Our bird had a white nape patch, white feather fringes, narrow bars on the underparts, and well-spaced chestnut spots on all the wing feathers. An Indian Cuckoo should have widely spaced barring on undersides, and its juveniles have black-and-white barring on the head with white wing-bars—unlike our cuckoo. The Himalayan Cuckoo is more difficult to rule out, but is expected to be darker, with a more finely barred head and no white patches on the head and nuchal area. A Common Cuckoo juvenile's plumage is most similar to our bird (Mullarney et al. 1999), which species is congruent with the known documented host species from India.

The Common Cuckoo is known to parasitise more than two hundred species over its range (Payne 2005), including the Red-billed Leothrix, which has been recorded as one of the hosts in India (Baker 1942). It has not been documented as a host for either Indian- or Himalayan Cuckoo (Lowther 2013). Brood parasitism has not been reported in the endemic population of Red-billed Leiothrix in southern China, in spite of co-resident cuckoo species (Yang et al. 2014). The Red-billed Leiothrix has been introduced in several countries: Australia, Tahiti, France, Colombia, USA, and England, and feral populations exist in Japan, Italy, and Hong Kong (Male et al. 1998). In these introduced and feral populations, only one instance of parasitism on the Red-billed Leothrix has been reported by an Oriental Cuckoo *C. optatus* in Japan (Tojo & Nakamura 2014), several decades after the Red-billed Leothrix became established in the 1930s (Anon. Undated).

In summary, the most likely parasite species observed by us is a Common Cuckoo, which is a known parasite of the Red-billed Leothrix.

We thank the reviewers for their assistance in identifying the juvenile cuckoo species.

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Nest of Slaty-breasted Rail *Lewinia striata* in Navsari, Gujarat

The Slaty-breasted Rail *Lewinia striata* is a summer/monsoon migrant in southern Gujarat, and there is the possibility that it might be breeding in this region (Patel 2016). Ganpule (2016) lists it as a rare monsoon migrant, with isolated sightings from Saurashtra, and states that it is regular in southern Gujarat. Grimmett et al. (2011) and Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) do not show its distribution in Gujarat, but it occurs here regularly.

On 16 July 2018, in the evening, we sighted the Slaty-breasted Rail **[103]** in the outskirts of Navsari (20.84°N, 72.87°E). On 19 July 2018, as the water level had decreased, three pairs were seen here. After this sighting, the birds were not seen for the entire month of August 2018.

Minal Patel

103. Slaty-breasted Rail near Navsari.

On the morning of 04 September 2018, during the course of our routine bird watching in this area, we saw some movement in a patch of reeds beside the road. We noted that there was a bird in the reeds but could not see it properly. Soon, a Slaty-breasted Rail was spotted. One individual flew from this patch of reeds, landing 5–5.5 m beside the road, and after a few seconds, another bird emerged from exactly the same place. Jugal Patel, who has studied the Slaty-breasted Rail in southern Gujarat, had told us that pairs are frequently seen, and he strongly suspected they bred there (Jugal Patel, *pers. comm. verbally*). We decided to check the spot from where they had emerged. After reaching the spot, we scrutinized the grass and it took us a few minutes to see the egg in the concave-shaped nest. The nest was about 4–5 cm in diameter, and made up of 3–5 cm long, smooth, sticks. We took two photographs of the single egg in the nest **[104a, b]**, and left the spot as quickly as possible. After that, we positioned ourselves at a safe distance and waited for the birds to return. One bird returned to the nest within seven to eight minutes, and started incubating, and so we immediately left the area.

Neel Tandel


Priyank Kapdi

104a, b. Nest with egg, of Slaty-breasted Rail near Navsari.

Early in the morning of 05 September 2018, we visited the nest again. Even after two hours of waiting at a safe distance, we did not observe any activity in the area. We approached the nest and found it empty. We do not know what happened to the egg, and the adults were also not seen. The most likely cause for its absence could be predation by snakes, mongoose, or other predators, which are frequently seen there.

Though the guidelines for nesting biology studies by Barve et al. (2020) had not been published when we carried out our observations, we retrospectively verified our practices against the guidelines. The species is not classified as 'Threatened' under the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species (https://www.iucnredlist.org/), and we were not inside a protected area. Hence, those guidelines are not applicable in our case. Our discovery of the nest was opportunistic, and we did not intend to carry out any detailed breeding study on the nest we had discovered.

Therefore, we seem to have taken sufficient care in ensuring that the breeding birds were not disturbed. Unfortunately, the nesting was not successful. We believe that the nest predation happened due to circumstances that were beyond our control. Our actions near the nest may not have been responsible for the nest predation as other than observing the nest, we did not clear any vegetation nor make any changes near the nest site. We infer this from the fact that the incubating bird returned within seven to eight minutes after our observations, and that we immediately left the area. When we left the area, the bird was still on the nest. The reasons for the nest predation remain unknown.

It has been observed during detailed breeding biology studies that eggs/chicks are predated and it is the natural order that these things happen. Are these nests predated because they are being observed? Would this particular nest of the Slaty-breasted Rail not have been predated if we had not observed it? That is something we cannot answer. Our observation has contributed to the knowledge that the Slaty-breasted Rail breeds in Gujarat, something that was speculated, but was directly observed this time. We endorse Barve et al. (2020) in that nest predation is a matter for serious concern and that the guidelines for nesting studies should be rigorously followed and that all precautions should be taken to ensure that the welfare of the birds should be the only priority when doing these studies.

This is the first time that a nest of the Slaty-breasted Rail has been found in Gujarat, and this sighting confirms that it does breed here. Since the habitat observed here is seen in other parts of southern Gujarat, especially between the Narmada and Tapi River areas, it is possible that the Slaty-breasted Rail could be breeding in this region. Suitable habitats should be scrutinised for the Slaty-breasted Rail in the summer/monsoon months in this region.

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The Bar-headed Goose *Anser indicus* in the wetlands of Kashmir Valley, India

The Bar-headed Goose *Anser indicus* breeds in Ladakh, (India), Tibet (China), Mongolia, Uzbekistan, Tadjikistan, and Kyrgyztan (Rahmani & Islam 2008). It winters in lowland swamps, marshes, lakes, and rivers throughout northern India and the Gangetic Plain (including the Nepal *terai*), to Assam, Gujarat, Karnataka, Maharashtra, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala (Ali & Ripley 1987; Rahmani & Islam 2008). Although the Bar-headed Goose is a common summer visitor to its breeding habitats in the high altitude plains of eastern Ladakh, its presence in the adjoining Union Territory of Jammu & Kashmir is quite sparse.

On the foggy morning of 06 December 2019 following an unconfirmed report from one of the field staff, Abdul Rauf, we visited the Manibugh Wetland (34.18°N, 74.81°E; *c.*1610 m asl) in Pampore, Srinagar. On reaching the wetland we observed a fairly good population of Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos*, Common Teal *A. crecca*, and Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra* present there. While we were busy watching them we spotted a flock of seven Bar-headed Geese flying in to the wetland, probably from the nearby paddy fields to its north-eastern side. We followed the flock with binoculars and camera till the birds settled in the water **[105]**. Although the weather was foggy, we managed to photograph the birds. At 0915 h we heard another flock of 16 Bar-headed Geese coming in towards the wetland from the same direction.

In winter, the Bar-headed Goose has been recorded only from the Gharana Wetland in Jammu District (Rahmani & Islam 2008). Tahir Shawl reported up to 2,000 were reported from the wetland in 2006 (Rahmani & Islam 2008). Khursheed Ahmad reported that *c.*50 birds stayed on the Hygam Wetland in Kashmir for a very brief period in February 2006 (Rahmani & Islam 2008). Since then, there has not been any report from the Kashmir wetlands (Suhail et al. 2020). The 23 birds that we spotted remained for nearly a month, 06–29 December 2019, and were probably using the wetland as a stopover site.