

Does the Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher *Ceyx erithaca* breed in southern Gujarat?

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The Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher *Ceyx erithaca* is a summer visitor to the eastern Himalayan foothills, and is resident in south-western India (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). It was not recorded from Gujarat (Parasharya *et al.* 2004; Grimmett *et al.* 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012) until 2015, when Jat (2015) reported it from Vansada National Park in the Dang forest. In this note, we report a second sighting of the species from the Dang forest, substantiating the hypothesis that it might be a visitor to the area during its breeding season (Jat 2015) and its inclusion in the checklist of the birds of Gujarat (Ganpule 2016).

On 20 July 2016, VM and DMR were surveying Odonata on a small stream of Ambika River near Ahwa in Dang district, Gujarat. A small kingfisher, which flew across the stream from less than a meter away from us, drew our attention. The kingfisher disappeared into the vegetation, but it looked different, as it had characteristic pink colour. Next day, we saw it again, at the same location, when it flew c.300 m along the stream. This time we could confirm that it was an Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher. On the fourth day, while collecting damselflies in a damp area of the stream, we saw the kingfisher again, perched in vegetation at the edge of the stream. The bird had mud on its beak. During the next few minutes, we observed it attempting to dig a burrow 1.5 m above the water, in the mud bank. Intermittently, it returned to perch upon the short vegetation nearby. We took a few record photographs of the bird [112].

MUJ joined us on the morning of 24 July 2016 to document this sighting. The kingfisher was spotted at a little distance from the place where it was seen digging into the mud bank.

Jat (2015) recorded the Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher from Vansada National Park (*henceforth*, VNP) on 14 June 2014 for the first time. MUJ had tried to locate it again in VNP during June–July 2015 but failed. This sighting is the second record of

the species in the Dang forest, and that too, during its breeding season. However, its current location is at least 30–40 km west of the previous one, and is outside the protected area. In this sighting the bird was actually seen attempting to dig a tunnel, and photographed with a mud-soiled beak. This is evidence enough to suggest that the species probably breeds in the area. It is quite likely that it is a regular breeding visitor to the Dang forest during the south-western monsoon. Birdwatchers might have missed it, as it remains close to the water in forested areas, and during the monsoon, people usually avoid walking down to the stream as it is slippery and risky. Both these sightings, from Dang forest, are the result of intensive searches near the stream during the monsoon. If attempts are made, the species might be sighted from many more locations in the Dang forest, which is the northern most extension of the Western Ghats (Rathod *et al.* 2016), which comprise its main range (Grimmett *et al.* 2011; Rasmussen and Anderton 2012). Its wider distribution in southern Gujarat is evident from another record from Surat: On 05 November 2016, Bharatsinh Rathod (ITI, Majura Gate, Surat) found a dead bird in his office (photograph on local Whatsapp group, shared by Palak Thakor, Jugalkishor Patel). The previous two records (Jat 2015), and the current two, are either from the beginning, or the end of its breeding season. It has not yet been recorded here during its non-breeding season. Hence the species could be considered a breeding visitor to southern Gujarat. The four records also justify its inclusion in the Gujarat checklist (Ganpule 2016). It could be classified as a summer/breeding visitor to southern Gujarat.

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Vishal Mistri

112. Oriental Dwarf Kingfisher perching between bouts of digging nesting tunnel.