Appendix 1. Birds at Kukkarahalli Tank recorded during three different time periods (up to 1997: Guruprasad, P. 1997\*; 1999-2000 and 2006-2007: current study)

S. No.	Species	Up to 1997	1999-2000	2006-2007
1	Lesser Whistling Duck <i>Dendrocygna javanica</i>	VC/r/V/B	C/V/ Ro/Fo	C/V/ Ro/Fo
2	Common Pochard <i>Aythya ferina</i>	R/W	AB	AB
3	Garganey <i>Spatula querquedula</i>	VC/W	C/W/Ro/Fo	C/W/Ro/Fo
4	Northern Shoveler <i>Spatula clypeata</i>	UC/W	AB	AB
5	Indian Spot-billed Duck <i>Anas poecilorhyncha</i>	VC/r/B	VC/r/Ro/Fo/B	VC/r/Ro/Fo/B
6	Northern Pintail <i>Anas acuta</i>	UC/W	AB	AB
7	Common Teal <i>Anas crecca</i>	UC/W	AB	AB
8	Comb Duck <i>Sarkidiornis melanotos</i>	VR/W	AB	AB
9	Cotton Teal <i>Nettapus coromandelianus</i>	UC/W	AB	AB
10	Quail sp. <i>Coturnix</i> sp.	R/r	AB	AB
11	Grey Francolin <i>Francolinus pondicerianus</i>	C/r/B	C/r/Fo/Ro/B	C/r/Fo/Ro/B
12	Little Grebe <i>Tachybaptus ruficollis</i>	VC/r/B	VC/r/ Ro/Fo /B	VC/r/ Ro/Fo /B
13	Rock Pigeon <i>Columba livia</i>	UC/V	VC/Fo	VC/Fo
14	Eurasian Collared Dove <i>Streptopelia decaocto</i>	C/r	AB	AB
15	Spotted Dove <i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>	C/r/B	C/r/Fo/Ro/B	C/r/Fo/Ro/B
16	Laughing Dove <i>Streptopelia senegalensis</i>	NR	VR/V	AB
17	Indian Nightjar <i>Caprimulgus asiaticus</i>	R/r	R	R
18	Asian Palm Swift <i>Cypsiurus balaisiensis</i>	UC/V	UC/V/Fo	UC/V/Fo
19	Indian House Swift <i>Apus affinis</i>	C/V	C/V/Fo	C/V/Fo
20	Greater Coucal <i>Centropus sinensis</i>	VC/r	VC/r/Fo/Ro	VC/r/Fo/Ro
21	Pied Cuckoo <i>Clamator jacobinus</i>	UC/V	AB	AB
22	Asian Koel <i>Eudynamis scolopacea</i>	C/r/B	C/r/Fo/Ro/B	C/r/Fo/Ro/B
23	Indian Cuckoo <i>Cuculus micropterus</i>	UC/V	AB	AB
24	Ruddy-breasted Crake <i>Zapornia fusca</i>	VR/W	AB	AB
25	Baillon's Crake <i>Zapornia pusilla</i>	VR/W	VR/W/Fo	AB
26	White-breasted Waterhen <i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>	C/r/B	C/r/Fo/Ro/B	C/r/Fo/Ro/B
27	Watercock <i>Gallicrex cinerea</i>	VR	AB	AB
28	Purple Swamphen <i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>	VC/r/B	VC/r/ Fo/Ro/B	VC/r/ Fo/Ro/B
29	Common Moorhen <i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	VC/r/B	VC/r/ Fo/Ro/B	VC/r/ Fo/Ro/B
30	Common Coot <i>Fulica atra</i>	VC/r/B	VC/r/ Fo/Ro/B	VC/r/ Fo/Ro/B
31	Lesser Adjutant <i>Leptoptilos javanicus</i>	UC/V	AB	AB
32	Painted Stork <i>Mycteria leucocephala</i>	C/V/B	C/V/ Ro/Fo/B	C/V/ Ro/Fo/B
33	Asian Openbill <i>Anastomus oscitans</i>	VR/V/B	VR/V/Ro	VR/V/Ro
34	Woolly-necked Stork <i>Ciconia episcopus</i>	NR	VR/V	AB
35	Spot-billed Pelican <i>Pelecanus philippensis</i>	C/V/B	C/V/ Ro/Fo/B	C/V/Ro/F
36	Yellow Bittern <i>Ikbrychus sinensis</i>	R/r	AB	R/V/Ro/Fo
37	Cinnamon Bittern <i>Ikbrychus cinnamomeus</i>	R/r	R/V/Ro/Fo	R/V/Ro/Fo
38	Black-crowned Night Heron <i>Nycticorax nycticorax</i>	VC/r/B	R/V/Ro/Fo	C/V/ Ro/Fo/B
39	Indian Pond Heron <i>Ardeola grayii</i>	C/r	C/r/Ro/Fo	C/r/Ro/Fo
40	Cattle Egret <i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	VC/r	VC/r/Ro/Fo	VC/r/Ro/Fo
41	Grey Heron <i>Ardea cinerea</i>	C/r/B	C/r/Ro/Fo	C/r/Ro/Fo
42	Purple Heron <i>Ardea purpurea</i>	C/V/B	C/V/ Ro/Fo/B	C/V/ Ro/Fo/B
43	Great Egret <i>Ardea alba</i>	C/r	R/V/Fo	R/V/Fo
44	Intermediate Egret <i>Ardea intermedia</i>	C/r	C/r/Ro/Fo	C/r/Ro/Fo
45	Little Egret <i>Egretta garzetta</i>	C/r	C/V/ Ro/Fo/B	C/V/ Ro/Fo/B
46	Black-headed Ibis <i>Threskiornis melanocephalus</i>	C/V/B	C/V/ Ro/Fo/B	C/V/ Ro/Fo/B
47	Eurasian Spoonbill <i>Platalea leucorodia</i>	UC/V/B	VR/V/Ro	VR/V/Ro
48	Indian Black Ibis <i>Pseudibis papillosa</i>	C/V/B	C/V/Fo	C/V/Fo
49	Glossy Ibis <i>Plegadis falcinellus</i>	C/V	C/V/Ro	C/V/Ro
50	Little Cormorant <i>Microcarbo niger</i>	C/r/B	C/r/Ro/Fo/B	C/r/Ro/Fo/B
51	Great Cormorant <i>Phalacrocorax carbo</i>	C/r/B	C/r/Ro/Fo/B	C/r/Ro/Fo/B
52	Indian Cormorant <i>Phalacrocorax fuscicollis</i>	R/V/B	C/r/Ro/Fo/B	C/r/Ro/Fo/B

Appendix 1. Birds at Kukkarahalli Tank recorded during three different time periods (up to 1997: Guruprasad, P. 1997\*; 1999-2000 and 2006-2007: current study)

S. No.	Species	Up to 1997	1999-2000	2006-2007
53	Oriental Darter <i>Anhinga melanogaster</i>	C/r/B	C/r/Ro/Fo/B	C/r/Ro/Fo/B
54	Eurasian Thick-knee <i>Burhinus oedicnemus</i>	VC/r/B	VC/r/Ro/Fo/B	AB
55	Black-winged Stilt <i>Himantopus himantopus</i>	C/V	C/V/Fo/Ro	C/V/Fo/Ro
56	Little Ringed Plover <i>Charadrius dubius</i>	R/W	AB	AB
57	Kentish Plover <i>Charadrius alexandrinus</i>	R/W	AB	AB
58	Yellow-wattled Lapwing <i>Vanellus malabaricus</i>	R/W	AB	AB
59	Red-wattled Lapwing <i>Vanellus indicus</i>	C/r/B	VC/r/Fo/Ro	VC/r/Fo/Ro
60	Greater Painted-snipe <i>Rostratula benghalensis</i>	UC	AB	AB
61	Pheasant-tailed Jacana <i>Hydrophasianus chirurgus</i>	C/r/V/B	AB	AB
62	Bronze-winged Jacana <i>Metopidius indicus</i>	C/r/B	C/r/Ro/Fo/B	C/r/Ro/Fo/B
63	Little Stint <i>Calidris minuta</i>	VR/W	AB	AB
64	Pintail Snipe <i>Gallinago stenura</i>	VR/W	AB	AB
65	Common Snipe <i>Gallinago gallinago</i>	VR/W	AB	AB
66	Common Sandpiper <i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	UC/W	C/W/Fo/Ro	C/W/Fo/Ro
67	Green Sandpiper <i>Tringa ochropus</i>	C/W	C/W/Fo/Ro	AB
68	Common Greenshank <i>Tringa nebularia</i>	UC/W	AB	AB
69	Common Redshank <i>Tringa totanus</i>	R/W	AB	AB
70	Wood Sandpiper <i>Tringa glareola</i>	C/W	UC/W/Fo/Ro	UC/W/Fo/Ro
71	Marsh Sandpiper <i>Tringa stagnatilis</i>	UC/W	UC/W/Fo/Ro	UC/W/Fo/Ro
72	Buttonquail sp. <i>Turnix</i> sp.	UC	AB	AB
73	Brown-headed Gull <i>Chroicocephalus brunnicephalus</i>	VR/W	AB	AB
74	Whiskered Tern <i>Chlidonias hybrida</i>	R/W	AB	AB
75	River Tern <i>Sterna aurantia</i>	VR/W	VR/W/Fo	VR/W/Fo
76	Black-bellied Tern <i>Sterna acuticauda</i>	VR/W	AB	AB
77	Black-winged Kite <i>Elanus caeruleus</i>	R/V	AB	AB
78	Oriental Honey Buzzard <i>Pernis ptilorhynchus</i>	NR	NR	VR
79	Egyptian Vulture <i>Neophron percnopterus</i>	C/V	AB	AB
80	Crested Serpent Eagle <i>Spilornis cheela</i>	NR	NR	VR
81	White-rumped Vulture <i>Gyps bengalensis</i>	UC/V	AB	AB
82	Tawny Eagle <i>Aquila rapax</i>	UC/V	AB	AB
83	Western Marsh Harrier <i>Circus aeruginosus</i>	NR	C/V/Fo	C/V/Fo
84	Shikra <i>Accipiter badius</i>	UC/V	C/V/Fo	C/V/Fo
85	Besra <i>Accipiter virgatus</i>	UC/V	AB	AB
86	Brahminy Kite <i>Haliastur indus</i>	C/r/B	C/r/Fo/Ro/B	C/r/Fo/Ro/B
87	Black Kite <i>Milvus migrans</i>	UC/r/B	C/r/Fo/Ro/B	C/r/Fo/Ro/B
88	Common Barn Owl <i>Tyto alba</i>	UC/V	UC/V	AB
89	Spotted Owlet <i>Athene brama</i>	VC/r	VC/r/Fo/Ro/B	VC/r/Fo/Ro/B
90	Collared Scops Owl <i>Otus bakkamoena</i>	VC/r	VR/V/Ro	AB
91	Indian Grey Hornbill <i>Ocyrceros birostris</i>	C/r/B	C/r/Fo/Ro	C/r/Fo/Ro
92	Common Hoopoe <i>Upupa epops</i>	VC/r/B	UC/V/Fo	UC/V/Fo
93	Lesser Golden-backed Woodpecker <i>Dinopium benghalense</i>	C/r	UC/V/Fo	UC/V/Fo
94	White-naped Woodpecker <i>Chrysocolaptes festivus</i>	UC/V	VR/V/Fo	AB
95	Brown-headed Barbet <i>Psilopogon zeylanicus</i>	R/V	AB	AB
96	White-cheeked Barbet <i>Psilopogon viridis</i>	VC/r/B	VC/r/Fo/Ro/B	VC/r/Fo/Ro/B
97	Coppersmith Barbet <i>Psilopogon haemacephalus</i>	VC/r/B	VC/r/Fo/Ro/B	VC/r/Fo/Ro/B
98	Green Bee-eater <i>Merops orientalis</i>	C/r	C/V/Fo	C/V/Fo

Appendix 1. Birds at Kukkarahalli Tank recorded during three different time periods (up to 1997: Guruprasad, P. 1997\*; 1999-2000 and 2006-2007: current study)

S. No.	Species	Up to 1997	1999-2000	2006-2007
99	Chestnut-headed Bee-eater <i>Merops leschenaulti</i>	R/V	R/V	AB
100	Blue-tailed Bee-eater <i>Merops philippinus</i>	R/W	UC/W/Fo	AB
101	Indian Roller <i>Coracias benghalensis</i>	C/r/B	UC/V/Fo	UC/V/Fo
102	Common Kingfisher <i>Alcedo atthis</i>	C/r/B	C/r/Fo	C/r/Fo
103	Pied Kingfisher <i>Ceryle rudis</i>	UC/V	UC/V/Fo	UC/V/Fo
104	White-throated Kingfisher <i>Halcyon smyrensis</i>	C	C/r/Fo	C/r/Fo
105	Black-capped Kingfisher <i>Halcyon pileata</i>	VR	AB	AB
106	Rose-ringed Parakeet <i>Psittacula krameri</i>	C/r	C/r/Fo/Ro/B	C/r/Fo/Ro/B
107	Indian Pitta <i>Pitta brachyura</i>	UC/W	R/V	AB
108	Small Minivet <i>Pericrocotus cinnamomeus</i>	UC/V	UC/V/Fo	R/V/Fo
109	Large Cuckooshrike <i>Coracina javensis</i>	R/V	AB	AB
110	Black-headed Cuckooshrike <i>Lalage melanoptera</i>	R/V	R/V/Fo	AB
111	Eurasian Golden Oriole <i>Oriolus oriolus</i>	UC/V	UC/V/Fo	UC/V/Fo
112	Ashy Woodswallow <i>Artamus fuscus</i>	R/V	AB	AB
114	Common Woodshrike <i>Tephrodornis pondicerianus</i>	R/V	AB	AB
115	Common Iora <i>Aegithina tiphia</i>	UC/V	UC/V/Fo	AB
116	Black Drongo <i>Dicrurus macrocercus</i>	C/r	C/r/Fo/Ro	C/r/Fo/Ro
117	Ashy Drongo <i>Dicrurus leucophaeus</i>	UC/V	UC/V/Fo/Ro	UC/V/Fo/Ro
118	White-bellied Drongo <i>Dicrurus caerulescens</i>	VR/V	VR/V/Fo	AB
119	White-throated Fantail <i>Rhipidura albicollis</i>	R/V	R/V/ Fo/Ro	R/V/ Fo/Ro
120	Brown Shrike <i>Lanius cristatus</i>	UC/V	AB	AB
121	Bay-backed Shrike <i>Lanius vittatus</i>	UC/V	UC/V/Fo/Ro	AB
122	Long-tailed Shrike <i>Lanius schach</i>	UC/V	AB	AB
123	Great Grey Shrike <i>Lanius excubitor</i>	UC/V	AB	AB
124	House Crow <i>Corvus splendens</i>	UC/V	VC/r/Fo/Ro	VC/r/Fo/Ro
125	Large-billed Crow <i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>	VC/r/B	VC/r/Fo/Ro	VC/r/Fo/Ro
126	Indian Paradise-flycatcher <i>Terpsiphona paradisi</i>	UC/V	UC/V/Fo/Ro/B	UC/V/Fo/Ro/B
127	Thick-billed Flowerpecker <i>Dicaeum agile</i>	C/V	C/V/Fo/Ro	C/V/Fo/Ro
128	Pale-billed Flowerpecker <i>Dicaeum erythrorhynchos</i>	C/V	C/V/Fo/Ro	C/V/Fo/Ro
129	Purple-rumped Sunbird <i>Leptocoma zeylonica</i>	C/r/B	C/r/Fo/Ro/B	C/r/Fo/Ro/B
130	Purple Sunbird <i>Cinnyris asiaticus</i>	C/r/B	C/V/Fo/Ro	C/V/Fo/Ro
131	Blue-winged Leafbird <i>Chloropsis cochinchinensis</i>	R/V	AB	AB
132	Streaked Weaver <i>Ploceus manyar</i>	C/r/B	AB	AB
133	Baya Weaver <i>Ploceus philippinus</i>	UC/r/B	UC/V/Fo	UC/V/Fo
134	Red Munia <i>Amandava amandava</i>	R/V	AB	AB
135	Indian Silverbill <i>Euodice malabarica</i>	UC/V	AB	AB
136	White-rumped Munia <i>Lonchura striata</i>	UC/V	AB	AB
137	Scaly-breasted Munia <i>Lonchura punctulata</i>	C/V/B	C/V/Fo/Ro/B	C/V/Fo/Ro/B
138	Black-headed Munia <i>Lonchura malacca</i>	C/r/B	UC/V/Fo	UC/V/Fo
139	House Sparrow <i>Passer domesticus</i>	C/r/B	C/r/Fo/Ro/B	C/r/Fo/Ro
140	Forest Wagtail <i>Dendronanthus indicus</i>	R/W	AB	AB
141	Olive-backed Pipit <i>Anthus hodgsoni</i>	UC/V	AB	AB
142	Paddyfield Pipit <i>Anthus rufulus</i>	C/V	C/V/Fo	C/V/Fo
143	Tawny Pipit <i>Anthus campestris</i>	C/W	AB	AB
144	Western Yellow Wagtail <i>Motacilla flava</i>	R/W	R/V/Fo	R/V/Fo
145	Grey Wagtail <i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	C/W	R/V/Fo	R/V/Fo
146	Citrine Wagtail <i>Motacilla citreola</i>	C/W	AB	AB
147	White-browed Wagtail <i>Motacilla maderaspatensis</i>	C/r/W	C/r/Fo/Ro	C/r/Fo/Ro

Appendix 1. Birds at Kukkarahalli Tank recorded during three different time periods (up to 1997: Guruprasad, P. 1997\*; 1999-2000 and 2006-2007: current study)

S. No.	Species	Up to 1997	1999-2000	2006-2007
148	White Wagtail <i>Motacilla alba</i>	UC/W	UC/W/Fo	AB
149	Cinereous Tit <i>Parus cinereus</i>	C/V	C/V/Fo/Ro	C/V/Fo/Ro
150	Rufous-tailed Lark <i>Ammomanes phoenicura</i>	C/V	C/V/Fo/Ro	C/V/Fo/Ro
151	Ashy-crowned Sparrow Lark <i>Eremopterix griseus</i>	C/V	C/V/Fo/Ro	C/V/Fo/Ro
152	Bushlark sp. <i>Mirafra</i> sp.	R/V	AB	AB
153	Oriental Skylark <i>Alauda gulgula</i>	R/V	AB	AB
154	Crested Lark sp. <i>Galerida</i> sp.	UC/V	AB	AB
155	Zitting Cisticola <i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	R/V	AB	AB
156	Ashy Prinia <i>Prinia socialis</i>	C/r/B	C/r/Fo/Ro/B	C/r/Fo/Ro/B
157	Plain Prinia <i>Prinia inornata</i>	C/V	UC/V/Fo/Ro	UC/V/Fo/Ro
158	Common Tailorbird <i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>	C/r/B	C/r/Fo/Ro/B	C/r/Fo/Ro/B
159	Booted Warbler <i>Iduna caligata</i>	C/V	UC/V/Fo/Ro	UC/V/Fo/Ro
160	Blyth's Reed Warbler <i>Acrocephalus dumetorum</i>	UC/V	UC/V/Fo/Ro	AB
161	Clamorous Reed Warbler <i>Acrocephalus stentoreus</i>	UC/V	UC/V/Fo/Ro	UC/V/Fo/Ro
162	Red-rumped Swallow <i>Cecropis daurica</i>	UC/V	UC/V/Fo	UC/V/Fo
163	Wire-tailed Swallow <i>Hirundo smithii</i>	R/V	R/V/Fo	AB
164	Barn Swallow <i>Hirundo rustica</i>	UC/V	C/V/Fo	C/V/Fo
165	Red-whiskered Bulbul <i>Pycnonotus jocosus</i>	UC/r	UC/r/Fo	UC/r/Fo
166	Red-vented Bulbul <i>Pycnonotus cafer</i>	C/r/B	C/r/Fo/Ro/B	C/r/Fo/Ro/B
167	Common Chiffchaff <i>Phylloscopus collybita</i>	C/W	AB	AB
168	Greenish Leaf Warbler <i>Seicercus trochiloides</i>	UC/V	UC/V/Fo/Ro	AB
169	Oriental White-eye <i>Zosterops palpebrosus</i>	R/V	AB	AB
170	Yellow-billed Babbler <i>Turdoides affinis</i>	UC/V	UC/V/Fo/Ro	UC/V/Fo/Ro
171	Rosy Starling <i>Pastor roseus</i>	R/V	R/V/Ro	R/V/Ro
172	Brahminy Starling <i>Sturnia pagodarum</i>	UC/V	UC/V/Ro	UC/V/Ro
173	Chestnut-tailed Starling <i>Sturnia malabarica</i>	UC/V	UC/V/Ro	UC/V/Ro
174	Common Myna <i>Acridotheres tristis</i>	C/r	C/r/Fo/Ro/B	C/r/Fo/Ro/B
175	Jungle Myna <i>Acridotheres fuscus</i>	C/r	C/r/Fo/Ro/B	C/r/Fo/Ro/B
176	Indian Robin <i>Saxicolaoides fulicatus</i>	C/r/B	C/r/Fo/Ro	C/r/Fo/Ro
177	Oriental Magpie Robin <i>Copsychus saularis</i>	C/r/B	C/r/Fo/Ro/B	C/r/Fo/Ro/B
178	Asian Brown Flycatcher <i>Muscicapa dauurica</i>	VR/V	AB	AB
179	Tickell's Blue Flycatcher <i>Cyornis tickelliae</i>	R/V	R/V/ Fo/Ro	R/V/ Fo/Ro
180	Red-breasted Flycatcher <i>Ficedula parva</i>	VR/V	AB	AB
181	Pied Bushchat <i>Saxicola caprata</i>	C/r/B	C/r/Fo/Ro	C/r/Fo/Ro
Total		178	120	104

\* Not all species mentioned in Guruprasad (1997) could be traced to definite records. In cases where there is a likely confusion with another species, we have limited the listing to the generic level, e.g., Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix* is listed as Quail sp. *Coturnix* sp.

AB: Absent; B: Breed; C: Common > 75% sightings; Fo: Forage; NR: Not recorded; R: Rare < 25% sightings; r: Resident; Ro: Roost; UC: Uncommon < 50% sightings; V: Visitor; VC: Very common found throughout our transects and during the entire study period; VR: Very rare < than five individual sightings; W: winter visitor.



# Status and distribution of Broad-billed Sandpiper *Calidris falcinellus* in Gujarat, India

Prasad Ganpule, Maulik Varu, Kapilsinh V. Zala & Ashvin Trivedi

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Prasad Ganpule, C/o Parshuram Pottery Works, Nazarbaug, Morbi 363642, Gujarat, India. E-mail: [prasadganpule@gmail.com](mailto:prasadganpule@gmail.com)

Maulik Varu, C/o Physiology Department, Government Medical College, Bhavnagar 364001, Gujarat, India. E-mail: [drmaulikvaru@yahoo.com](mailto:drmaulikvaru@yahoo.com)

Kapilsinh V. Zala, Plot No. 6, Opp. Gayatri Temple, B/h Uttakarsh Society, Bhuj 370001, Gujarat, India. E-mail: [kvzala@gmail.com](mailto:kvzala@gmail.com)

Ashvin Trivedi, Jalani Jar, Bajararia Fali, Near Pancheshwar Tower, Jamnagar 361001, Gujarat, India. E-mail: [snapchaserashvintrivedi@yahoo.com](mailto:snapchaserashvintrivedi@yahoo.com)  
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## Introduction

Broad-billed Sandpiper *Calidris falcinellus* is a long-distance migrant occurring as a winter visitor to the Indian Subcontinent. The nominate *falcinellus* breeds in Scandinavia and north-western Russia, and winters from eastern, and southern Africa, through Arabia, to western and southern India, and Sri Lanka. The race *sibirica* breeds in Taymyr, and River Lena, east to River Kolyma, and winters from north-eastern India through Southeast Asia, the Philippines and Indonesia, to Australia (Van Gils & Wiersma 1996).

In Gujarat, the Broad-billed Sandpiper is a winter migrant mainly in the Gulf of Kachchh (Kazmierczak 2000; Grimmett *et al.* 2011). Ali & Ripley (2007) and Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) give its distribution along the entire coast of Gujarat, while Chandler (2009) gives its winter distribution for inland as well as coastal Gujarat. Dharmakumarsinhji (1955) gives its distribution as, 'coastline of Saurashtra and possibly Kachchh.'

Naik *et al.* (1990) list it as a migratory species to the intertidal areas and salt pans along the Gulf of Kachchh.

Here we describe the current status, and distribution, of Broad-billed Sandpiper in Gujarat. We carried out surveys in different areas in the Gulf of Kachchh and along the coast near Bhavnagar. We also collected records of the species from literature, and from websites, and asked birdwatchers to provide information on the species in Gujarat.

## Observations

Our sightings of Broad-billed Sandpipers, between April 2008 and October 2013, and those of others, are summarised in Table 1.

Published reports are mainly from Kachchh (Varu 1988, 2010; Akhtar & Tiwari 1991), and Jamnagar (Varu *et al.* 2009), and the photos on the birding websites—[www.indianaturewatch.net](http://www.indianaturewatch.net); [www.orientalbirdimages.org](http://www.orientalbirdimages.org)—are also from these two places,

**Table 1.** Sightings of Broad-billed Sandpiper in Gujarat (2008–2013)

Date	Place	Habitat	Activity	No. of birds	Remarks <sup>1</sup>
13 April 2008	Salt pans near INS Valsura, Jamnagar	Salt pans	Feeding	5	
15 April 2008	Salt pans near INS Valsura, Jamnagar	Salt pans	Feeding	3	
26 September 2008	Creek near Madhapar Bhunga, Jamnagar	Intertidal mudflats	Roosting	2	
17 September 2009	Bedi Port road, Jamnagar	Salt pans	Feeding	65	Varu <i>et al.</i> 2009
24 September 2009	Bedi Port road, Jamnagar	Salt pans	Feeding	71	Varu <i>et al.</i> 2009
28 October 2009	Near Bedi Port gate, Jamnagar	Salt pans	Feeding	5	
30 October 2009	Near Bedi Port gate, Jamnagar	Salt pans	Feeding	4	
20 November 2008	Gujarat (Details not Known)	Not known	Not known	3	Deomurari 2008
28 November 2009	Mudflats near Samlasar Salt pans, Dwarka	Sandy beach/mudflat	Feeding	1	
20 December 2009	Samlasar Salt pans, Dwarka	Salt pans	Not recorded	3	
December 2009	Pingleshwar Coast, Kachchh	Not known	Not known	1	Devasar 2009
January 2010	Narara, Marine National Park, Jamnagar	Not known	Not known	1	Subramanya 2010
23 January 2010	Gagva Salt pans, Jamnagar	Salt pans	Not recorded	1	
14 February 2010	Creek near Madhapar Bhunga, Jamnagar	Intertidal mudflats	Feeding	2	
17 March 2010	Bedi Port road, Jamnagar	Salt pans	Feeding	300–350	In breeding plumage
21 March 2010	Near Bedi Port gate, Jamnagar	Salt pans	Feeding	300–350	In breeding plumage
04 April 2010	Century Salt pans, Jamnagar	Salt pans	Feeding	4	
11 April 2010	Balachadi Coast, Jamnagar	Intertidal mudflats	Feeding	1	
12 April 2010	Digvijay Salt pans, Jamnagar	Salt pans	Feeding	2	
13 April 2010	Digvijay Salt pans, Jamnagar	Salt pans	Feeding	2	
25 April 2010	Jamnagar	Not known	Not known	1	Trivedi 2010
08 May 2010	Near Bedi Port gate, Jamnagar	Salt pans	Feeding	15	
10 October 2010	Balachadi Coast, Jamnagar	Intertidal mudflats	Feeding	1	
31 October 2010	Digvijay Salt pans, Jamnagar	Salt pans	Not recorded	3	
01 May 2011	Navlakhi Coast, Near Morbi	Intertidal Mudflats	Feeding	10	
15 August 2012	Navlakhi Coast, Near Morbi	Intertidal Mudflats	Feeding	15	
20 January 2013	Haathab Coast, Bhavnagar	Intertidal Mudflats	Feeding	2	
16 October 2013	New Port road, Bhavnagar	Salt pans	Feeding	1	

<sup>1</sup> Unless stated the observations are by the authors

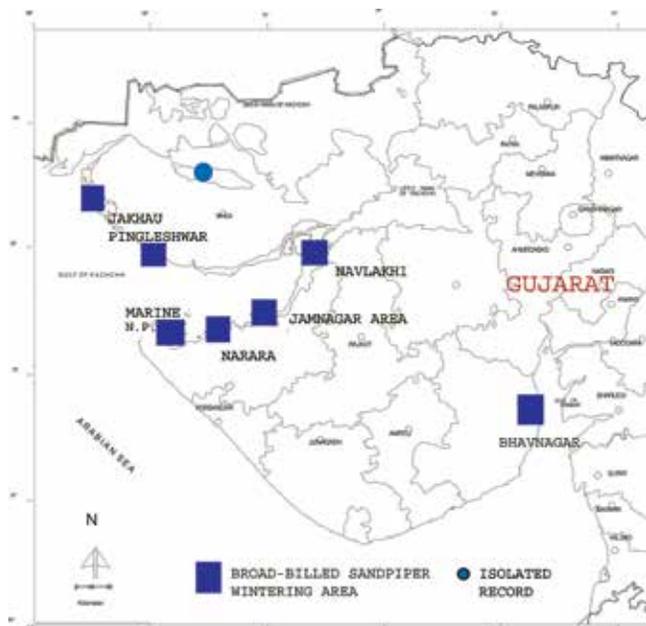


Fig. 1. Distribution of Broad-billed Sandpiper in Gujarat.

with a majority of the photos being from Jamnagar. Current distribution of Broad-billed Sandpiper based on our data, other published records, and from website reports, is given in the map (Fig. 1).

Our observations indicate that the Broad-billed Sandpiper arrives in Gujarat in August, with 15 August being its earliest arrival date. The birds seen in August are in partial breeding plumage [137]. They are usually seen till the second week of May, when most birds are in full breeding plumage. Broad-billed Sandpipers are usually seen in small numbers in Gujarat. They associate with other waders like Dunlin *Calidris alpina*, Little Stint *C. minuta*, Curlew Sandpiper *C. ferruginea*, and other small waders. Their usual habitats are inter-tidal mudflats, muddy creeks, and salt pans. They have been observed feeding, as well as roosting, on salt pans, and intertidal mudflats.

## Discussion

As seen from the above observations, the Broad-billed Sandpiper is mainly seen in coastal areas around Jamnagar and Kachchh. The records from Bhavnagar indicate that it occurs in coastal areas around the Gulf of Cambay (Khambhat) as well. It has not been



137. Broad-billed Sandpiper starting to moult out of breeding plumage. Jamnagar, September 2009.



Photos: Ashwin Trivedi

138. A small flock of Broad-billed Sandpipers. Jamnagar, March 2010.

recorded commonly from Gujarat earlier and it is possible that it may have been overlooked due to its similarity to Dunlin. There are no published records of Broad-billed Sandpiper from coastal areas of southern Gujarat, and from around the Porbander coast. As there appears to be suitable habitat, there is no reason why it would not be occurring there; towards this, intensive surveys in southern Gujarat, and other areas of Saurashtra, are highly recommended, since there is a 06 August 2015 record of two Broad-billed Sandpipers from Porbandar (Rughani 2015), which is earlier than the first arrival date we noted. Though occurring mainly in coastal areas, there is an inland record from Kachchh (Akhtar & Tiwari 1991).

The sighting of flocks of more than 300 birds is significant; as such large flocks have not been noted here previously, though Dharmakumarsinhji (1955) notes that 'fairly large' flocks sometimes occur, without mentioning the number of birds. Broad-billed Sandpipers are known to flock before spring migration (Van Gils & Wiersma 1996). Ali & Ripley (2007) mention that, 'segregated flocks in breeding plumage are seen in early May', but here the flocks were seen in March [138]. The sighting of 65 and 71 birds in September (Varu *et al.* 2009) may indicate that the birds are staging in Gujarat, on autumn migration, to fly further south into the Indian Subcontinent, with Ali & Ripley (2007) noting that, "at first they are usually seen in pairs".

Ali & Ripley (2007) further reported that the nominate *falcinellus* occurs along the western coast of India, and that the birds occurring in eastern India comprised *sibirica*. However the occurrence of both races along the eastern coast is mentioned in Balachandran & Natarajan (1997). The birds observed in breeding plumage, in Jamnagar, lack rufous tones on upperparts and are of the nominate race. Whether the race *sibirica* occurs in Gujarat is not known, and further observations are needed to ascertain this.

## Conclusions

From recent observations, it would appear that the Broad-billed Sandpiper is a fairly common, and widespread, winter migrant to the Gujarat coast. It is widely distributed along the Gulf of Kachchh and along the Bhavnagar coast in the Gulf of Khambhat. Further surveys are needed along the mainland coast of the eastern part of the Gulf of Khambhat, and southern Gujarat, to determine its status there. It is usually seen in small numbers in suitable intertidal habitat, but has not been recorded inland recently.

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# A monospecific colony of Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* in agricultural landscape of central Uttar Pradesh, India

Rajneesh Dwevedi, Aniket Kumar, Mahendiran Mylswamy

Dwevedi, R., Kumar, A., & Mylswamy, M., 2015. A monospecific colony of Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* in agricultural landscape of central Uttar Pradesh, India. *Indian BIRDS* 10 (6): 149–150.

Rajneesh Dwevedi, Sälim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History, Coimbatore, India. Current address: Lady Irwin College, Department of Zoology, University of Delhi, Delhi, India. E-mail: [rajneesh.conservation@gmail.com](mailto:rajneesh.conservation@gmail.com) [RD]

Aniket Kumar, Department of Environmental Studies, University of Delhi, Delhi, India. [AK]

Mahendiran Mylswamy, Sälim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History, Coimbatore, India. [MM]

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## Introduction

The Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* is widely distributed across the world. It is found all over India, from coastal areas up to 1500 m asl (Ali & Ripley 1968). It is also a species that is rapidly expanding its range across the globe (Lowe-McConnell 1967; Ali & Ripley 1968; Jenni 1969; Arendt & Arendt 1988; Si Bachir *et al.* 2011).

The breeding biology of the Cattle Egret has been studied in detail across the globe (Jeni 1969; Dusi & Dusi 1970; Siegfried 1972; McKilligan 1997; Parejo *et al.* 2001), and in India (Hilaluddin *et al.* 2003; Patankar *et al.* 2007; Joshi & Shrivastava 2012; Kour & Sahi 2013). It is known to nest in, both, monospecific- (Samraoui *et al.* 2007; Si Bachir 2008), and in mixed colonies (Dusi & Dusi 1970; Ranglack *et al.* 1991; Hilaluddin *et al.* 2003). A colony of Cattle Egrets may have from a few dozens, to thousands, of nests at once (Siegfried 1972; Fujioka 1985; Hilaluddin *et al.* 2006; Kour & Sahi 2013). This species has been well documented to be nesting in variety of nesting substrate and landscape (Hilaluddin *et al.* 2006; Parkes *et al.* 2012; Kour & Sahi 2013). This study describes a large monospecific colony of Cattle Egrets found in Aladapur village, Barabanki District, Uttar Pradesh.

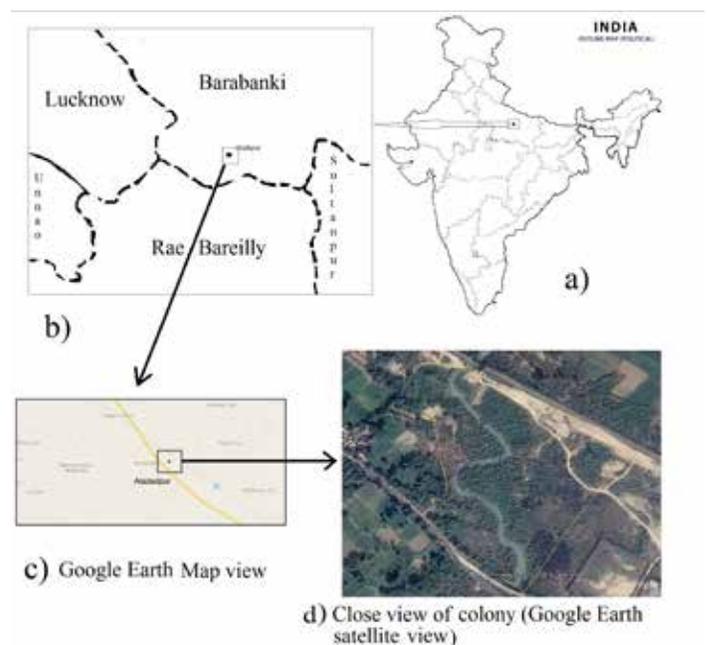


Fig. 1. Location of Cattle Egret colony



139. Cattle Egret colony in Aladapur, Barabanki in 2014.

Aladapur village (26.66°N, 81.29°E; 104 m asl) is in Barabanki District, central Uttar Pradesh (UP) (Fig 1a). Barabanki is located 40 km east of UP's capital city, Lucknow (Fig 1b, 1c). The climate here is humid sub-tropical, as the region lies in the great plains of the Ganges and its tributaries. Aladapur receives most of its rainfall during the monsoon (~1000 mm per annum). This region is dominated by agricultural landscape and human settlements. A small canal also passes through the area draining 4 Km. away in river Gomti, a tributary river of the Ganges. The colony area (area within the yellow polygon in Fig.1d) lies between a railways line and national highway. This route is one of the busiest as it connects the two major cities of Lucknow and Varanasi. Hence, the disturbance is very high due to the traffic movement.

We monitored the Cattle Egret colony from a vantage point, from April to June 2014, and took photographs to assist us for reference and monitoring of nests. We counted the numbers of nests, and of adult Cattle Egrets. An active nest was confirmed as such, if it contained an egg.

We spotted this colony while on a random road survey in April 2014. We had never seen this colony earlier, despite visiting the area often, in the past few years.

Most of the Cattle Egret nests were on mesquite bushes *Prosopis juliflora*, and few on date palm *Phoenix dactylifera*. However, the plants were not surrounded by water, as noted for other colonies by Dwevedi *et al.* (2014), and Subramanya (1996).

At this colony we counted a maximum of 436 nests [139]. However, this number may be an underestimate, as we could have missed some nests because of the dense mesquite. We did not observe nesting of any other colonial species here. Hence, the colony was monospecific. However we recorded a few adult Little Egret *Egretta garzetta*, and Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax*. Presence of foraging individuals of other colonial waterbirds, like Asian Openbill Stork *Anastomus oscitans*, Black-headed Ibis *Threkiornis melanocephalus*, and Little Cormorant *Microcarbo niger* have been recorded in the nearby region in the past decade (*pers. obsv.*, of authors). We resurveyed the colony between April and June 2015, but did not find even a single nest of another colony nesting species.

The central UP landscape is dominated by agriculture, and the association between Cattle Egrets and agricultural landscape is well known (Siegfried 1971; Czech & Parson 2002). Hence, there is a possibility of more such colonies existing in the region.

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# Recent sightings of Lesser Adjutant *Leptoptilos javanicus* in Barak Valley, Assam

Amir Sohail Choudhury

Choudhury, A. S., 2015. Recent sightings of Lesser Adjutant *Leptoptilos javanicus* in Barak Valley, Assam. *Indian BIRDS* 10 (6): 151.

Amir Sohail Choudhury, C/o Yasmin-Sajjad Choudhury, Project-e-road (Opp. Kachari Masjid), Hailakandi 788151, Assam, India. E-mail: [amirsohailhk@gmail.com](mailto:amirsohailhk@gmail.com)

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Listed as 'Vulnerable' (BirdLife International 2015), the Lesser Adjutant *Leptoptilos javanicus* is a large bird seen to soar frequently in the sky of Barak Valley, Assam. This southern part of Assam comprises three districts, namely, Cachar, Hailakandi, and Karimganj, through which the Barak River flows. The Lesser Adjutant is widely distributed throughout the Brahmaputra-, and Barak Valleys. It is relatively less abundant in the latter area (Choudhury 2000). There were sporadic breeding records of the bird from this valley (Choudhury 2000). Here I report some recent sightings of the Lesser Adjutant from these three districts during the years 2011–2015, to update the current status of this species.

My first sighting of this species was during an Asian Waterbird Census (AWC) survey on 06 February 2011 when I saw three birds at Bauwwa Beel (24.64°N, 92.58°E), an Important Bird Area (IBA) in Hailakandi District. Then I saw a lone bird on 09 March 2011. Again, during the census in the subsequent two

years, in the same area, I saw only single individuals; however, in the censuses of 2014, and 2015 none were seen. On the other hand, on 02 February 2014, during AWC at Son Beel (24.70°N, 92.46°E), Karimganj District, which is another IBA in Barak Valley, I saw 12 individuals. In addition, Lesser Adjutant was also seen in some other areas of Hailakandi District, apart from several sightings from Cachar-, and Karimganj Districts (Table 1).

The number of sightings from Barak Valley is encouraging, as this area seems to be supporting a viable population of this threatened species. Regular monitoring, apart from AWC, should be done to assess future trends of its population.

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**Table 1.** List of sighting of Lesser Adjutant in Barak Valley (District-wise) from 2011–2015

District	Sites	Date	No. of Individual	Remarks
Hailakandi	Bauwwa Beel (IBA) (24.64°N, 92.58°E)	06 February 2011	3	Feeding/Foraging in Paddy field
		09 March 2011	1	Flying
		10 February 2012	1	Feeding/Foraging in Paddy field
		15 February 2013	1	Flying
	Near Hailakandi town (24.68°N, 92.56°E)	10 August 2012	1	Flying
		22 September 2012	1	Flying
		08 October 2012	1	Flying
		28 October 2012	3	Flying
		27 December 2012	1	Flying
		26 December 2013	1	Flying
		27 December 2013	1	Flying fast from west to east
		27 June 2014	1	Flying
	15 September 2015	3	Flying	
Aashiali Beel (24.69°N, 92.53°E)	28 August 2013	1	Feeding/foraging in paddy field; however during flood 3 to 4 were seen as told by locals	
Mirargram (24.71°N, 92.54°E)	01 September 2013	1		
Ujankupa (24.71°N, 92.54°E)	21 September 2015	2	Feeding/foraging in paddy field	
Aenakhal (24.59°N, 92.56°E)	24 May 2015	1	Flying above tea estate	
Cachar	Kalinagar (24.87°N, 92.60°E)	12 August 2015	1	Flying
	Chotto Jalenga (24.67°N, 92.72°E)	29 August 2013	1	Feeding/foraging in paddy field
		09 September 2014	1	
	Irongmara (24.69°N, 92.74°E)	06 November 2013	1	Flying at low heights (approximately 150 m)
		16 December 2013	1	Flying
	Assam University Campus (24.69°N, 92.75°E)	11 February 2014	1	Flying
Salchapra (24.83°N, 92.68°E)	02 September 2015	1	Flying	
Karimganj	Son Beel (IBA) (24.70°N, 92.46°E)	02 February 2014	12	Soaring, flying from west to east
	Satirsagan (24.65°N, 92.47°E)	19 May 2015	3	Feeding/foraging in paddy field

## Status of Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans* in India

Prasad Ganpule

Ganpule, P., 2015. Status of Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans* in India. *Indian BIRDS* 10 (6): 152–154.

Prasad Ganpule, C/o Parshuram Pottery Works, Nazarbaug, Morbi 363642, Gujarat, India. E-mail: [prasadganpule@gmail.com](mailto:prasadganpule@gmail.com)

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The Caspian Gull *Larus cachinnans* is a monotypic, large, white-headed gull. It breeds from the northern parts of the Black-, Caspian-, and Azov Seas, and Lake Aral, east to Lake Balkash, and Lake Saisan, Kazakhstan; wintering in the southern part of its breeding range—in the Persian Gulf, east to the Indian Subcontinent, and sparsely to the northern Red Sea (Olsen & Larsson 2004). It is similar in appearance to the 'Steppe Gull' *L. fuscus barabensis*, and good views are required to separate the two.

The Caspian Gull is now considered a monotypic species (Collinson *et al.* 2008). Its current status in India is interesting, as Grimmett *et al.* (2011) considered its status as 'uncertain', while Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) considered it as 'hypothetical'. It was recently excluded from the India Checklist by Praveen *et al.* (2014), who discounting two individuals seen here as probable *cachinnans* / *barabensis* intergrades, and not pure *cachinnans*, concluded that there were no confirmed records of the species from India. One of the birds that I saw in the Little Rann of Kachchh, Gujarat, on 02 March 2014 [140, 141] was considered to be closer to *barabensis*, based on the amount of black on its primaries, though it showed mirrors on 'p10' and 'p9', similar to *cachinnans* (Hans Larsson, *in litt.*, e-mail dated 13 May 2015).

The hybridisation between *cachinnans* and *barabensis* is discussed in detail in Panov & Monzikov (2000), and Collinson *et al.* (2008); the latter stating that, 'there is some evidence of hybridization between the two, but it is very limited and unidirectional: *barabensis* type mtDNA has been found in individuals



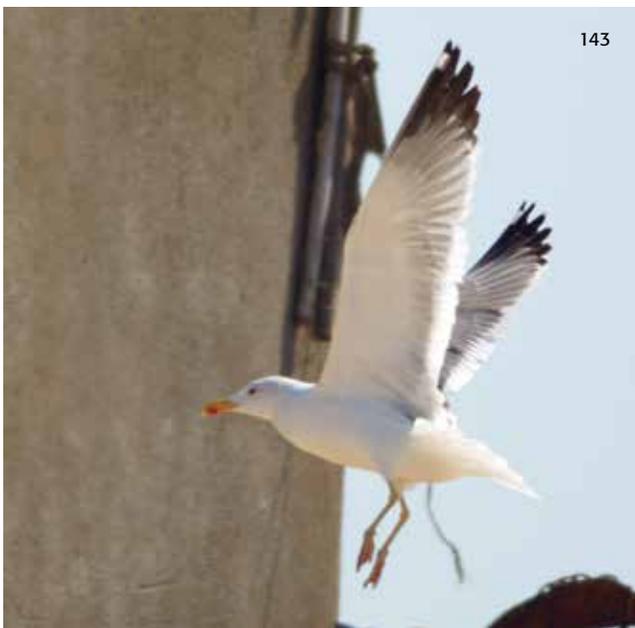
Photos: Prasad Ganpule



140-141. This gull from the Little Rann of Kachchh was considered to be closer to *barabensis*, based on the amount of black on its primaries, though it showed mirrors on 'p10' and 'p9', similar to *cachinnans*.

that are phenotypically *cachinnans*, but not vice versa.' However, they add that individual gulls, sometimes, show intermediate characters between *cachinnans* and *barabensis* and it may be impossible to assign them to either form; but the fact that some *barabensis* individuals are phenotypically close to *cachinnans* means that it does not always imply intergradation. We believe that gulls reported here fall in the latter category, though this cannot be ascertained conclusively.

Another individual seen in Okha, Gujarat, on 11 January 2015 [142, 143] could also probably be a *cachinnans*, but showed a different wing pattern from that of a typical Caspian Gull. It had an elongated, 'pear shaped' head with a sloping forehead, straight bill, pale upperparts, and had completed a moult in January, but had a mirror only on 'p10' and not on 'p9', and showed more black in wings with restricted grey 'tongues' on outer primaries, which is unlike *cachinnans*. This individual could not conclusively be identified as a Caspian Gull. It should be noted that Caspian Gulls, in the eastern parts of their breeding range, show more black / less white in the wing, which is similar to *barabensis*, and hence are not easily separable from it (Images 455, 456 in Olsen & Larsson 2004). Olsen & Larsson (2004) discuss this geographical variability in *cachinnans* in detail. Some Caspian Gulls, breeding in northern Kazakhstan, have *cachinnans* type features but a wing-tip pattern approaching that of a 'Steppe Gull', while others have a pattern like *cachinnans*; both being treated as Caspian Gulls currently: please see images at URL: <http://birdsofkazakhstan.com/> (Wassink 2015). Such birds could occur as winter migrants in India, and could be overlooked among the 'Steppe Gulls' here. This individual was very similar to such a type of Caspian Gulls.



Photos: Prasad Ganpule

142-143. This gull from Okha, could also probably be a *cachinnans*, but showed a different wing pattern from that of a typical Caspian Gull.

On 25 January 2015, I saw a *cachinnans* type adult gull on a small river on the western side of the Little Rann of Kachchh, Gujarat (23.13°N, 70.93°E). I was able to observe it for almost ten minutes, and photograph it while it was swimming, and also in flight [144–146]. It was a classic *cachinnans*, showing pale grey upperparts, a sloping forehead with a 'beady' eye, long grey 'tongues' on the outer primaries, mirrors on 'p9' and 'p10', and a long bill. The black on the primaries was restricted till 'p5'. It seemed to be in near breeding plumage, with a bright yellow bill, and yellow legs. It could be identified as a Caspian Gull based on Gibbins *et al.* (2010), who state that the typical primary pattern, if noted, is diagnostic in Caspian Gull, especially with respect to other species occurring here, i.e., 'Heuglin's Gull' *L. f. heuglini*, and 'Steppe Gull'.

Since the occurrence of Caspian Gull in India is uncertain, I sent the images I'd taken to various experts for their opinions; who confirmed that the bird looked like a Caspian Gull, the only proviso being its yellow legs. However, Olsen & Larsson (2004) state that 12% of Caspian Gulls in colonies in Ukraine had deep

144-146. This is a classic Caspian Gull from the Little Rann of Kachchh.

yellow legs. Gibbins *et al.* (2010) also state that some birds show stronger yellow legs, though rarely in winter. Hence 'yellow legs' are not unknown in Caspian Gulls.

Though quite rare, there are *cachinnans* type individuals seen in Gujarat regularly. Two of the probable birds, and one typical bird are described above. In addition to these sightings, I have noted one or two individuals every year in Gujarat, either in the Little Rann of Kachchh, or in Jamnagar / Okha areas. Unfortunately I have not kept detailed records of such birds. Hence *cachinnans* type birds do occur here as regular, but scarce winter migrants. Where these *cachinnans* type gulls come from is not known. It is presumed that they breed in the eastern-most part of their

breeding range (Azov Sea?), and are slightly different from the western *cachinnans* in showing more black in wings.

All these records, especially of the individual from the Little Rann of Kachchh in January 2015 showing typical characters of the eastern population indicate that Caspian Gull is a scarce but regular visitor to the region, probably overlooked amidst flocks of 'Steppe' and 'Heuglin's Gulls'. Though some *barabensis* / *cachinnans* intergrades could occur in India, it is unlikely that all *cachinnans* type birds seen here are intergrades. We, therefore, call for inclusion of Caspian Gull in the India Checklist until any revision, in future, of taxonomic status of eastern population (that is currently treated as *cachinnans* by Dickinson & Remsen 2015).

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I thank Klaus Malling Olsen, Andreas Buchheim, Arend Wassink, Norman Deans van Swelm, Brian J Small, Peter Adriaens, Martin Gottschling, and Hans Larsson for their help. I thank Praveen J. and R. Jayapal for their inputs. I also thank Ashwin Trivedi, Swadeepsinh Jadeja, and Kapilsinh Zala for their company.

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## Woolly-necked Storks *Ciconia episcopus* nesting on mobile-towers in Pune, Maharashtra

Umesh Vaghela, Dipak Sawant & Vishwanath Bhagwat

Vaghela, U., Sawant, D., & Bhagwat, V., 2015. Woolly-necked Storks *Ciconia episcopus* nesting on mobile-towers in Pune, Maharashtra. *Indian BIRDS* 10 (6): 154–155.

Umesh Vaghela, Om Shree Associates, B-8, First Floor, Sant Tukaram Vyapar Sankul, Nigdi, Pune 411044, Maharashtra, India.

E-mail: [omshreeuv@gmail.com](mailto:omshreeuv@gmail.com) [UV] [Corresponding author]

Dipak Sawant, Curator, Indian Herpetological Society, Pune 411046, Maharashtra, India. E-mail: [dipaktheraptor@gmail.com](mailto:dipaktheraptor@gmail.com) [DS]

Vishwanath Bhagwat, H8, The Nest, HDFC Colony, Chinchwad, Pune, Maharashtra, India. E-mail: [vr\\_bhagwat@hotmail.com](mailto:vr_bhagwat@hotmail.com) [VB]

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The Woolly-necked Stork *Ciconia episcopus* is a large wading bird that is patchily distributed throughout the Indian Subcontinent. It prefers well watered areas including flooded grassland, irrigated ploughed fields, rain-filled puddles, banks of streams and rivers, ponds, lakes, and marshes, including ones deep inside forests (Ali & Ripley 1978). The South Asian population is split from its African counterpart *C. microscelis* and assigned a specific status as Asian Woolly-neck *C. episcopus* by BirdLife International (2014), which listed it as Vulnerable since the population is decreasing due to habitat loss (Wetlands International 2014). Though this species is known to normally nest singly in trees (Ali & Ripley 1978), here we report two instances of it nesting on mobile-towers in Pune, Maharashtra.

**Nest 1:** On 15 October 2011, at 1310 hrs two of us (UV & DS) noticed a pair of Woolly-necked Storks nesting on top of a mobile-tower (17.50°N, 73.84°E) above a four storey hostel building near Mutha River, in the densely populated area of Dattawadi, Pune [147]. The nest was c. 23 m above the ground. The mobile-tower itself was 11 m tall. The nest comprised a platform of c. 1 m diameter built using sticks and other plant materials [148]. Both birds were seen visiting the nest. The

presence, or absence, of chicks could not be ascertained, as the nest was inaccessible.

**Nest 2:** On 22 September 2013, 0743 hrs, while watching birds at Pashan Lake, Pune (18.54°N, 73.79°E), a reservoir on Ramnadi River, two of us (UV & VB) noticed a Woolly-necked Stork flying with a leafy forked branch, probably of an eucalyptus tree. It briefly alighted on top of the tallest building in the vicinity, and then flew a short distance to a mobile-tower. The mobile-tower was on top of a multi-storey residential building. Another bird was already present on that nest. The bird placed the twig in nest, and spent a few minutes preening [149]. Then the pair started re-arranging the sticks and twigs in the nest. They ignored the House Crows *Corvus splendens* perched close to nest, and also a Black Kite *Milvus migrans* that was soaring over the nest [150]. The three-storey building was c. 10 m tall, and the mobile-tower, an additional 14 m, i.e., the nest was about 24 m from the ground. The nest was similar to the one observed at Dattawadi. Both the nests were built on top of mobile-towers, in the vicinity of rivers, and / or wetlands.

Unlike other colonial breeding storks in this geographical region, Woolly-necked Stork is known to breed individually (Ali



147. Nest of Woolly-necked Stork *Ciconia episcopus* on a mobile-tower at Dattawadi, Pune.



Photos: Umesh Vaghela

148. Detail of Woolly-necked Stork nest on mobile-tower at Dattawadi, Pune.

& Ripley 1978). Its breeding season may vary geographically; nesting during December–March in southern India, but between July–September in northern India. However, our observations, and discussions with fellow birdwatchers suggest that their breeding activity in Pune's surroundings is during September–December.

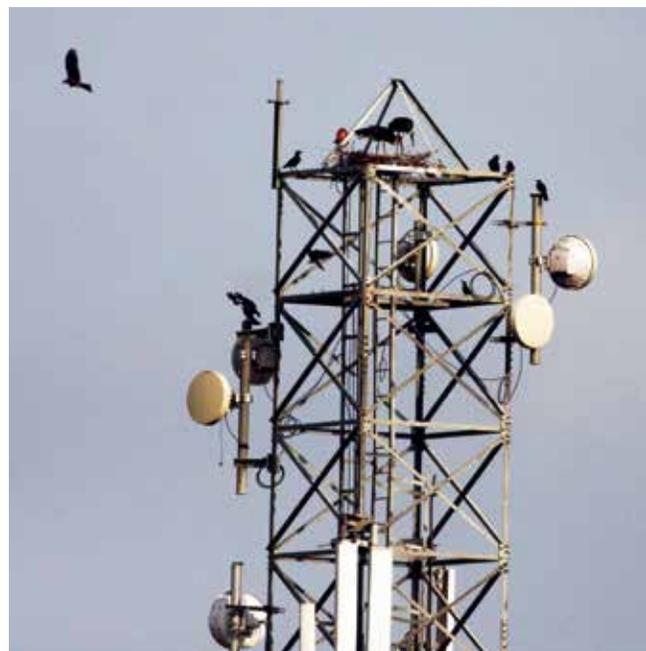
They prefer tall and lofty trees, like *Bombax ceiba* (Ali & Ripley 1978), *Ficus religiosa*, *F. bengalensis*, *Tamarindus indica*, and *Dalbergia sissoo* to build nests (Hume 1890). Nests are usually seen on medium sized trees (10–30 m), though it is not uncommon to find nests on large trees, as high as 50 m. An unusual nesting of Woolly-necked Stork on a ledge was reported from the Chambal River valley (Rahmani & Singh 1996; Vyas & Tomar 2007). There appear to be no prior reported instances of this species nesting on man-made (artificial) structures. Though both nests were seen in habitation with several tall trees, the mobile-towers were taller than most trees in the neighbourhood. Probably, this height was more advantageous to the storks rather than the shorter trees. This exceptional nesting behaviour could be an example of rapid adaptability of wildlife to anthropogenic developments.

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149. Woolly-necked Stork preening in nest on mobile-tower at Pashan, Pune.



150. Woolly-necked Stork pair in nest on mobile-tower, ignoring other birds, at Pashan, Pune.

Photos: Umesh Vaghela

Vol. III of 3 vols. Pp. i–ix, 1–461.

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# Observations of Black-tailed Crake *Zapornia bicolor* in Shillong, Meghalaya

Sudhanya Ray Hajong

Hajong, S. R., 2015. Observations of Black-tailed Crake *Zapornia bicolor* in Shillong, Meghalaya. *Indian BIRDS* 10 (6): 156–157.

Sudhanya Ray Hajong, Department of Zoology, North-Eastern Hill University, Shillong 793022; Meghalaya, India. E-mail: [s\\_hajong@hotmail.com](mailto:s_hajong@hotmail.com)

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Photo: Sudhanya R. Hajong

151. Black-tailed Crake *Zapornia bicolor*.

The Black-tailed Crake *Zapornia bicolor* is a small bird, first reported from Shillong by Godwin-Austin in the late nineteenth century. His report was based on a single specimen collected in June, and two more live specimens along with an egg (Godwin-Austen 1874). He kept the birds in confinement but they did not survive. Baker (1907) recorded two more specimens from Shillong in Khasi Hills. Since these earlier records, no recent reports of this bird from Meghalaya have been published, though its presence in other north-eastern Indian states are available, apart from those from adjoining countries—Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh (Inskipp & Round 1989; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Recently, Pradhan (2015) reported this species from the Himalayan region of northern West Bengal, in a wetland in Darjeeling, and made some observations on their status. Of the six pictures from India that are posted on the Internet, on the Oriental Bird Images website ([www.orientalbirdimages.org](http://www.orientalbirdimages.org)), photographs have been shot in Sikkim, Assam, and Arunachal Pradesh.

Here I report the presence of this crake in a small wetland near Shillong, along with my observations over a period of two years.

From 2013 to 2015 I have sighted, and recorded, during my morning excursions, a few adults and juveniles of this species in a small wetland (25.61°N, 91.90°E; 1402 m asl; 03 ha) located in the heart of the North-Eastern Hill University (NEHU) campus in Shillong. In the initial stages of my observations during the morning, I heard a 'trill' call from the reeds, and could occasionally see one or two birds flying in the reeds. Later, to

properly identify the birds I spent a considerable time on the edge of the wetland, observing this bird through binoculars. On 27 July 2015, I was able to photograph one individual [151] that was foraging nearby; upon hearing me it ran away, pausing a while in an open spot, and giving me an opportunity to get a clear photograph before it disappeared among the reeds. Again, on 04 August 2015 three birds, one adult, and two young birds, were noticed pecking on the ground. On 07 August 2015 two more individuals were observed preening among the grasses on the western side of the marsh. They were uttering a low 'tuk...tuk...tuk...' call while foraging. I also heard an occasional, louder call: a long descending trill, which began with a 'waak...waak...' call.

My observations of their habits, and the habitat is similar to that reported by Baker (1927) who described that the Black-tailed Crakes prefer patches of jungles, scrub, and rushes around small pools, streams, and areas around rice paddies, which provide them with plenty of cover. The area is divided into an eastern patch of 02.39 ha (Fig. 1; A), and a small western patch of 0.11 ha (Fig. 1; B); these two sites are separated by a narrow road. They contain vegetation in the form of *Scipus mucronatus*, *Erocaulon* sp., and other grass species. This area is perennially wet, and probably benefits from an underground source of water that slowly seeps up from the eastern end of the marsh. This is also the main source of water for the now renovated NEHU fishponds (Fig. 1; C, D).

Villagers informed me that this marshy habitat is only about three decades old. Earlier, the entire area on the northern side of the main campus road (Fig. 1) was cultivated, for rice, and vegetables, by the villagers till NEHU procured it for its campus. Since then it has remained unused, and due to water-logging after the construction of the approach road, the area had become marshy. That the Black-tailed Crake has bred in such a small and fragmented habitat, within semi-urban settings, is an indication of its resilience amidst extensive habitat fragmentation.

I could not find any recently published literature on any aspects on these birds from the Khasi Hills. However, it is likely that they still inhabit suitable areas adjoining rice cultivation, wetlands, and forested areas, in the Khasi Hills of Meghalaya. In the Khasi language, the Black-tailed Crake is referred to as, 'Syiar-um', which literally means 'waterfowl'. I feel that given the extensive fragmentation of wetlands, and encroaching development, only the skulking nature of rails in general, and this 'great skulker' (Ripley 1977) in particular, has helped it survive in such small habitats.

## Acknowledgements

I acknowledge the historical facts about the area provided by N. Thongni of Mawkynroh



Fig. 1. Map of area where Black-tailed Crakes were seen.

village. I also thank Y. Kumar, Botany Department, and NEHU for identifying the aquatic vegetations. Lastly, I thank my family for tolerating my early morning bird- and nature-watching excursions.

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# Occurrence of Forest Owlet *Heteroglaux blewitti* in Betul District, and the importance of its conservation in the Satpura landscape

Prachi Mehta, Prasanna N. S., Anil Kumar Nagar & Jayant Kulkarni

Mehta, P., Prasanna N. S., Nagar, A. K., & Kulkarni, J., 2015. Occurrence of Forest Owlet *Heteroglaux blewitti* in Betul District, and the importance of its conservation in the Satpura landscape. *Indian BIRDS* 10 (6): 157–159.

Prachi Mehta, Wildlife Research and Conservation Society, 1A Shriyog Society, 127/3 Sus Road, Pashan, Pune 411021, Maharashtra, India. India.

E-mail: [prachimehta1@gmail.com](mailto:prachimehta1@gmail.com) [PM] [Corresponding author.]

Prasanna N. S., Wildlife Research and Conservation Society, 1A Shriyog Society, 127/3 Sus Road, Pashan, Pune 411021, Maharashtra, India. [PNS]

Jayant Kulkarni, Wildlife Research and Conservation Society, 1A Shriyog Society, 127/3 Sus Road, Pashan, Pune 411021, Maharashtra, India. [JK]

Anil Kumar Nagar, Conservator of Forest (Working Plan), Hoshangabad 461001, Madhya Pradesh, India. [AKN]

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## Introduction

The Forest Owlet *Heteroglaux blewitti* is a small-sized owl, endemic to India [152]. Owing to its localised distribution, and suspected-to-be-declining population, it has been listed as a Schedule I species in The Indian Wild Life (Protection) Act, 1972 and is listed as Critically Endangered by the IUCN (BirdLife International 2015). The Forest Owlet made its debut in Indian ornithology in 1872 from present Chhattisgarh State. Till 1884, six more specimens of the Forest Owlet were collected from different parts of the country (Hume 1873; King & Rasmussen 1998), but thereafter, and for a long time, there were no records of the Forest Owlet, and it was therefore thought to be probably

extinct from the country (Ripley 1952, 1976). In 1997, after a long hiatus of 113 years, the Forest Owlet was recorded near Toranmal in north-western Maharashtra (King & Rasmussen 1998), marking its historical homecoming in Indian ornithology. Following its rediscovery, the search for the Forest Owlet began with renewed interest across the country and, including the present record it has been reported from nine locations in eight districts of the country (Table 1; Fig. 3.).

## Sighting of Forest Owlet in Betul District

In 2012, we initiated a long-term study on the ecology of Forest Owlet in the reserved forests of Khandwa District in Madhya



Photos: WRCS

152. Forest Owlet *Heteroglaux blewitti*.



153. Forest owlet habitat in Betul District.

Table 1. Confirmed sites of Forest Owlet (1997–2014)

Year of first sighting	Location	Published records
1997	Toranmal Forest, Nandurbar District, Maharashtra	King & Rasmussen 1998
1999	Taloda Forest, Nandurbar District, Maharashtra	Ishtiaq & Rahmani 2000
2000	Melghat Tiger Reserve, Amravati District, Maharashtra	Ishtiaq & Rahmani 2000
2000	Khaknar Forest, Burhanpur District, Madhya Pradesh	Ishtiaq & Rahmani 2000
2007	Piplod Forests, East and West Kalibhit Forests, Khandwa District, Madhya Pradesh	Mehta et al. 2008
2009	Yawal Wildlife Sanctuary, Jalgaon District, Maharashtra	Chavan & Rithe 2010
2014	Tansa Wildlife Sanctuary, Palghar District, Maharashtra	Laad & Dagale 2015
2014	Purna Wildlife Sanctuary, Dang District, Gujarat	Patel et al. 2015
2014	Betul District, Madhya Pradesh	This publication

Pradesh. One of the objectives of our study is to assess the impact of forestry practices on its ecology. The reserved forests of Khandwa, Burhanpur, and Betul Districts (Madhya Pradesh) are managed for forestry workings by the state forest department. AKN is the Conservator of Forests, Hoshangabad, and is in charge of preparing the working plan for West Betul Division, and allocating compartments for various forestry operations. Betul District's boundary is located 25 km from one of the known Forest Owlet locations in Khandwa, and supports teak-dominant forests similar to those in Khandwa District [153]. Considering these facts AKN felt that there was a possibility of the occurrence of Forest Owlet in Betul District and suggested a survey of Forest Owlet in selected forested areas in Betul District.

Accordingly we carried out a call survey along roads and trails passing through forested areas in Betul District. Past workers have used this method successfully to locate the Forest Owlet (Ishtiaq & Rahmani 2000; Jathar & Rahmani 2004; Mehta et al. 2008). We followed a protocol wherein the territorial call of the Forest Owlet is broadcast at intervals of every two kilometers along the road, and the response is awaited for a period of five minutes. In May 2007, the Wildlife Research and Conservation Society (WRCS) had surveyed forested areas in western Betul District for the Forest Owlet but could not locate the bird (Mehta et al. 2007; Mehta et al. 2008). In March 2014, we surveyed forests in the southern (21.90°N, 77.34°E), and western parts of Betul District (21.72°N, 77.11°E) but again did not detect any bird. We decided to resurvey the same areas in December 2014 during the breeding season of the Forest Owlet when birds are more likely to respond to the territorial calls.

On 29 December 2014 at 1255 hrs, while surveying in the western Betul division, PNS heard a response of the Forest Owlet

within 15 seconds after broadcasting the call. About 10 m from the calling station, a single Forest Owlet was seen perched on a leafy teak *Tectona grandis* tree. The tree was located beside a village road surrounded by a barren crop field. There were a few teak trees bordering the crop field. The elevation of the site was 466 m. The nearest continuous forest was 50 m from the perch site. The forests here are of the type 5A/C1b Southern Dry Deciduous Teak Forest according to classification of Champion & Seth (Dabas 2006), with associated trees of teak, *Terminalia elliptica*, *Anogeissus latifolia*, and *Madhuca longifolia* var. There was frequent movement of vehicles and people on the road.

The sighting of the Forest Owlet in Betul District is the first record in Madhya Pradesh outside its known sites in Burhanpur-, and Khandwa Districts. The site in Betul is located close to the northern boundary of Melghat Tiger Reserve (Fig. 2), which has the largest known population of the species.

### Protection of Forest Owlet habitat at Betul

The newly discovered Forest Owlet location was near a crop field that had a few houses and a village road passing through it. Although there were no crops in the field, we observed 25–30 dead mice lying in the crop field, about 300 m from the Forest Owlet's perch site. Use of rodenticide is quite widespread in this region, and is an issue of concern considering rodents form a major part of the Forest Owlet's diet in the study area (Mehta et al. in prep.).

Based on the results of the survey in Betul, AKN has proposed the Forest Owlet site and surrounding compartments to be included in the Biodiversity Working Circle, where the focus will be on habitat improvement and habitat protection measures. AKN has also initiated awareness against the use of rodenticides in nearby villages. Conservation measures proposed by AKN need to be implemented, as they will help in protecting Forest Owlet habitat in Betul.

### Conservation of Forest Owlet in Satpura Landscape

The known locations of the Forest Owlet extend along the Satpura Range, starting from Khandwa in the north, to Betul in the east, Melghat and Yawal in the south, and Taloda in the west. From there the distribution extends southwards along the coastal plains to the west of the Western Ghats in Purna Wildlife Sanctuary, and Tansa Wildlife Sanctuary (Fig. 3). The forest type at all these locations is dry deciduous, mostly teak bearing, forest. The distances between most sites are fairly large, of the order of 100 km. However, the Forest Owlet populations in Melghat Tiger Reserve, Betul-, and Burhanpur District are almost connected, while the Khandwa population, to the north of the Betul population, is slightly isolated. If there is exchange of individuals between these populations, which is possible, but has not yet been confirmed, they may be considered to

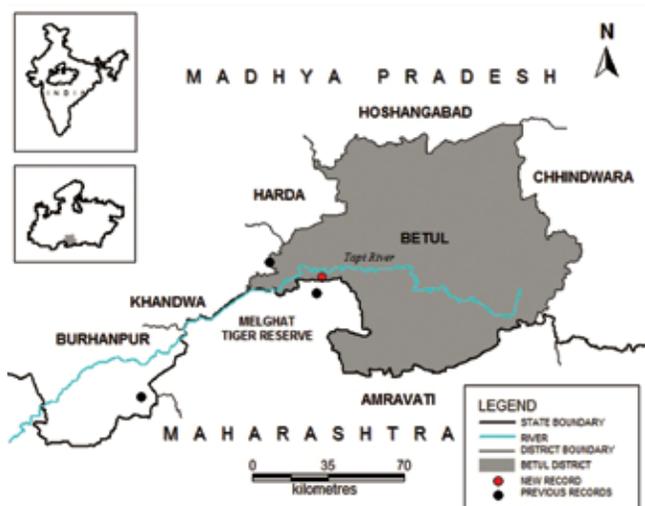


Fig. 2. New location of Forest Owlet in Betul District.



Fig. 3. A possible meta-population of the Forest Owlet is circled.

form a meta-population. This is probably the largest and best-connected meta-population (circled area in Fig. 3) of the Forest Owlet in the Satpura Hills. Protection of Forest Owlet habitat in the Khandwa–Burhanpur–Betul–Melghat landscape would be crucial in conserving the Forest Owlet. An inter-state action plan needs to be drawn up for conservation of this meta-population of the Forest Owlet.

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## A record of Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher *Ceyx erithaca* from Vansda National Park, Gujarat

M. U. Jat

Jat, M. U., 2015. A record of Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher *Ceyx erithaca* from Vansda National Park, Gujarat. *Indian BIRDS* 10 (6): 159–160.

M. U. Jat, 3 Anand Colony, Poultry Farm Road, First Gate, Atul 369020, Gujarat, India. E-mail: [mohammed796@rediffmail.com](mailto:mohammed796@rediffmail.com)

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My friends, Mitul, Akshay Desai, and I visited Vansda National Park of Navsari District, Gujarat (20.83°–21.35°N, 73.33°–73.52°E; 23.99 sq km), for birding on 14 June 2014. The hilly terrain of the park is an extension of the Sahyadri range, and represents the northern zone of the Western Ghats in Gujarat.

While we were photographing an Orange-headed Thrush *Zoothera citrina*, a small reddish bird flew by and disappeared into the bushes. But soon afterwards it came back, and perched about 10 m from us. It was unmistakably an Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher *Ceyx erithaca*. I took some photographs of the bird and confirmed its identification [154]. Information of this sighting was shared with several birdwatchers and photographer friends.

The Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher is a summer visitor to the eastern Himalayan foothills, and is resident in south-western India (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). So far the species has not been recorded from Gujarat (Kazmierczak 2000; Parasharya *et al.*



154. Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher *Ceyx erithaca*.

Photo: M. U. Jat.

2004; Grimmett *et al.* 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). However, an Internet search about its occurrence in Gujarat provided a pleasant surprise. The Ahmadabad edition of the *Times of India* epaper, dated 30 June 2013, reported, with photographs, the rescue of an adult Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher by Dinesh Parmar near Navrangpura, Ahmadabad (23.03°N, 72.55°E). That was, probably, the first record of the species from Gujarat. Interestingly, both the records are from June, which is its breeding season according to Ali & Ripley (1983), who state that it disperses widely during the rainy season with the advent of suitable breeding conditions, and thus it is a regular breeding visitor to many areas during the south-west monsoon (June–September). It is possible that the species moves through Gujarat in June, as it disperses northward during its breeding season, beyond its regular distribution range in the Western Ghats. An Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher was recorded at Panarwa village, of Phoolwari ki Naal Wildlife Sanctuary, Rajasthan, in April 1997 (Tehsin 1999). The distance between the current record from Vansda National Park and Panarwa village is c. 400 km. It is likely that the species occurs in between these points, at suitable sites.

## Acknowledgement

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# Black-throated Munia *Lonchura kelaarti* in Pune District, Maharashtra

Shruti A. Dudhane

Dudhane, S. A., 2015. Black-throated Munia *Lonchura kelaarti* in Pune District, Maharashtra. *Indian BIRDS* 10 (6): 160–161.

Shruti A. Dudhane, 11, Visawa Housing Society, Taljai Road, Dhankawadi, Pune, Maharashtra, India. E-mail: [shrutidudhane@gmail.com](mailto:shrutidudhane@gmail.com)

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The Black-throated Munia *Lonchura kelaarti* is a small passerine, which is a resident in the hills of south-western India, the Eastern Ghats, and Sri Lanka (Grimmett *et al.* 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

On 20 August 2015, on a birding trip to Mulshi (18.50°N, 73.51°E), Pune District, I saw three munias on a tree. Initially, I thought they were White-rumped Munias *L. malacca*, but upon a closer look they seemed different. I managed to photograph them [155] before they took off, which later helped me identify them as Black-throated Munias. They moved away silently, so I couldn't trace any further activity. Black face and throat, streaked mantle



Photo: Shruti A. Dudhane

155. Black-throated Munia *Lonchura kelaarti*.

and crown, and the lack of a clear white rump were the factors that pointed me towards this species. From the photographs, the identification of the subspecies is difficult, but referring to the descriptions and field guides, and on the basis of distributional range, these might be the Western Ghats race *jerdoni*.

A further search for previous sightings and records of this bird, on websites ([www.orientalbirdimages.org](http://www.orientalbirdimages.org); [www.indianaturewatch.net](http://www.indianaturewatch.net); [www.facebook.com](http://www.facebook.com)), and field guides (Grimmett *et al.* 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012) mainly pointed out the records from south-western-, and eastern India. Its status in the state of Maharashtra is unclear. Abdulali (1981) includes it as an uncommon resident in his state checklist without giving any actual records. His notes, "from Mahabaleshwar and / or Ratnagiri at the southern extremity of the state", are interpreted by Prasad (2006) as, 'presumably from Sindhudurg district'. Unnithan (2001) lists only a specimen from Bombay Market [=Crawford Market] for Maharashtra, but the provenance of such birds is unknown. The nearest definite records of this species from Pune are from Goa (filming nature IBC21267), while there are many photographs on most websites, which were taken in Dandeli Wildlife Sanctuary, Karnataka. Subsequent to this record, a bird was photographed in Mahabaleshwar in 2015, and Shinde (2015) posted a hazy photograph of this bird online. Hence, these records constitute the first definite reports of the Black-throated Munia from Maharashtra, and the northern most records from the Western Ghats.

## Acknowledgements

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# A Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus* from Banni Grasslands, Gujarat, India

Veer Vaibhav Mishra

Mishra, V. V., 2015. A Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus* from Banni Grasslands, Gujarat, India. *Indian BIRDS* 10 (6): 161. Veer Vaibhav Mishra, Naturalist, Centre for Desert and Ocean (CEDO), Nakhatrana, Kachchh, Gujarat. E-mail: [vvaibhavam2007@gmail.com](mailto:vvaibhavam2007@gmail.com)  
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On 16 December 2010, I was returning after a birding session with fellow-birder Nonnie Saran, from Banni Grasslands in Kachchh, Gujarat, near Nakhatrana, Kachchh. I kept an eye open for an Indian Courser *Cursorius coromandelicus* in the fields along the roadside. Suddenly I spotted an unfamiliar thrush-like bird in a field Bharapur (23.41°N, 69.27°E). We stopped, and went back to check it out. Having taken a few photographs [156], we tentatively identified it as a Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus*. It was feeding on an insect. I showed the photographs to Jugal Tiwari, and after referring to field-guides (Kazmierczak 2000; Grimmett *et al.* 2011), we confirmed that it was indeed a Mistle Thrush.

Mistle Thrush is not included in the Gujarat checklist (Parasharya *et al.* 2004). It is resident in the western Himalayas, and in Baluchistan, and no record from Gujarat is shown in recent

field-guides (Grimmett *et al.* 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). There are three known reports of Mistle Thrush from outside its main range in the Himalayas: a specimen collected in January 1903 from Lahore (Punjab, Pakistan; Kinnear 1903); a sight record in February 2002 from Sultanpur in Haryana (Harvey 2002); and another sight record in February–March 2003 from Pachmahri, Madhya Pradesh (Prince 2003).

I would like to thank Bill Harvey for confirming my identification and providing information on past records.

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Photo: V. Mishra

156. Mistle Thrush *Turdus viscivorus* in Banni Grasslands, Gujarat.



## A case of total albinism in a Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer*

D. E. Gabadage, W. M. S. Botejue, A. S. Dias, T. D. Surasinghe & D. M. S. S. Karunarathna

Gabadage, D. E., Botejue, W. M. S., Dias, A. S., Surasinghe, T. D., & Karunarathna, D. M. S. S., 2015. A case of total albinism in a Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer*. *Indian BIRDS* 10 (6): 162–163.

D. E. Gabadage, Biodiversity Conservation Society, No: 150/6, Stanly Thilakarathne Mawatha, Nugegoda 10250, Sri Lanka.

W. M. S. Botejue, Biodiversity Conservation Society, No: 150/6, Stanly Thilakarathne Mawatha, Nugegoda 10250, Sri Lanka.

A. S. Dias, Biodiversity Conservation Society, No. 150/6, Stanly Thilakarathne Mawatha, Nugegoda 10250, Sri Lanka.

T. D. Surasinghe, Department of Biological Sciences, Bridgewater State University, Bridgewater, MA 02325, USA.

D. M. S. S. Karunarathna, Nature Explorations and Education Team, No: B-1 / G-6, De Soysapura Flats, Moratuwa 10400, Sri Lanka. E-mail: [dmsameera@gmail.com](mailto:dmsameera@gmail.com)

[Corresponding author.]

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Albinism is the reduced production, or absence, of the pigment melanin—a trait regulated by genetic polymorphism (Kinnear *et al.* 1985; Oetting & King 1999). Consequently, albinos have paler-than-usual skin coloration, white hair or feathers, and pink-coloured eyes (Jeffery 1997; van Grouw 2006). Although not widespread, albinism has been recorded from a variety of taxa, both invertebrate and vertebrate, in many parts of the world (Ortenburger 1922; Sage 1962; Gross 1965; Mitchell & Mazur 1998; McCardle 2012; Fernández-Rivera *et al.* 2015).

Only a single instance of albinism in birds has been reported from Sri Lanka so far, that of an albino Indian Nightjar *Caprimulgus asiaticus* from Udawale, south-central Sri Lanka (Perera & Jayasena 2012). Here, we document the first Sri Lankan record of an albino Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer*.

The Red-vented Bulbul is an omnivorous bird native to southern Asia, and is among the most common and widely distributed birds of Sri Lanka, having been recorded across all bioclimatic and elevation zones (Henry 1998). It is also known to occupy a wide range of habitats including dry scrub, open forests, grasslands, and many anthropogenic habitats such as home gardens, and croplands (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005).

We observed an albino fledgling Red-vented Bulbul on 05 February 2014 at a private residence located in the suburban town Gampaha, Sri Lanka (07.09°N, 80.01°E; 18 m asl, wet zone lowlands). The albino bird (~ 10 cm from beak to tail) was reared inside a metallic cage (length: 40 cm, width: 30 cm, and height: 50 cm), which was placed in the veranda of a private residence [157]. The residents informed us that the bird fell out of its nest, which was located in the home garden. Subsequently, the residents transferred the juvenile into the artificial wire cage. The parents continued caring for the juvenile in its new location.

We observed the bird daily, from a distance of about 7 m from the cage, for four to five hours per day, between 0825 and 1610 hrs, for two consecutive months. The parents of the albino fledgling had a normal Red-vented Bulbul's plumage [158]. They fed and guarded the albino juvenile continuously. On an average, they fed the juvenile 30.5 (±6.5) times a day with small fruits, such as berries, as well as with adult and larval insects of variable sizes (~ 05–15 mm). Incidental observations, by the residents, confirmed that this parental care lasted for over six months until the albino bird's demise on 24 August 2015.



157. Albino chick of Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer*.



158. Normal plumaged parent of albino Red-vented Bulbul feeding the juvenile.

Photos: A. S. Dias

Extreme variations of skin pigmentation have been recorded earlier in Red-vented Bulbuls. Law (1921) reported a melanistic individual from India that was a deep black, with the complete absence of white or pale coloration, whereas Berry (1894), Baker (1915), and Joshua (1996) reported different forms of partial

albinism and leucism among bulbuls. Albinos may have lower probability of survival in the wild. Absence of melanin results in the impaired development of the iris, retina, eye muscles, and optic nerves; thereby albinos are likely to suffer vision impairment due to the inability to focus acutely, the heightened sensitivity to light, and the weakened perception of depth (Heiduschka & Schraermeyer 2007). White, or pale, coloration prevents them from camouflage, making them highly conspicuous to predators (Sandoval-Castillo *et al.* 2006; Acevedo *et al.* 2009). Furthermore, melanin blocks harmful radiation, the absence of which can make albinos susceptible to complications from UV-induced injury (Binkley 2001). Given the absence of brightly-coloured, multi-patterned plumage, albinos are unlikely to attract mates or conspecifics; therefore, they will not be able to make social or kin groups (Binkley 2001). On the contrary, Mestri *et al.* (2011) recorded successful reproduction of partial albino adult birds in two successive years. Ghose & Khan (2005) made similar observations on an albino adult Red-vented Bulbul foraging in a mixed-species feeding flock. In both observations, the albinos were elusive, constantly sought concealment within the denser part of the canopy, and less agile.

The degree of parent care provisioned for this albino juvenile was remarkable. The duration and feed rates, as well as protection were comparable to those given to normal wild juveniles (Ali & Ripley 2001; Sharma & Sharma 2013). Parental investments for albino offspring can be maladaptive and incur deleterious fitness costs since albino juveniles have lower survival probability and lower mating success to pass genes to the next generation (Bensch *et al.* 2000). Red-vented Bulbuls have extended breeding seasons (June–September), and they are known to sire (~3) multiple broods per season (Watling 1983; Zia *et al.* 2014). Given such a reproductive capacity, the parental birds could have enhanced their fitness by abandoning the albino juvenile and simply rearing a second brood (Székely *et al.* 1996). We did not find any peer-reviewed literature documenting the continued parental care by normal wild adult birds for their albino offspring.

The continued parental care, after the juvenile was dislodged, and subsequently translocated to an artificial cage at a different location, was noteworthy. This observation demonstrated the adaptive nature of bulbuls to human settlements (Watling 1983; Sharma & Sharma 2013; Zia *et al.* 2014). Red-vented Bulbuls are known to nest inside human dwellings, and to rear their young at such locations. Although relocating dislodged avian nestlings is not an uncommon act performed by human (Clutton-Brock 1991), we are unaware of any published records where parental birds continued caring for a translocated juvenile. We suspect that this behavior could be a result of parental–offspring signaling, and the ability of the parents' offspring recognition based upon strong cues emitted by the dislodged juvenile (Godfray 1991).

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## Letters to the Editor

### Sighting of a Lesser Adjutant *Leptoptilos javanicus* from Solapur, Maharashtra

During a visit to the marshes near Degaon village (17.67°N, 75.85°E), Mangalwedha Road, Solapur, on 09 January 2015, we spotted a Lesser Adjutant *Leptoptilos javanicus* [159]. It was again seen on 16, 23, and 26 January, and 18 and 27 February 2015. It was foraging in a marsh covered with tall grass *Typha latifolia* that is managed as food for livestock by the local people.



The Lesser Adjutant is a 'Vulnerable' species (BirdLife International 2015) with a few records from Maharashtra (Rahmani *et al.* 2014). It was recorded at Ujani Dam in Pune (Prasad 2004), Sanjay Gandhi National Park, Mumbai (Antheria 2003), and there exists an old record, from further east, in Vidharbha (D'Abreu 1923). Although the Lesser Adjutant was recorded by Gaikwad *et al.* (1997), there are no other published reports on this species till date from south-western Maharashtra; hence this note.

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— Rahul S. Vanjari & Raghvendra S. Vanjari

Rahul S. Vanjari  
Sangameshwar College,  
Solapur, Maharashtra, India.

Raghvendra S. Vanjari, D.B.F.  
Dayanand College of Arts and Sciences,  
Solapur, Maharashtra, India.

### Observation of sunning by Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus* in Blackbuck National Park, Velavadar, Gujarat

Sunning, the act of spreading out in full sunshine to expose plumage to direct sunlight, is a widespread phenomenon among birds (Simmons 1986). It is particularly prevalent in species that lack water repellent plumage (Rijke 1968). There is little information in the literature regarding sunning by harriers; just one published record of sunning in Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus* from Senegal, on its African wintering ground (Villers *et al.* 2014). Here we report an observation of sunbathing in Montagu's Harrier at Blackbuck National Park in Gujarat.

On 12 October 2014, at 1134 hrs, while returning from Blackbuck National Park (22.05°N, 72.05°E), we observed an adult female Montagu's Harrier sitting on the cemented base of an electric pole. It was at a distance of about 15–18 m from the roadside. After spending few seconds sitting there it moved down and stood on the ground nearby. Thereafter it settled on the ground, fully spreading its wings on ground surface, and lifting its fanned tail vertically to an 80°–90° angle to its body [160]. In this position, its back and the fanned tail were directly exposed to the sun. Except for turning its head sideways, it did not show any other movement during this sunning activity. The bird seemed quite alert, and kept an eye on the surroundings. After few seconds the vertical tail was dropped, but the wings remained spread out. This typical sunning posture was held for nearly two minutes. Following this, it stood up, and preened—both under wings, under its tail, and belly—for about one minute. The bird then flew up and sat on the cemented base of the electric pole in the same pose as earlier, with its right side directly exposed to sunlight. A few seconds later, it changed position, so that its back and tail were exposed to the sun. During this entire observation the bird called intermittently. After this it flew to perch on the top of electric pole, and finally flew away. Since then, we have visited this park many times, but have not observed sunning in any harrier species roosting here.



160. Montagu's Harrier sunning.

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– Niyati S. Patel, Anirudh G. Vasava, & Jenis Patel  
Voluntary Nature Conservancy, 101-Radha Darshan, Behind Union Bank,  
Vallabh Vidyanagar 388120, Gujarat, India.  
E-mail: [aniruddh.vasava@gmail.com](mailto:aniruddh.vasava@gmail.com)

### A Western Reef Egret *Egretta gularis* record from Jalore District, Rajasthan

This is with reference to the report of a Western Reef Egret *Egretta gularis* from Sirohi District, Rajasthan (Sharma *et al.* 2015). We would like to report another instance of the occurrence of this species from the state.

During our CAIRN Project's biodiversity survey on 03 February 2014, at 1050 hrs, we were observing and counting birds around a waterbody at *Sayar ka kaseta* (24.95°N, 71.35°E; 35 m asl) near Sanchore in Jalore District, Rajasthan, India. While taking a head count of the birds, the first author saw a dark grey coloured egret, which we photographed [161]. It was the size of a Little Egret *E. garzetta*, its overall body colour was slate gray, with a prominent white chin and throat, the white area extending back to its mid-neck, and to five centimeters below the base of its bill; lemon-yellow eyes, blackish upper mandible, yellowish lower mandible dark grayish, somewhat lighter (whitish) on belly, bluish gray wings with a brownish cast, black legs, and yellow feet. On the basis of these characters, and after consulting field guides (Kazmierczak 2000; Grimmett *et al.* 2011), we identified the bird as a Western Reef Egret.



Photo: A. K. Chhangani

161. Western Reef Egret *Egretta gularis*.

The Narmada Canal, which now passes through parts of Jalore District, has created some wetlands in the low-lying areas that are suitable for birds, and we may expect reports of more species of waterbirds including Western Reef Heron from here in future.

We thank Chandrakala Padia, Vice Chancellor, Head, Department of Environmental Science, Maharaja Ganga Singh University, Bikaner, and CAIRN India Ltd., for providing facilities and funds for the survey and research. We wish to thank PCCF, State Forest Department, and the officials, and staff posted at the study area.

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– A. K. Chhangani  
Department of Environmental Science, Maharaja Ganga Singh University,  
Bikaner 334001, Rajasthan, India.  
E-mail: [chhanganiak@yahoo.com](mailto:chhanganiak@yahoo.com)

K. S. Bithoo, M. Singh, P. D. Charan, & M. M. Saxena

Department of Environmental Science, Maharaja Ganga Singh University,  
Bikaner 334001, Rajasthan, India.

### Purple Sunbird *Nectarinia asiatica* feeding on sugary syrup exuding from 'jalebis'

While on an official visit to Piploo (26.03°N, 75.72°E), Tonk District, Rajasthan, on 01 April 2013 I noticed some birds feeding on 'jalebis' (a deep fried sweet made from 'maida' flour and then soaked in sugar syrup) outside a sweetmeat shop in the crowded main bazaar. Initially, due to the distance, I expected the birds to be House Sparrows *Passer domesticus*, being a commensal, and common in small towns. However, when I walked closer to the shop I was surprised to see four adult Purple Sunbirds *Nectarinia asiatica*. They were nonchalantly sucking the sugary syrup exuding from *jalebis* while perched on the pile of the sweetmeat. The birds did not seem to be troubled by the presence of the shopkeeper, nor his one or two customers, nor was the shopkeeper unduly concerned with the petty thievery under his nose! I watched the birds for a couple of minutes before they flew away.

Nectar is the most important product in the diet of sunbirds, being recorded for 93 species, with a further 21 species suspected of nectarivory (del Hoyo *et al.* 2008). Purple Sunbirds feed on the nectar of loranthus, and many other flowers, being especially fond of the fleshy blossoms of mhowa *Madhuca indica*, and sugary exudation from *Borassus* palms tapped for toddy (Ali & Ripley 1999). In the Punjab (Pakistan) they are very fond of the nectar of akh *Calotropis procera* but there they are probably more insectivorous and less dependent upon nectar than members of the Nectarinidae (Roberts 1992). The species is also known to feed on grapes, which it damages by piercing and sucking out juice in orchards around Hyderabad (India), where it is considered a pest (Kumar *et al.* 1981, 1984; Cheke & Mann 2001). In Bihar, the stomachs (gizzards) of 14 birds were examined from February to March, and besides traces of nectar (very rapidly digested), a number of small geometrid caterpillars, small spiders, small flies, Jassids, the caterpillar of a Heterocera, one Pentatomid bug, and one weevil (*Myloccerus* sp.) were found (Mason & Maxwell-Lefroy 1912).

However, in the available literature I was not able to find any information on the above foraging behaviour.

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– Harkirat Singh Sangha

B-27, Gautam Marg, Hanuman Nagar, Jaipur 302021 India.  
E-mail: [harkirat.sangha@gmail.com](mailto:harkirat.sangha@gmail.com)

### A strange display by Vernal Hanging-parrots *Loriculus vernalis*

While on a bird survey at the Biligiriranga Temple Sanctuary (now also a Tiger Reserve) located in the Chamrajnagar District of Karnataka, I was put up at the old forest bungalow at Burude, of 1940 vintage. The delightful bungalow is located within a moist-deciduous forest. Just at the periphery of the bungalow, outside an elephant trench, on all sides is a row of quite tall and mature *Eucalyptus* sp. trees. At the time of our visit, between 30 November and 03 December 2012, these trees were in bloom and had a constant flow of visitors, mostly Gold-fronted Leafbird *Chloropsis aurifrons* and Vernal Hanging-parrots *Loriculus vernalis*, especially in the morning hours.

Before sunrise, around 0615 hrs, I noticed some strange display behaviour of the Hanging-parrots on 01 and 02 December. This dawn ritual consisted of 50–60 birds bunching up in a tight flock, and perching on the topmost branch of the tallest tree, all of them facing eastwards. A few birds were even seen hanging upside down by one leg as though roosting. At some point, without warning, the birds suddenly burst out of the tree, scattering in all directions synchronously, and thereafter came together as a tight mass, flying and weaving about the canopy in an undulating fashion. As the flock circled about and moved closer to the tree from where they took off, a few birds would settle down on its branches while the rest would continue to circle and fly around. The birds were rather quiet during the flight, and when settled on the trees. This went on till about 0645 hrs, by which time the sun was up, lighting the top-most branches. Once this happened, the birds would scatter, and begin feeding on nectar from the flowers on the trees.

Strangely, on the morning of 03 January, which happened to be cloudy, though the parrots were about, no bunching up or display flight was seen. Was it because the sun was not out that the birds did not perform their ritual?

– V. Santharam

Institute of Bird Studies & Natural History, Rishi Valley 517352, Chittoor District, Andhra Pradesh, India. E-mail: [santharam.v@gmail.com](mailto:santharam.v@gmail.com)

### Common lora *Aegithina tiphia* preying on a bush frog

The Common lora *Aegithina tiphia* is bird of gardens and orchards and is distributed across most of the Indian Subcontinent, except in its north-west (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). It is usually seen on the

outskirts of villages, cultivated lands, and the edges of forests and scrub-jungle. It is described as an insectivorous bird, usually feeding on insects, their eggs, and larvae (Ali & Ripley 1996; Ali 2002)—the prey items range up to the size of large mantids—including spiders (Araneae), ants (Hymenoptera), beetles (Coleoptera), caterpillars, and occasional adult lepidopterans (Wells 2005).

On the morning of 09 November 2012, at approximately 0800 hrs, I was photographing birds in the suburbs of Gudalur town (11.51°N, 76.50°E) when I spotted a female Common lora foraging amidst garden plants. The bird was hopping from branch to branch among the bushes and trees and I watched it catch and eat several caterpillars from a hibiscus plant. It was constantly hopping around the branches, disappearing within the foliage, and appearing back into sight, often with a prey item in its beak. On one such occasion, it resurfaced from amongst the leaves of a mango tree *Mangifera indica* with a frog in its beak [162]. The frog appeared to be a *Raorchestes* sp. (Gururaja K. V., verbally), was approximately 38 mm long, and appeared a rather large prey item for the bird. It appeared to be lifeless as the bird placed it upon the branch of the tree. The lora proceeded to thrash it against the branch, and kept tossing it in its beak, apparently attempting to swallow it—sometimes holding the frog by its leg, and sometimes by its head. However, the bird was unsuccessful in swallowing the frog, probably because it was too large, and after several failed attempts, it flew away after about five minutes. To the best of my knowledge, there has been no report, yet, of an lora attempting to feed upon amphibians.



162. The Common lora appeared with a frog in its beak.

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– Thomas Vattakaven

Flat C1104, Jalvayu Heights, HMT Main Road, Jalahalli,  
Bengaluru 560013, Karnataka, India.  
E-mail: [thomas.vee@gmail.com](mailto:thomas.vee@gmail.com)

## Comments on birds of Dharwad

This is with reference to the checklist of birds presented in the paper on urban birds of Dharwad by Ghorpade (2015). I would like to bring to the attention of readers, a few interesting historical records from the Dharwad area that are accessible on the website: [portal.vertnet.org](http://portal.vertnet.org). There are specimens of Brown Fish Owl *Ketupa zeylonensis* (FMNH #230128), Streak-throated Swallow *Petrochelidon fluvicola* (FMNH #233412-15), Clamorous (=Indian) Reed Warbler *Acrocephalus stentoreus brunnescens* (FMNH #239651), Indian Bushlark *Mirafra erythroptera* (UMMZ #145249-51), and Singing Bushlark *M. cantillans* (UMMZ #232468-77) from Hubli/Dharwad. Some of these were definitely collected by Walter Koelz, while others were too, based on their dates of collection. The Common Quail *Coturnix coturnix* is listed in Ghorpade's checklist, but the more likely Rain Quail *C. coromandelica* is missing, but a specimen of which has been collected from Dharwad (FMNH #420521). There are also several specimens of the Large Grey Babbler *Turdoides malcomi* (FMNH #235166, #235187-190) in Koelz's collection from this locality. Readers are also advised to check the list of birds of Dharwad District in [www.ebird.org](http://www.ebird.org), which comprises 196 species as on 06 October 2015. I would request the author to review his entry of Tytler's Leaf Warbler *Phylloscopus tytleri* in the checklist. Though this species may occur, the most likely leaf warbler in Dharwad, per eBird bar charts, is the Greenish Warbler *P. trochiloides*, which is not listed by the author.

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– Praveen J.

B303, Shriram Spurthi, ITPL Main Road, Brokefields,  
Bengaluru, Karnataka 560037, India.  
E-mail: [paintedstork@gmail.com](mailto:paintedstork@gmail.com)

## Marshall's lora *Aegithina nigrolutea* in India and Sri Lanka

I carried out a six-year study on the breeding plumage, vocalisations, and distribution of the Marshall's lora *Aegithina nigrolutea* in Gujarat, India. Though the study area was a scrub forest near Morbi (22.82°N, 70.97°E), Gujarat. The results of the study were presented elsewhere (Ganpule 2014), through this letter, I would like to bring into focus certain details of the study that may be of interest to Indian birdwatchers.

A Marshall's lora does not show white-tipped tail, and tertials in newly acquired breeding plumage, which makes it difficult to separate it from a Common lora *A. tiphia*, but consistent vocal differences from Common lora were noted. Many different types of songs / calls were recorded, which included two types of level, drawn out songs, which were not known earlier. Moulting strategy is different than previously thought, with a complete moult before breeding.

Some individuals recorded from Sri Lanka are different in plumage (being greener-backed, and showing reduced black on head in breeding plumage), and there could be potential for sub-specific differentiation since vocalisations are also different, but further study is needed.

Recently, a Marshall's lora that had a green-coloured back, and appeared to have nearly completed moulting into breeding

plumage, was photographed in Sivalapperi, southern Tamil Nadu, in October 2014 (Sajna 2014). This individual was similar to the 'green-backed' birds recorded in Sri Lanka. A 'green-backed' Marshall's lora has been recorded from Coimbatore District, Tamil Nadu (BMNH 1938.8.10.1), and is described by Wells *et al.* (2003), as showing a different tone of dorsal green, and is similar to the 'green-backed' birds from Sri Lanka. Hence it is possible that a small population of the darker, 'green-backed' Marshall's lora may be distributed in southern India, and Sri Lanka.

Through this letter, I urge birdwatchers to photograph, and record vocalisations of Marshall's lora from everywhere in its range, and especially of 'green-backed' birds in Tamil Nadu, and Sri Lanka. When compared with the calls and songs of Marshall's lora from the study area in Gujarat, it was apparent that the calls of the birds from Sri Lanka were harsher, and more 'scolding' sounding, and the songs also differed. Recording vocalisations would help in further study as these differences in calls / songs that were noted between birds from Gujarat, and Sri Lanka (Ganpule 2014), can be elucidated.

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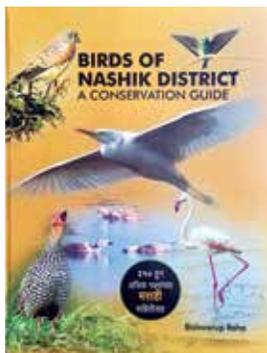
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– Prasad Ganpule

C/o The Parshuram Pottery Works, Nazarbaug,  
Morbi 363642, Gujarat, India.  
E-mail: [prasadganpule@gmail.com](mailto:prasadganpule@gmail.com)



## Review



*Birds of Nashik District:  
A conservation guide*

By Biswarup Raha

Nashik: Nature Conservation Society  
of Nashik. 2014.

Hardback (17.7 x 22.5 cm), pp. i–viii,  
1–377.

Price: Rs. 750/-

A new book on the birds of Nashik District (Maharashtra) has recently been published by the Nature Conservation Society of Nashik, with financial support from the Forest Department of Maharashtra. Its author, Biswarup Raha, Honorary Wildlife Warden of Nashik District, is known for his exemplary work on the conservation of threatened species, including vultures, the Great Indian Bustard, and the Lesser Florican, in the Nashik area.

This is a bilingual guide describing 251 species of birds, in English, and Marathi. It generously spends 296 pages on illustrating 251, of the 341 species of birds (pp. 362–369) recorded by the author in Nashik District, depicting plumages of sexual dimorphism, and birds in flight or in flocks. Many species are illustrated with more than one photograph. Some photographs are of birds that are rarely sighted, like Ortolan Bunting *Emberiza hortulana* (p. 207), Broad-tailed Grassbird *Schoenicola platyurus* (p. 186), Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna* (p. 255), etc. Some photographs are stunning: Black Ibis *Pseudibis papillosa* landing, and Red-headed Falcon *Falco chicquera* (p. 129), in that they describe the behaviour of the species. The species descriptions are classified as per habitats into forest birds, grassland birds, and wetland birds, instead of a taxonomic order.

There are chapters dealing with general information about birds, tips for birdwatching, and taxonomic families of birds, a note on forests, besides information about important locations in Nashik District for bird watching. After the bird descriptions there are notes about some locations around Nashik, with interesting biodiversity, like the Ojhar Grasslands, Nandur Madhmeshwar, and Gangapur Dam. Issues like poaching, disease, and conservation of Great Indian Bustards, and vultures are discussed. Raha's contribution in addressing these conservation issues has been immense, and he has been quite successful in garnering public support for the conservation movement in the area.

Devoting one page to each species would have been sufficient, and would have reduced the size of the book by around 45 pages. The conservation notes, and photographs, about the work of the author in particular, and the Nature Conservation Society in general, are inspiring. But these (43 pages) are too long with too many photographs and could have been curtailed to half. Many bird photographs are not up to the mark: Streak-throated Swallow *Petrochelidon fluvicola* (p. 167), Long-billed Pipit *Anthus similis* (p. 197), Glossy Ibis *Plegadis falcinellus* (p. 241), Ortolan Bunting (p. 207), Red Munia *Amandava amandava* (p. 203), Greylag Goose *Anser anser* (p. 253), Lesser Pied Kingfisher *Ceryle rudis* (p. 311), etc. These should have been replaced with better ones, especially since species like the pipit, and the bunting are often difficult to separate from conspecifics. Stricter editing, with help from professional proofreaders, for the Marathi translation could have improved the text to a great extent.

In summary, though this book could have been more compact, and with a slightly downward price, it is a must buy for bird watchers and scientists working in, and around, Nashik as it contains a great deal of information about the birds of the region. Incorporating the conservation aspect is a novel idea, and has been executed nicely in the book. We need more such regional books.

—Raju Kasambe

B-205, Trimurti Apartments  
Borkar Lane, Tilak Nagar  
Dombivli (East), Distt. Thane 421201  
Maharashtra, India.  
E-mail: [kasambe.raju@gmail.com](mailto:kasambe.raju@gmail.com)

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## Snapshot sightings

### Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike from Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh

Rushil Fernandes & Able Lawrence



On 27 September 2015, a male Bar-winged Flycatcher-shrike *Hemipus picatus* was photographed at the edge of a clearing inside the reserve forest of Sanjay Gandhi Postgraduate Institute of Medical Sciences (SGPGIMS) (26.75°N, 80.93°E), Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh. It was subsequently seen on the same perch on 11 October. Its dark brown mantle (vs black) indicates the *capitalis* race. Though known from the Himalayan landscape of Uttaranchal and Nepal (Grimmett *et al.* 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), this is probably the first time it is observed from the plains of Uttar Pradesh.

Rushil Fernandes, UGC - Senior Research Fellow, Molecular Synthesis Laboratory, Center for Biomedical Research, SGPGI Campus, Lucknow 226014, Uttar Pradesh, India.

E-mail: [r.fernandes@cbmr.res.in](mailto:r.fernandes@cbmr.res.in)

Able Lawrence MD, DM, Additional Professor, Clinical Immunology, SGPGIMS, Lucknow 226014, Uttar Pradesh, India. E-mail: [abledoc@gmail.com](mailto:abledoc@gmail.com)

### Red-tailed Shrike from Jaisalmer, Rajasthan

Pranjal J. Saikia



While on a visit to Sudasari (26.72°N, 70.58°E), Desert National Park, Jaisalmer on 17-18 September 2015, several Red-tailed Shrikes *Lanius phoenicuroides* were noted of which an adult male photographed on 18 September clearly showed white underparts, complete mask with white supercilium, rufous crown, darker brownish mantle, white primary patch and red tail clinching the

identification. Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) states that the Red-tailed Shrikes normally seen in north-west India are closer to the Isabelline Shrike *L. isabellinus*, probably basing on Richard Meinertzhagen's statement in Ali (1955). Hence, this is perhaps the one of the first photo documentation of a definite Red-tailed Shrike from Rajasthan.

Geoscience Department, Oil India Limited, 2A, District Shopping Center, Saraswati Nagar, Basni, Pali Road, Jodhpur 342005, Rajasthan, India. E-mail: [pranjadib@gmail.com](mailto:pranjadib@gmail.com)

### Desert Wheatear from Vijayapura, Karnataka

Ramesh Desai



A Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti* in non-breeding plumage was photographed on 25 December 2014 and subsequently on 04 January 2015 at Bhutanal Lake (16.88°N, 75.70°E), Vijayapura [=Bijapur]. The species mainly winters in north-western India with vagrants reported as far as Kerala (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), and Chennai (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). Though its presence in Karnataka state

has not been previously documented, it is probably unsurprising for this locality as the bird is known to winter regularly in neighbouring Maharashtra as per distribution maps in [www.ebird.org](http://www.ebird.org) (Accessed on 06 November 2015).

Principal Gr-1 / Deputy Director (Trg), Govt. ITI (M), Hosur Road, Near Dairy Circle, Bengaluru 560029, Karnataka, India. E-mail: [rameshdesai@yahoo.com](mailto:rameshdesai@yahoo.com)

### Wood Snipe from Loktak Lake, Manipur

Elangbam Premjit Singh



In the evening of 27 September 2015, a Wood Snipe *Gallinago nemoricola* was rescued at Toubul (24.62°N, 93.79°E), near Loktak lake, Bishnupur District, Manipur.

Two attempts to release the bird on successive days failed as its left wing seemed to be broken. The bird was kept in captivity for four days before it succumbed to injuries. Wood Snipe is scarce everywhere in India (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), classified as Vulnerable by BirdLife International, and is included in the Manipur checklist based solely on historical records (Choudhury 2009).

Toubul, Bishnupur District 795126, Manipur, India. E-mail: [premjiddanao@gmail.com](mailto:premjiddanao@gmail.com)

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