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Status and distribution of Black-bellied Tern *Sterna acuticauda* in Gujarat

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Introduction

The Black-bellied Tern (*Sterna acuticauda*) is found in Pakistan (River Indus) and towards the east in the major river systems of East to Cental India, the Assam Valley, and to Bangladesh. It is now sporadic in S China (W Yunnan), Nepal, and Myanmar, and probably extinct in Cambodia, Laos, NW Thailand, and S Vietnam. Historical reports from SW Afghanistan (Seistan) probably refer to Whiskered Tern (*Chlidonias hybrida*); it is also doubtfully reported from Lasbela (SW Pakistan) and Baluchistan (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

Photo: Devvratsinh Mori

In India, the species is believed to be widespread on large rivers, extending from Gujarat, eastward to Arunachal Pradesh, and Punjab in the north to old Andhra Pradesh (now Telangana & Andhra Pradesh) in the south. It is a winter visitor to Kerala, and some parts of southern India (Grimmett *et al*. 2011, Rahmani 2012, Palei 2015). Birdlife International (2022) considers the species as 'Endangered' on a global scale as its population is roughly 6,700 – 17,000 mature individuals in the wild. However, a re-assessment is urgently needed as the species is somewhat less studied in many parts of its range.

Identification

The Black-bellied Tern is similar to three other tern species: River Tern (*Sterna aurantia*), Whiskered Tern and Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*). Here, we discuss the basic Identification features of Black-bellied Tern based on field experience and available literature/reference books. The Black-bellied Tern is a small-sized, typical, elegant tern. The breeding adult looks striking with long deep orange bill and legs, pale upperparts, dark black cap and belly, white lores and a deeply forked tail (with greyish outer webs). The wings show dark trailing edge to primaries from above and below. The non-breeding adult has pale greyish upperparts, and orange bill with a dark tip. The Black-bellied Tern is slightly smaller than River Tern. The bulkier River Tern can be similar but averages shorter- and thicker-billed, lacks black belly in breeding plumage, and has patchier black on the head in non-breeding plumage. The long orange bill separates this species from Whiskered Tern while the Common Tern too has a different bill. The Black-bellied Tern in non-breeding plumage often shows a dark eye-stripe and black on the belly is less or can be absent. However, structurally, it is different from Whiskered Tern and Common Tern and if good photographs are obtained, the identification is fairly easy.

Historical records from Gujarat

Ali (1954) collected specimens of Black-bellied Tern from Kheda District, and reported it from the Orsang River near Bodeli; he stated that its status is uncertain but it was probably resident and breeding 'on the sandbanks of some of the rivers'. Dharmakumarsinhji (1955) also gave it as a 'resident and local migrant', stating that he saw a pair or two nesting in the company of a colony of River Terns; the location of the nests is not mentioned but was presumably from Saurashtra. Khachar (1996) stated that it bred with River Terns at Jasdan, Saurashtra. Breeding of Black-bellied Tern was recorded in 1980 and 1982 at Bortalav, Bhavnagar (Raju Vyas, *pers. comm.*). Ganpule (2016) gave it a 'rare? probably migrant' and as 'probably overlooked in non-breeding plumage' with sightings from Jamnagar and Porbandar. In the recent reference texts, Kazmierczak (2000) and Grimmett *et al*. (2011) have shown it as an uncommon resident in almost entire Gujarat while Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) have shown it as resident only along the Narmada River in southern Gujarat.

Sightings

The authors recorded this species at different locations in Gujarat, between March 2021 and January 2023. The first author saw two Black-bellied Terns near Bharuch, southern Gujarat, on 12 March 2021, at around 10:30 hrs. He did not have a camera with him at that time and the birds were flying around. The second sighting was on 1 May 2022, at around 11:05 hrs when both authors were visiting Sukhi Dam near Ratanmahal Sloth Bear Sanctuary, along with Bhavanisinhji Mori. A few record photographs were taken. The light conditions were excellent and after some time, it flew towards

Table 1: Records of Black-bellied Tern from Gujarat (2013 till January 2023)

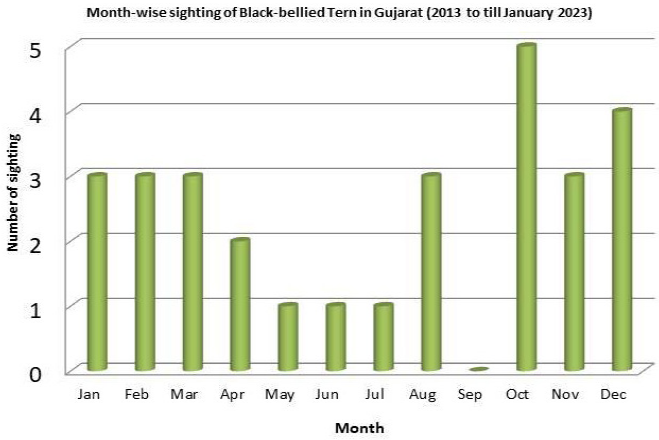
Sr No.	Date	Location	Observer	Source	Reference
1	Not available	Jamnagar			Ganpule (2016)
2	Not available	Porbandar			Ganpule (2016)
3	August 2013	Surat	Vijayendra Desai	FB	Desai (2013)
4	25 February 2018	Bharuch	Kandarp Andharia	BOG	Andharia (2018)
5	26 October 2019	Karai Siphon, Gandhinagar	Ayaz Mansuri	BOG	Mansuri (2019)
6	27 October 2019	Karai Siphon, Gandhinagar	Raaz Kasi	BOG	Raaz (2019)
7	27 October 2019	Gandhinagar	Jay Patel	BOG	Patel (2019)
8	10 November 2019	Sant Sarovar, Gandhinagar	Tushar Tripathi	eBird	Tripathi (2019)
9	24 November 2019	Zadeshwar, Bharuch	Sandip Modi	BOG	Modi (2019)
10	15 December 2019	Little Rann of Kachchh	Mittal Gala	eBird	Gala (2019)
11	4 October 2020	Hansot Road, Bharuch	Parthiv Agola	BOG	Agola (2020)
12	17 February 2021	Nareshwar, Bharuch	Manish Kumar Chattopadhyay	BOG	Chattopadhyay (2021)
13	10 March 2021	Narmada River, Bharuch	Pankaj Maheria	BOG	Maheria (2021)
14	12 March 2021	Narmada River, Bharuch	Devvratsinh Mori	Author's sighting	*pers.observation*
15	20 March 2021	Narmada River, Bharuch	Viral Patel	BOG	Patel (2021)
16	19 October 2021	Nilkanteshwar Temple, Bharuch	Dhyey Shah	eBird	Shah (2021)
17	February 2022	Bharuch	Ajith Kumar	FB	Kumar (2022)
18	30 April 2022	Bharuch	Saswat Mishra	eBird	Mishra (2022)
19	1 May 2022	Sukhi Dam, near Ratanmahal WLS	Devvratsinh Mori & Kartik Upadhyay	Author's sighting	
20	25 July 2022	Karajan, near Baroda (Rescued)	Patel M	*pers. comm.*	
21	1 August 2022	Karajan, near Baroda	Patel M	*pers. comm.*	
22	20 August 2022	Karajan, near Baroda	Patel M	*pers. comm.*	
23	12 November 2022	Karajan, near Baroda	Patel M	*pers. comm.*	
24	3 December 2022	Karajan, near Baroda	Devvratsinh Mori & Kartik Upadhyay	Author's sighting	
26	11 December 2022	Karajan, near Baroda	Patel M	*pers. comm.*	
27	20 December 2022	Karajan, near Baroda	Devvratsinh Mori & Kartik Upadhyay	Author's sighting	
28	8 January 2023	Valvod Dam	Devvratsinh Mori & Kartik Upadhyay	Author's sighting	
29	11 January 2023	Fichwada	Patel M	*pers. comm.*	
30	23 January 2023	Karajan, near Baroda	Patel M	*pers. comm.*	
31	Not available	Baroda	Not available		eBird

a small island where a breeding colony of River Terns was present. Attempts to relocate it on the same evening were unsuccessful. Based on the photographs, the identification was easy as the bird was in breeding plumage. The third sighting was at Karjan (21° 56' 54.5" N, 73° 15' 25.3" E), at our birder friend Mital Patel's farm. We saw seven different individuals between 07:30 hrs and 18:30 hrs at a few fish ponds which this species frequently visits. The bird was pretty familiar with our presence at the time. We took some good photos from a safe distance. The birds arrive at the fish farm at around 07:00 hrs and catch fish and insects. They are seen till about 18:00 hrs, after which they fly towards the Narmada River, which is about one km away. This is most likely the best place to watch the Black-bellied Tern in Gujarat.

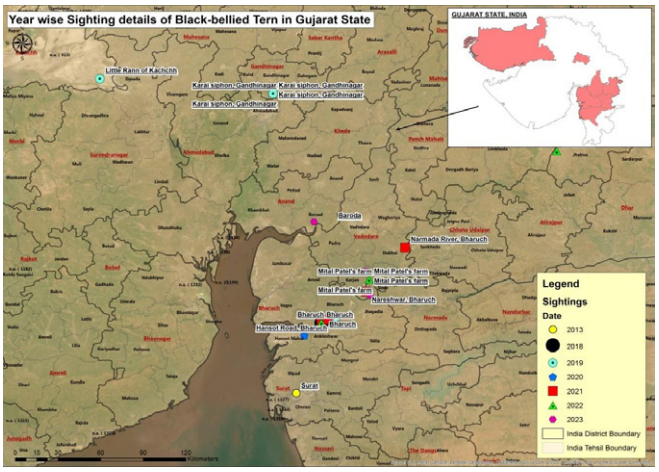
Since this species is endangered and there are very few recent sightings from Gujarat, we attempted to collect recent records of the Black-bellied Tern from Gujarat. We have tried to collect maximum published records and sight records, which are given in Table 1. Photographs posted on different websites and on the social media were searched to consolidate information about its current status in Gujarat. It is possible

that we may have missed some sightings which have not been shared by birdwatchers online. The records of this species from 2013 till January 2023 are listed in the Table.

Based on these sightings collected from 2013 till January 2023, the maximum sightings are in the month of October. See Graph 1 for details of month-wise sightings of Black-bellied Terns from Gujarat. Map 1 gives the locations from which the Black-bellied Terns have been noted recently in Gujarat.



Graph-1: Month-wise sightings of Black-bellied Tern in Gujarat (2013 till January 2023)



Map 1: Distribution of Black-bellied Tern in Gujarat (2013 till January 2023)

Photo: Devvratsinh Mori

Discussion

The Black-bellied Tern is one of the 16 species of terns occurring in Gujarat (Ganpule 2020). Based on the sightings collected by us, it can be seen that there are only infrequent sightings of this species in Gujarat and that the majority of the sightings are from 2019 onwards – it is likely that bird watchers are on the look-out for this tern now due to its rarity. It is somewhat regularly seen only along the Narmada River in southern Gujarat while there are sporadic sightings from Saurashtra. There are no recent records of this species from mainland Kachchh and northern Gujarat. The sighting from Sukhi Dam is significant as this is a new location from where the species has been noted. The Sukhi Dam was constructed over the Sukhi River in Chhota-Udepur. This dam was built in the village of Sagadhra to manage the water of the river for irrigation purposes. The Sukhi River is a small tributary of the Narmada River, and the area surrounding Sukhi was flood-affected before the construction of this dam. There is a confluence of the Sukhi and Bharaj Rivers near the villages of Sagdhra and Khos in Pavi-Jetpur and Chhota-Udepur Taluka, respectively, of Vadodara District (Bhavsar 2015). There is good avian diversity in this area as we saw and recorded more than

Photo: Kartik Upadhyay

50 bird species in the summer season. The sighting of the Black-bellied Tern from this area makes it an important location for our state.

Conservation possibilities in Gujarat

In Cambodia, domestic dogs predate on nests and local communities collect eggs (Goes *et al*. 2010). The Black-bellied Terns are also susceptible to illegal fishing, sand and gravel mining, cat predation, and river damming (Goes *et al*. 2010; BirdLife International 2022). According to Rahmani (2012), dams and water utilization in towns and villages for drinking in India leave very little water in dams and rivers in the summer, exposing the islands on which the terns nest to terrestrial predators. Dogs, cats, and crows destroy whole colonies. Further, the sudden release of water from the dams after rains also washes away eggs and chicks.

For these reasons, the species is listed as 'Endangered'. We suggest that for future conservation, a detailed survey needs to be carried in Gujarat between February-April so that the number and locations in which these terns are present can be confirmed. It should be noted that there are sightings almost throughout the year and it is likely that this species breeds here. We can learn more about the breeding ecology, habitat preferences, and movements of this species through surveys and detailed studies. There might be good habitats left in Gujarat for the Black-bellied Terns, and their habitats can be preserved for future species management.

Conclusion

In general, terns are poorly studied in western India and in Gujarat. Apart from the status and distribution given recently by Ganpule (2016), this is the first proper compilation of recent records of the Black-bellied Tern from Gujarat. This short note provides a baseline and gives current information on this species in the state. It can be seen that the maximum number of sightings of this species are from non-protected areas. The breeding period of this species is from February to April and it could be breeding along the large rivers in Gujarat, especially the Narmada River near Bharuch. However, there are no recent documented breeding records of the Black-bellied Tern from Gujarat. Systematic surveys will be useful in understanding the ecology of this species in the state and management plans can be worked out for the conservation of the Black-bellied Tern in Gujarat.

Acknowledgments

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Sighting of Lesser Noddy *Anous tenuirostris* at Mahuva near Bhavnagar – a first record for Gujarat

Batuk Bhil: At – Nikol, near Mahuva, Bhavnagar 364290.

Mahendra Bhil: At – Nikol, near Mahuva, Bhavnagar 364290.

Photo: Batuk Bhil

Due to a low pressure created in the Arabian Sea during the onset of the monsoon season in 2022, there was a heavy wind and a rough sea around Mahuva, Bhavnagar, for four to five days. The sea was very rough during that time, with big waves lashing the coast. During that time, on 16 June 2022, at around 17:00 hrs, we received a message from a local fisherman that a sea bird was seen near the shore. We had discussed the types of birds occurring in the sea around Mahuva with him and so, he was aware of our interest in birds. He described it as a blackish bird with a greyish head. Thinking that it could be a Sooty Gull (*Ichthyaetus hemprichii*), we immediately left to see that bird. We reached the site and saw that it was a noddy species. Initially, we thought that it could be a Brown Noddy (*Anous stolidus*). It was perched on a dried *Prosopis juliflora* and seemed to be weak or injured. We approached nearer to it and took some photographs with our mobile phones. On closer approach, it flew and perched on a nearby tree. After that, it took off and went towards the west, into the sea. The location where we saw it was 21° 04' 40.1874" N, 71° 50' 29.7594" E.

Photo: Batuk Bhil

After coming back home, we carefully checked the photographs. We observed that this noddy had whitish head with pale lores, dark brownish upperparts and a slim bill. Compared to a Brown Noddy, it was slimmer and had a smaller and slimmer bill. Based on the pale lores, slim build and slim, short beak, we identified it as a Lesser Noddy (*A. tenuirostris*). We sent the photos to Prasad Ganpule, who confirmed that it was indeed a Lesser Noddy.

The Lesser Noddy is a pelagic species and a non-breeding visitor to Sri Lanka; it is very local and rare in Sri Lanka and in the Bay of Bengal (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). For India, there are a few records from South India, mainly from Kerala, on 'eBird'. The Lesser Noddy has not been recorded from Gujarat earlier and it is not given in the checklist of the birds of Gujarat (Ganpule 2016, 2020). Thus, this is the first record of the Lesser Noddy from Gujarat and it is an addition to the avifauna of the state.

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Sighting of Pectoral Sandpiper *Calidris melanotos* at Pariej: an addition to the avifauna of Gujarat

Dr. Aniket Patel: At – Ahmedabad. aneet_1@hotmail.com

Photo: Aniket Patel

I travelled to Pariej, near Kheda, for bird photography on the 27 December 2020. Pariej is a wetland which is home to a large number of migratory and non-migratory species of birds. It was there that I was photographing different water birds and waders when I happened to see and photograph a bird which was not seen by me earlier. I was able to take many photos. It was medium-sized, and looked similar to a Ruff (*Calidris pugnax*). I thought that this bird looked different from a Ruff and it could be something else. I tried to identify it but could not do so. I then forgot about this sighting and the photographs remained in my computer archive for almost two years.

In December 2022, I happened to come across these photographs again. This time, I forwarded the photos to Sejal Daniel, who forwarded them to Ashok Mashru. He confirmed that this was a Pectoral Sandpiper (*Calidris melanotos*). To be sure of the identification, he sent the photos to Prasad Ganpule, who also confirmed that this was a Pectoral Sandpiper in non-breeding plumage and this was the first sighting of this species for Gujarat. The identification could be confirmed by the clean-cut border between streaked breast and white belly, the weakly patterned head and the straight short bill with yellow basal half. I uploaded all the photographs I took on that day on the 'eBird' website – see checklist https://ebird.org/checklist/S11884925, where too the identification was confirmed.

Photo: Aniket Patel

The Pectoral Sandpiper breeds on the tundra in the high Arctic. It winters mainly in southern South America, but small numbers also winter in Southeast Asia, Australia, and New Zealand. For India, it is a rare vagrant, with records mainly from Punjab and Kerala – see eBird for more details of these sightings. But, there are very few sightings of this species from India and it is a genuine vagrant here. It is likely that it is overlooked due to identification difficulties.

The Pectoral Sandpiper has not been listed in the Gujarat checklist (Ganpule 2016, 2020) and this is the first record of the Pectoral Sandpiper for Gujarat.

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Sighting of Green-crowned Warbler *Phylloscopus burkii* in Kachchh: a first record for Gujarat

Manoj Tank: At – Bhuj, Kachchh. mjtank1967@gmail.com

Mahesh Parmar: At – Bhuj, Kachchh. mhp4561@gmail.com

Mahendra Tank: At – Bhuj, Kachchh. tankmahendra8@gmail.com

Photo: Manoj Tank

While bird watching at Chaduva-*rakhal*, which a scrub forest, near Bhuj, in Kachchh, on 10 December 2022, we saw one warbler with a yellow belly. The head pattern was especially striking, with dark lateral crown stripes, a prominent eye-ring broken at the rear, a greenish supercilium, whitish crown stripe, pale legs and dark patch on the ear-coverts. We could take a few photographs but could not identify the bird in the field. So after coming home, the first author shared the photos on the social media. There were many expert bird watchers who replied back that this was a Green-crowned Warbler (*Phylloscopus burkii*). This warbler is similar to Whistler's Warbler (*P. whistleri*), White-spectacled Warbler (*P. affinis*) and few other species. It is separated from these by the finer, whitish broken eye-ring, broad and prominent lateral crown stripes, weak or absent wing-bar, longer and thicker bill, which was seen here.

The Green-crowned Warbler breeds in the Himalayas and winters in the plains; winter records from Bihar and Bastar (Chattisgarh) are known (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). There are records, with photographs, from Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra, on 'eBird'. Hence, this warbler is known to occur in Central India as a vagrant. However, the Green-crowned Warbler has not been noted in Gujarat before (Ganpule 2016, 2020) and this was a surprise sighting for us. This is the first record of a Green- crowned Warbler for Gujarat and it is an addition to the avifauna of the state.

Photo: Manoj Tank

Photo: Manoj Tank

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Fourth update to the Gujarat checklist: December 2022

Prasad Ganpule: C/o Parshuram Pottery Works, Opp. Nazarbaug, Morbi 363642. prasadganpule@gmail.com

This paper is the fourth update to the Gujarat checklist; the checklist was published in 2016 (Ganpule 2016), the first update in December 2017 (Ganpule 2017), the second update in March 2020 (Ganpule 2020) and the third update in December 2021 (Ganpule 2021), which took the number of species documented within the boundaries of the state of Gujarat, along with the adjoining Union Territories of Diu & Daman, and Dadra & Nagar Haveli, to **612**. This paper reviews important records, lists recent additions to the state checklist and discusses other significant sightings from the state, from 1 January 2022 (when the third update was published) till 31 December 2022.

The records of the following species have been reviewed:

Mute Swan (*Cygnus olor*): A Mute Swan was seen at Dhinchada Lake, Jamnagar, on 9 January 2022. The sighting was well documented with photographs and there was no doubt regarding the identification. Only a single individual was seen. This bird remained at the same place till the second week of April and it was seen by a multitude of bird watchers. There are many photographs of this bird posted on 'eBird' from this location and during this period.

The origin of this individual was a matter of great debate as the Mute Swan is a rare vagrant to India. Though this individual was seen flying around the lake frequently, there were a few factors which led many bird watchers believe that this individual was probably an escapee from an aviary or of captive origin. These are as follows:

1) The bird allowed close approach

2) It was seen in the same place/lake for more than 3 months

3) It remained here till the lake had almost dried up (the water was very shallow and only a small area was covered with water) in the second week of April

4) The temperatures in April were above 40° C but the bird remained at the lake in these conditions for many days.

This swan disappeared after the second week of April. It was believed that it may have shifted to a nearby water body or it could have been hunted by the locals there since it was very approachable. The sighting of the Mute Swan in the same location for more than 3 months can be considered as unusual as this species is a rare winter vagrant to India. The Mute Swan was added to the 'India Checklist' based solely on two birds collected across the Line of Control in Gilgit, Kashmir (Praveen & Kichloo 2020). A record of a single individual near Pune, Maharashtra (Trevenen 1923) could not be concluded as a wild vagrant (Praveen & Kichloo 2020). Thus, there is only one accepted record of this species for India. However, there are a few records of the Mute Swan from Sindh, Pakistan (Baker 1915) well before independence but it was not noted in Gujarat even then. While it is possible that extreme cold weather can drive down a few individuals to the Indian Subcontinent (as genuine wild vagrants), this sighting from Jamnagar is unlikely to be of a wild vagrant based on the details given above. Further, it is known that a large private aviary near Jamnagar has swans in its collection and the Mute Swan is one of the species kept there. Thus, this sighting of a Mute Swan from Jamnagar is likely to be of a bird of captive origin or an escapee from a private collection.

This sighting was widely discussed among senior bird watchers here and looking into the details recorded for this individual and considering the rarity of this species for India along with the presence of the Mute Swan in a private aviary near Jamnagar, it was decided that this sighting should not be included into the Gujarat checklist. Hence, the Mute Swan is not accepted to the state checklist.

Egyptian Goose (*Alopochen aegyptiaca*): An Egyptian Goose was seen and photographed near Nada *bet*, in Greater Rann of Kachchh, and was reported in newspapers on 9 January 2023 – see https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/ahmedabad/rare-sighting-egyptian-goose-spotted-in-nadabet/articleshow/96842519.cms.

The Egyptian Goose is native to Africa, south of the Sahara. This is a species which is very common in private collections and in aviaries. It is considered as an invasive species (after introduction) in a few countries like the USA and UK. Even in India, it can be found in zoos and in the pet trade. The location of the sighting makes it interesting as there are no large cities or known aviaries nearby. However, it should be noted that this goose is a strong flier and can easily turn up in odd locations. While a feral population is not yet known to be present here, this individual was most likely an escapee from a private collection. Hence, the Egyptian Goose is not added to the Gujarat checklist and this record is considered to be that of a likely escapee.

The following species have been added to the state checklist after the publication of the third update:

613. Lesser Noddy (*Anous tenuirostris*): A Lesser Noddy was seen and photographed near Mahuva, Bhavnagar, in July 2022 (*see elsewhere in this issue*). The photos show all the diagnostic

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features of the species and there is no doubt regarding the identification. The Lesser Noddy is an addition to the avifauna of Gujarat.

614. Pectoral Sandpiper (*Calidirs melanotos*): A Pectoral Sandpiper was photographed at Pariej, Kheda district, in December 2020 (*see elsewhere in this issue*). More photos are uploaded on 'eBird' – see details at: https://ebird.org/checklist/S118849256. This individual was photographed from different angles and all the features are seen well and the identification is correct. The Pectoral Sandpiper is an addition to the avifauna of Gujarat. Though this sighting was made in December 2020, the identification was confirmed only recently and hence, this species is added to the state checklist this year, after the publication of the record.

615. Green-crowned Warbler (*Phylloscopus burkii*): A Green-crowned Warbler was photographed near Bhuj, Kachchh in December 2022 (*see elsewhere in this issue*). This was a surprise sighting for Gujarat as this warbler is mainly seen in the Himalayas. There are a few records of this species from Central India (Maharashtra and Madhya Pradesh) but it is a rare vagrant to the western part of the country. This well documented sighting of a Green-crowned Warbler is a first for Gujarat.

Details of some vagrant and interesting species which were seen or photographed in Gujarat from 1 January 2022 till 31 December 2022:

Spanish Sparrow (*Passer hispaniolensis*): A male Spanish Sparrow (*Passer hispaniolensis*) was photographed at Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary in January 2022 (Alvani 2022). This was the first photograph of this species for Gujarat. The Spanish Sparrow was added to the Gujarat checklist based on a sight record from Kachchh (Ganpule 2016). This sighting further confirms the occurrence of the Spanish Sparrow for Gujarat.

Long-eared Owl (*Asio otus*): The Long-eared Owl is a vagrant to Gujarat, with records only from Kachchh. A Long-eared Owl was photographed at Velavadar National Park, near Bhavnagar in February 2022 (Vegad *et al*. 2022). This was the first sighting of a Long-eared Owl for Saurashtra.

Northern Wheatear (*Oenanthe oenanthe*): A male Northern Wheatear was photographed at Modhva Beach, Mandvi, Kachchh, in April 2022 (Varu *et al*. 2022). This sighting further confirms that the addition of the Northern Wheatear to the Gujarat checklist was correct.

Common Swift (*Apus apus*): The Common Swift was added to the Gujarat checklist based on a record from Saurashtra (Lavkumar 1958). Recently, a Common Swift was seen and photographed from Mahuva, near Bhavnagar in September 2022 (Batuk Bhil, *pers. comm*.). A number of photos were taken but these are not very clear. The identification can be done based on the features seen in these photos and it is very likely to be a Common Swift. Another Common Swift was seen by me in the western part of the Little Rann of Kachchh on 15 August 2022 in the late evening. Unfortunately, photos could not be taken due to the failing light but the bird was seen well with binoculars. Having seen Common Swifts in the Himalayas, I was certain of the identification. While the Common Swift is given as a vagrant with no recent sightings by Ganpule (2016), it is likely that this species is an autumn passage migrant / vagrant in Gujarat and is likely to be overlooked due to identification difficulties.

Fork-tailed Swift (*Apus pacificus*): A Fork-tailed Swift was photographed near Mahuva, Bhavnagar, by Batuk Bhil in September 2022 (Batuk Bhil, *pers. comm*.). Only one photograph was taken. This photo shows the long tapered tail and the white rump patch seen in this species but other details are not very clear. Though this record is most likely to be correct, the quality of the photograph makes conclusive identification difficult. However, like the Common Swift, the Fork-tailed Swift is also likely to be an autumn passage migrant / vagrant to Gujarat. Bird watchers should look out for both these species in August and September in Gujarat.

Indian Swiftlet (*Aerodramus unicolor*): The Indian Swiftlet was added to the Gujarat checklist based on a photo record near Surat (Maheria *et al*. 2020). There was only one photograph available and this was identified by experts as an Indian Swiftlet. Since the publication of this record, the identification of this bird has been questioned – it has been suggested that this could be a Little Swift (*Apus affinis*) or even an Asian Palm Swift (*Cypsiurus balasiensis*).

But, after this photo record, the Indian Swiftlet has been sight recorded in the Dang Forests by me along with a group of bird watchers in April 2022. The sighting was made by us and the bird was seen well. The identification was confirmed by the lack of white rump (eliminating Little Swift) and the tail was much shorter than what is seen in Asian Palm Swift. I took some photographs but these were somewhat blurred as it was difficult to get good photos of this bird in flight. However, since we were aware of the significance of this record, we took detailed notes and confirmed the identification.

Even considering the photo record by Maheria *et al*. (2020) as disputed, the occurrence of the Indian Swiftlet in the Dangs is not surprising. There is another record on 'eBird' from the

Dang Forests in early March 2022, but a photograph is not available. This record could also be correct. As explained in Maheria *et al*. (2022), the Indian Swiftlet has been photographed very near the Gujarat border in Tansa WLS and its occurrence in the Dang Forest is thus expected. Further photographic records will help in substantiating the presence of this species in Gujarat. Bird watchers are urged to look out for and photograph this species in South Gujarat forests.

Discussion

This update brings the species list for Gujarat to **615** and in line with the recently published field guide to the birds of Gujarat (Ganpule *et al*. 2022), wherein 615 species are listed for the state till 31 December 2022. All the species listed in the field guide are as per the Gujarat checklist and the subsequent updates (including this update). The field guide also lists an additional 46 species as unconfirmed, escapee, possible or hypothetical; details are provided for all these species. Readers can refer to this update and the earlier updates to understand the reasons/discussions regarding inclusion or exclusion of certain species for the state. More details of the field guide, including how to order it, are available at: https://bcsg.co.in/field-guide/

Three species have been added to the Gujarat checklist in the past one year. More and more people are now indulging in bird watching as a hobby and this has resulted in a large number of sightings being shared on the social media and on other forums. With so much information now available, birders are finding it easier to 'tick' rare species since news of sightings spreads quickly. Since photographs are shared on the social media, the identifications are duly scrutinized by a larger group of experts and this has helped in correct identifications for rare species. With a good field guide now available for the state, it is hoped that birders will be inspired to visit the 'less visited' areas of the state and increase our knowledge of the birds in Gujarat.

The next update will again aim to carry new and interesting records from Gujarat.

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Observations on breeding of the Shaheen Falcon *Falco peregrinus peregrinator* in Gujarat

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Introduction

The Shaheen Falcon (*Falco peregrinus peregrinator*) is a powerful falcon with blackish upperparts, rufous underparts and white throat. It is also known as the Black Shaheen or the Indian Shaheen. It often shows a complete black hood, covering most of the cheeks. Juveniles are similar to adults in plumage but show prominent streaking on underparts and rufous fringes to the upperwings. In adults, sexes are similar but female is larger than the male (photo 1 and photo 2).


Photo 1a


Photo 1b

All Photos: Nirav Bhatt

Adult male perched on Euphorbia and on a rock. See photo 2a & 2b in which the female is also perched on the same perches. Compare structure and size of male with female. The male is smaller and has a slimmer build.

Three subspecies of Peregrine Falcon are found in India. The most common and widespread subspecies of India is the Tundra Peregrine Falcon (*F. p. calidus*), which is a common winter visitor in Gujarat (Ganpule 2016). The Red-naped Shaheen (*F. p. babylonicus*) is rare, and seen in Gujarat and mainly in the NW India; it is also a winter migrant (Ganpule 2016, Bhatt & Ganpule 2017). The Shaheen Falcon is the only resident subspecies of the Peregrine Falcon which is known to breed in the Indian Subcontinent (Naoroji 2006). This bird usually prefers rocky mountains, hills or other such habitats but during winters, they are also known to migrate locally (Naoroji 2006, Mori & Joshi 2007).


Photo 2a


Photo 2b

All Photos: Nirav Bhatt

Adult female perched on Euphorbia and rock. Note that the female is bigger and more powerful-looking than the male. The reverse sexual dimorphism shown by this falcon can be seen in these photos.

In Gujarat, Shaheen Falcons have been reported from various locations throughout the state, but most of the sightings were from hills or rocky mountain habitat. For Gujarat, it is an uncommon to rare resident in the hilly and forested areas of Saurashtra and also in the forest areas from North to South

Gujarat (Mori & Joshi 2017); the authors speculated that the Shaheen Falcon could be breeding in the Girnar, Pavagadh and Jessore Hills. The reproductive season of Shaheen Falcon is from December to April, and the nest is usually on high cliff ledges or in cavities (Naoroji 2006). The nests of the Shaheen Falcon have also been recorded on man-made structures such as buildings and transmission or mobile phone towers in India (Pande *et al*. 2009, Pande *et al*. 2017).

I present herewith various observations on the breeding of Shaheen Falcons in Gujarat. All the observations were in the hills or rocky mountain habitat. There have been no reports of breeding of the Shaheen Falcon on man-made structures in Gujarat so far and I did not encounter any breeding pair nesting on man-made structures. Although the Shaheen Falcon is widespread, there is very little information about the nesting of this falcon in the state. The reasons for insufficient breeding data of this falcon could be attributed to many factors such as the following:

It is very difficult to find an active nest or an eyrie in vast habitats of hills or rocky mountains

Upon finding a nest, the visibility of the nest from an accessible vantage point is usually very limited

As the nesting happens on the top or upper cliffs, mountains ledges or in crevices in vertical cliffs, it is very cumbersome to trek to the top of the hills or mountains on a regular basis to monitor the breeding activities

Even though the birds look very bright and colourful, in the rocky mountains or on out- crops, they are extremely camouflaged and very difficult to find when perched

The activity time of a breeding pair is limited as the birds spend most of the time either perched or flying high up. Even when seen flying, they travel large distances with ease and it is not possible for observers to follow the bird's movements

Observations

My observations on the breeding of these birds are from the Girnar Hills, Pavagadh Hills, rocky outcrops in three different locations of Jessore and Palanpur outskirts and also from Mt. Abu. In my recent visit, I was able to observe a pair of Shaheen Falcons in the Idar Hills too, which is also an apt habitat for the breeding of the Shaheen Falcon but, there have been no earlier reports of this falcon from the location and I could not confirm whether it was breeding there.

Precise nest locations and dates of the photographs have been intentionally withheld owing to the probable disturbance which may be caused to breeding birds and considering the rarity of these falcons while also looking at the various threats to the nesting birds. Utmost care was taken to ensure that the nesting birds were not disturbed, following the protocols in Barve *et al*. (2020). The distance from the observation point to the nest was more than 100 mts and all the photographs of nestlings were taken maintaining significant distance and using a Canon 600 mm lens and a 1.4x Teleconverter with a 45 MP camera; all the photographs given here are full cropped images. I did not attempt to find out the clutch size or brood size at hatching because the observed nest was in a steep valley and sampling the nest contents would have required invasive and potentially unethical techniques – see Barve *et al*. (2020) for details on conducting research on nesting birds.

All Photos: Nirav Bhatt

The chick, aged 12-14 days old. Note emerging pin feathers on wing. Overall covered with white down.

A pair was observed mating in mid-February. In May-end, a nest with one small chick, of about 12-14 days age (photo 3), was observed in the nest – this day was noted as day 0. The chick was aged based on its size and the down feathers seen but it is possible that the aging could be one –two days in error. The chick was almost fully white, with a few dark wing feathers emerging (emerging pin feathers). The chick would sit motionlessly for most of the time. It became active only when the parents would come to feed it. The nest location was such that the nest cavity or crevice in the ledge was deep and the visibility from my vantage point was limited. Therefore, once the chick went deeper inside the nest, its activities could not be monitored.

After 7 days, a repeat observation of the nest was done and the chick (now aged about 19-21 days) (photo 4) was seen growing up rapidly with primary feathers and tail retrices developing more than what was seen earlier. During this time,


Photo 4a


Photo 4b

The chick, aged 19-21 days, with blackish wing feathers growing and with few blackish feathers on mantle. Otherwise covered in white down. The tail, showing emerging blackish feathers with pale rufous tips, is visible in the second photo.

the chick was a little more active and it had started more movements inside the nest. It was seen flapping its wings a few times but it remained seated for most of the times. After 18 days, a repeat observation of the nest was done and the chick (now 30-32 days old) (photo 5) was seen to be almost ready for fledging. All the flight and tail feathers had developed while few underwing coverts were in the developing stage. During this time, the chick was fairly active. It rested for some time and it kept flapping its wings at regular intervals (photo 6). The chick would call upon seeing the adult birds. Except for a few whitish down feathers on the head, all juvenile-type feathers had grown and the tail showed rufous barring with pale rufous tips (photo 7)

After 28 days of the observation, I expected that the now fledged chick would be seen flying with adults but as I reached


Photo 5

All Photos: Nirav Bhatt

The young bird, aged 30-32 days, with almost fully developed juvenile plumage.


Photo 6

The young bird, flapping its wings. Few underwing-covert feathers not yet grown and hint of whitish down feathers on crown.


Photo 7

The young bird, flapping its wings. Note rufous edges to upperwings and the tail with rufous barring and pale rufous tips.

Adult male with bat kill.

Adult with Little Swift kill.

the location, it was extremely foggy and the climate was very cloudy. We could not see the young or the adult birds. I did not visit this location again.

There were many interesting observations made by me during the monitoring of this particular nest. In the initial stages of nesting, the adults would stay near the nesting area and chased off any other raptors, including the Indian Vulture (*Gyps indicus*), from the nesting ledge. Very few prey deliveries were observed during the nesting period as there was significant fog in early morning; there was practically no visibility of the nest from the vantage point. This was the situation almost throughout the nest observation period. The adult bird was once seen hunting a bat species (photo 8) and once with a Little Swift (*Apus affinis*) (photo 9). Besides the Indian Vultures, which were also nesting in nearby ledges, the other raptors seen near the nesting area were Black-winged Kites (*Elanus caeruleus*), White-eyed Buzzard (*Butastur teesa*), Shikra (*Accipiter badius*) and Oriental Honey Buzzard (*Pernis ptilorhynchus*).

Discussion

The data presented here is one of the very few long duration nesting observations of the Shaheen Falcon in Gujarat, where one chick fledged. There were more nesting observations from other parts of Gujarat, most of which were post fledgling, which are reported below:

Nest	Date	Observations
Nest 1	May-end 2017	two young seen flying with adults
Nest 2	June 2018	two young seen flying with adults
Nest 3	May-end 2019	two young seen flying with adults
Nest 4	June 2021	one young seen perched and flying with adults
Nest 5	June 2021	two young seen perched and flying with adults
Nest 6	June-end 2022	one freshly fledged bird in nest

In six nesting observations I made in different parts of the state in the last few years, there were two fledged young on four occasions while there was only one fledged bird on two occasions. Based on my observations, it seems that the fledging period for this falcon is about 30-35 days and it is likely that the young remain with the parents for some more time. According to Naoroji (2006), the fledging period for this falcon is not known and the corresponding role of the sexes is also not known. This study thus provides a rough estimate on the fledging period in this falcon.

It was a very thrilling experience to see the activities in the nesting territory once the chicks are fledged. The young would continuously keep calling and would follow the adults. The adults would respond back with calls. Often, there were some aerial food transfers and very fast flights. There were only limited prey deliveries which were observed by me as most of the observations I made were brief. All the prey items which were given to the chicks were unidentified bird species while the identified species were Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*), Rose-ringed Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*) and some swift/martin species.

Although this is not a detailed study on the breeding biology of the species, this study gives an idea about the expected productivity and the status of this Peregrine Falcon subspecies

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in the state. A detailed study on the breeding biology of the Shaheen Falcon from multiple locations in Gujarat could provide significant insight into the breeding requirements and the reasons behind the success or failure of nesting.

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Observations of a nest of an Indian Paradise-Flycatcher *Terpsiphone paradisi*

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The Balaram-Ambaji Wildlife Sanctuary is located near Palanpur, in northern Gujarat and is an excellent place for bird watching. I frequently visit this sanctuary, in different seasons, and have noted many species of birds. In the monsoon season of 2022, I was fortunate to find a nest of an Indian Paradise-Flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi*). I monitored this nest and present here my observations on the nesting of this species.

Photo: Kailash Jani

Observations

On 10 July 2022, at around 07:00 hrs, I was visiting the sanctuary as per my routine. On that day, I saw a male white morph Indian Paradise-Flycatcher on a nest. The nesting site was at 24° 16' 1.1994" N, 72° 31' 33.5994" E. The male was incubating the eggs. It made short flights but always came back quickly to the nest to incubate the eggs. The female was present near the nest and was keeping a watch on the nest. It was seen perched on nearby branches but was always seen near the nest. Incubation was mainly done by the male. I observed the nest till 12:00 hrs and returned back.

Photo: Kailash Jani

On 14 July 2022, at around 11:00 hrs, I reached the nesting site but it was raining. The male was sitting in the nest and I thought that hatching had not taken place. But, as soon as it stopped raining, the male started feeding the chicks. I observed that there were two chicks inside the nest. As it was raining intermittently, the male and female used to cover the chicks by spreading their wings, probably providing warmth and protecting them from the rain. I observed the nest till 15:00 hrs and then returned back.

On 16 July 2022, it was not raining and I could see that the chicks had grown slightly. I could clearly see the chicks and

Photo: Kailash Jani

Photo: Kailash Jani

observed the male feeding both the chicks frequently. The female rarely fed the chicks. On 21 July 2022, we reached the site early at 06:00 hrs and saw the chicks coming out of the nest. It was heartening to see that the chicks had fledged. They were flying short distances and the adults were keeping a close eye on them.

I kept detailed notes on the nesting and observed the following:

1) The male incubated the eggs most of the times and the female was always seen perched nearby

2) Whenever another female approached the nest, the male used to display to the other female while the nesting female used to aggressively fight with the new female and chase it away

3) The male used to feed the chicks while the female rarely fed them

4) The chicks were fed various insects like spiders, ants, moths and butterflies

5) Just above the nest of the Indian Paradise-Flycatcher, there was a nest of a White-bellied Drongo (*Dicrurus caerulescens*). Near the nest of the drongo were nests of White-browed Fantail (*Rhipidura aureola*), Red-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*) and Oriental White-eye (*Zosterops palpebrosus*). On the approach of a prey bird like a Shikra (*Accipiter badius*), the drongo used to aggressively chase away the prey birds and also other potential threats to its nest. Nesting near the drongo gave obvious advantage to these birds

6) The entire nesting cycle, from building of nest till the chicks fledged took about 30-35 days

7) Since there are a large number of *Prosopis* sp. trees in this area, the nest was made in these trees. It seems *Prosopis* sp. trees are preferred due to thorns and the dense branches; the nest is well hidden and the thorns provide additional protection

8) The faecal sacs of the newly hatched chicks were taken away and deposited elsewhere due to which the nest remained clean. The male was seen taken away the faecal sac on a majority of occasions

9) An interesting observation was that when the Paradise-Flycatcher was building its nest, the Oriental White-eye used to steal some of the nesting material in the absence of the pair

10) The nest was made on a low hanging branch of a tree which was surrounded by small cliffs. The cliffs are likely to offer protection to the nest during the monsoon season when it sometimes gets windy

Discussion

The Indian Paradise-Flycatcher is common in this area and breeds widely in other parts of the state (Ganpule 2016). The breeding of this flycatcher is well studied (Ali & Ripley 2001, Gokula & Vijayan 2003, Das & Adhikari 2019) and the breeding period for this species in Gujarat is in the monsoon season, usually from March till August but chiefly May and June. The breeding in this area was in July.

The observations made at this nest are in line with what has been observed elsewhere in India for this species. The male plays a major role in incubation and feeding and the same was observed here. Ali & Ripley (2001) give period of incubation as 15-16 days and young leaving the nest about 12 days after hatching. Here too, the total nesting time was about 30 days.

The successful breeding here shows that the habitat is suitable for the Indian Paradise-Flycatcher. More studies will be helpful in knowing the breeding biology of this species.

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Data on nesting of Lesser Flamingo *Phoeniconaias minor* in the Little Rann of Kachchh

B. R. Makwana: Range Forest Officer, At – Lakhtar, Dist: Surendranagar.

The paper by Rathwa (2022) regarding the successful breeding of the Lesser Flamingo (*Phoeniconaias minor*) in the Little Rann of Kachchh in the previous issue inspired to me dig out my old notes on the nesting of this species in the Little Rann of Kachchh. I was posted as RFO in the Wild Ass Sanctuary, also known as the Little Rann of Kachchh, at Bajana, and had observed nesting in this area. In the monsoon of 2010, the nesting was unsuccessful. In 2013, the nesting was successful while in 2014, it was partially successful. It was in 2014 that I was able to collect some data on the nest and eggs of the Lesser Flamingo in this area. I present this data on the nesting of this species in the Little Rann of Kachchh in 2014.

Photo: B. R. Makwana

Photo: B. R. Makwana

In 2014, flamingo nesting was observed in salt pans, about 12 km from Vachhraj-*byet*, in six different groups. The location was at 23° 12' 252" N, 71° 22' 799" E. It appeared that the soft mud / silt from river waters collected in the salt pans due to the flooding of the rann was helpful in nest building as the soft mud could be easily collected and shaped into the nest by its beak. Due to the collection of this mud, a small depression was caused around the nest. These depressions were of about six to nine inches in depth and about 12 inches wide. In all, a total of 3393 nests were counted, in which most nests had one egg but a few had two eggs. Of the six groups, I took measurements of two plots used for nesting. The measurement details of these plots are as follows:

Table 1: Measurements of nesting plots

Sr. No.	Length (mts)	Width (mts)	No. of nests	No. of eggs
Plot no. 1	18.40	18.40	221	180
Plot no. 2	16.30	19.70	265	225

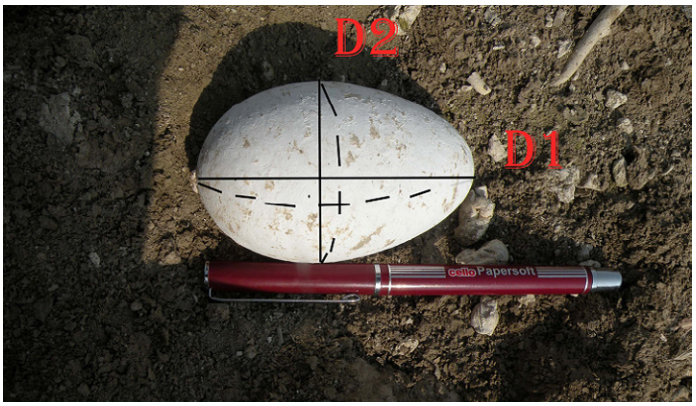

Photo: B. R. Makwana

Since the birds had left the nests and the nesting had failed, we took 25 eggs and took some measurements. The eggs were measured; the measurements - D1 and D2 - as shown in the photo given here were taken. Note that here, D1 and D2 are

Table 2: Egg and nest measurements

Sr. No.	D 1 (cm)	D 2 (cm)	Weight (gms)	Outer upper circumference of nest (in cm)	Height of nest (in cm)	Outer base circumference of nest (in cm)
1	22	16	97	81	18	118
2	23	14.5	76	85	14	98
3	22.5	15.5	85	69	16	141
4	21.5	17	86	81	16	119
5	22	17	96	76	23	106
6	21	15	79	85	16	130
7	21	15	78	91	16	120
8	22	17	96	95	15	102
9	22	16.5	97	110	16	140
10	20	15	80	75	11	108
11	21	16	85	95	15	102
12	22	16	89	75	10	104
13	21	16	81	81	12	101
14	21	16.5	94	97	13	108
15	21	16.5	80	76	14	112
16	21	16	81	81	12	112
17	21	16	75	101	16	108
18	23	17	117	78	14	106
19	22	16.5	87	85	23	122
20	21	15.5	90	95	19	118
21	22	15.5	86	89	16	114
22	20.5	16	86	78	20	108
23	20.5	16	88	102	9	105
24	20.5	16	90	84	17	104
25	21	15.5	79	86	28	108

measurements of both sides of the egg (the perimeter measured horizontally and vertically at the longest and widest point) and is not the length/width as per standard measurements. The weight for these eggs was also taken. Along with the eggs, the nest measurements were taken. It is likely that the when the nests were measured, some erosion to the nests due to rainfall might have happened.

The measurements for these 25 eggs and 25 nests are given in the table.

The average for D1 was 21.42 cm while for D2 was 15.98 cm. The average for outer upper circumference was 86.04 cm, average outer base circumference was 112.56 cm while the average height was 15.6 cm.

Discussion

In 2014, a long time passed between the first and the second rains. As a result, the water level around the nests decreased and it is likely that food became scarce. The adults left the areas, abandoning the nests and the nesting failed. It was also observed that some Steppe Eagles (*Aquila nipalensis*) preyed on the eggs. As explained in Rathwa (2022), the level of water (or the amount of rains) is a critical factor in the breeding success. Sadly, in 2014, due to the long duration between the rains, the water level became too low for nesting to succeed.

The data presented here is one of the few instances where details of the eggs and nests could be measured. It is hoped that this data is useful for researchers and other people engaged in the study of this species.

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Distribution and breeding of the Orange-headed Thrush *Geokichla citrina* in Saurashtra

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Photo: Pilu Sitapara

The Orange-headed Thrush (*Geokichla citrina*) is a summer migrant to the Himalayas and is resident in the Northeast, Central and Western India (Grimmet *et al*. 2011). It is a rare resident in South Gujarat forests and is considered to be a vagrant elsewhere in Gujarat (Ganpule 2016).

There are historical records of the Orange-headed Thrush from South Gujarat. Breeding of this species has been recorded in Rajpipala area (Monga & Naoroji 1983) and also in other parts of southern Gujarat. We present here details regarding an attempted breeding by this species near Rajkot and give an update on the sightings of Orange-headed Thrush from Saurashtra.

An Orange-headed Thrush was seen at Bhutnath Mahadev Temple, Halenda, near Rajkot, on 19 June 2017 (Gheravda *et al*. 2017). On 19 June 2022, the first and second authors visited Bhutnath Mahadev Temple for birding. Here, they saw an Orange-headed Thrush pair. They also saw and photographed the courtship behaviour of the pair, with the male giving some food to the female. On 14 August 2022, the first and second authors again visited the same place and observed the pair collecting nesting material from the ground and going inside a tree but they could not find a nest. On 19 August 2022 we visited there for further confirmation of the nest and observed the pair collecting nesting material and dead leaves from the ground and going into the same tree many times. We managed to see the nest on the topmost branches of the tree. Both birds were adding nesting material in the nest.

On 23 August 2022, the third author and Manoj Finava visited the temple area again for observing the nesting activity there. But, they noted with surprise that the nest was abandoned by the Orange-headed Thrush pair and they saw a squirrel in the nest and a Large Grey Babbler (*Argya malcolmi*) pair was stealing nesting material from this nest. On searching around, no Orange-headed Thrush was seen. It is possible something happened and the thrush pair abandoned the nest and left the area.

Photo: Jignesh Rathod

Photo: Ashok Mashru

We collected records of the Orange-headed Thrush from Saurashtra. The records were collected mainly from 'eBird' website and from published sources. All recent records of this species from Saurashtra are detailed in the table.

Discussion

There are sightings of the Orange-headed Thrush in the Saurashtra region, mainly from Junagadh, Gir-Somnath, Amreli, Porbandar, Bhavnagar and Rajkot, as can be seen in the table given here. Many records are from Gir Sanctuary and National Park area. However, there are very few breeding records of the Orange-headed Thrush from the Saurashtra region. Looking at the earlier sighting of a fledgling at Gir National Park area (Vaja & Vaghasia 2016) and this attempted nesting near Rajkot (both in the Saurashtra region), it seems that in summers or in

early monsoon season, the Orange-headed Thrush migrates to the Saurashtra region and probably breeds in suitable areas in favorable conditions. Frequent visits in the rainy season by bird watchers to such places might reveal if the Orange-headed Thrush is a regular breeding bird in Saurashtra region.

There are only two records of this species from November and December while a majority of the sightings are from the monsoon season. So, it can be said that this thrush is primarily a monsoon migrant to Saurashtra and it is very likely that it breeds here in suitable habitat.

Table 1: List of sightings and breeding details of Orange-headed Thrush in Saurashtra

Sr No	Place	Date	Observer	Activity	Source
1	Girnar Forest, Junagadh	10 November 2005	BhaveshTrivedi	Sighting	Vaja & Vaghasiya (2016)
2	Girnar Forest, Junagadh	24 March 2015	Divyaraj Shah	Sighting	eBird
3	Girnar Forest, Junagadh	20 March 2019	Gaurang Bagda & Ravi Patel	Sighting	eBird
4	Jamvala, Dist: Gir-Somnath	5 December 2015	BhaveshTrivedi	Sighting	Vaja & Vaghasiya (2016)
5	Gir Sanctury, Gir-Somnath	March 2009	Mukesh Samani & Ashok Mashru	Feeding	Vaja & Vaghasiya (2016)
6	Gir Sanctury, Gir-Somnath	23 April 2014	Aditya Puntambekar	Sighting	eBird
7	Gir Sanctury, Gir-Somnath	11 June 17	Divyesh Ghervada	Sighting	eBird
8	Gir Sanctury, Gir-Somnath	8 June 2019	Hrishikesh Rane	Sighting	eBird
9	Shemardi Check Post, Gir-Sancturay, Gir-Somnath	15 June 2015	Viral Joshi	Sighting	eBird
10	Gir NP, Dist: Gir-Somnath	8 May 2018	Viral Pankaj	Sighting	eBird
11	Gir NP, Dist: Gir-Somnath	25 July 2015 19 June 2016	Abhilash Vaja & Pranav Vaghasiya	Breeding: fledgling sighting	Vaja & Vaghasiya (2016)
12	Galdhara, Dhari, Dist: Amreli	1 July 2019	Kaushal Sharma	Sighting	eBird
13	Ranigala, Bhavnagar	6 July 2014	Batuk Bhil	Sighting	eBird
14	Velavadar N P, Dist: Bhavnagar	14 June 18	Amit Vegad	Sighting	Vegad (2018)
15	Hingolgadh Sancturay, Dist: Rajkot	June, July 2022	10 observations by different birdwatchers	Sightings	eBird
16	Barda, Porbandar	11 June 2017	Dhaval Vargiya	Sighting	eBird
17	Bhutnath Mahadev Temple, Halenda, Dist: Rajkot	19 June 2017	Divyesh Ghervada Nirav Raval Prakash Jani	Sighting	Gheravda *et al.* (2017)
18		19 June 2022	Krunal Trivedi	Sighting	ebird
19		19 June 2022	Jignesh Rathod, Pilu Sitapara, Sandeep Nandani	Courtship behaviour of a pair	Author's sighting
20		14 August 2022	Jignesh Rathod, Pilu Sitapara	Nest material collection	Author's sghting
21		15 August 2022	Rajesh Radadiya, Hemanya Radadiya	Sighting	eBird
22		19 August 2022	Jignesh Rathod, Pilu Sitapara, Ashok Mashru	Nest material collection and nest building	Author's sighting

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Purple Sunbird *Cinnyris asiaticus* chick predation by Common Garden Lizard *Calotes versicolor*

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Photo: Vedant Upadhyay

The Purple Sunbird (*Cinnyris asiaticus*) is a small nectar-eating sunbird species belonging to the family Nectariniiade, and it is widely distributed across the Indian Subcontinent and Southeast Asia (Ali & Ripley 1983). This is the most common sunbird species in Gujarat (Ganpule 2016) and India (Grimmett *et al*. 1998). This species occurs abundantly in and around the human populations and is found in the urban gardens of Vadodara, Gujarat (Vyas 2021).

On 23 April 2022, the first author [VU] was moving around in the backyard garden near his home at around 12:00 hrs, in the area surrounding his residence at Vadodara, when he heard some alarm calls from birds. He found a Common Garden Lizard (*Calotes versicolor*) approaching an overhanging sunbird nest in the bush. The nest was of a Purple Sunbird and was at a height of about two meters on a Pink Acacia tree (*Rubinia* sp.). Somehow, the lizard was able to catch a chick from the nest and fell on the ground with its prey. The lizard caught the chick's leg. The chick was small; it was not able to fly and so could not escape. The lizard suddenly ran towards a bush and disappeared into the bush with the chick. We presumed later that the lizard might have swallowed the chick whole. The chick was hardly a few days old. Usually, a sunbird selects a safe site and constructs an overhanging nest that predators cannot reach. But here, this garden lizard somehow got to the nest and was able to predate a chick. This is an unusual prey item and a remarkable hunting tactic for a garden lizard.

Photo: Vedant Upadhyay

The Common Garden Lizard is well known to be an ambush predator and is also is known for its versatile camouflage abilities. This diurnal and arboreal lizard is widespread and found in anthropogenic habitats, including home gardens,

parks, plantations, and cities (Somaweera & Somaweera 2009). This species is found in Gujarat too and is seen in anthropogenic habitat, including in Vadodara (Patel & Vyas 2019). The published literature (Sharma 1982, Daniel 1983, Sudasinghe & Somaweera 2015, Deshpande *et al*. 2020) shows that the diet of this lizard consists of invertebrates and vertebrates, including plants matter, too. Plant matter such as leaves, twigs, flowers, seeds, and shoots was found in the gut contents of a lizard (Bhatti *et al*. 1987), as were numerous stone particles in some cases. The garden lizards feed on various types of annelids, insects, myriapods, arachnids, crustaceans, amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals of a manageable size (Sudasinghe & Somaweera 2015). Daniel (1983) rarely noted warm-blooded animals in the diet of this lizard. The garden lizard sometimes feeds on bird eggs, nestlings, and adult birds (Daniel 1983). There are records of it feeding on eggs, nestlings, and adults of Baya Weaver (*Ploceus pilippinus*) and the same bird species predating young lizards as reciprocal predation was noted (Dhindsa & Toor 1983). Paralkar (1995) noted this lizard species feeding on House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*). The current observation shows that the chick of a Purple Sunbird is also in the diet of Common Garden Lizard.

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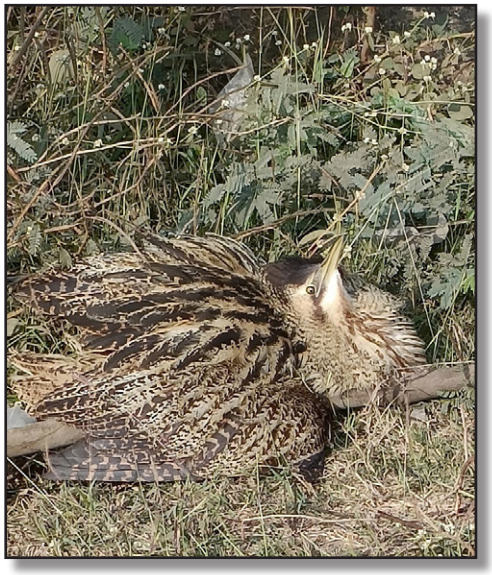
Short Birding Notes



Rescue of a Great Bittern *Botaurus stellaris* at Mandvi, Surat

On 9 December 2022, I got a call, early in the morning, from a local person informing that a heron-like bird was injured and attacking people going near it. The location was near Kakrapal Left Bank Canal, at Mandvi, Surat. So, I went there with staff of the Forest Department working at Mandvi. We reached the site and found that the bird was a Great Bittern (*Botaurus stellaris*). We observed that when the bird was feeling threatened, it tried to protect itself by hiding into the bushes and strangely, attacking everyone who went close to it! After communicating with experts, we found out that among all bittern species, only the Great Bittern shows this kind of behaviour – especially when panicked. Afterwards, we gently rescued the bird without causing it any harm and safely transferred it to the Mandvi Animal Hospital for preliminary examination where it was found with no physical injury and seemed to be completely healthy. Finally, we decided to release it back and we chose a safe site close to the rescue area and released it back in the wild. The Great Bittern has been recorded earlier at Parvat near Kosamba, in Surat and at Amalsad, Navsari (Patel *et al.* 2020). But, it is rare here.

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Winter sighting of Indian Pitta *Pitta brachyura* in Gir National Park

On the morning of 25 December 2022, we were on a safari ride inside the Gir National Park, and we stopped our gypsy to photograph a Crested Serpent Eagle (*Spilornis cheela*). The area was covered with dense trees and was wet because of a water spring. The visibility was not good, when suddenly, I saw a small but colourful bird on the ground. First, I thought that it was some myna species, but when I saw it with my binoculars, I was surprised. It was an Indian PItta (*Pitta brachyura*). Even our gypsy driver was surprised! I immediately took out my camera and photographed the bird. I could take only a few photos because of the low visibility and the bird was constantly moving from one place to another, picking dead leaves. We did not hear it call and it was silent. We then observed another Indian Pitta near the first bird. This is the first time we had seen an Indian Pitta in the winter. This species is a monsoon migrant to Gujarat (Ganpule 2016) and is gone by October from Gir NP area (pers. observation). This December-end sighting is quite unusual for Gir.

Jitendra Devmurari: At – Sasan.

Malabar Whistling Thrush *Myophonus horsfieldii* in Polo Forest

On 19 February 2022, I was planning to head out to Polo Forest alone on my bike because on weekends, the Polo Forest road is generally closed by forest officials for vehicular traffic due to lack of sufficient parking. As usual, Rahul Rathore called the night before to join in and so did Rakesh Singh and Gaurav Singh. The plan was to reach Polo Forest by 07:30 hrs to maximize our chances of avoiding the weekend rush, but as luck would have it, we got late by almost 45 minutes by the time we reached there. We stopped our car along the bank of the river as we saw some bird activity. Rahul, Rakesh and Gaurav went down near the river to investigate while I was keeping an eye on the road. It was then that a myna-sized bird flew across the road and I caught a glimpse of it. The bird seemed dark, almost black, against the sun. My first instinct was that it was an Indian Blackbird (*Turdus simillimus*) as I knew there are records of this species up north in Mt. Abu and the habitat is similar here. I called the team up and we tried to locate the bird and managed to get a couple of photographs before it vanished deep into the forest. On reviewing our photos, we noticed that it was not a blackbird but a Malabar Whistling Thrush (*Myophonus horsfieldii*) based on the blue upperparts, blue-scaled underparts and darker head. This is probably the first record of the Malabar Whistling Thrush from Polo Forest. I thank Rahul Rathore for the photograph given here.

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Sighting of Stoliczka's Bushchat *Saxicola macrorhynchus* at Saladi Pond, Amreli

On 7 November 2022, we were bird watching at Saladi Pond, near Amreli. We were observing murmurations of Rosy Starlings (*Pastor roseus*). While we were watching this display, we saw that a Rosy Starling, which had only one leg, came and tried to perch on a dry bush. We went closer to take a photo but it flew away and a Siberian Stonechat (*Saxicola maurus*) and interestingly, a Stoliczka's Bushchat (*Saxicola macrorhynchus*) came and perched on the bush. The Stoliczka's Bushchat then went near the road side and perched there. We were able to take photographs and confirmed the identification. It was surprising to see the Stoliczka's Bushchat at this location. Though there are sporadic records of this species from Saurashtra, it is quite rare in Amreli District.

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Besra *Accipiter virgatus* at Padam Dungri Forest, Vyara

On 24 September 2022, our group was on a trek of Chunivad region of Padam Dungri Forest, in Vyara Division, participating in a nature program organised by Bird Conservation Society, Gujarat and the Forest Department. While on this trek, I saw a bird similar to a Shikra (*Accipiter badius*) perched on an upper branch of a large tree and took some photographs. I shared the photographs with experts and it was identified as a Besra (*Accipiter virgatus*) by Nirav Bhatt. This raptor, which prefers forests, is quite rare in Gujarat. There are recent records from Vansada National Park (Patel 2017) and Shoolpaneshwar Wildlife Sanctuary (Shah 2022). It is likely that due to its similarity to Shikra, it is often overlooked. This is an important sighting for Vyara area and confirms the occurrence of this species here. I thank Nirav Bhatt for helping with the identification.

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Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio* in Jamnagar District

On 5 September 2021, we were on a birding trip on Jamnagar-Samana Road. Near Vadpanchasara Village, we stopped for a while. The area is hilly with scrub forest. We saw a shrike and followed it. After watching it with binoculars, we confirmed that it was a Red-backed Shrike (*Lanius collurio*). We managed to get a few record photographs. This species is an autumn passage migrant in Gujarat, with good numbers recorded regularly in Kachchh (Ganpule 2016). This is for the first time that we saw this species near Jamnagar. It is likely that a small number of Red-backed Shrikes may be passing through Jamnagar District during the passage migration season.

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Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus* at Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary

On 16 August 2022, we were on a bird watching / boating trip, starting from the picnic area of Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary. We went to Bor Island inside the sanctuary. To our surprise, we saw and photographed a Terek Sandpiper (*Xenus cinereus*) on Bor Island. It was surprising to observe this coastal bird in this inland lake. This was the first time we had seen this species at Nalsarovar. The sighting of coastal bird at Nalsarovar in August is certainly unusual and seems to be a record of a bird on migration. It is well known that species which prefer coastal areas in the winter are often seen in inland water bodies during migration. This record of a Terek Sandpiper at Nalsarovar is likely to be of a migrant resting here and going further south to its wintering grounds.

Kamrudin Alwani & Anwar: At – Nalsarovar.

Brahminy Kite *Haliastur indus* near Ahmedabad

I go to Pharmez on Sarkhej – Bavla Highway, near Ahmedabad, every day to drop my sister at work and on my way back, I stop at various water bodies along the highway for bird watching. On the morning of 15 October 2022, I stopped at one such water body as on that day, many birds were quite close to the highway. I was walking along observing the birds and in a while, I noticed a raptor perched atop an electric pole. I could see the white head, neck and breast, light yellowish bill and dark wings but since it was against the light, I could not observe it properly. I rushed back to my car to get my mobile to get a photo for identification. As I was about to take a photo, it started flying around and along with the earlier described plumage features, the chestnut wings with black tips were clearly visible and I was very sure it was Brahminy Kite (*Haliastur indus*). It was a lifer for me and I was very excited. Still, to be very sure about the identification, I checked it with an experienced friend and it was from him that I came to know that it was a rarity for this bird to be found here and even 'eBird' marked the bird as rare in this area. Hence, I began a quest to locate it again and get a good photo. On same evening, I revisited the spot with a camera but the bird was not seen and I had to return back with disappointment. However, it was seen on 17 and 18 October 2022 and I managed to get good photographs. The Brahminy Kite is uncommon in this area.

Ami Bhatt: At – Ahmedabad.

White-capped Bunting *Emberiza stewarti* at Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary

On 31 October 2022, at around 17:30 hrs, we went to the Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary for photographing the Namaqua Dove (*Oena capensis*) which was seen in a particular area. On the way, we stopped when a bird flew from the ground and perched on a tree. At first, we thought it was a Tree Pipit (*Anthus trivialis*) but it looked different. We took some photographs and shared the photos with Sunil Kini and Dhyey Shah. It was identified as a female White-capped Bunting (*Emberiza stewarti*). The White-capped Bunting is a rare winter migrant to Gujarat with a few records from the state from Saurashtra and Kachchh; there is one previous record of this species from Nalsarovar (Ganpule 2016) and this is the second record for this area. We thank Sunil Kini and Dhyey Shah for their help in the identification of this bird.

Kamrudin Alvani & Latif Alvani: At – Nalsarovar.

White-throated Kingfisher *Halcyon smyrnensis* feeding on a bat *Chiroptera* species

I routinely go for bird watching on Vagudad Road, near Rajkot. On 13 November 2022, I was birding in the area. I saw a White-throated Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*) with something in its beak. I realized that it was a kill in its beak. I went closer and took some photographs. I was surprised to see that it was holding a small bat (*Chiroptera* sp.) in its beak. I could not identify the species of the bat it had killed. This was something new for me as I had never seen a White-throated Kingfisher with a bat kill as this species usually feeds on insects, reptiles, small mammals and other small birds. I searched the literature (Woodall & Kirwan 2020) for the diet of the White-throated Kingfisher; though a wide variety of prey items are listed, I did not find any instance of this kingfisher feeding on a bat and this is unusual prey for the White-throated Kingfisher. The bat is an addition to the already varied diet of this kingfisher.

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Sighting of Red Spurfowl *Galloperdix spadicea* at Samba Village in Surat District

On 14 May 2022, I went to meet my friend Snehal Patel at Samba Village in Surat District. At around 09:00 hrs, we went to his farmhouse. We were roaming around in the agricultural fields when we observed a Red Spurfowl (*Galloperdix spadicea*) there. We were excited to see this bird there as it is quite uncommon in this area. I took some photographs and confirmed the identification. The Red Spurfowl is seen in forest areas of South Gujarat but this sighting from Samba Village is unusual.

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Indian Skimmer *Rynchops albicollis* near Thebi Dam, Amreli

On 23 January 2020, at 08:00 hrs, we were photographing a huge flock of Bar-Headed Geese (*Anser indicus*) at Thebi Dam, near Amreli. We saw some Caspian Terns (*Hydroprogne caspia*) and Gull-billed Terns (*Gelochelidon nilotica*) flying near a patch of shallow water, and which attracted us to photographed these terns. We found one Indian Skimmer (*Rynchops albicollis*) along with the flock of terns. We went a little closer and we saw it skimming near us. The bird was very cooperative and it settled down on a mud mound near the dam infrastructure. We were lucky to get a photo with the dam seen behind it. In Amreli District, as far as we are aware, there is no previous record of this species and it was really exciting to see this beautiful bird in this region.

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Sighting of Common Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia* in Jawala Lake, Savli, Vadodara

On 18 September 2022, we visited the Jawala Lake near Savli, which is around 30 km from Vadodara. Jawala Lake (22° 34' 20" N, 73° 19' 24" E) is an irrigation reservoir in which rain water is stored. This water body is surrounded by lush green fields and tall grass which provides an excellent habitat for a lot of birds. On the periphery of the agricultural fields are thick reed beds dominated by *Phragmites karka*, *Typha angustata* and *Arundo donax* which are known to be ecologically valuable for many invertebrates and birds as they use them for roosting as well as a source of food. During the visit, we were able to see munia species namely Red Avadavat (*Amandava amandava*), Tricolored Munia (*Lonchura malacca*), and Scaly-breasted Munia (*L. punctulata*) collecting the blooms. While observing these, our attention was drawn towards two small, streaked, warblers that were moving in these dense reeds. Our presence did not seem to bother these birds as they kept moving in and out of these thickets in search of food. After some time they stopped to preen, which gave me a chance to photograph and observe them. We took some photographs and identified these as Common Grasshopper Warblers (*Locustella naevia*). The Common Grasshopper Warbler is an uncommon winter migrant to Gujarat (Ganpule 2016) and there are only a few records of this warbler from Vadodara District.

Rahul Talegaonkar & SujataTalegaonkar: At - Vadodara.

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BOOK REVIEW

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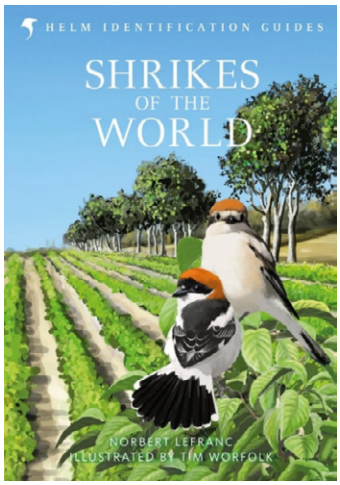
Title: SHRIKES OF THE WORLD – 336 pp
Author: Norbert Lefranc
Illustrated by: Tim Worfolk
Publisher: Helm, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, London. 2022.
Format: Hardback



This book, published by Helm (Bloomsbury Publishing Plc), under the 'Helm Identification Guides' series is written by Nobert Lefranc and illustrated by Tim Worfolk. This is the second edition; the earlier 'Shrikes: A guide to the shrikes of the world' by Nobert Lefranc was published in 1997. The taxonomy has been updated and many new sections have been added in this edition.

The format of the book is: Introduction, Acknowledgements, Style and layout of the book, Taxonomy and relationships – A brief historical approach, True shrike systematics, Overview of the genus *Lanius*, Overview of the genus *Eurocephalus*, Colour plates, Species accounts, Bibliography and Index. The history of shrike taxonomy is given in 'Taxonomy and relationships' and in the chapter on 'True shrike systematics' written by Jérôme Fuchs, the relationships within Laniidae are explained in detail; the species which require more molecular work are mentioned, with the author explaining that the Long-tailed Shrike requires further research since it has a large distribution, encompassing several major biogeographic breaks. The chapter on the overview of the genus Lanius is very extensive, covering the life history of shrikes, and includes several relevant photographs and illustrations showing behaviour and other details.

The book covers 34 species as per the current accepted taxonomic treatment for this group; 32 species of Laniidae and two species of *Eurocephalus*. The 21 plates illustrate all the species and a further five plates are given, in which illustrations of the spread wings and tail of 'Grey Shrike' taxa are given. The illustrations are very elaborate, with male, female, first winter/ juvenile plumages depicted. This is followed by main species accounts which cover identification, geographical variation, moult, measurements, breeding and non-breeding distributions, vagrancy, behaviour, food, breeding, population trends and conservation status. The species accounts carry maps showing the breeding / wintering regions and vagrant records. The species text is authoritative but succinct, and explains in detail all the topics covered under each heading. Good quality photographs, with captions, showing male / female / first winter / juvenile birds are given for each species.

Though the book lists many species which do not occur in India, there is still enough for the Indian bird watcher to be interested. For bird watchers in Gujarat, the species accounts of Red-backed Shrike, Turkestan Shrike (or Red-tailed Shrike) and Isabelline Shrike will be of great interest. All these three species are seen in Gujarat and the identification of these shrikes in the field is often quite difficult. Adding to this confusion is the occurrence of the Brown Shrike in Gujarat! Getting the identification correct for these four shrike species is a problem faced by many bird watchers here. The field identification of first-winter shrikes of these species remains a challenge and this book, with illustrations and photographs, will be helpful in understanding the finer aspects of identifying these species in the field. Also of particular interest are hybrids between different shrike species given in this book. For example, in the species account of Red-backed Shrike, a hybrid of Red-backed Shrike x Red-tailed Shrike is shown in one photograph and the hybridization zones between *L. collurio* x *L. isabellinus* and *L. collurio* x *L. phoenicuroides* are shown. The species account of the Great Grey Shrike is a delight, with photographs and maps for different subspecies, and the plumage features explained. The taxonomic notes add to the text and the taxonomic treatment for these taxa is explained in detail so that readers can get an idea about taxonomy for many species.

This book is a must have for bird watchers with an interest in shrikes. In general, less attention is given to shrikes by birders but shrikes, as a group, are fascinating birds. I have always been interested in shrikes and look forward to using this book for identification and as a reference. This book will be a useful resource for all those interested in shrikes and will be an important addition to a bird watchers library. This book is available online at: https://www.bloomsbury.com/in/shrikes-of-the-world-9781472933775/ for Rs. 3599/- in hardback and Rs. 3239/- for eBook in India. □