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FRONT COVER: Red Avadavat *Amandava amandava*
PHOTOGRAPHER: Ramki Sreenivasan

Gujarat: birding destination *par excellence*

J. K. Tiwari

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PHOTOS: J. K. TIWARI

Chhari-Dhand in the morning

Introduction

The landmass of Gujarat state (196,077 km²), with a coastline of 1,650 km, and several offshore islands, plays a critically important role in the ornithology of India. 490 spp. of birds have been listed from Gujarat, and its physical location invariably attracts new records annually, e.g., the sightings of Caspian Plover, and Brown-breasted Flycatcher in 2009.

Gujarat has four National Parks and 24 Wildlife Sanctuaries. The only Wetland Conservation Reserve of Gujarat is Chhari-Dhand in the Banni area of Kachchh district. Large scale nesting of Lesser- and Greater Flamingo from India has only been recorded from the Rann of Kachchh. Among large mammals, the Asiatic wild ass, and the Asiatic lion are now confined to Gujarat.

17 Important Bird Areas (IBA) have been listed from Gujarat by Islam & Rahmani (2004), e.g., Banni, Bhal, Charkala Salt Pan, Gir, ka lake, Khijadia nal Salrovar, Marine national Park Jamnagar, Naliya grasslands, Rampura grasslands, Thol lake, Salt pans of Bhavnagar, Velavadar, wetlands of Kheda, Wild Ass Sanctuary and Bhaskarpara wetland.

Besides the protected areas there are a large number of habitats, like wetlands, grasslands, *vidis*, grazing lands and, temple forests where birds find safe refuge in a state where vegetarianism is dominant, and people respect wildlife. Due to rapid industrialisation and demographic expansion the bird habitats in Kachchh are exposed to tremendous anthropogenic pressures. Several habitats are under threat and need urgent attention, e.g., destruction of grasslands, and thorn forest in Kachchh.

A variety of habitats

The diverse wildlife habitat of the state, e.g., the Great, and Little Ranns of Kachchh (20,600 km²), the Banni grasslands (3,847 km²), 42 off-shore islands in the Gulf of Kachchh, the Marine National Park near Jamnagar, the dry deciduous forests of Gir and Barda Hills, the tropical thorn forest of Kachchh, Vijaynagar Polo, Ambaji-Balaram, and Jessore Sloth Bear Sanctuary, and the moist deciduous forest of southern Gujarat provide excellent habitats for the resident and migratory birds. The seasonal wetlands of

Kachchh and the perennial waterbodies of Gujarat support large populations of resident and migratory waterbirds. Mangrove forests of Kachchh and the Gulf of Kachchh provide not only the spawning ground for fish and prawns but excellent mudflats and estuarine habitat for coastal birds.



Aristida grasslands Kachchh



Banni halophytes Suaeda



Great Rann Salt flats



Kachchh wilderness



Seasonal wetlands Kachchh

The Aravalli Hills in northern Gujarat provide excellent habitat for species like Scimitar Babblers, Bonelli's Eagle, Green Avadavat, and over 200 spp., of birds; the Satpura and Vindhya Hills, passing through eastern Gujarat, and the Sahyadri Hills, through southern Gujarat, support unique birdlife.

Gujarat has many perennial rivers, e.g., Narmada, Tapi, Sabarmati, Mahi, Daman Ganga, Purna, Ambika, and Bhadar, which provide excellent habitat for waders, waterfowl, and land birds.

The thick woodlands of the Dang forest, e.g., in Vansada National Park, support woodpeckers, Malabar Trogon, White-rumped Shama, Indian Pitta, etc. The park is nestled along the boundary

Table 1. National Parks of Gujarat¹

Name	Year established	Area [km ²]	Location
Gir National Park	1975	258.71	Sasan Gir district: Junagadh
Blackbuck National Park	1976	34.08	Velavader district: Bhavnagar
Vansda National Park	1979	23.99	Vansda district: Navasari
Marine National Park	1982	162.89	Gulf of Kachchh District: Jamnagar



Thorn forest Kachchh

PHOTOS: J. K. Tiwari



Thorn forest in monsoon Kachchh

of the Western Ghats and shows many interesting species of flora and fauna.

The grasslands of Velavadar (34.08 km²) near Bhavnagar, in the Bhal region, provide excellent habitat for the nesting of Lesser Florican. The grasslands host good populations of Black Buck and Wolf. In winter, about 4,000 harriers of four species over-winter in Velavadar (Clarke *et al.* 1998).

Marine National Park, is India's first marine park, and is located in the Gulf of Kachchh (Jamnagar district). There are 42 islands off the Jamnagar coast, within this park, and most of them are surrounded by reefs, the most spectacular being Pirotan.

Table 1. National Parks of Gujarat¹

Name	Year established	Area [km ²]	Location
Gir Wildlife Sanctuary	1965	1153.42	Sasan Gir district: Junagadh, Amreli
Wild Ass Sanctuary	1973	4953.70	Little Rann of Kachchh
Nal Sarovar Birds Sanctuary	1969	120.82	Nal Sarovar district: Amdavad & Surendranagar
Jessore Sloth Bear Sanctuary	1978	180.66	Jessore hill district: Banaskantha
Barda Wildlife Sanctuary	1979	192.31	Hingolghadh district: Rajkot
Hingolghadh Sanctuary	1980	6.54	Hingolghadh district: Rajkot
Marine Sanctuary	1980	295.03	Gulf of Kachchh district: Jamnagar
Narayan Sarovar Sanctuary	1981	444.23	Narayan Sarovar district: Kachchh
Khijadia Bird Sanctuary	1981	6.05	Khijadia district: Jamnagar
Ratanmahal Sanctuary	1982	55.65	Ratanmahal district: Dahod
Kutch Desert Sanctuary	1986	7506.22	Great Rann of Kachchh
Gaga Wildlife Sanctuary	1988	3.33	Gaga district: Jamnagar
Rampara Sanctuary	1988	15.01	Rampara district: Rajkot
Thol Lake Bird Sanctuary	1988	6.99	Thol district: Mahesana
Shoolpaneshwar Sanctuary	1982	607.70	Narmada district
Porbandar Birds Sanctuary	1988	0.09	Porbandar district: Porbandar
Pania Wildlife Sanctuary	1989	39.63	Amreli district
Balaram Ambaji Sanctuary	1989	542.08	Banaskantha district
Jambuhoda Sanctuary	1990	130.38	Jambughoda district: Panchmahal
Purna Wildlife Sanctuary	1990	160.84	Dangs district
Kutch Bustard Sanctuary	1992	2.03	Near Naliya district: Kachchh
Mitiyala Wildlife Sanctuary	2004	18.22	Mitiyala district: Amerli
Total area		16440.91	

Nalsarovar, near Ahmedabad, is an important freshwater wetland that supports thousands of migratory and resident birds.

Some important avifauna

The critically endangered Indian Bustard is seen in the Naliya grasslands (Kachchh). Grey Hypocolius *Hypocolius ampelinus*, a migrant from the Middle East, is seen only in Fulay village, and near the Banni area of Kachchh, and nowhere else in India. A major stronghold of the Indian endemic parid, White-naped Tit *Parus nuchalis*, is the tropical thorn forest of Kachchh district.

Stoliczka's Bushchat *Saxicola macrorhyncha* is an endemic and vulnerable species that is seen in the grasslands of Kachchh and Velavadar and on the fringes of the Little Rann.

Great White Pelican occasionally breed in the Great Rann (Ali & Ripley 1987; Grimmett *et al.* 1998). Kachchh (Banni around Chhari-Dhand mainly), and Saurashtra are major wintering grounds for the Common Crane *Grus grus*. After a good monsoon c. 40,000 of them winter in Banni from September to February, mainly around Chhari-Dhand, Servo Dhand, Hodko Thath (wetland), on the edge of the Great Rann.

On 17 December 2009, 60 Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* were seen in Banni by this author. The birds were seen till 10 February 2010. This is perhaps the largest single population of this species reported from India.

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J. K. Tiwari

Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* 6 February 2010 Banni Kachchh

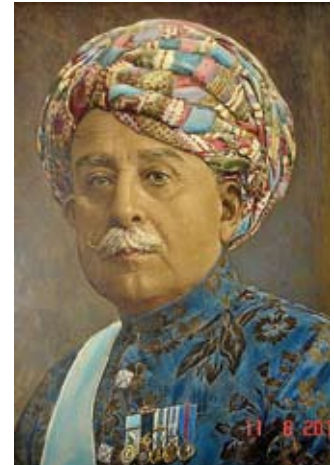
¹ Source: <http://gujenvfor.gswan.gov.in/wildlife/wildlife-national-parks-sanctuaries.html> [downloaded on 25 October 2010]

Gujarat royalty and Indian ornithology

Lavkumar Khachar

Khachar, L., 2010. Gujarat royalty and Indian ornithology. *Indian BIRDS* 6 (4&5): 91–92.

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Maharao Khengarji III of Kachchh'

Ornithology is the science of bird study. It is different from other such sciences in that the subject of study, birds, are so visible and attractive that amateurs can undertake observations that add to the knowledge accumulation, provided certain simple scientific procedures are followed. Some outstanding papers have been written on the biology of individual species by housewives observing the goings on from their kitchen windows! The late Maharaj Kumar Dharmakumarsinhji would be a classic example of an absolute amateur who achieved full recognition as an ornithologist of enviable reputation. Khacher & Khacher (1986) have highlighted his unique contribution to not only ornithology, but natural history in general—of Saurashtra in particular and India in general. He was the epitome of how a shikari, a photographer, an artist, and a birdwatcher could carve for himself a niche, among scientists, without any formal scientific training. I consider it my very good fortune to have been closely associated with him from my early boyhood through life till I myself had created an identity of my own.

His nephew, Shivbhadrasinhji, the younger son of Maharaja Krshnakumarsinhji, is equally knowledgeable, as indeed he should be considering the exposure he got from the earliest childhood in a family of avid outdoor men. Unhappily, he writes in a rather desultory fashion though he could contribute immensely to natural history literature; the gun has been replaced by the camera and if nothing else, he has accumulated an outstanding record that would be of immense archival value, rivaling the footage and photographs of his uncle. Shivbhadrasinhji is an inspiration to a very active group of birdwatchers in Bhavnagar operating a nature club appropriately named after Dharmakumarsinhji.

From Bhavnagar in Saurashtra one goes to Mansa near Gandhinagar, a small principality, which gave us Divyabhanusinh Chavda who used his spare time from being a hotelier with India's premier Taj group of hotels, to give us two definitive books, one on the Asiatic Lion and the other on the Indian Cheetah; he finds a place here on the strength of his having written on Dharmakumarsinhji and prepared a bibliography of his writings (Dharmakumarsinhji 1998; Divyabhanusinh 1998a, b). Today in

retirement, he is President of World Wide Fund for Nature—India, and defers to me as his onetime teacher at the Rajkumar College, and has relationship with the Wankaner royal family represented here by Maharajkumar Ranjitsinh, who has written papers dealing with the Great Indian Bustard *Ardeotis nigriceps* among other natural history and conservation issues.

The Wankaner family, though not listed among contributors to Ornithology, other than for the pieces written by MK Ranjitsinh, has a singular distinction, in that for three generations, the family carefully looked after the grasslands of the former Wankaner State, resulting in the conservation of an unique ecosystem that provides sanctuary to the Great Indian Bustard and the Lesser Florican *Sypheotides indica* among other grassland-specific birds. Ranjitsinh's elder brother, and the present titular head of the family, Digvijaysinhji, enjoys an eminence in the field of conservation in his own right, having been a powerful political voice for the cause during his stints as member of the Gujarat Legislature, and later as member of the Lok Sabha. Interestingly, it would read like some medieval power politics when one learns that Divyabhanusinh's mother came from Wankaner, and the sisters of Ranjitsinh were married into the two leading conservation families of Gujarat, one to Shivbhadrasinhji of Bhavnagar and the other, now deceased, to MKS Himmatsinhji of Kachchh.

The Kachchh family is unique in that they have been contributing to ornithology for four generations! Maharao Khengarji (1866–1942¹) wrote on the newly located breeding site of the Large Flamingo in the Great Rann of Kachchh (Khengarji 1904) followed by a note on the Lesser Flamingo (Khengarji 1909). His son Vijayrajji (1885–1948²) wrote several notes for the *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society (JBNHS)*, on goose shoots and other game birds (Vijayrajji 1912, 1913, 1932). He supported the late Salim Ali's ornithological surveys of Kachchh. Then, we have notes by Madansinhji (1949, 1957, 1977), again on game birds, while his youngest brother Himmatsinhji wrote on a great variety of bird observations throughout his life (at least 71 papers from 1959–2007). A couple of years prior to his demise, he had been writing very readable and highly appreciated pieces for the Gujarati bird publication *Vihang*. He had been working on the upgradation of Salim Ali's *Birds of Kutch* (1945) during

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Khengarji_III_of_Kutch.

² <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Vijayrajji>.

³ Downloaded on 10 November 2010 from: http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/7/7c/Maharao_Khengarji_III.jpg.

the last years of his life. I would like to see the upgrading of the book by Jugal Kishore Tiwari who has been doing great work in popularising Kachchh as a birding venue, and who had the full appreciation of Himmatsinhji. Himmatsinhji encouraged a number of local birdwatchers in Kachchh, who are doing excellent field observations and regularly writing for *Vihang*. The baton has been effectively passed on from the royal to the plebeian bearers to keep Kachchh in the forefront of ornithology in the state of Gujarat, and in India.

Himmatsinhji was one year senior to me at the Rajkumar College, Rajkot, and the friendship we developed at school continued through life till his passing away. A month before his demise, he spoke to me on the ubiquitous mobile phone, from across the Gulf of Kachchh, as I was being shown a nesting pair of Black-necked Storks *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus* in the Khijadiya Waterbird Sanctuary near Jamnagar. He had been updating notes on that very species in Kachchh! While I can claim generating public awareness for the notification of the Marine National Park, and the Khijadiya Sanctuary, it is the present Jam Saheb Sataji who 'pointed' me to get the action started. It is a pity, the Jam Saheb has not written notes on the birds and other natural history of the erstwhile Jamnagar State, as his knowledge is unrivalled for its personal exposure. And as for me, I shall always consider whatever I saw and learnt in his 'territory' as material borrowed from him. Though after Dharmakumarsinhji and Himmatsinhji, I have the largest number of writings (see Pittie's bibliography later in this issue), I feel I have not done enough considering what I could have, had I followed Salim Ali's advise and maintained a regular and detailed diary through life. So, when I remonstrated with Himmatsinhji for not having written more, pat came his wry rejoinder, "A pot calling the kettle black!" It is fitting that I conclude this piece by referring to my cousin the late Durbar Shivraj Kumar Khachar of Jasdan for his very qualitative support to the cause of ornithology in Gujarat. Apart from a series of first records for our area in central Saurashtra appearing in the *JBNHS*, he has to his credit among

the very first photographs of the Great Indian Bustard and the Lesser Frigatebird to appear in that journal (in all he published 37 papers during 1949–1992). Both of us bird-watched together and developed a very close and affectionate association with Salim Ali. He underwrote the cost of intensive bird banding for the BNHS at Hingolghadh Sanctuary, Jasdan. He also participated in several bird banding camps with Salim Ali in Kachchh.

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Roosting behaviour of Franklin's Nightjar *Caprimulgus affinis*

Prasad Ganpule

Ganpule, P., 2010. Roosting behaviour of Franklin's Nightjar *Caprimulgus affinis*. *Indian Birds* 6 (4&5): 92–94.

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Manuscript received on 14 July 2009.

Introduction

Paneli vidi (22°49'N 70°56'E) is a scrub forest and grassland located near Morbi, my hometown, in Rajkot district, Gujarat. I have been observing a flock of roosting Franklin's Nightjars *Caprimulgus affinis* for the past one year. My observations are given here.

On an evening in late August 2008, while trying to photograph a Marshall's Iora *Aegithina nigrolutea* in breeding plumage, I stumbled upon a flock of Franklin's Nightjars that was roosting by the side of a road. The area was stony with sparse scrub. I almost walked right on to them before four birds suddenly flushed, and settled nearby. I scrutinised the ground carefully and found

ten birds roosting (including the four that had flown off) in a small area of c. 4.5 m². I regularly visited the site subsequently.

Identification

Identification of nightjars is often confusing and difficult. During the course of my observations, I had the opportunity to observe and photograph the birds. A brief description of the male, female, and juvenile birds is given below:

Male: General colouration is brownish-grey. The main identification marks of a male are the all white two outer tail feathers (Fig. 1). These are seen in flight but difficult to see when the birds are roosting. In flight, spots in middle of first four primaries are white. A clear buff-coloured 'V' is seen from shoulder to centre of back when roosting (Fig. 2). There is no marking/streaking on the head. Prominent, round buff-coloured spots are present on the coverts extending up to the secondaries. The bird in Fig. 3 is possibly a molting male.

Female: General colouration is greyish. Upperparts are mottled grey. Buff-coloured 'V' is not very prominent but seen clearly (Fig. 4). Outer tail feathers are mottled. In flight, spots on primaries are rufous buff in colour. Buff coloured spots on the coverts and secondaries are smaller and not prominent.

Juvenile: General colouration is brownish-grey. Upperparts are mottled. There is no 'V' on the upperparts. There are almost no spots on the coverts (Fig. 5).

Observations

I observed the site regularly from late August 2008 and the details are given below. Care was taken not to disturb the birds. All observations were duly recorded and I took numerous photographs of the birds.

The Nightjars changed their location once, to a new site about 30 m from the original. After that they were observed at this new site only. This area was almost identical to the earlier one, i.e., stony with sparse scrub. The birds seemed to be more wary at dawn and dusk, but were sluggish in the afternoon.

Behaviour

I first observed a total of ten birds. Some of them were roosting within 15 cm of one another, and another flock was roosting nearby within 60 cm of one another. All the ten birds were roosting in a small area of c. 4.5 m². There were three juveniles



Fig. 1. Male Franklin's Nightjar *C. affinis* showing white outer tail feather



Fig. 2. Male with rufous 'V' on back



Fig. 3. Moulting male?

/ immature birds in the group. The birds could be approached to within a distance of 1.5 m without disturbing them. When the birds changed their location to the new site, all were still roosting within a small area. Thus, communal roosting was observed at both the sites. When the number of birds was low, all the birds were observed to be roosting within 1.5 m of one another.

On 23 November 2008 a herd of goats came into the area where the nightjars were roosting. A goat passed within 10 cm of a roosting bird. The nightjar did not even flinch!

The absence of any birds in late May could be because of the complete drying up of a nearby lake, and could have been the reason for their dispersal.

After June 2009, when I observed the birds again, communal roosting was not observed. The birds were now roosting in pairs (Fig. 6). The pairs were scattered and were almost 9–12 m away from one another. This could have been due to the breeding season of the birds. In July, the birds had again started roosting in groups. This clearly indicates that these nightjars roost in pairs during the breeding season and in groups at other times.

Vocalisation

The birds could be approached to within 1.5 m without disturbing them. When the distance was less than that, they got alarmed and the closest bird uttered a soft 'chukp' call. All the closely roosting birds would then fly off with a small chuckle (again like a soft 'chukp'), and would settle at some distance (3–4.5 m). I did not hear any other call during my observations.



Fig. 4. Female Franklin's Nightjar *C. affinis*



Fig. 5. Juvenile Franklin's Nightjar *C. affinis*

PHOTOS: Prasad Ganpule

I believe this is a type of a warning call to the other birds nearby. This call is not described in the reference books and needs to be recorded and analysed properly.



Fig. 6. Franklin's Nightjar *C. affinis* pair

Conclusion

I wonder whether this type of communal roosting, within a small area, over a long period of time, is unique to Franklin's Nightjar?

Among all the other nightjars that I have seen i.e., Large-tailed *C. macrurus* (at Bharatpur), Grey *C. indicus*, and Indian *C. asiaticus*, only solitary roosting birds were spotted.

Acknowledgements

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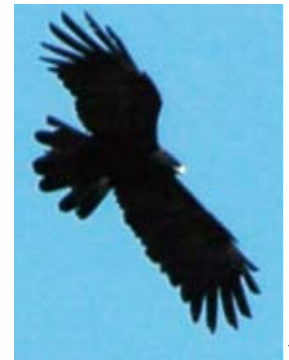
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Table 1.

Sl No.	Date	No of Birds	Time	Status	Observed with
1	23.viii.08	10	18:00	Roosting	Rohit Ganpule
2	30.viii.08	12	18:00	Roosting	
3	7.ix.08	8	18:00	Roosting	
4	21.ix.08	10	07:00	Roosting	
5	28.ix.08	6	07:00	Roosting	Rohit Ganpule, at new site
6	19.x.08	4	18:30	Roosting	
7	26.x.08	5	18:30	Roosting	
8	9.xi.08	8	10:00	Roosting	Jugal Tiwari
9	23.xi.08	4	09:00	Roosting	Ashok Mashru
10	28.i.09	4	18:00	Roosting	
11	15.ii.09	2	18:00	Roosting	R. B. Balar
12	11.iii.09	4	07:00	Roosting	
13	29.iii.09	3	18:00	Roosting	
14	12.iv.09	2	10:00	Roosting	
15	31.v.09	Nil	08:00	Roosting	
16	21.vi.09	2	08:00	Roosting	
17	5.vii.09	6	18:30	Roosting	
18	9.vii.09	3	07:30	Roosting	B. M. Parasharya
19	12.vii.09	8	18:30	Roosting	

Black Eagle *Ictinaetus malayensis* at Narmada Dam, Gujarat



B. M. Parasharya

Figs 1 Black Eagle *Ictinaetus malayensis*.

B. M. Parasharya

Parasharya, B. M., 2010. Black Eagle *Ictinaetus malayensis* at Narmada Dam, Gujarat. *Indian BIRDS* 6 (4&5): 95–96.

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The Black Eagle *Ictinaetus malayensis* is a resident and widespread species in India. Its Indian race *I. m. perniger* is distributed throughout the Himalayan foothills from Kashmir to Arunachal Pradesh, the Western and Eastern Ghats, the highlands of Madhya Pradesh, and the Chota Nagpur Plateau regions in Orissa and West Bengal (Naoroji 2007). However, there are only a few published records of the species from Gujarat. During his ornithological survey of Gujarat, Ali (1954) observed it beating over teak and mixed deciduous forest at Jambughoda (Panchmahal district) on 11 November 1945 (See map; location 1). Dharmakumarsinhji (1955) did not record it from Saurashtra but later (1965) reported it from Gir forest (See map; location 2). Naoroji (2007) also mentions a sight record from Gir by Jim Hall. On 14 January 2008, Desai photographed a soaring eagle at Jamwala in Gir forest (See map; location 14).

On 6 March 2009, C. K. Borad, V. Vasudev Rao, and I saw an eagle, soaring low in front of us near Dyke 2 of Narmada Dam (21°52'38.93"N 73°43'13.56"E) at Kevadia colony Narmada district, Gujarat (See map; location 17). The conspicuous characters of the eagle were its dark black colour and very broad wingspan with open outer primaries and fanned tail. We took several photographs with a 200 mm lens. We thought that it could be a Black Eagle, but really did not pay much attention to confirming its identity.

On 12 November 2009, I was standing with Lalita Vijayan on the terrace of the SACON building at Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu. I saw two large low-flying eagles just in front of us. They reminded me of the raptor I had seen at Narmada dam. Lalita Vijayan confirmed our identification when I described the bird to her.

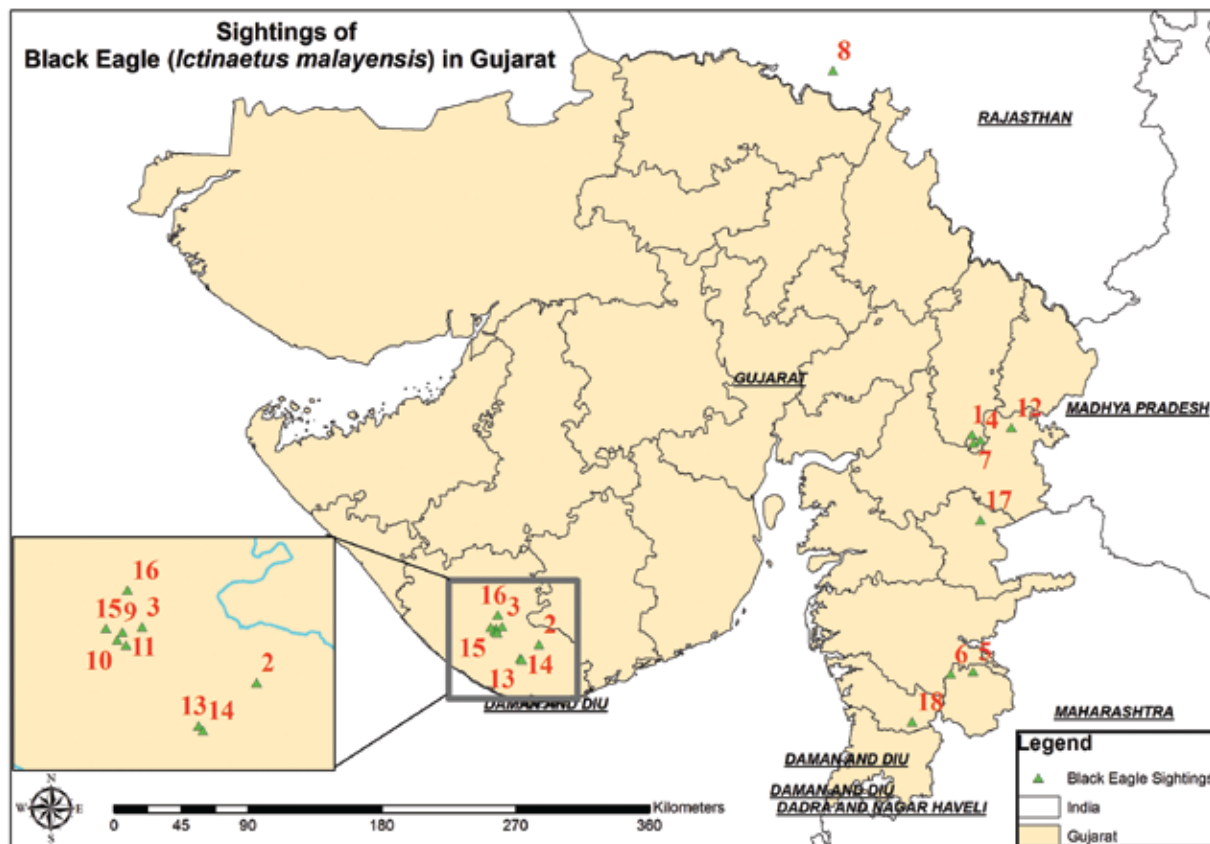
Inspired by this incident, I processed the photographs taken at Narmada (Figs 1 & 2). After looking at the photographs in Naoroji (2007), and the illustrations in Grimmett *et al.* (1998), Kazmierczak (2000), Ferguson-Lees & Christie (2001), and Rasmussen & Anderton (2005), there was no doubt about its identification. The bird we saw at Narmada was an additional sight record of from Gujarat.

Further enquiries among birdwatchers about unpublished sightings of Black Eagle from Gujarat are reported below. Surprisingly, there are large numbers of records both from Gir forest, Jambughoda and forests of southern Gujarat.

Two birds were recorded soaring above Jambughoda forest between Ghanimata and Kada dam (See map; location 4) in the second week of January 2000 (Raju Vyas, *verbally*). Trivedi (2004) had also recorded it at Jambughoda Wildlife Sanctuary during January 2002, 2003, 2004 and 2005 (See map; location 7). Kartik Upadhyay (*verbally*) had photographed a soaring bird in January 2007 at Sukhi dam (See map; location 12) c. 23 km west of Jambughoda forest. The current record is hardly 60 km from Jambughoda Wildlife Sanctuary where Ali (1954) had seen the Black Eagle.

Taej Mundkur (*verbally*) had seen the eagle once in Gir forest during 1985–1986 (See map; location 3). Yogendra Shah (*verbally*) photographed it in December 2004, and again in January 2005 near Sasan in Gir forest (See map; locations 9 & 10). Mukesh Bhatt (*verbally*) recorded a lone eagle near Pilipat in Gir forest on 23 November 2006 (See map; location 11). Arpit Deo-murari photographed it at Jamwala on 18 November 2007 (See map; location 13). Yong Ding Li (OBC Images) photographed a single bird at Sasan in Gir forest on 13 December 2008 (See map; location 15). Saurabh Desai (*verbally*) also photographed it near Sasan in Gir forest on 22 December 2008 (See map; location 16).

Besides two known habitats, the species has also been recorded twice from Purna Wildlife Sanctuary, Dang: at Dhulda (See map; location 5) on 20 August 2001, and Rupgadhi Fort (See map; location 6) on 22 December 2001 (Trivedi 2004). Recently, Mukesh Bhatt (*verbally*) recorded it at Ajmalgadh (See map; location 18), on the Vansda–Dharampur road, in Navsari district, on 27 August 2009. It was also recorded at Mt. Abu, Rajasthan (See map; location 8), which is just on the northern periphery of Gujarat, on 8 November 2002 (Ashok Mashru, *verbally*).



From the number of unpublished records it appears that the species is not as uncommon in Gujarat, as believed (Ali & Ripley 1983; Khacher 1996; Grimmitt *et al.* 1998 Kazmierczak 2000; Naoroji 2007). Its records from the state are restricted to Dang, Narmada and Jambughoda forests, which may be considered as an extension of its range in the Western Ghats. The only other extensive forest patch in Gujarat is Gir forest, where the eagle has been repeatedly recorded recently. The species has not yet been recorded from other parts of Gujarat. Naoroji (2007) had remarked that this eagle does stray into dry deciduous hills, which are not its preferred habitat. He observed that the species might have been overlooked in the Satpura and Vindhya ranges in the central highlands, for which no confirmed records exist. The sighting at Narmada dam, and records at Purna Wildlife Sanctuary (Trivedi 2004) are from the edge of Satpura Range. The record from Mt. Abu is from the Aravalli Hills, which is western-most record of the species.

Acknowledgements

I thank Raju Vyas, Taej Mundkur, Yogendra Shah, Mukesh Bhatt, Kartik Upadhyay, Arpit Deomurari, and Ashok Mashru for sharing their sight records. I also thank Arpit Deomurari for placing all sightings on a GIS map. Vasudev Rao of ANGR Agricultural University, Hyderabad, and C. K. Borad of Anand Agricultural University, Anand accompanied the visit to Narmada dam. I thank Lalita Vijayan of SACON; but for her inputs this note would have never been generated.

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Ringed Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* in Gujarat

Nirav Bhatt

Bhatt, N., 2010. Ringed Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* in Gujarat. *Indian BIRDS* 6 (4&5): 97.

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On 28 January 2010, while on one of my birding trips to the Rann of Kachchh, I spotted an adult Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* perched; we had been observing one particular adult female Peregrine in this area for the past few seasons. We tried to get a bit closer to check if this was our regular peregrine or a different individual, but as we approached it, it flew out of sight over the horizon. We carried on ahead, scanning the Rann for birds. 15 min., later we spotted the same peregrine on an adult drake Gadwal *Anas strepera* kill, contentedly plucking the already dead duck (Fig. 1). There was no waterbody in this area for at least a kilometer, so we believe that the falcon had taken down the Gadwal in mid-air. Unfortunately, we were not witness to the actual hunt. We were able to get quite close to the raptor, which was unperturbed and busy feeding. As it moved around over the kill, I observed that the falcon had a metal ring on its right tarsus. I managed to get close-up pictures of the falcon, and the ring, from various angles. It read: Ring No: N 3053. NARC, POB 45553, ABU DHABI, UAE (Fig. 2).

I send the pictures to J. Pranay Rao, and Hyder Jaffer from Raptor Conservation Foundation (Andhra Pradesh, India), who in turn forwarded them and details of the ring to Margit Muller, Director of Abu Dhabi Falcon Hospital (ADFH) in Abu Dhabi. Dr Muller informed us that this individual was of an unknown origin that they had received in Abu Dhabi. It was ringed and later released in Kazakhstan in May 2009. The bird was in juvenile plumage when released. The 'NARC' on the ring stands for the National Avian Research Centre in Abu Dhabi.

This sighting is one of the most memorable moments in my life. I cherish those moments when I took the pictures of the Peregrine feeding on the duck. We returned to the area many times after the first sighting, and saw the bird several times. Our last sighting was on 10 March 2010.



A close up of the ring

Nirav Bhatt

Peregrine on Gadwal

Acknowledgements

I would specially like to thank J. Pranay Rao and Hyder Jaffer from Raptor Conservation Foundation for their help in obtaining information about the bird. I would also like to thank Margit Muller, Director, Abu Dhabi Falcon Hospital, for sharing information about the bird and also for sending pictures of the bird. A special thanks to my wife Riddhi, and Jay Shah, who shared the joy of this wonderful and memorable sighting with me.



Nirav Bhatt

Plumage variations in Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*



B. M. Parasharya

Fig. 5

Dishant Parasharya, Bhavik Patel & B. M. Parasharya

Parasharya, D., Patel, B., & Parasharya, B. M., 2010. Plumage variations in Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*. *Indian BIRDS* 6 (4&5):98–99.

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Introduction

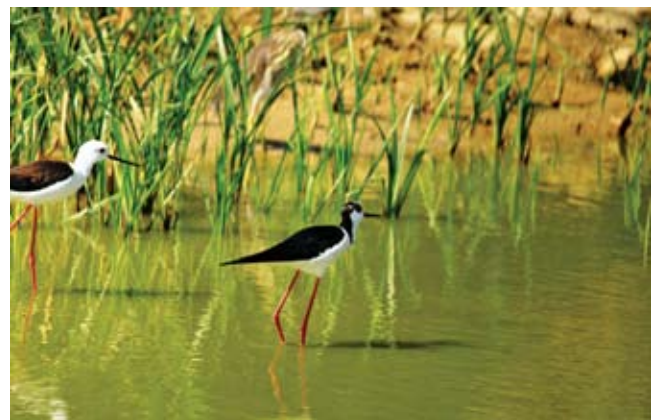
Plumage illustrations and descriptions of Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* in publications concerning the Indian Subcontinent (Ali & Ripley 1983; Kazmierczak 2000; Rasmussen & Anderton 2005; Sonobe & Usui 1993) are restricted to the typical plumages of adult (breeding and non-breeding), juvenile, and female birds. Unfortunately, there are no illustrations or descriptions of the large number of plumage variations found in Black-winged Stilts with regard to changes brought about by age or season. Hence, stilts with variable amount of black on crown and upper neck, which are seen in winter, do not look like any of the birds illustrated / described in the books. As a result, many birdwatchers suspect such birds to be Australian subspecies *H. h. leucocephalus*. This note describes plumage variations seen in the field, and compares plumage patterns of Indian variations with conspecifics of Black-winged Stilt, i.e., *H. h. leucocephalus*, and *H. h. mexicanus*.

Observations Unusual plumage

On 13 January 2010 we spotted a Black-winged Stilt that had quite a different plumage from its conspecifics, foraging in a small, waterlogged area near Dwarka (22°19'57"N 69°05'39"E), Gujarat. The bird had dark black wings and white under parts. Unlike the other birds it had a black nape, upper neck and crown, black lores and ear-coverts. Some white feathers were visible on the black nape. Its forehead, chin, throat, and breast were white. The other stilts nearby had pure white head and neck region with grey plumage on back (Figs. 1 & 2).

On 8 December 2009, we photographed another Black-winged Stilt at Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary (22°49'25"N 72°02'02"E) with similar plumage pattern as described above. However, this bird had a small

white spot above its eye, and typical maroon / red edge to its wings (Fig 3); a diagnostic feature of *H. h. mexicanus* (Hayman *et al.* 1986).



Figs. 1 & 2

Photos: Bhavik Patel



Fig. 3



PHOTOS: B. M. Parasharya

Fig. 4

In a third situation, adult birds had pure white heads with black on their napes and upper necks only (Fig. 4). In all the three birds described above, the mantle was always grey.

Normal plumage:

Normally, juveniles have dark crowns and ear-coverts, and light-grey plumage on the dorsal side of their necks and mantles. Such birds are always numerous during December–January. Variations in juvenile plumage during winter show black on crown and around eyes with varying amount of light grey on nape (Fig. 5).

Discussion

According to Hayman *et al.* (1986), in the plumage of nominate race *H. h. himantopus*, the crown and hind neck patterns vary from pure white to dusky grey in both sexes but the black patterning found in other races is absent. During non-breeding season, in some individuals of the nominate race, greyish plumage becomes more extensive on the crown, nape and hind-nape.

According to Rasmussen & Anderson (2005), non-breeding male of *H. h. himantopus* has dark (often black) cap and side of head, and grey hind-neck that contrasts weakly with black mantle (tipped dark brown when fresh). Whereas the *H. h. leucocephalus* has black wings with white head and sharply marked black hind-neck; its upper mantle is white. *H. h. leucocephalus* is well documented from Sri Lanka.

The black plumage on crown and nape in two birds was quite different from the pattern seen in the juveniles. In juvenile plumage, these parts are light grey and not black. The prominent black colour seen in the photographs indicate that the birds were not juveniles.

The other two subspecies, *H. h. mexicanus* and *H. h. leucocephalus*, shown in the book, with illustrations, partly match with birds in question but not exactly. *H. h. mexicanus* has similar black pattern on head and neck but has black mantle which continues with black of upper neck. However in the birds observed here, black colour of mantle and neck was not continuous. The upper part of the base of the neck was prominent white. The *H. h. leucocephalus* found in Australia has white mantle as well as forehead and crown; having black only on the nape and dorsal side of the neck. In both the birds observed here, the crown and ear-coverts are also black and hence differs from *H. h. leucocephalus* too. The stilt in photograph 3 almost gives an impression of *H. h. leucocephalus* however careful observation of the photograph reveals remnants of grey feathers on the mid crown as well as base of ear-coverts which is a character of *H. h. himantopus*.

We also looked at photographs of the species on Oriental Bird Club websites and found a few images matching our photographs. In two photographs by Yashodhan Bhatia, taken at Jamnagar, Gujarat, the head, nape, upper neck and back are jet black, whereas in photographs by Nikhil Devasar (place not specified), besides black on crown, nape and upper neck, grey feathers are visible on the periphery of black plumage of head and nape.

Hence, it can be concluded that all plumage variation of Black-winged Stilt described / illustrated here were of the nominate sub-species *H. h. himantopus*.

We have been observing such stilts with variable amount of black on head and neck every winter since 2005. The birds with black crown are not seen during summer (April–June) or monsoon (July–September). Hence, we believe that such stilts, seen during winter, may be migratory. It is also possible that black on the head and neck may disappear during breeding season (summer). These observations suggest that a comprehensive study of such common species, their plumage variations, and migratory patterns be studied.

Acknowledgement

K. L. Mathew, Associate Research Scientist of Junagadh Agricultural University for drawing our attention towards this types of plumage variations a few years back, which lead us to work in detail. We are also thankful to our respective organisations, i.e., Bombay Natural History Society, and Anand Agricultural University, and the colleagues for helping us in data collection and other direct or indirect help.

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Nesting of Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia* in Little Rann of Kachchh

Ashwin Pomal & Pratap Sevak

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Introduction

The Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia* was recorded breeding for the first time in India on Khijadia bet of the Little Rann of Kachchh in 1992–1994 (Tiwari *et al.* 1997). Shri Bhikhabhai Gagabhai Paredhi (Bhikha Bhagat), a resident of Nanda bet (23°32'38"N 71°7'4"E) on the northern fringe of the Little Rann of Kachchh, Gujarat, had originally discovered that nest. He has always been vigilant for colonies of Caspian Terns, and after 15 years has once again found a breeding colony on the same Khijadia bet on 16 September 2009.

Caspian Terns were known to breed locally in Pakistan, and Sri Lanka, and in winter spread out sparingly more-or-less throughout the Indian Subcontinent (Ali & Ripley 1983). Ranjitsinh (1992), and Tiwari *et al.* (1997) have since recorded it breeding in India. Subsequently, Grimmer *et al.* (1998) have shown it breeding in Gujarat, and Kazmierczak (2000) has shown it as a summer visitor, with a single 'red cross' in Gujarat, India. Rasmussen & Anderton (2005) considered it a resident in south-western Afghanistan, and the western coast from Baluchistan to western Gujarat, and Sri Lanka (northern and south-eastern coasts of the island).

The first evidence of Caspian Tern breeding within Indian Territory were remains of eggshells, and a dead chick found at a deserted colony near Pung bet in the Little Rann of Kachchh (Ranjitsinh 1992). Later, a knowledgeable villager had recorded breeding Caspian Terns at Khijadia bet in 1992 and 1993, which was confirmed by Tiwari *et al.* (1997), and also informed that Caspian Terns had been nesting at the same site (Khijadia bet) for three years.

Tiwari *et al.* (1997) had also shown possibilities of its nesting at Lakhpatt and Chhari Dhandh on the north-western edge of Kachchh. The only other nesting site of Caspian Tern within Indian Territory is Charakla saltpan of Tata Chemicals near Mithapur (Jamnagar district, Gujarat),

where it was recorded nesting in June 2003 (Bhatia 2004). Caspian Terns have been nesting at Charakla saltpans every year during 2003–2009 (Satish Trivedi, *verbally*). Now, there are several records of Caspian Tern nesting at Khijadia bet of Little Rann of Kachchh and Charakla saltpans because the area is accessible to vigilant birdwatchers. We may find many more nesting sites of Caspian Tern if these areas are monitored regularly.

Study area

Tiwari *et al.* (1997) have described the Little-, and Great Rann of Kachchh in detail. The word *bet* is used for a slightly elevated land, with or without vegetation, above the extensive plain sandflat of the Rann. During the south-western monsoon (June–September), when the Rann gets inundated, the *bet* (= island) becomes inaccessible to ground predators, and hence a safe haven for ground nesting birds, like terns. Khijadia bet (23°30'7.85"N



Fig. 1. Study area showing Nanda bet and Khijadia bet

71°8'57.30"E), on which the Caspian Terns were recorded breeding, is c. 3 km south of Nanda *bet* on the northern fringe of the Little Rann of Kachchh (Fig. 1). The *bet* is about 19 km west of where Ranjitsinh (1992) had found eggshells, and dead chicks of Caspian Tern, in December 1988 (Tiwari *et al.* 1997).

Observations

From Nanda *bet*, Bhikha Bhagat watched Caspian Terns carrying fish in their beaks (Fig. 2) and regularly flying southwards in early September 2009. Based on his earlier experience, he knew that this indicated an active breeding colony. When AP telephoned him on 16 September 2009, he was actually on his way to locate the breeding colony and he was quite sure about finding the same. Excited by this news, we confirmed from Bhagat about nesting colony of Caspian Tern and decided to visit the site with other birdwatcher friends (Narendra Gor, Dinesh Panchal, Bhavesh). On 17 September, we travelled about 200 km and reached Bhagat's residence in Nanda *bet* at 2000 hrs. After a delicious traditional dinner, we stargazed up to 0130 hrs. The amazing sky was brilliant with stars, milky-ways and the occasional passing of small meteorites.

Next morning we awoke at 0500 hrs and got ready for the mission under the leadership of Bhikha Bhagat. As per his instructions, we carried snacks, water, camera, and binoculars. We had to walk about 3 km in three feet of water (Fig. 3) to reach to Khijadia *bet*. Before starting, we saw Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybridus*—12, Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus*—15, and Kentish Plover *C. alexandrinus*—8, on Nanda *bet*. We saw huge rafts of ducks on our way. We did not realise how tiring our trip was for about one kilometer, for we were busy with photography. But after that AP had to give his camera bag to Bhikha Bhagat, who encouraged us to walk slowly. After about two kilometers, we were much fatigued, but could see Khijadia *bet*. A few Caspian Terns flying around inspired us to walk the remaining distance.

We reached the western edge of Khijadia *bet* at 0845 hrs. This *bet* was c. 200x50 m in size, and was raised slightly above water. We could see about 125 Caspian Terns and 100 Whiskered Terns flying and calling on the eastern edge of the *bet*. We also saw Caspian Terns feeding their young. Many of the Whiskered Terns were in breeding plumage but there was no evidence of them breeding. The atmosphere was alive due to their constant chirping.

We counted 64 nests in the colony, which was spread on the eastern part of the *bet*. The distance between two nests was hardly 30–45 cm, and the distance of nests from the water was just 45–60 cm. The nest was a depression in the soil, 10 cm in diameter and two centimeters in depth, without any nest material. Birds were incubating on in six nests, containing one egg each.



PHOTOS: Ashwin Pomal

Fig. 2. Caspian Tern with fish.



Fig. 3. Members of the Kachchh Nature Club on their way from Nanda to Khijadia on 18 September 2009.

Shell remnants of 62 eggs were found. Eggs, c. 5 cm long, had a greyish ground colour, with brown and black spots of variable size on their broad ends (Fig. 4). A few eggs were lying on ground; some of them were partly damaged. Six chicks were lying dead in the colony. We saw 45 chicks with distinct plumage and red bill in two groups, each of 20–25 individuals, swimming in the water (Fig. 5). The chicks may have been about 20–25 days old. The terns were constantly flying overhead, uttering their alarm calls while we examined the colony.

At 1000 hrs we started for Sukhpar *bet*, reaching it at 1200 hrs, after walking 2 km. We had left our shoes on Nanda *bet*, and the hot soil gave us a trying time. Moreover, our supply of drinking water was almost finished. We still had to walk 3 km, on hard ground, to reach our destination. The ground was burning hot and walking on grass was risky as there were lots of spikes. Somehow, managing between those two options, we reached our destination at 1345 hrs. After lunch at Bhikha Bhagat's residence, we returned to Bhuj in the evening.

Discussion

Breeding season: Going by the age of the chicks (20–25 days) that we saw on Khijadiya *bet*, and keeping in mind the on going incubation at six nests (9.4%), we assume that the majority of chicks might have hatched in the last week of August 2009. If 20–22 days were the incubation period (Ali & Ripley 1983), the probable period of the colony's development would be around mid-July. Hence, on Khijadia *bet*, the Caspian Terns bred during July–September 2009. Tiwari *et al.* (1997) had recorded their nesting on Khijadia *bet* during November–December. Tiwari *et al.* (1997) opined that precise time of nesting appears to be primarily controlled by the appearance of temporary islands for nesting, which in turn are dependent on the flooding regime of the Rann. The terns could breed during south-west monsoon, probably because of below average annual precipitation resulting into minimum fluctuations in flooding regime around the island.



Fig. 4. Eggshell of Caspian Tern



Ashwin Pomai

Fig. 5. Caspian Tern adults and young.

The breeding season of the Caspian Tern recorded on Khijadia bet is quite different from the Charakla salt pans (May–June) of Jamnagar district, Gujarat (Bhatia 2004). It is June–July in Pakistan (Roberts 1991–1992), and between May and June in Sri Lanka (Ali & Ripley 1983).

Population size: On 18 September 2009, we counted 64 nest depressions, and 150 adult Caspian Terns around the colony at Khijadiya bet. This is much less than the number of nests / pairs recorded breeding on the same bet by Tiwari *et al.* (1997) in 1993 (200 nests), and 1994 (300 nests). At Charakla Salt pans, Bhatia (2004) recorded 452 nests in June 2003, and 1,600 adult terns on the colony in July 2003.

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Bhikha Bhagat had discovered this colony in 1993 and had shown it to J. K. Tiwari, S. N. Varu, and P. Majithia (Sanctuary Superintendent, Wild

Ass Sanctuary). After sixteen years, he has discovered breeding colony of Caspian Terns at the same place and we feel proud to be witness of this second breeding record in the Little Rann of Kachchh. We are thankful to R. L. Meena (Conservator Forest, Kachchh Circle), J. G. Bava (Dy. Conservator Forests, Wild Ass Sanctuary), L. N. Jadeja (Dy. Conservator Forests, Eastern Kachchh), J. D. Godhia (Range Forest Officer, Adesar), and J. K. Tiwari (CEDO) for special information. I especially thank B. M. Parasharya for encouraging us to publish this information by preparing this note and adding relevant discussion and references on the subject.

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Birding adventures in Kachchh, Gujarat

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For the third time in three minutes, the jeep spins 360 degrees in the slithery mud. I try, with minimal results, to stay as calm as Lakkubhai, the veteran driver of our 'Sumo' SUV. Outside, the rain continues to pour in sheets, converting the entire terrain into slurry. Though such storms are not common in Kachchh, they still constitute the bulk of the rainfall, in this semi-desert environment, during the monsoon.

Matters were a world apart that morning of 1 September 2008, when we had set out for the Banni grasslands—at 3,847 kms², the largest expanse of flat land in the country. The day had started as a beautiful, sunny one till mid-afternoon. We were

slurping the last of the tea from saucers, they don't do cups in Kachchh, when the western horizon suddenly turned an ominous shade of grey-brown. We hurriedly returned the tea-ware to the nomadic camel herder who had, so kindly, brewed fresh camel-milk tea for us, and made an undignified dash for the jeep.

Earlier over lunch, Jugal Tiwari, our bird-guide, had warned, "If it rains in the Banni, then we're truly stuck. There are no roads here and the soil quickly turns into slush." As the skies continued to darken, we were well aware that the closest metalled road was probably 40–50 kms away. Jugalbhai hurried us on, and though we implicitly trusted his intuitive knowledge of the land, some-



Dry earth, Kachchh

Ramki Sreenivasan

thing told me that this thunderstorm was going to be one that I would not forget in a hurry.

For the next two hours, we held on dearly to whatever support we could find inside the jeep, while Lakkubhai kept his foot on the recalcitrant accelerator. It was one of the finest displays of cross-country driving I've ever had the privilege to witness. Even a moment's lapse in concentration would have caused the tyres to sink into the thin top-layered soil, so notorious for harbouring quicksand. And when we finally hit the road, the 'high-fives' were born more out of relief than jubilation.

Kachchh (earlier referred to as Kutch, and sometimes, Cutch) is a mysterious land, not easy to comprehend. Much of its area cannot easily be covered, and it is larger in size than some states of India. Spread over 45,612 km², a quarter of Gujarat's land-mass, Kachchh is the second largest district in the country after Ladakh. More than half of it consists of saline marshes of the Great- and Little Rann, which bound the district on the north and east, virtually making Kachchh an island—the other sides are marked by the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Kachchh. The border with Pakistan lies along the northern edge of the Great Rann.

Kachchh literally means a place which is intermittently wet and dry, as a large part of this district is shallow wetland, which submerges during the rainy season and becomes dry during the rest of the year. This makes the terrain extremely treacherous, and the absence of obvious landmarks does not help either, as you wend your way through desolate patches.

I travel, as a part of my passion for photographing all sorts of Indian birds, to various hotspots in the country. Birding, by its very nature, makes one an intrepid traveller as it necessitates voyages to the remote. There existed a famous argument in the early decades after independence as to who was better travelled in India—Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru or the ornithologist, Salim Ali. I don't think Panditji even came a close second!

Of all the Indian Subcontinent's bird-rich regions, it is the arid northwest, and Kachchh in particular, that hold one of the greatest diversity of avian species. This is because of the unique and spectacular habitats Kachchh supports. The bird-list is close to 400 species and the focus of my expeditions was to photograph some important residents, as well migrants, that come from the Middle East, and various parts of Europe. I have now made four trips to this part of the world, including the Wild Ass Sanctuary in the Little Rann, which despite its related name, doesn't lie in the district of Kachchh.

Our patch of magic falls on the migratory route of palaeartic birds. A stream of migrants passes through every year, starting



Desert cat *Felis sylvestris*

from August and continues till end of March. The vast open areas and low-lying flood-plains of Banni and Great Rann together with the man-made wetlands, dams, reservoirs, ponds and lakes provide excellent habitat for waders, waterfowl, and cranes.

As mentioned earlier, Kachchh is a huge area and it can easily swallow any number of trip days, or weeks. Hence absolute focus and rigorous planning are critical to tackle your trip. For me the task was straightforward—divide the area by habitat, thereby targeting birds unique to specific environments. In this way I covered both the Ranns, as well as the semi-desert, grasslands, wetlands, coast, and tropical thorn forest. The diverse habitats support an assortment of speciality birds, including rare and threatened species.

Some of these include Great Indian Bustard *Ardeotis nigripes*, Lesser Florican *Sypheotides indica*, White-naped Tit *Parus nuchalis*, Marshall's Iora *Aegithina nigrolutea*, White-bellied Minivet *Pericrocotus divaricatus*, Cream-coloured- *Cursorius cursor* and Indian *C. coromandelicus* Courser, Greater- *Phoenicopterus ruber* and Lesser- *P. minor* Flamingos, Sarus *Grus antigone*, Common- *G. grus* and Demoiselle- *G. virgo* Cranes. Fourteen different species of larks (Fam: *Alaudidae*), including Greater Hoopoe-Lark *Alaemon alaudipes* dot the landscape. Innumerable raptors too are present.

Summer (passage) migrants that typically come from the Middle East and Africa include Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*, European Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*, European Roller *Coracias garrulus*, Greater Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*, Rufous-tailed Scrub-Robin *Cercotrichas galactotes*, and Blue-cheeked Bee-eater *Merops persicus*.

Winter migrants include Houbara Bustard *Chlamydotys houbara*, Grey Hypocolius *Hypocolius ampelinus*, and several raptors, not to mention the esoteric and little-known Stoliczka's Bushchat *Saxicola macrorhyncha*, four types of wheaters (*Oenanthe* spp.), Common Crane (upto 40,000), and several speciality waders like Crab-Plover *Dromas ardeola*, and Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*.

In addition to avian diversity, Kachchh also supports a host of mammals like the wolf *Canis lupus*, golden jackal *C. aureus*, desert- *Vulpes v. pusilla* and Indian- *C. vulpes bengalensis* fox, desert- *Felis sylvestris* and jungle- *F. chaus* cat, Indian gazelle *Gazella bennettii*, blackbuck *Antelope cervicapra*, Asiatic wild ass *Equus hemionus* and the nilgai *Boselaphus tragocamelus*. Spiny-tailed- *Uromastyx hardwickii* and monitor- *Varanus bengalensis* lizards make up the bulk of the reptilian population. With a lot of detailed planning, local expertise, and a dollop of Lady Luck, it is possible to see most of these animals and birds. Given the accessible flat

PHOTOS: Ramki Sreenivasan



Camels in Banni



Photos: Ramki Sreenivasan

Banni during the monsoon

terrain, almost all of Kachchh can be covered in a sturdy vehicle.

Though each individual habitat of Kachchh holds its unique charm, the most visually stunning is the Banni grassland. Vast, and absolutely flat, Banni's scapes are breathtaking and difficult to describe. Its skies, grass, and wetlands add further colour and texture to the landscape. Banni's low-lying alluvial plains are flooded during the monsoon by north flowing rivers like the Bhukhi, Gajansar, Chhari, Layari and Nara. The water from the huge catchment areas of Kiro and Palkhiari hills washes away the salinity of Banni. During the monsoon, water levels in Banni become the same as that of the Great Rann, but after the rains most of the water is emptied into the Rann, leaving saucer-shaped natural depressions that hold water and become hot-spots for birds. Based on their size these depressions are called *dhand* (Chhari, Servo), *thath* (Hodko, Baghadio), *chach* (Chachlo, Bhitara), and *kar* (Kiro). None of the above four types of wetlands are perennial, the size and volume of water in these water-bodies being dependent on the quantity of annual rain.

Chhari Dhand, now a Ramsar site, is the largest, and in a good year becomes an 80 km² wetland supporting hundreds of bird species.



Great Rann of Kachchh

Birdlife in Banni is spectacular. Common Cranes over-winter here in the vicinity of Chhari Dhand, arriving in September, and departing in March. The saline soil encourages profuse growth of *Cyperus* sedge, which is their main food. Naliya grasslands are another favourite for wildlife in Kachchh and provide taller grass than Banni to support two shy and endangered bustards, the Great Indian, and the Lesser Florican. Both these gamebirds breed here, but their numbers are small and ever dwindling. I have been rewarded with bustard sightings on all my trips to Naliya and during the monsoon have seen several spectacularly displaying male floricans.

Both Naliya and Banni support an incredible diversity of raptors and it is indeed memorable to see huge flocks of wintering harriers (*Circus* spp.), especially at sunset.

The Rann can be considered a large ecotone, a transitional area between marine and terrestrial ecosystems, and is believed to have been a shallow sea. The Great-, and Little- Rann of Kachchh together form one of the world's largest wetland ecosystems. Strategically located, the Ranns' habitat serves as wintering, feeding, staging, and breeding grounds for millions of migratory birds.

The Great Rann, extending over 20,000 km², is harsh, hot, and seemingly lifeless in summer, when high winds and extreme temperatures prevail. This same habitat is magically transformed into an endless wetland during the monsoon, when the north-flowing rivers of Kachchh empty into the Rann. The migration of birds coincides with the end of monsoon, and early migrants can be seen using the flooded Great Rann as an entry point into the Indian Subcontinent. A number of islets, locally called *bets*, are found in the Great Rann. Access to them is very difficult in the wet season, and it is at this time that most resident birds, like Greater- and Lesser- Flamingo, Caspian- *Sterna caspia* and Little- *S. albifrons* Terns, Little Ringed- *Charadrius dubius*, and Kentish- *C. alexandrinus* Plovers breed.

The Wild Ass Sanctuary (4,954 km²) is located in the Little Rann of Kachchh, and is named after a subspecies of the Asiatic wild ass *E. h. khur*, the last population of which it now harbours. It is an extensive, desiccated, unbroken, bare surface of dark silt,



Great Rann of Kachchh

encrusted with salts, which soon transforms into a spectacular coastal wetland as soon as rains end.

Another unique habitat of Kachchh is tropical thorn forest, like the one near Phot Mahadev. These forests hold rare and specialist birds like White-naped Tit, White-bellied Minivet, and Marshall's Iora.

I managed to photograph most of the denizens I came looking for but, like always, there were many 'dips'. That's the equi-

Asiatic wild ass *Equus hemionus* in the Little Rann of Kachchh

Photos: Ramki Sreenivasan

siteness of birding. You never finish, and there is always a need to return for more, creating a life-long attachment for a place. Kachchh had already done the trick for me, and as I packed my equipment prior to boarding the flight in Bhuj, I couldn't resist planning a longer trip to cover more of Kachchh and its birds. I am already looking forward to it—but in a different month, perhaps a dissimilar season, maybe a disparate adventure!

Gujarat avifauna: a taxonomic miscellany

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Gujarat came on the 'scientific' ornithological map 252 years ago. Carl von Linné, the gifted Swedish botanist and pioneer of the binomial system of nomenclature, christened the brilliantly plumaged Red Munia, "*Fringilla Amandava*" (Linné 1758). He named this by taking the name Amandava from the Italian naturalist Aldrovandus¹ (1522–1605; alias Ulisse Aldrovandi), who might have seen pictures or specimens based on a bird from anywhere in the 'East Indies', as its terra typica was 'India orientali'. This may or may not have been from India itself. Baker (1921) decided that a clear type locality was required and gave it as Calcutta [=Kolkata], which is rather the fixation of a type locality than a restriction since the loose geographic terms in the early literature long antedate the type concept and thus a type locality was not proposed as such. Whistler & Kinnear (1933), apparently unaware of Baker's action, re-restricted it to northern Gujarat. The logic in Whistler & Kinnear's fixation lies in the etymology of the specific binomen "*amandava*" which is thought to derive from a

corruption of the word 'Amdavad', which is the Gujarati word for the city of Ahmedabad (Jobling, 1881; Pittie 2004).

Below I have distilled an avian taxonomic miscellany with roots in the state of Gujarat.

Toponyms: These taxa have been named for places in Gujarat. Red Munia *Amandava amandava amandava* Linné, 1758, Syst. Nat., ed. 10, 1: 180 (Eastern India. Restricted to Calcutta by Baker, 1921, *JBNHS* 27: 725. Whistler & Kinnear, 1933, *J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* 36: 837, designate northern Gujarat, apparently unaware of the earlier restriction.).

Common Tailorbird *Orthotomus sutorius guzuratus* (Latham, 1790), *Index Orn.*: II: 554 (Guzerat) (*sic*).

Spotted Dove *Streptopelia chinensis suratensis* (Gmelin, 1789), *Syst. Nat.* 1 (2): 778 (Surat, Gulf of Cambay, India). [Surat 21°10'N 72°50'E.]

Yellow-eyed Babbler *Chrysomma sinensis saurashtrensis* Koelz, 1954, *Contrib. Inst. Regional Exploration*, No. 1: 4 (Sasan, Saurashtra). [= *Chrysomma sinense hypoleucum* (Franklin, 1831)

¹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ulisse_Aldrovandi.

Proc. Zool. Soc. London: 118; Sasan 21°08'N 70°47'E.]

Rufous-backed Shrike *Lanius schach kathiawarensis* Koelz, 1950, Amer. Mus. Novit., No. 1452: 7 (Jamwala, Junagadh, Kathiawar Peninsula, India). [= *Lanius schach caniceps* Blyth, 1846, J. Asiatic Soc. Bengal 15: 302 (India); Junagadh 21°31'N 70°28'E.]

Eponyms: These taxa have been named after people, and described from Gujarat.

Oriental Skylark *Alauda gulgula dharmakumarsinhji*² Abdulali, 1976, J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc. 72: 448 (1975) (Bhavnagar, Gujarat). [= *Alauda gulgula inconspicua* Severtzov, 1872, Vertik. Turkest. Zhivotn. (1873): 142 (Turkestan).]

Sand Lark *Calandrella raytal krishnakumarsinhji*³ Vaurie & Dharmakumarsinhji, 1954, JBNHS 52: 8 (Bhavnagar, Gujarat).

Small Minivet *Pericrocotus peregrinus dharmakumari*² Koelz, 1950, American Mus. Nov. 1452: 6 (Jamwala, Junagadh, Kathiawar). [= *Pericrocotus cinnamomeus cinnamomeus* (Linné, 1766).]

Baya Weaver *Ploceus philippinus sardarpateli*⁴ Koelz, 1952, J. Zool. Soc. India 4: 43 (Ratnapur, Bhabanagar (sic), Saurashtra). [= *Ploceus philippinus philippinus* (Linné, 1766).]

Red-vented Bulbul *Pycnonotus cafer humayuni*⁵ Deignan, 1951, Auk 68: 110 (Deesa, Gujarat).

Holotypes: These taxa have been described from, or restricted to, Gujarat.

Indian Treepie *Dendrocitta vagabunda behni* Steinheimer 2009, Zootaxa 2149: 21 (Mulchoud Village, Dangs district, Gujarat).

Indian Treepie *Dendrocitta vagabunda pallida* (Blyth, 1846), Western Himalayas, restricted to Galkund, Surat Dangs (Gujarat) by Paynter, 1961, JBNHS 58: 381.

Stoliczka's Bushchat *Saxicola macrorhyncha* (Stoliczka, 1872), J. Asiat. Soc. Bengal 41: 238 (Rápur and Bhuj, Kachchh).

Autochthonyms: The origin of the etymology of this taxon is indigenous.

Sirkeer Malkoha *Phaenicophaeus leschenaultii sirkeer*⁶ (J. E. Gray, 1831), in Hardwicke's Ill. Ind. Zool. 1 (6), pl. 28.

Names in Synonymy: These taxa have been described from localities in Gujarat.

Aegithina nigrolutea sulfurea Koelz, 1954, Contrib. Inst. Regional Exploration, No. 1: 9 (Sihor, Saurashtra). [= Marshall's lora *Aegithina nigrolutea* (Marshall, 1876) Stray Feathers 4: 410 (Meerut).]

Hemiprocne longipennis dryas Ripley, 1950, Proc. Biol. Soc. Wash. 63: 101 (Juna, Rajpipla, south Gujarat). [= Crested Treeswift *Hemiprocne coronata* (Tickell, 1833) J. Asiat. Soc. Bengal 2: 580 (Jungles of Borabhūm and Dholbhūm).]

Pyrrhulauda grisea siccata (Ticehurst, 1925) Bull. British Ornith. Club 45: 87 (Deesa, Gujarat). [= Ashy-crowned Sparrow-lark *Eremopterix grisea* (Scopoli, 1786) Del. Flor. Et Faun. Insubr. 2: 95 (Gingee, S. Arcot dist., India).]

Sutoria agilis Nicholson, 1851, Proc. Zool. Soc. London 1851: 195 (Surat, N. India) (1853). [= Common Tailorbird *Orthotomus sutorius patia* Hodgson, 1845, Proc. Zool. Soc. London 29 (Nepal).]

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² R. S. Dharmakumarsinhji (1917–1986) of Bhavnagar (Gujarat), ornithologist, and author of *Birds of Saurashtra* (1955).

³ His Highness Raol Shri Krishnakumarsinhji (1919–1965), the 27th Maharaja Saheb of Bhavnagar and elder brother of Sri Dharmakumarsinhji.

⁴ Sardar Vallabhbai Patel (1875–1950), Indian freedom fighter and politician from Gujarat.

⁵ Humayun Abdulali (1914–2001), eminent Indian ornithologist.

⁶ Gujarati name 'sirkeer' or 'lili sirkeer' for the Sirkeer Malkoha.

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A bibliography of ornithology in Gujarat, India: 1758–2010

Aasheesh Pittie

Pittie, A., A bibliography of ornithology in Gujarat, India: 1758–2010. *Indian BIRDS* 6 (4&5): 107–136.

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Introduction

This bibliography has been extracted from my larger database, "A bibliographic index to the birds of South Asia." It comprises papers, popular articles, pertinent books, chapters, published and unpublished reports, trip reports, etc. Books of a general nature, not dealing largely with the ornithology of Gujarat, have been omitted, e.g., country/region handbooks and field guides, family/species monographs, etc. It covers a period of two hundred and fifty-one years, from 1758–2010. A bibliography of this nature cannot pretend to be complete and this is no exception. There are always publications beyond the reach of the bibliographer. A case in point being the various birding trip reports prepared by bird tour operators. However a majority of the published ornithological work on Gujarat's ornithology is listed here. Accuracy in transcribing is a basic tenet of bibliography and though great care has been taken to ensure it, mistakes may have crept in and pertinent published material inadvertently left out. This is the more likely in that I have not seen all the entries listed below in the original, but have freely taken them secondhand from the 'References' or 'Further reading' sections of papers and books. I would be grateful if readers sent me citations of material that is missing here.

Authors have been arranged alphabetically and their work chronologically. Multi-author papers have been listed under the name of the senior author. Separate entries have not been inserted for co-authors. Where a title was not given in the original, a suitable descriptive substitute was coined, generally comprising a part of or the complete first sentence, and is placed within brackets.

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Photo gallery: birds of Gujarat



Crab Plover *Dromas ardeola*



Lesser Flamingo *Phoeniconaias minor*



PHOTOS: RAMKI SREENIVASAN

Lesser Florican *Sypheotides indica*



Common Shelduck *Tadorna tadorna*



Dunlin *Calidris alpina*



Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata* Whimbrel *N. phaeopus*



Caspian Tern *Sterna caspia*



PHOTOS: Arpit Deomurari

Little Tern *Sterna albifrons*



Ramki Sreenivasan

Saunderson's Tern *Sterna saundersi*



Niranjan Sant

Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius*

Niranjan Sant

Common Crane *Grus grus*

Arpit Deomurari

Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*

Arpit Deomurari

Demoiselle Crane *Grus virgo*

Arpit Deomurari

Grey Plover *Pluvialis squatarola*

Ramki Sreenivasan

Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*



Arpit Deomurari

Slender-billed Gull *Larus genei*

Dhritiman Mukherjee

Houbara *Chlamydotis undulata*

Ramki Sreenivasan

Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps cristatus*

Arpit Deomurari

Great Black-headed Gull *Larus ichthyaetus*

Ramki Sreenivasan

Black-necked Grebe *Podiceps griseigena*

Arpit Deomurari

Bar-headed Goose *Anser indicus*



Arpit Deomurari

Greylag Goose *Anser anser*

Arpit Deomurari

Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*

Arpit Deomurari

Spotted Redshank *Tringa erythropus*

Arpit Deomurari

Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola falcinellus*

Arpit Deomurari

Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*

Arpit Deomurari

Red-necked Phalarope *Phalaropus lobatus*

Clement Francis

Short-eared Owl *Asio flammeus*

Ramki Sreenivasan

Desert Courser *Cursorius cursor*

Niranjan Sant

Pallid Scops-Owl *Otus brucei*

Niranjan Sant

Sykes's Nightjar *Caprimulgus mahrattensis*

Ramki Sreenivasan

Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus*

J.K. Tiwari

European Nightjar *Caprimulgus europaeus*



Vaibhav Mishra

Red-capped Shaheen *Falco peregrinus babylonicus*

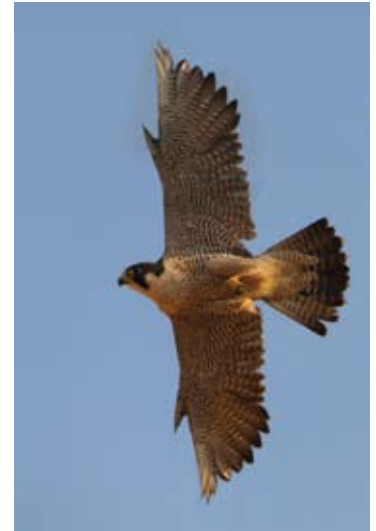
Niranjan Sant

Long-legged Buzzard *Buteo rufinus*

Ramki Sreenivasan

Steppe Eagle *Aquila nipalensis*

Clement Francis

Merlin *Falco columbarius pallidus*

Ramki Sreenivasan

Black-capped Shaheen *F. p. calidus*

Ramki Sreenivasan

Pallid Harrier *Circus macrourus*

Clement Francis

Montagu's Harrier *Circus pygargus*



Ramki Sreenivasan

Variable Wheatear *Oenanthe picata opistholeuca*

Ramki Sreenivasan

Greater Whitethroat *Sylvia communis*

Niranjan Sant

Rufous-tailed Wheatear *Oenanthe xanthopyrma*

Ramki Sreenivasan

Desert Wheatear *Oenanthe deserti*

Ramki Sreenivasan

Variable Wheatear *Oenanthe picata*

Ramki Sreenivasan

Variable Wheatear *Oenanthe picata picata*

Ramki Sreenivasan

Desert Lark *Ammomanes deserti*

Ramki Sreenivasan

Greater Short-toed Lark *Calandrella brachydactyla*

Niranjan Sant

Bimaculated Lark *Melanocorypha bimaculata*

Ramki Sreenivasan

Greater Hoopoe Lark *Alaemon alaudipes*

Arpit Deomurari

White-naped Tit *Parus nuchalis*

Arpit Deomurari

Sand Lark *Calandrella raytal krishnakumarsinhji*

Ramki Sreenivasan

Green Avadavat *Amandava formosa*

Ramki Sreenivasan

White-bellied Minivet *Pericrocotus erythropygus*

Ramki Sreenivasan

Trumpeter Finch *Bucanetes githagineus*

Niranjan Sant

Stoliczka's Bushchat *Saxicola macrorhyncha*

Niranjan Sant

Marshall's Iora *Aegithina nigrolutea*

Niranjan Sant

Hypocolius *Hypocolius ampelinus*

Niranjan Sant

Bristled Grassbird *Chaetornis striata*Rufous-tailed Scrub-robin *Cercotrichas galactotes*

Ramki Sreenivasan

Ramki Sreenivasan

Spotted Flycatcher *Muscicapa striata*Desert Warbler *Sylvia nana*

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Rufous-fronted Prinia *Prinia buchanani*Lesser Whitethroat *Sylvia curruca*

Niranjan Sant



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