

Correspondence

Sarus Crane *Antigone antigone* in Dang District: An elevation record in Nepal

The Sarus Crane *Antigone antigone* is distributed in the lowlands of Nepal. Most of them are found outside protected areas, especially in agricultural areas and wetlands. A high population density of Sarus Crane is inseparably associated with wetland habitats (Prakash *et al.* 2014).

The Dang District (27.60°–28.48°N, 82.03°–82.08°E; 2,955 sq. km; 545 m asl) consists of two valleys: Dang Valley and Deukhuri Valley, or, upper and lower valleys, respectively. Dang is surrounded by forest-covered hills that connect Bardia-Banke- and Chitwan National Parks through the Churia forests of Arghakanchi, Kapilvastu, Rupandehi, and Nawalpur/Nawalparasi districts in the Dovan Bottleneck. Dang is connected with Banke National Park on the western side, and an intact forest on the southern side connects Dang with Sohelwa Wildlife Sanctuary in India (Khanal 2015; Khanal & Baniya 2018). Dang District is between Kapilvastu- and Banke districts.

A pair of Sarus Crane was photographed in Motipur of Dang District on 15 August 2015 [29]. There is no earlier record of the Sarus in Dang, making this the first confirmed record for the district. Till now, the highest elevation record of the Sarus in Nepal was c.300 m asl (Inskipp *et al.*, 2016); the present record, at 545 m is now the highest altitude record of Sarus in Nepal. From their known range in Nepal, there are only two possible places from where the cranes could have come to the Dang District—either Banke, or Kapilvastu. But both these possibilities entail the Sarus crossing mountains that are 900 m high. It is also possible that the cranes migrate between Banke and Kapilvastu, and stop over for brief periods in Dang during their migration.



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29. Pair of Sarus in Dang.

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Bearded Vulture *Gypaetus barbatus* in Girnar Wildlife Sanctuary, Junagadh, Gujarat

On the morning of 15 January 2019, I visited the Ransivav area (21.50°N, 70.62°E), in the Girnar Wildlife Sanctuary, near Junagadh, Gujarat. This region is located near the Girnar Hills and is a part of the sanctuary. I observed some birds of prey soaring on thermals late that morning. Among them I noticed a large bird soaring alongside an Oriental Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus*. I took a few photographs [30] of both the soaring birds.



Dipak Vadhver

30. Bearded Vulture in Gujarat.

After coming home, I initially identified the other bird as an Egyptian Vulture *Neophron percnopterus* and posted the photos on my Facebook page. Nirav Bhatt, who has studied birds of prey in Gujarat, replied that the mystery bird looked different and requested me to send all the photos I had taken in hi-resolution. After studying the images he confirmed that the bird was a juvenile or immature Bearded Vulture *Gypaetus barbatus*, also known as Lammergeier.

Though the bird was seen only in flight, it showed well all the identification features; the large size (when compared with the nearby Oriental Honey Buzzard), dark head and neck, pale creamy underparts, large wedge-shaped tail, pointed wings, and the typical 'beard' was seen below the beak in one of the images. The Egyptian Vulture, though similar in shape, is much smaller, with a smaller tail and lacks the 'beard'. The large wedge-shaped tail eliminated other *Gyps* vultures and also *Aquila* eagles.

The Bearded Vulture is resident in the Himalayas and in the mountains of Afghanistan and western Pakistan, with unpredictable local movements, and is a winter migrant to Sindh and Baluchistan in Pakistan (Grimmett *et al.* 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). While it is resident in the Himalayas in India, there are no records of it from anywhere else in the country.