

FLAMINGO Gujarat

Bulletin of Gujarat Birds

ISSN: 2583 - 2050



Vol. V 3 July - Sep 2022



Flamingo

Gujarat - Bulletin of Gujarat Birds issue: Vol. V 3 July - September, 2022

Editor: Prasad Ganpule
Assistant Editor: Ashok Mashru
Consulting Faculty: Anika Tere; Anuj Raina; Arpit Devmurari; Bharat Jethva; Devesh Gadhvi; Dhaval Vargiya; Dishant Parasharya; Gaurang Sindhav; Geeta Padte; Hiren Soni; Indra Gadhvi; Jagruti Rathod; Ketan Tatu; Kunan Naik; Maulik Varu; Nirav Bhatt; Raju Vyas; Ranjit Devkar; Shantilal Varu; Sunil Kini; Uday Vora; Viral Joshi; V. C. Soni
Managing Editor: Bakul Trivedi
Assistant Managing Editor: Devvratsinh Mori
Layout and design: Pugmark Qmulus Consortium

Contents:

Breeding of Lesser Flamingo <i>Phoeniconaias minor</i> in the Little Rann of Kachchh, Gujarat.....	1
Observations of a nest of an Asian Pied Starling <i>Gracupica contra</i> at Timbi, Vadodara.....	6
Shades of grey: White-cheeked Tern <i>Sterna repressa</i> and Common Tern <i>Sterna hirundo</i> near Porbandar, with notes on identification.....	10
Short Birding Notes.....	22
OBITUARY.....	26

- Views expressed by the contributors in 'Flamingo Gujarat' are not necessarily those of BCSG.
- No part of this publication may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, without permission in writing from Bird Conservation Society, Gujarat (BCSG).
- Author will be held responsible for any act of plagiarism.

Cover Photo: 'Lesser Flamingo' by Nirav Bhatt

ISSN: 2583 - 2050

Date of publication: 10 October, 2022



bcsg Bird Conservation Society, Gujarat

Governing body:

President: Bakul Trivedi **Hon. Secretary:** Uday Vora **Hon. Treasurer:** Prashant Shah
Vice President: Ashok Mashru **Hon. Jt. Secretary:** Anuj Raina
Exe. Committee : Maulik Varu; Pankaj Maheria; Dishant Parasharya; Yashodhan Bhatia; Kailash Jani; Ramde Bhatia

Regd. Address : 19/414, Satyagrah Chhavni, Satellite Road, Ahmedabad-380015, Gujarat.

Email: devvratsinhji.flamingogujarat@gmail.com, **Web:** www.bcsug.co.in

To download all previous issues please visit www.flamingogujarat.com

Breeding of Lesser Flamingo *Phoeniconaias minor* in the Little Rann of Kachchh, Gujarat

Anil K. Rathwa: RFO, At - Bodeli, Chhota-Udaipur, Gujarat. anil.rathwa@ymail.com

Introduction

The Lesser Flamingo (*Phoeniconaias minor*) is one of the two flamingo species which are resident in India. It is smaller and more pinkish than the Greater Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus roseus*) in breeding plumage. It inhabits coastal as well as inland wetlands (Tere 2005). The Lesser Flamingo is categorised as a 'Near Threatened' species as populations appear to be undergoing a moderately rapid decline, due to irregular breeding attempts (BirdLife International 2022). The Lesser Flamingo is seen in large numbers in Gujarat (Tere & Parasharya 2004).

It was earlier believed that the Lesser Flamingo did not breed within the Indian Territory (Ali 1945, 1954). However, a mixed colony of Lesser Flamingos was found nesting with Greater Flamingos at 'flamingo city' in the Great Rann of Kachchh, in the Kachchh Desert Sanctuary located in Great Rann of Kachchh in Gujarat (Ali 1974). This was the first breeding record of the Lesser Flamingo from India. Subsequently, the breeding of the Lesser Flamingo has been recorded in many locations in India (Tere 2005). Lesser Flamingos were recorded to nest in the Little Rann of Kachchh by Mundkur *et al.* (1989) and Vaishnav *et al.* (2005). A large number of adults and chicks have been reported from Little Rann of Kachchh earlier, near Zinzuwada, in 1998, when 30,000 adults and 20,000 chicks were seen (Singh *et al.* 1999). Further, it was noted that 70,000-80,000 chicks were recorded at Bela-Mowana, in the eastern part of the Great Rann of Kachchh (Parasharya *et al.* 2010). This area in the Great Rann of Kachchh is having similar habitat (and terrain) to the Little Rann of Kachchh. In November 2014, a large abandoned colony of flamingo nests was found between Vachhraj-byet and Mardek-byet in the Little Rann of Kachchh; there were more than 5,000 nests with unhatched eggs. It seemed that the nesting failed since the rann had dried up. So, the Lesser Flamingo is known to breed in Gujarat.

I explored the Wild Ass Sanctuary (Little Rann of Kachchh) during the monsoon of 2021, when the Lesser Flamingos were nesting in the sanctuary. The visits inside the sanctuary were

carried out from August to October. I present here the results of surveys in the Little Rann of Kachchh in the monsoon of 2021.

Observations

I visited the Little Rann of Kachchh on 31 July 2021, along with a team of the forest department personnel. On this day, we surveyed some areas in the eastern part of the Little Rann of Kachchh but did not find any flamingos. On 17 and 18 August 2021, Lesser Flamingos were recorded in the eastern parts of the rann but detailed counts were not done. Subsequently, two teams of forest department personnel were formed and we scanned the area in the eastern part of the rann. We found three nesting colonies; the first colony had about 250 nests and 50 eggs. The second colony had about 300 nests and 15 eggs. The third colony was very big, with about 10,000 Lesser Flamingos. We could not estimate the nests and eggs in this area as it was unapproachable due to the terrain, but we could see that nesting activity was being carried on – we could see nests with eggs. On 20 August 2021, a team of the forest department surveyed Pung-byet and Maharaja-byet areas in the north-eastern part of Little Rann of Kachchh and found a large congregation of Lesser Flamingos there but we could not confirm if these birds were nesting there at that time.

I revisited the previously seen nesting colonies on 22 August 2021 along with Nirav Bhatt. It was difficult to reach close to nesting colonies due to the muddy terrain. We saw three flocks of Lesser Flamingos with binoculars from a distance and counted a total of about 7,000 individuals. Nesting activity was not observed in the surveyed areas. We (Nirav Bhatt and I) surveyed the colonies on 5 September 2021 along with two teams of forest department personnel and found all the three previously visited colonies abandoned. It seemed that the nesting was unsuccessful as the eggs had not hatched. I could not ascertain the reasons for which these colonies were abandoned. There were about 500 nests in one colony and about 1,500 nests in the second. We could not approach the third colony to check the number of nests. A re-survey in the

	Colony 1	Colony 2	Colony 3	Colony 4
No. of nests	1,000	5,000	10,000	15,000
No. of nests where incubation was on-going	200	-	1000	-
No. of chicks with adults	500	1,000	-	-
No. of chicks without adults accompanying them	-	2,500	5,000 (in six flocks)	6,000

Lesser Flamingo....

part of the Little Rann around Maharaja-byet, and Vachhraj-byet, was made on 17 September 2021 but no nesting was found.

On 21 September 2021, I received information from the forest department staff and locals that flamingos were nesting near Koparni, in the Little Rann of Kachchh. The site was near the Jajam area in the Little Rann of Kachchh. Hence, the site was

visited on the same afternoon. We observed four nesting colonies. The details of these colonies are given in the table.

Photographs were taken to document the nesting of the flamingos in this area. The total area of the nesting of the four colonies was spread across approximately 10 sq. kms. The distance between colony 1 and colony 2 was 350 mts, between colony 2 and colony 3 was 550 mts, and between colony 3 and



All Photos: Nirav Bhatt



© Nirav Bhatt

Lesser Flamingo.

During this visit, we found two new, very large colonies, spread across about 6 sq. km, in addition to the four successful nesting colonies seen earlier, with about 2000 and 5000 nests respectively. These were found to be without chicks or eggs and the nests looked similar to the earlier four colonies where successful nesting was observed. This meant there could be another additional nesting area than what has been reported in this study. It was also useful to note that the colonies seen in the Little Rann of Kachchh consisted only of Lesser Flamingos and no Greater Flamingos were seen in the colonies visited by us. It was observed that almost all the nests were in salt-pans made in the previous season and only about 400 nests were outside the salt-pans.

I should add here that it is very challenging to access many areas of the rann at the time of nesting and our team had to make extreme efforts to survey the entire area. The visits were made in two tractors, which would wade through the flooded, vast, open areas with mud patches. After a certain point, even the tractors could not be taken ahead. Then, our enthusiastic team members would walk in the mud for kilometres in the scorching heat of September, which was extremely tiring. But, the observations of small chicks of the flamingos were indeed worth the entire effort.

colony 4 was 1800 mts. After this visit, the area was again not approachable because of heavy rain and to avoid disturbing the breeding birds, further visits were not conducted.

On 17 October 2021, this area was visited again and the four nesting colonies seen previously were observed. About 4000 abandoned nests were found with new eggs; these nests were empty earlier as the chicks from these nests had already hatched when we had seen this colony in our previous visit. We could not confirm if the same birds had used these nests or new pairs had nested here. Also, we could not be sure if the nests were re-used or constructed again at the same place. This needs further study and if nests were re-used, then it will be an interesting observation regarding the breeding of the

Record of ringed Lesser Flamingo



All Photos: Nirav Bhatt

Lesser Flamingo....

We found one tagged adult Lesser Flamingo with yellow ring with "AXD" written in black. A silver ring on the other leg was not readable. I contacted Dr. Suresh Kumar from WII and Dr. Madhumita Panigrahi from BNHS for details of this tagged individual and came to know that this bird was ringed at Ratnal Lake in Bhachau Taluka of Kachchh District on 3 April 2019 in its sub-adult stage. The sighting of the ringed bird in the nesting colony was a very interesting for us and suggests that the flamingos come to nearby nesting grounds for breeding.

Discussion



A total of about 30,000 nests and about 15,000 chicks were directly observed in different colonies in the Little Rann of Kachchh in 2021. The observation of about 15,000 chicks in the rann is very important in terms of the habitat ecology that supports such huge nesting. It also suggests that when the monsoon rains are good and the habitat and conditions are suitable, the Lesser Flamingos breed in the Little Rann of Kachchh in large numbers. There is evidence that flamingos converge from different sites of Gujarat (and maybe elsewhere) to breed in the ranns (Tere & Parasharya 2005, Parasharya & Tere 2006). The observation of a bird tagged in Kachchh and seen here during the breeding season further supports the same. This sighting of the tagged flamingo was after 903 days. It was in its breeding plumage and was probably breeding here. It weighed 1770 grams at the time of capture.

In Lesser Flamingos, breeding is very irregular and dependent on suitable conditions which vary considerably from year to year (Tere 2005, del Hoyo *et al.* 2020). Vaishnav *et al.* (2005) found a colony of Lesser Flamingos in 1985 with 10,000 nests about 10 km north of Koprani Village, near Pung-byet. During the current survey, the breeding colonies were recorded very near to the same site. The preference for nesting on the bunds and within the salt pans in this area has been recorded earlier by Parasharya & Tere (2006) and our surveys have further confirmed this observation.

The level of water is a very important or even a critical factor for the successful nesting of the Lesser Flamingos (Childress *et al.* 2008). If there is less rainfall, then the nesting is abandoned while excess rainfall often results in the washing away of nests from a particular location. In the earlier failed nesting observed in November 2014, the drying up of the rann could have been the main reason for the abandonment of the nests. Based on our surveys of the breeding of the Lesser Flamingos in this area, the following suggestions may be worked upon:

A 100 meter x 1 meter bund (made of mud), of about 2.5 ft height, may be prepared in about 1 hectare area in different parts of the rann. Since nesting was observed mainly in salt-pans, and the flamingos used the bunds made in the salt pans



for nesting, these bunds may be helpful in providing suitable nesting sites. These bunds can provide elevated ground (above the water level) when the area is flooded by the monsoon rains.

A camera, with time-lapse monitoring with only few pictures per day from a high vantage point, may be installed from the time of the first nesting observation. This will help in understanding the reasons for nesting success/failure especially because of the fluctuating water-levels.

Surveys with boats or tractors, should be conducted in different parts of the Little Rann of Kachchh. This will help in knowing the number of sites used for nesting by the flamingos. It is likely that there could be more areas in which these birds are nesting in the rann.

Making of elevated mud bunds for nesting could be useful in providing nesting sites for the flamingos. Washing away of nests due to the flooding of the Rupen River in the Little Rann of Kachchh has been recorded in the monsoon of 2003 and 2005 (Parasharya & Tere 2006). Elevated bunds could prevent the destruction of nests due to flooding. It should be noted that time lapse cameras often require regular monitoring,

which may not be possible in this case as the nesting areas are often unapproachable. Surveys and breeding studies can disturb the breeding birds and due care should be taken to avoid any disturbance; Lesser Flamingos are sensitive to disturbance during the nesting period (Parasharya & Tere 2006).

It is pertinent to note that many areas of the rann are not approachable due to the terrain and the flooding of the rann in the monsoon season. It is also surprising that the flamingos do not use the *byets* inside the rann, which are elevated and become islands during the monsoon, for nesting. A more detailed survey is required to know the habitat preferences of the flamingos for breeding in the rann. Regular monitoring of nesting of Lesser Flamingos may help in providing more information on the breeding biology of this species in the Little Rann of Kachchh area, which is one of the most important nesting sites for the species in the country. If there is good rainfall and the habitat / conditions become suitable each year with the efforts and actions of the forest department, the nesting of this threatened species can be expected every year in this area. A detailed study of factors affecting the nest site selection, nest building, nesting success/failure, may be done to know more about the breeding of this species in the Little Rann of Kachchh.

Acknowledgements

I am thankful to Shri P. B. Dave (DCF, Wild Ass Sanctuary) and Dr. B. Suchindra (CF, Wildlife Circle, Gandhinagar) for their continuous support and guidance. I thank Nirav Bhatt for accompanying us for documentation during these surveys and contributing photographs and Prasad Ganpule for helping with the manuscript. I thank Dr. Madhumita Panigrahi and Dr. Suresh Kumar for giving the ringing information. I am grateful to the entire staff of the Wild Ass Sanctuary, especially Dalsukhbhai, Pratapbhai, Vijaybhai, Patadiyabhai, Hirabhai, Zalabhai, Vishnubhai, Maheniyabhai and Naseeb for extensive hard work during the surveys. The comments of an anonymous reviewer greatly improved the manuscript.

References

- Ali, S., 1945. *The Birds of Kutch*. Oxford University Press. Published for the Govt. of Kutch.
- Ali, S., 1954. The birds of Gujarat – Part I. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 52(2): 374-458
- Ali, S., 1974. Breeding of the Lesser Flamingo, *Phoeniconaias minor* (Geoffroy) in Kutch. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society*. 71 (1): 141-144
- BirdLife International, 2022. Species factsheet: *Phoeniconaias minor*. Downloaded from <http://www.birdlife.org> on 15/07/2022

Childress, B., Nagy, S. & Hughes, B., (Compilers). 2008. International Single Species Action Plan for the Conservation of the Lesser Flamingo (*Phoeniconaias minor*). CMS Technical Series No. 18, AWEA Technical Series No. 34. Bonn, Germany.

del Hoyo, J., Boesman, P. F. D., Garcia, E. F. J. & Kirwan, G. M. 2020. Lesser Flamingo (*Phoeniconaias minor*), version 1.0. In *Birds of the World*. Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA. <https://doi.org/10.2173/bow.lesfla1.01>

Mundkur, T., Pravez, R., Khachar, S., & Naik, R. M., 1990. Hitherto unreported nest site of Lesser Flamingo *Phoeniconaias minor* in the Little Rann of Kutch, Gujarat. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 86 (3): 281-285

Parasharya, B. M., & Tere, A., 2006. *Lesser Flamingos in India: A Knowledge Update*. Anand Agricultural University, Anand, Gujarat, India.

Parasharya, B., Tere, A., & Vyas, R. R., 2010. Bela-Mowana: a lesser known nesting site of flamingos in India. *Flamingo, Bulletin of the Flamingo Specialist Group* 18: 21-25

Tere, A., 2005. *Ecology of Greater Flamingo *Phoenicopterus roseus* and Lesser Flamingo *Phoenicopterus minor* on the wetlands of Gujarat*. Ph. D. Thesis submitted to The Maharaja Sayajirao University of Baroda, Vadodara, Gujarat, India.

Tere, A. & Parasharya, B. M., 2004. Counts of the flamingos at some sites of Gujarat state, India. *Waterbirds* 27 (2):141-146

Tere, A., & Parasharya, B. M., 2005. Post-breeding distribution of flamingos and their population estimation. *Flamingo* 3 (4): 2-5

Singh H. S., Patel, B. H., Pravez, R., Soni V. C., Shah N., Tatu K., & Patel, D., 1999. *Ecological Study of Wild Ass Sanctuary*. Gujarat Ecological Education and Research (GEER) Foundation, Gandhinagar.

Vaishnav, H. A., Chavan, S. A. & Vora, U. A., 2005. Nesting behavior of flamingos in the Rann of Kachchh. *Flamingo* 3 (2): 2-4 □

Observations of a nest of an Asian Pied Starling *Gracupica contra* at Timbi, Vadodara

Raju Vyas: BPC-Haveli Road, Nr. Splatter Studio, Alakapuri, Vadodara 390007. razoovyas@hotmail.com

Kartik Upadhyay: 1/101 Avni Residence, Near Bansal Super Market, Gotri-Vasna Road, Vadodara. kartik_upadhyay35@yahoo.com

The Asian Pied Starling (*Gracupica contra*) (henceforth APS), also known as the Pied Myna, belongs to the family Sturnidae (George 1971). Carl Linnaeus, a Swedish scientist, described the species in 1758 (Ali & Ripley 1983). A recent molecular analysis suggested its placement in a separate genus, leading to the reinstatement of the older genus, and it is now treated as *Gracupica contra* (Lovette *et al.* 2008, Zuccon *et al.* 2008). This species was earlier treated as *Sturnus contra* (Ali & Ripley 1983, Grimmett *et al.* 1998).

Distribution

APS is a widely distributed bird in India, mainly found at the foothills of the Indian Subcontinent, up to around 700 mts above msl, often seen close to human settlements and especially in areas with access to open water (Ali & Ripley 1983, Lovette *et al.* 2008). This starling is a common bird of the Gangetic Plains, extending south into Andhra Pradesh, in the west till Rajasthan and in the east towards Meghalaya and Bangladesh (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005). The western distribution of this species was said to remain mainly within India's territorial limits (Ali & Ripley 1983, Rasmussen & Anderton 2005). However, a few published reports show the species' occurrence in Pakistan (Murtaza 1997, Hanif *et al.* 2017) and up to Iraq (Abed & Mudhafar 2019), where it is considered an introduced or accidentally escaped species. The natural/original distribution range of this species extends over a wide range in central, south, and southeast Asia in the following countries: Bangladesh, Bhutan, Cambodia, China, India, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, and Thailand – it was considered as introduced to the following countries: Japan, Saudi Arabia Taiwan, China, and United Arab Emirates (BirdLife International 2009).

The westward extension of its distribution range into Rajasthan and Punjab is due to changes in irrigation and farming pattern (Sharma 2004). This species was reported further south up to Mumbai (George 1971), and Ahmednagar in Maharashtra. APS sightings have been reported from various locations of Gujarat, including Rajkot (Raol 1966), Valsad, and South Gujarat, which were thought to be of escapees (Monga & Naoroji 1983). There are reports from Vansada National Park, Navsari (Singh *et al.* 2000), and from Jamnagar and Dahod (Ganpule 2016), while a recent sighting from Vadnagar, Mehsana District, in North Gujarat is known (Choudhary & Desai 2021). The status of the species is given as rare / vagrant

in the state (Ganpule 2016, 2020). Here, we present new data on the breeding of APS based on some observations near Vadodara, Gujarat. We observed the breeding activities of this starling at the water body of Waghodia, in Vadodara District.

Study area

Timbi is a small irrigation reservoir (22° 18' 49" to 22° 18' 53" N, 73°17' 11" to 73°17' 22" E) and is located in the outskirts, towards the east, of Vadodara. This reservoir was constructed by the ex-ruler Sayajirao Gaekwad III of the erstwhile state of Baroda in 1947 for the irrigation of 48 villages in Shripor-Timbi of Waghodia Taluka, District Vadodara. It has an earthen dam within a periphery of approximately 6 sq. km encompassed area, and the water body supports various types of vertebrate fauna.

Methodology

We monitored a breeding pair of APS, and a nest, at Timbi Irrigation Reservoir for three weeks, from 15 June 2018 to 8 July 2018, to know the food spectrum and feeding behaviour of the species. The nest was monitored by direct observations with the help of binoculars (8x40), and some of the events were documented using digital cameras. We also ensured the safety of the nest and took all measures to minimise the disturbance to the breeding birds (Barve *et al.* 2020).

Observations

On 15 June 2018, one of the authors was on a bird-watching trip to Timbi in the morning. On the north side of the reservoir, shallow water supports dense vegetation, along with *Typha* Reeds (*Typha* sp.). This vegetation supports many



Photo 1



Photo 2,

aquatic birds. Two APS were seen perched on an electric cable (Photo 1) and flew inside a dense growth of *Typha*. The author observed that one of the APS was collecting long, dry leaf blades, flying over the water body, and disappearing on the west side of the water body towards the earthen bunds. Such behaviour was assumed to be of the bird nesting/nest building. On the next day, after careful observation, we were able to locate a nest (Photo 2) on a Neem tree (*Azadirachta indica*) (22° 18' 50.79" N, 73° 16' 41.62" E). There were few large trees at the seepages of the main canal of the reservoir. The nest was at a height of about five meters, on the top branch of a less-covered tree canopy. The nest looked globular (of round shape), made up of irregular mass consisting of straws, dry

leaves, twigs, grassroots, and a few unusual nesting materials such as plastic, cotton, and Jute fibres, and its rugs (Photo 3).

We were speculating on the basis of the nest's size and the birds' behaviours that the nest was active, with eggs probably



Photo 3



Photo 4

Asian Pied Starling...

laid inside. During the day, one of the birds continued to stay in the nest, and the other perched outside the nest, except in the morning, when both birds were actively involved in foraging nearby. One of the birds stayed a long time in the nest, which indicated one of the parents was engaged in the incubation of eggs.

On 24 June 2018, we noticed that both the birds were active during the entire day from early morning to late evening and continued to visit the nest. We speculated that the eggs must have hatched, and constant visits to the nest by both the parents showed that they were bringing food for the newly hatched fledglings (Photo 4). For the next two weeks, both parents were actively involved in feeding the chicks, and in between, they sometimes brought nesting material and repaired the nest, and at the end of the day in the late evening, both perched outside the nest.

On 5 July 2018, we noticed beaks of the two hatchlings coming out from the nest when their parents brought food. On the next day, on 6 July, both the hatchlings came out of the nest and begged for food from the parents. On 8 July, both the hatchlings and the parents were found in the same vicinity,

and the next day, they disappeared from the area. We could recognise food items which were brought by parent birds as various types of insects, spiders, earthworms, grains, and fried *sev* & puffed-rice. Both parent birds were very fond of unnatural foods such as fried wafers, puffed-rice, and *sev-ganthiya* (Photo 5).

Discussion

The present observation of nesting is from June and July at Timbi, Vadodara. The breeding season of the species was noted to be between March and September (Ali & Ripley 1983, Pandey 1991, Sethi & Kumar 2018, Shoma & Begum 2020) which is what was observed here. The nest is a loose mass of straw formed into a dome with an entrance on the side and placed in a large tree or sometimes on man-made structures, often close to human habitation (Bajaj 1992, Tiwari 1992). Here, we noted a similar type of nest construction on a large Neem tree, and its location was close to a wet, marshy habitat. The use of nesting materials is the same as described in earlier studies (Pandey 1991, Gupta *et al.* 2013, Sethi & Kumar 2018), except for using some unusual nesting materials such as plastic, cotton, and jute fibres. The use of such unusual



Photo 5

items for the nest is suggestive of innovation by this species in the selection of nesting material (Gupta *et al.* 2013).

Timbi is one of the important wetlands in the district, and 248 species of resident and migratory birds have been noted here till 30 June 2022 – see the following link for details: <https://ebird.org/hotspot/L4008340?yr=all&m=>. Timbi Wetland is under great threat due to the increase in various types of anthropogenic pressures, development of new human habitations around the water body, dumping of solid waste, fishing activities, and water pollution (Naria *et al.* 2019). There is an urgent need to conserve this reservoir.

References

- Abed, S., & Mudhafar, S., 2018. The first record of Asian Pied Starling (*Gracupica contra*) - Linnaeus, 1758 (Aves, Sturnidae) in Iraq. *Ecology, Environment and Conservation* 25 (1): 105-110
- Ali, S., & Ripley, S. D., 1983. *Handbook of the birds of India and Pakistan*. Oxford University Press, Bombay.
- Bajaj, R., 1992. Ecological and Behavioural studies on Pied Myna, *Sturnus contra contra* Linn. in and around Kurukshetra, Haryana, India. *Ph. D Thesis*, Kurukshetra University, Kurukshetra, India
- BirdLife International, 2009. *Sturnus contra*. IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. Version 3.1. International Union for Conservation of Nature. www.iucnredlist.org/apps/redlist/details/147659.
- Barve, S., Shankar Raman, T.R., Datta, A. & Jathar, G. 2020. Guidelines for conducting research on the nesting biology of Indian birds. *Indian Birds* 16(1): 10-11
- Choudhary, S. V. & Desai, P. G. 2021. Range Extension of Asian Pied Starling (*Gracupica contra*) in Gujarat state, Western India. *Prithivya* 1 (2): 1-3. (An Official Newsletter of WCB Research Foundation and WCB Research Lab.)
- Ganpule, P. 2016. The birds of Gujarat: Status and distribution. *Flamingo* 8 (3)–12 (4): 2–40
- Ganpule, P. 2020. *A checklist of the birds of Gujarat*. Birds Conservation Society, Gujarat. Ahmedabad.
- George, N. J., 1971. The Pied Myna, *Sturnus contra* (Linnaeus) in Bombay. *Journal Bombay Natural History Society* 68: 243–244
- Grimmett, R., Inskipp, C. & Inskipp, T. 1998. *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*. 1st Edition. London: Christopher Helm, A & C Black.
- Gupta, P. K., Gupta, R. C. & Kaushik, T. K. 2013. A chance observation reveals a marked shift in nest lodging patterns in case of pied myna in urban suburbs in Kurukshetra city. *Journal of Experiment Zoology* 16(1): 219-220
- Hanif, U., Abbas, F., Khan, Z. I. & Mian, A. 2017. New Record of Asian Pied Starling (*Gracupica contra contra*) from Kalar Kahar (Pakistan), *Journal of Bioresource Management* 4 (4). DOI: <https://doi.org/10.35691/JBM.7102.0078>
- Lovette, I., McCleery, B., Talaba, A. & Rubenstein, D. 2008. A complete species-level molecular phylogeny for the Eurasian starlings (Sturnidae: *Sturnus*, *Acridotheres*, and allies): Recent diversification in a highly social and dispersive avian group. *Molecular Phylogeny & Evolution* 47: 251–260
- Monga, S. G., & Naoroji, R. K., 1983. Birds of the Rajpipla forests – South Gujarat. With notes on nests found and breeding recorded and some new observations. *Journal of Bombay Natural History Society* 80 (3): 575-612
- Murtaza, S. A., 1997. Record of the sightings and breeding of pied mynah *Sturnus contra* at Lahore. *Journal of Bombay Natural History Society* 94: 569–570
- Naria, K.H., Patel, H. J. & Padate, G. S. 2019. Growing Threats to the Wetland Ecosystems of Vadodara-A Need for Ecological Monitoring and Protection. *Jalaplavit* 9 (3):5-19
- Pandey, D. N., 1991. Nesting habitat selection by the Pied Myna *Sturnus contra* Linn. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 88(2): 285-286
- Raol, L.M. 1966. Unexpected bird. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* 6: 9–10
- Rasmussen, P. C., & Anderton, J. C., 2005. *Birds of South Asia - The Ripley Guide*. Smithsonian Institution and Lynx Edicions. Washington DC and Barcelona.
- Sethi, J., & Kumar, M., 2018. Nesting and breeding ecology of Asian pied starling *Sturnus contra*. *Journal of Entomology and Zoology Studies* 6 (1): 713-716
- Sharma, S. K., 2004. Present distribution of Asian Pied Starling *Sturnus contra* in Rajasthan. *Zoos' Print Journal* 19: 1716–1718
- Shoma, S. F., & Begum, S., 2020. Comparative nesting patterns and success of mynas and starlings (Aves: Sturnidae) inhabiting Jahangirnagar University Campus, Bangladesh. *Bangladesh Journal of Zoology* 48(2): 321-334
- Singh, H. S., Raval, B. R, Patel, B. H., Tatu, K., Patel, D., Vyas, R., & Patel, B. H. 2000. *Biodiversity Study on Vansada National Park*. Gujarat Ecological Education & Research Foundation, Gandhinagar.
- Tiwari, J. K., 1992. An unusual nesting site of Pied Myna. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* 32 (3-4):12
- Zuccon, D. E., Pasquet, E. & Ericson, P. G. P., 2008. Phylogenetic relationships among Palearctic–Oriental starlings and mynas (genera *Sturnus* and *Acridotheres*: Sturnidae). *Zoology Scripta* 37: 469–481 □

Shades of grey: White-cheeked Tern *Sterna repressa* and Common Tern *Sterna hirundo* near Porbandar, with notes on identification

Dr. Maulik Varu: 301, Shreeji Annex, Golden City, Jamnagar. drmaulikvaru@yahoo.com

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



Photo 1 – presumed White-cheeked Tern – the bird depicted in the red square has dark ash-grey upperparts, lacking contrast with lesser-covert bar; tail feathers reaching wing tip; short legs. This bird looked significantly darker than surrounding Common Terns. Likely White-cheeked Tern but rump, tail or underwing pattern not observed. Note that one bird on the left is Common Tern which is much paler on the upperparts. 15 May 2022. Maulik Varu.

On 15 May 2022, I visited a coastal area near Porbandar, on Porbandar-Somnath Highway, with Punit Karia, Dr. Bhargav Raval and Swadeepsinh Jadeja. There, we saw a mixed flock of terns (*Sterna* sp.) consisting of Great-crested Tern (*Thalasseus bergii*), Lesser-crested Tern (*T. bengalensis*), Sandwich Tern (*T. sandvicensis*), Common Tern (*Sterna hirundo*) and Saunders's Tern (*Sternula saundersi*). We took many record photographs of this flock. We could see that some terns, which were similar in size to Common Terns, were looking much darker (photo 1). After watching a few photos on the computer at my home, I found 2-3 individuals looking different than nearby Common Terns; these birds were smaller-sized, with darker upperparts, and had a greyish wash on the entire underparts, showing white cheeks and longer tail projection; one - two birds were in non-breeding plumage while one bird was assuming breeding plumage. The flock then flew and I was able to take a video of this. I could see that some birds had greyish rump, greyish trailing edge to underwings, greyish lesser coverts and a pale band in the middle. I identified these birds as White-cheeked Terns (*Sterna repressa*) (photo 2) while some Common Terns were also present in this flock (photos 3-5).

I sent the photos to Prasad Ganpule and he informed that these individuals were likely to be White-cheeked Terns. He also informed that the identification of perched White-cheeked Terns is difficult as the grey rump and tail, and the underwing pattern, which are diagnostic, are not visible. There are previous sightings of White-cheeked Terns from Gujarat



PHOTO 2

Photo 2 – White-cheeked Tern – bird in red square – in flight, the dark trailing edge, dark lesser coverts and the white band in the middle is visible. The rump and tail are distinctly greyish. The grey rump and tail, along with the underwing pattern all point to White-cheeked Tern. 15 May 2022. Maulik Varu.

but many of these could not be conclusively identified as this species or were sight records not supported by photos. The true status of this species in Gujarat is not known and it is thought to be rare winter migrant here.

Acknowledgements

I am thankful to Punit Karia, Swadeepsinh Jadeja and Dr. Bhargav Raval for their company in the field.

IDENTIFICATION NOTE

[Previously, the White-cheeked Tern has been recorded a few times in Gujarat; from Porbandar (Parasharya & Mukherjee



Photo 3 – Breeding plumaged Common Tern. Dark trailing edge to primaries. Pale grey upperparts. Underparts with vineous-greyish wash. Short reddish bill. Note clean white tail and rump along with much paler upperparts than White-cheeked Tern. Presumed to be *ssp. tibetana*. 15 May 2022. Bhargav Raval.



Photo 4 – Common Tern – Note that the bird in the red square has greyish upperparts and white cheek-stripe is visible. But the rump and tail are white, contrasting with the mantle, similar to Common Tern. It is likely that camera exposure is making the bird look grey but this bird looks darker than the Lesser Crested Tern *T. bengalensis* in front of it. This image is from video grab and the true colours may not be evident but in the field, the bird looked greyish. 15 May 2022. Maulik Varu.

2001) and I had seen probable White-cheeked Terns twice with Maulik Varu, Ashvin Trivedi and Swadeepsinh Jadeja near Poshitra, Dwarka, on 24 October 2010 and 19 December 2010. While no photograph is available regarding the earlier sighting from Porbandar by Parasharya & Mukherjee (2001), the birds seen at Positra were photographed in flight from far but the photos were deemed to be too poor to confirm the identification beyond doubt. A recent record from Porbandar (Karia & Karia 2021), likely to be a White-cheeked Tern, was treated as unconfirmed since the rump and underwings could not be photographed though the plumage seemed too dark for Common Tern. I present here notes on identification of White-cheeked Tern and its separation from Common Tern.



PHOTO 5

Photo 5 – Common Tern – Note the bird in the red square has greyish underparts, but white tail and rump. The bill is short. Note that there is one more bird with faint grey wash to underparts below this individual. The grey trailing edge to the underwings is also visible. This image is from video grab and the true colours may not be evident but in the field, the bird looked greyish. 15 May 2022. Maulik Varu.

The identification of the White-cheeked Tern is difficult. It is very similar to Common Tern; the eastern subspecies *longipennis* of Common Tern is darker above and below than the nominate *hirundo*, approaching White-cheeked Tern in colour but the White-cheeked Tern is the darkest of medium-sized *Sterna* species (Malling Olsen & Larsson 1995). Breeding White-cheeked Tern shows dull red bill with dark tip or wholly dark upper mandible – dark bill tip is usually larger than in Common Tern but can be similar to *longipennis* Common Tern. The bill is long and evenly slender, with a drooping tip in White-cheeked Tern while Common Tern has a relatively shorter bill than White-cheeked Tern (van Duivendijk 2011). The plumage is darker grey above, being ash-grey to sooty-grey, with grey rump and tail almost concolorous with back (Common Tern always shows white rump and tail in breeding plumage) – but note that White-cheeked Tern can show rather conspicuous white sides to the rump (Malling Olsen & Shirihai 1997). The tail feathers lack inner white webs seen in Common Tern and hence, tail looks uniformly grey (Grimmett et al. 2011). The underparts are darker grey in breeding plumage, and a white cheek-stripe is visible – recalling a long-billed and long-tailed Whiskered Tern (*Chlidonias hybrida*). The dark underparts can often have a vineous tinge.

In non-breeding plumage, it is extremely similar to Common Tern and differs in being darker with all grey upperparts, with broader carpal bar not contrasting much with upperparts. The underparts are white, and black cap is slightly more extensive towards the forehead than in Common Tern while some White-cheeked Terns in winter show completely dark forehead (van

...White-cheeked Tern

Duivendijk 2011). In flight in all adult plumages, a pale central band is visible on underwing, contrasting with grey lesser coverts and almost complete dark trailing edge of wing. The flight is powerful, with faster and deeper wingbeats than Common Tern, and the body clearly moves up and down with the wing beats (Malling Olsen & Larsson 1995). It is important to note that the rump has white sides in White-cheeked Tern, which is obvious when seen side-ways on (Malling Olsen & Larsson 1995), and Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) have stated that Common Tern has a "greyer rump (in winter plumage only) than Arctic" Tern (*S. paradisaea*). However, the greyish rump in Common Tern in non-breeding is not mentioned in other reference texts. But if present in a few individuals in the winter, then this can cause further confusion in identification and separation of White-cheeked Tern from Common Tern. The tail streamers reach till wing tip or slightly beyond in White-cheeked Tern, which is also seen in Common Terns of eastern populations (van Duivendijk 2011). The length of the tail streamers is thus not very useful in identification. Malling Olsen & Shirihai (1997) have covered the field identification of White-cheeked Tern, with notes on breeding, non-breeding, first-winter/summer and second-summer plumages and can be referred to for further details; the White-cheeked Tern can be confused with Whiskered Tern, Saunders's Tern (*Sternula saundersi*) and Little Tern (*S. albifrons*) and the details of separation of White-cheeked Tern from these species is discussed by these authors and is not covered here.

Three subspecies of Common Tern are usually recognized; *S. h. hirundo*, *S. h. tibetana* and *S. h. longipennis* – a fourth subspecies, *S. h. minussensis* is recognized in several prominent sources but there is confusion about this taxon's diagnosable characters and breeding distribution (Arnold et al. 2020). Generally, it is described as intermediate between *S. h. hirundo* and *S. h. longipennis*, with the plumage coloration of the former and the bare part coloration more similar to the latter or variably intermediate. *S. h. minussensis* is usually treated as a junior synonym of *S. h. hirundo*, but such a treatment may be problematic given that the type locality of *S. h. minussensis* may lie within the breeding range ascribed to *S. h. tibetana*. Thus, following Arnold et al. (2020), three subspecies of Common Tern are recognized, with *S. h. minussensis* herein treated as a junior synonym of *S. h. hirundo*.

The subspecies *tibetana* is said to occur regionally while *longipennis* is possible or definite in our region (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Regionally occurring *tibetana* is said to be darker dorsally and ventrally (underparts have a vineous wash) than nominate *hirundo* while *longipennis* has a somewhat paler mantle than *tibetana* and darker bill (Arnold et al. 2020); the bill is shorter in *tibetana* than *hirundo*. Thus, regionally occurring *tibetana* can be somewhat darkish-grey in breeding plumage but has a shorter bill. In fresh plumage in spring, *tibetana* is slightly darker on the underparts and distinctly darker on the mantle than *longipennis*; light conditions also affect the perception of shades of grey (Kennerly 1995). In the photo given in Kennerly (1995), the upperparts look very dark

Table 1: Bill measurements in White-cheeked Terns and Common Terns

		Bill	Bill depth at gonys	Bill depth at rear edge of nostrils
Common Tern ssp. <i>hirundo</i>	ad ♂	32.2-40.3 (36.8) n=201	5.6-8.0 (7.0) n=198	7.6-10.0 (8.2) n=201
	ad ♀	32.1-39.6 (35.7) n=103	5.4-7.7 (6.7) n=110	7.2-9.5 (8.3) n=111
	ad	32.1-40.3 (n=312)		
	1 st summer	32.8-37.4 (35.7) n=17	6.0-7.3 (6.7) n=17	7.3-8.8 (8.0) n=17
Common Tern Ssp. <i>longipennis</i>	ad ♂	31.8-39.9 (35.2) n=55		
	ad ♀	31.9-37.4 (33.5) n=37		
	ad	31.9-39.9 (n=76)		
Common Tern Ssp. <i>tibetana</i>	ad ♂	30.4-36.7 (33.8) n=41		
	ad ♀	29.9-35.2 (32.2) n=42		
White-cheeked Tern	ad ♂	34.4-38.0 (35.9) n=23 36-39 (37.4) n=4 (in Persian Gulf)	5.9-7.0 (6.4) n=23	6.9-8.0 (7.6) n=23
	ad ♀	33.7-36.7 (35.1) n= 22 34-37 (32.2) n=5 (in Persian Gulf)	5.6-7.0 (6.3) n=22	6.7-8.0 (7.3) n=22
	ad	33.7-38.0 (n=45)		
	juv/1 st winter	28.6-34.1 (32.2) n=5	5.5-6.6 (6.2) n=5	6.1-7.7 (7.2) n=5

but the photo is from a print / negative, not from a digital camera, and looks overexposed. Thus, judging colours in this photo is difficult. It is important to note that all three subspecies of Common Terns can occur here in India, though on the western coast, especially in Gujarat, the occurrence of ssp. *tibetana* and *hirundo* is more likely.

While the White-cheeked Tern is said to have a long and evenly slender bill, often drooping at the tip, this is not always apparent in the field and based on observations of dark plumaged birds in the field at Porbandar, there is some variation in bill length

and depth. However, since photos of rump and tail of all dark plumaged birds seen at Porbandar were not obtained, the identification of many such darker birds remained inconclusive. But, in birds with grey rump and tail clearly seen here, there was some variation in this feature. Based on measurements in Malling Olsen & Larsson (1995), this difference in bill length and depth seems to be slight and might not be of much use in the field. A Table giving measurements of bills in White-cheeked Terns and Common Terns, based on Malling Olsen & Larsson (1995) and Malling Olsen & Shirihai (1997), is given here.

Table 2: Photos of Common Terns and White-cheeked Terns posted on eBird

Photographs posted on eBird	Remarks
https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/357424371 Location: UK	Breeding plumaged <u>Common Tern</u> . Note pale grey mantle and almost whitish underparts with only faint vineous tinge. White tail and rump. All red, short bill – ssp. <i>hirundo</i>
https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/169247651 Location: Ladakh, India	Breeding plumaged <u>Common Tern</u> . Note vineous-grey wash to underparts. A whitish cheek-stripe is apparent. White rump and underwing pattern is typical of Common Tern and upperparts are pale grey. Note very short bill. Presumed ssp. <i>tibetana</i>
https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/458392981 Location: Tamil Nadu, India	<u>Common Tern</u> in almost full breeding plumage. Note the pale grey upperparts. Bill is red at base. Few whitish spots are present on forehead. Note white tail. Presumed ssp. <i>tibetana</i> .
https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/229626281 Location: eastern China	Breeding plumaged <u>Common Tern</u> . Ssp. <i>longipennis</i> . Greyish wash on underparts, all black short bill. Note that it shows pale greyish trailing edges to secondaries, somewhat similar to White-cheeked Tern but lesser-coverts white
https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/370160191 Location: eastern China	Breeding plumaged <u>Common Tern</u> . Ssp. <i>longipennis</i> . Short bill; dark greyish underparts and shows white cheek stripe. Greyish trailing edges to secondaries but lesser coverts white. Note quite dark underparts
https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/214126781 Location: eastern Russia	Breeding plumaged <u>Common Tern</u> . Ssp. <i>longipennis</i> . Pale grey wash to underparts and shows hint of cheek stripe. Underwing pattern typical of Common Tern
https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/303891911 Location: Australia	Non-breeding <u>Common Tern</u> – note the pale greyish wash in centre of rump. Upperparts pale grey, much paler than White-cheeked Tern and rump is not uniformly grey but rather shows only some grey in the centre. Ssp. <i>longipennis</i>
https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/457439721 Location: UAE	Breeding plumaged <u>White-cheeked Tern</u> . Note concolorous ash-grey upperparts and underparts. White cheek-stripe is prominent. Red bill with dark tip
https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/344800371 Location: UAE	Breeding plumaged <u>White-cheeked Tern</u> . Note ash-grey underparts, typical wing pattern with grey lesser coverts and grey trailing edge to wing with contrasting pale band in the centre. Well defined white cheek stripe; red bill with dark tip
https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/341419431 Location: UAE	<u>White-cheeked Terns</u> – one bird in breeding and others in non-breeding. Note the very dark upperparts and long, thin slightly down curved bill. Breeding plumaged bird shows well defined cheek-stripe. Upperparts are ash-grey
https://macaulaylibrary.org/asset/155621631 Location: UAE	<u>White-cheeked Terns</u> – one bird shows dark bill and is not in full breeding. Note the overall ash-grey upperparts and long thin bills. Also note white-cheek stripe in bird assuming breeding plumage is not well defined. Underparts in breeding plumaged birds are pale greyish

...White-cheeked Tern

As can be seen from the Table 1, there is much overlap in bill measurements. But, in general, Common Tern of *ssp. tibetana* has a shorter bill when compared with the White-cheek Tern. The long, slender drooping bill, if present, is strongly indicative of White-cheeked Tern and when a combination of plumage features are checked, then identification is easier.

I searched for photos of Common Terns from India (presumably of *ssp. tibetana*) and compared them with White-cheeked Terns. I also searched for photographs of breeding plumaged *longipennis* Common Tern. A few photos of Common Terns and White-cheeked Terns, sourced from eBird, are given with remarks in Table 2.

As can be seen from the photos referenced in the Table 2, Common Terns often show a white cheek-stripe, which is somewhat similar to the cheek-stripe in White-cheeked Tern. Further, as can be seen in the photos, Common Terns can show greyish trailing edge to secondaries. When assuming breeding plumage, the cheek-stripe in White-cheeked Tern is not well defined. It can be seen that structurally, White-cheeked Tern generally looks shorter legged and longer billed than Common Tern. The plumage is darker ash-grey/sooty-grey, especially on the upperparts, in White-cheeked Tern though some Common Terns do look somewhat dark on the mantle. But, in general, White-cheeked Tern is darker than Common Tern, and in non-breeding plumage, the upperparts of Common Tern are paler, contrasting strongly with the dark carpal bar while in White-cheeked Tern, the upperparts do not show strong contrast with the carpal bar and the rump and tail are darker grey. In some Common Terns in breeding plumage, the underparts do look quite dark, similar to White-cheeked Tern, but other features like shorter bill, white tail/rump help in separating it from White-cheeked Tern. I have frequently seen Common Terns in Gujarat in non-breeding plumage and they show pale upperparts contrasting with dark carpal bar; upperparts are not dark and identification is fairly easy. The greyish trailing edge to the underwings and the white cheek-stripe are features that can be shown by the Common Tern is not mentioned in the reference texts and needs further study. A photo of *longipennis* Common Tern given on page 158 in Malling Olsen & Shrihai (1997) shows a bird with a grey trailing edge to secondaries and it is stated that in worn autumn birds, the secondaries can look darker in Common Terns but are never as conspicuous as in White-cheeked Tern. Hence, the greyish trailing edge to the secondaries can be a feature of Common Tern.

Overall, the pattern of the underwings and the grey tail and rump, which are almost as dark as the back, are the most



Photo 6 – White-cheeked Tern. Note very dark ash-grey upperparts. The bill is very long and drooping. This bird is in moult. The long drooping bill and the dark grey mantle fit White-cheeked Tern. Also note that the black crown and nape resembles a *Thalasseus* species, looking somewhat shaggy on the nape, unlike a Common Tern. 17 June 2022. Konark Karia.



Photo 7 - White-cheeked Tern. This bird was preening and the grey rump and tail, concolorous with the upperparts is clearly seen. This individual is also in moult. Note that the Common Tern in front looks much paler on the mantle with distinct contrast between the upperparts and carpal bar. This photo is instructive as it provides a direct comparison between the White-cheeked Tern and Common Tern. 17 June 2022. Konark Karia.

important characteristics in distinguishing the White-cheeked Tern from Common Tern and unless these features are observed well, identification is difficult though some very dark ash-grey/sooty-grey plumaged birds can be identified as White-cheeked Terns as plumage in Common Terns is not that dark in non-breeding plumage (*pers. observation*). While *tibetana* Common Terns can be dark on the mantle, in direct comparison with White-cheeked Terns at Porbandar, the mantle looked much paler in Common Terns. It is pertinent to note that sometimes, the upperparts of breeding plumaged White-cheeked Terns look paler than the underparts in sharp sunlight (Malling Olsen & Larsson 1995). In the photos given here from Porbandar (Photos 6-13), most of the features of White-cheeked Terns are seen and since there were many Common Terns present in the



Photo 8 - White-cheeked Terns. The bird on the right shows dark ash-grey upperparts, long bill and short legs. The preening bird on the left showed grey rump and tail, and had dark upperparts with long bill and short legs. 17 June 2022. Konark Karia.



Photo 9 – White-cheeked Tern. The bird preening its wings had a greyish rump and tail, with dark greyish upperparts. The paler bird on the left (at the back) is a non-breeding Common Tern. 17 June 2022. Konark Karia.

flock, direct comparison between both species was possible. As can be seen in the photos, the White-cheeked Tern is darker, with shorter legs and longer bill. In the field, the White-cheeked Tern is smaller than the Common Tern. Also compare White-cheeked Terns from Porbandar with this photo given in Table 2 (ML 341419431) and note that upperpart colour is similar to birds seen in Porbandar. There are very good photos of Common Terns from Central Asia (Kazakhstan) posted on the following website, at: <https://www.birds.kz/v2taxbest.php?s=270&l=en>. Photographs of many Common Terns in

breeding plumages are posted on this website. But, none of the birds approach White-cheeked Tern in mantle colour – the darkest birds are paler than White-cheeked Terns based on these photos. These birds are likely to be *hirundo/tibetana*. However, appreciating many of the features of White-cheeked Terns in the field is difficult and photos, from all angles, should be taken to confirm the identification. It is important that due caution be taken when identifying perched birds since the rump and underwing pattern is not usually visible when the bird is perched and these can be seen only in flight or when preening.



Photo 10 – White-cheeked Tern – Same birds as in photo 9. Note that the bill is long and this individual was smaller than the Common Terns seen at the back. The bird at the back, towards the right, is also likely to be a White-cheeked Tern, with ash-grey upperparts and underparts. 17 June 2022. Konark Karia.



Photo 11 –White-cheeked Tern assuming breeding plumage. Note ash-grey upperparts and greyish underparts. The bill is slim and long, with dark upper mandible and broad dark tip to lower mandible. Red legs. The white cheek-stripe is not well defined yet. Though the rump and tail were not seen in this bird, it is too dark for Common Tern and likely to be White-cheeked Tern. Note that the bird at the back is paler, with a stronger short bill, matching Common Tern. 17 June 2022. Konark Karia.

Based on observations in the field, an interesting question is whether the 'Kodak Grey Scale' can be used in separating White-cheeked Tern from Common Tern. A study of museum specimens should be conducted using the Kodak Grey Scale and the values compared with values for Common Terns. If there are

consistent differences, then this can be applied in separating these two species. But, it is not known how dark the darkest Common Terns are. The difference between the darkest Common Terns and the palest White-cheeked Terns should be measured; this can then be used in assessing if the Kodak Grey



Photo 12 – White-cheeked Tern. Note that the bird preening on the right (with the raised tail) has a grey tail and rump. The upperparts are ash-grey and the carpal bar contrasts with the mantle. This individual had somewhat paler plumage than the other White-cheeked Terns present but rump and tail were distinctly greyish. Underwing pattern not noted. But based on the grey tail, fits White-cheeked Tern. 17 June 2022. Konark Karia.



Photo 13 – White-cheeked Tern – The bird in the front has dark grey upperparts. It is in worn plumage, and some new pale ash-grey feathers are visible on the mantle. Dark grey tail feathers are visible but rump looks paler grey. The outer tail feathers are worn. The legs are short and the bill is long and drooping at the tip. All these features, especially the dark grey tail, fit White-cheeked Tern. Konark Karia. 24 May 2022.

Scale is a useful tool in identification of these taxa. Malling Olsen & Larsson (1995) stated that in White-cheeked Terns “the grey underparts may have an element of white or be paler grey; the palest birds are close to the darkest Common Terns (especially of race *longipennis*)”. While underpart colour may be similar, the

mantle colour is more ash-grey/sooty-grey in White-cheeked Tern and the difference could be consistent so that the grey scale values can be useful. The Kodak Grey Scale is widely used in identification of ‘large white-headed gulls’ (*Larus* species) and can probably be used in this case. Though, it should be noted



Photo 14 – Common Tern – A typical Common Tern in non-breeding plumage. Note the pale grey upperparts with dark carpal bar. Faint grey wash on belly is apparent. The bill is short, tail streamers reach till wings tip and rump is white. Near Dwarka, Gujarat. Prasad Ganpule. 14 October 2017.



PHOTO 15

Photo 15 – Common Terns – This flock of Common Terns was resting. Note the much paler upperparts and stronger, shorter bill. Carpal bar is distinct and contrasts with the upperparts in two birds. The bird on the extreme right (sitting down) is acquiring breeding plumage and looks pale silvery-grey, with red base to bill. Porbandar. Gaurang Bagda. 22 May 2022.

that using grey scale values is a somewhat theoretical exercise and it is likely to be only indicative; using it in the field requires experience and may not always be possible.

Based on our observations in the field in Gujarat, we found that Common Terns in non-breeding plumage did not have dark upperparts/mantle like White-cheeked Terns (photo 14 & 15). The pale grey rump in non-breeding Common Terns mentioned by Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) is not apparent and in the individuals I have seen in Gujarat (>100), the rump and tail looked white. However, I have not seen many Common Terns in

breeding plumage here in Gujarat and lack the data to compare Common Terns and White-cheeked Terns in breeding plumages / in the summer months. In the birds seen at Porbandar, a few individuals with pale grey upperparts, shorter bill and greyish underparts showed distinctly whitish rump and tail, which could be identified as Common Terns. In this flock, few individuals had a grey rump and tail, with dark trailing edge to underwings, grey-lesser coverts and a white band in the middle, which were identified as White-cheeked Terns. Some birds remained unidentified as rump/tail and underwings could not be photographed (photo 16). Hence, not all similar-sized, greyish-



Photo 16 – White-cheeked Tern? – The dark individual in the middle is somewhat of a mystery. It looks distinctly darker than the Common Terns in front and behind it. But, note that the upperparts are not quite darker ash-grey. The bill looks quite strong at the base but is drooping at the tip and is long (it is not slender). The white cheek-stripe is apparent and the underparts, especially near the belly, look quite dark. It is assuming breeding plumage. But is it a White-cheeked Tern? Without photos showing the rump, tail and underwings, identification is best left open though it is likely to be a White-cheeked Tern. Konark Karia. 24 May 2022.

looking birds in flocks of Common Terns should be identified as White-cheeked Terns! And the extent of grey in Common Terns needs more investigation. Further, the camera settings – like exposure, ambient light, background, colour settings are important when judging plumage in photos.

The White-cheeked Tern is a breeding visitor to the Vengurla Rocks, near Malvan, off the Maharashtra coast, and a passage migrant off Pakistan coast in March-June and October-December; it is said to be entirely coastal and pelagic in the non-breeding season (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). For India, there are only a few confirmed records (with photographs) posted on 'eBird', and majority of the sightings are during pelagic trips off the west coast. In May-end and June 2022, Konark Karia, young birder from Porbandar, visited the same location near Porbandar a few times and got good photographs of birds showing typical features of White-cheeked Terns. He informed (pers. comm.) that these terns were seen till the end of June in this area and were well documented by him. Many of the photos taken by him show very dark plumaged individuals, which can be identified as White-cheeked Terns as these birds were too dark for Common Tern, structurally looked shorter

legged and longer billed and most importantly, showed dark grey rump and tail. These birds were seen intermittently in this area for almost one month and were photographed.

The status of the White-cheeked Tern in Gujarat was given as 'uncommon winter visitor' (Ganpule 2016). Due to a paucity of records and difficulty in identification, its true status is difficult to ascertain. However, based on the recent confirmed sightings in May-June near Porbandar over the past two years, this species is likely to be more common during the summer passage migration season off the Gujarat coast when it returns to breed on the Vengurla Rocks and approaches near to the coast/is seen in coastal areas. The earlier sighting by Parasharya & Mukherjee (2001) from Porbandar was also in June. Hence, it is likely that in May-June, a few individuals come on the coasts. It could be a rare winter migrant here but with very few confirmed sightings, this is difficult to assess; if it is mainly pelagic in the non-breeding season, then it could be quite rare on the coasts in the winter. It has been recorded off-shore near Veraval recently (in October 2018) during a pelagic trip (Mansata 2018) but there are no recent photographic records near the coast in the winter. It could be occurring in coastal Kachchh (in the extreme western

Table 3: Summary of features of White-cheeked Tern and Common Tern in breeding and non-breeding plumages

	Breeding		Non-breeding		Remarks
	White-cheeked Tern	Common Tern	White-cheeked Tern	Common Tern	
Size and structure	Shorter-legged and smaller than Common Tern	Longer-legged and bigger than White-cheeked Tern	Shorter-legged and smaller than Common Tern	Longer-legged and bigger than White-cheeked Tern	White-cheeked Tern is slightly smaller than Common Tern
Bill size and shape	Long, slender and drooping	Shorter, straight and deeper-based	Long, slender and drooping	Shorter, straight and deeper-based	Long, slender and drooping bill is strongly indicative of White-cheeked Tern
Bill colour	Dull red with dark tip or wholly dark upper mandible	Reddish or bright red bill with dark tip*	Black	Black	* <i>ssp. longipennis</i> shows all black bill in breeding
Head Pattern	Black cap with prominent white cheek- stripe	Black cap and may show whitish cheek- stripe	Black on head more extensive on forehead – can show dark forehead in winter	Black on head mainly on crown and nape – white forehead and forecrown	
Upperparts	Dark ash-grey or sooty-grey, not contrasting much with broad carpal bar	Pale grey or darkish grey contrasting with thinner carpal bar	Ash-grey or sooty grey, not contrasting much with broad carpal bar	White or pale grey with contrasting dark carpal bar	Dark sooty-grey or ash-grey upperparts are indicative of White-cheeked Tern
Rump and tail	Grey and concolorous with dark greyish mantle	White and contrasting with greyish mantle	Grey and concolorous with mantle	White and similar in colour to mantle	Grey rump and tail are diagnostic for White-cheeked Tern
Underparts	Dark greyish, similar to upperparts and can show vineous wash	Paler or slightly dark greyish, paler than upperparts – shows vineous wash	White and contrasting much with dark greyish upperparts	White, similar to upperparts	
Tail streamers	Reaching tail tip or extending slightly beyond tail tip	Usually do not extend beyond tail tip*	Reaching tail tip or extending slightly beyond tail tip	Usually do not extend beyond tail tip	* <i>ssp. longipennis</i> may show tail streamers beyond wing tip
Underwing pattern	Grey-lesser coverts and dark grey trailing edge with white band in middle	White lesser coverts and middle band but can show greyish trailing edge to wing	Grey-lesser coverts and dark grey trailing edge with white band in middle	White underwing but with dark trailing edge mainly to primaries	Underwing pattern of grey lesser coverts, dark grey trailing edge and white band in middle is diagnostic of White-cheeked Tern

part) in May-June (since it is closer to Pakistan where it is common during this period) but needs to be looked out for. Further sightings will help in understanding its status in Gujarat.

Acknowledgements

I am extremely grateful to Konark Karia for sharing his sightings and contributing photographs; he has done excellent work in documenting the White-cheeked Terns near Porbandar. I am thankful to Gaurang Bagda and Bhargav Raval for contributing photographs. I thank Yoav Perlman for his inputs. I am grateful to Oscar Campbell, Keramat Hafezi Birgani and Abolghasem Khaleghizadeh for their help and to Antero Topp for helping with the reference from Alula. I thank Klaus Malling Olsen, Nils Van Duivendijk, Arend Wassink and Dr. Hamid Jabari for confirming the identification of White-cheeked Terns given here in photos 6 -13 – Prasad Ganpule]

References

- Arnold, J., Oswald, M., S. A., Nisbet, I. C. T., Pyle, P., & Patten, M. A., 2020. *Common Tern* (*Sterna hirundo*), version 1.0. In *Birds of the World* (S. M. Billerman, Editor). Cornell Lab of Ornithology, Ithaca, NY, USA. <https://doi.org/10.2173/bow.comter.01>
- Ganpule, P., 2016. The birds of Gujarat: Status and distribution. *Flamingo* 8 (3) – 12 (4): 2-40
- Grimmett, R., Inskipp C., & Inskipp T. 2011. *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*. 2nd Edition. Oxford University Press, Christopher Helm, Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, London.
- Karia, K., & Karia, P., 2021. Some important bird records from Porbandar area. *Flamingo Gujarat* 4 (2): 16-20
- Kennerly, P. R., 1997. Dark Common Terns. *Dutch Birding* 19 (6): 283-284
- Malling Olsen, K., & Larsson, H. 1995. *Terns of Europe and North America*. Princeton University Press, New Jersey, USA.
- Malling Olsen, K., & Shirihai, H., 1997. Field identification of White-cheeked Tern. *Alula* 4: 150–159
- Mansata, V., 2018. <https://birdsofindia.co.in/bird-name/4074/white-cheeked-tern/> [Accessed on 15 July 2022]
- Parasharya, B. M. & Mukherjee A., 2001. Sightings of White-cheeked Tern *Sterna repressa*, White-winged Black Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* and Saunder's Little Tern *Sterna saundersi* at Porbandar coast, Gujarat. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 98 (1): 113-114
- Rasmussen, P. C., & Anderton, J. C., 2012. *Birds of South Asia: The Ripley guide*. 2nd Ed. Smithsonian Institution and Lynx Edicions. Washington, D.C. and Barcelona.
- van Duivendijk, N., 2011. *Advanced bird ID handbook: The Western Palearctic*. New Holland Publishers, UK. □

Short Birding Notes



Probable Short-tailed Shearwater *Ardenna tenuirostris* at Nalsarovar

At around 08:30 hrs in the morning of 26 April 2022, I was around Ranagadh, in Nalsarovar Bird Sanctuary. I saw an unidentified bird in the lake waters. When I approached closer, the bird allowed us to about 30-40 feet near, but I could not take photos because I did not have a camera at the time. I managed to get closer and took a few photos and a video with my mobile phone. I could not identify this bird and so forwarded the photos and the video to experts. It was identified as a probable Short-tailed Shearwater (*Ardenna tenuirostris*). This bird was seen moving around my boat from around 15:00 hrs till late evening but was not seen on the next day. This bird did not fit Flesh-footed Shearwater (*Puffinus carneiceps*) and the tail was not long like seen in Wedge-tailed Shearwater (*P. pacificus*). The separation of the Short-tailed Shearwater from Sooty Shearwater (*A. grisea*) is difficult but the bill size and shape, and the 'cute' looking face, fits Short-tailed Shearwater more. There have been records of Short-tailed Shearwater from Gujarat, including from Nalsarovar (Shah *et al.* 2018), but this species is vagrant here.

[We thank Dipu K. for helping with the identification – Eds].

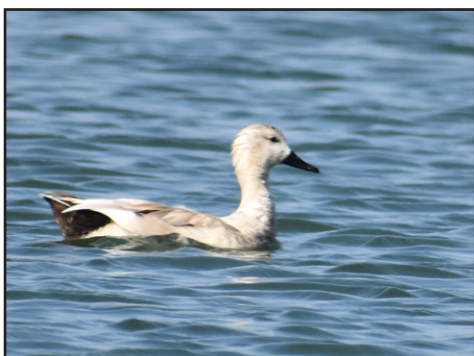
Ramzan Kasam Sama: At – Nalsarovar.



Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps indica* at Devisar Lake near Bilimora, Dist: Navsari

Since the first week of May, I was observing the nesting of Indian Golden Oriole (*Oriolus kundoo*), Asian Paradise Flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi*) and fantails (*Rhipidura* sp.) at Devisar Lake, near Bilimora. I also saw Eurasian Cuckoo (*Cuculus canorus*), Common Hawk Cuckoo (*Hierococcyx varius*), Grey-bellied Cuckoo (*Cacomantis passerinus*) and Pied Cuckoo (*Clamator jacobinus*). In this area, I saw an adult Emerald Dove (*Chalcophaps indica*) in the last week of May but was not able to take photos. After four days, on 30 May 2022 in the afternoon, I saw a bird perched in an *Acacia* sp. tree. It was a young Emerald Dove. I approached nearer and was able to take good photos and a video. It then flew away but I was able to see it for 2-3 minutes. This species is seen in Vansada National Park area and in other well wooded areas of South Gujarat (Joshi & Vyas 2021) but this is the first time I had seen it near Bilimora.

Dharmesh Patel: drdharmesh202@gmail.com



Colour aberrant Gadwall *Anas strepera* near Botad

One unusual duck was seen in a water-body of Botad District. In the month of February 2021, we saw one colour aberrant Gadwall (*Anas strepera*) in a lake in Botad District. The bird was observed for 25 days and then was not seen in the area. It used to forage alone and was often seen away from other ducks. When it tried to approach other ducks and Gadwalls in the lake, the other normal plumaged Gadwalls stayed away from it. It was observed that for a few days, a normal plumaged female Gadwall was often seen foraging with this individual. It was surprising to see this colour aberrant Gadwall here. I could not identify the mutation in this individual.

Vikram Gadhvi: At-Charanki, Tal: Ranpur, Botad.

Rushi Pathak: rushipathak2619@gmail.com



Sighting of Slaty-breasted Rail *Gallirallus striatus* near Valsad

On 5 April 2022, I was in my farm near the city of Valsad in South Gujarat. My farm is near the city and has vegetation around it. I saw and photographed a Slaty-breasted Rail (*Gallirallus striatus*) near my farm. I could get good photographs which confirmed the identification. The Slaty-breasted Rail is given as a rare monsoon migrant in Gujarat, and said to be regular in South Gujarat (Ganpule 2016). However, it is not very common in our area and this was the first time I had seen it near my farm. It is possible that due to its shy nature, it is overlooked.

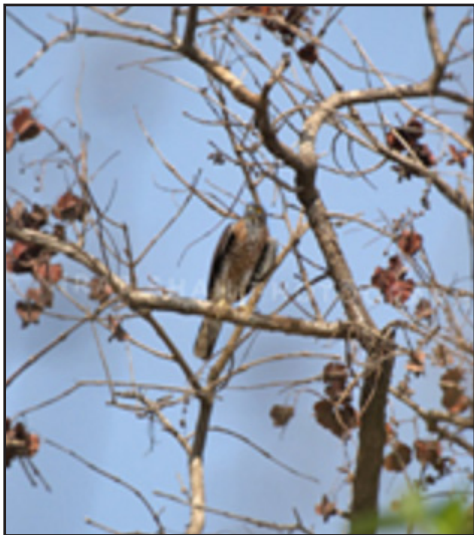
Mitul Desai: Valsad. desaimitul52@gmail.com



Sighting of Blue-throated Flycatcher *Cyornis rubeculoides* near Junagadh

I visited Narayan Dhara, Bhavanth area, near Junagadh, on 21 January 2021. There, I saw many flycatchers like Asian Brown Flycatcher (*Muscicapa dauurica*), Brown-breasted Flycatcher (*M. muttui*) and Taiga Flycatcher (*Ficedula albicilla*). I saw one different looking flycatcher which was somewhat shy and was harassed by the Asian Brown Flycatcher. It was overall brown above with rufous throat and breast, white belly, black bill and weak eye ring. I identified as a female Blue-throated Flycatcher (*Cyornis rubeculoides*). On 22 January, 27 January and 3 February, I saw it at the same place. Many other bird watchers also saw it here. It was last seen on 18 March 2021 by Naman Doshi at the same place. This suggests it was winter migrant to the Girnar area. The Blue-throated Flycatcher has been seen in a few places in Gujarat; it was recently seen in South Gujarat in Vansada National Park (Jat 2022). Bird watchers should look out for this species in Gujarat during the winter.

Gaurang Bagda: Junagadh. gaurangbagda@gmail.com



Besra *Accipiter virgatus* in Shoolpaneshwar Wildlife Sanctuary

On 23 April 2022, I was bird-watching in Shoolpaneshwar Wildlife Sanctuary when I heard "tchew-tchew" calls at around 08:30 hrs. This was when small birds like Jungle Babbler (*Turdoides striata*) and White-naped Woodpecker (*Chrysocolaptes festivus*) started uttering alarm calls and so I knew that it had to be a bird of prey. I scanned around with my binoculars but did not see anything. After some time, at around 09:15 hrs, I again heard the same calls and a small bird of prey with a dark mesial stripe on whitish throat, orangish pattern on underparts and dark tail bands took flight and perched in a tree. I took some photographs and identified it as a Besra (*Accipiter virgatus*). I shared the photos with experts and they confirmed that it was a female Besra. The Besra is usually seen in forests from North Gujarat to South Gujarat, and in Gir/Girnar area. There are a few records from Shoolpaneshwar WLS but it is rare here (Khadakkar *et al.* 2016).

I would like to thank Raju Kasambe (BNHS), Mukesh Bhatt, Anil Bharadwaj, Dharmesh Kantharia, and Nirav Bhatt for their precious guidance and for confirming the identification.

Niraj Shah



Sighting of a 'white' Indian Peafowl *Pavo cristatus* in Gir Wildlife Sanctuary

I was transferred to the Savarkundala Range of Gir Wildlife Sanctuary on 9 April 2021 and within a week, I saw one 'white' Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*) when on my round of Nani-Vadal vidi. But after that sighting, I was unable to see this individual again in my subsequent visits to this area. I thought it may have died during the cyclone 'Tauktae' which had hit this area last year. But on 27 March 2022, I sighted this 'white' peafowl again in the same area and I took pictures of it. It was entirely white, and quite likely the same bird. This bird was with other normal plumaged peafowl in a group, grazing on the ground. This is first instance of a sighting of a 'white' peafowl during my 14 years in Gir Wildlife Sanctuary. There is another instance of a sighting of a 'white' peafowl in a forest area by Raviraj Rathod, DCF Ratanmahal Sanctuary, at the Naldha Camp Site, in Ratanmahal Forest, on 5 May 2022; photos were taken with a mobile. Thus, it is quite surprising that such 'white' Indian Peafowls have been seen in forest areas and are surviving in the wild. The identification of the mutation causing aberrant plumage is often quite difficult; experts need to look into identifying the mutation and the factors causing this.

Yasin Zuneja: Forester, Savarkundala Range, East Gir.



Cattle Egret *Bubulcus ibis* preying on a bird

On 21 August 2021, in the evening, I was on a regular birding visit to the grasslands near Rajkot. There were many cattle and Blue Bulls grazing. There were Cattle Egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*) near these animals. I saw a Cattle Egret with a large prey in its bill. I took a few photographs. On zooming in the camera, I found that there was a small bird in its bill. The egret was moving away and flew nearby to be safe from other birds trying to snatch its prey. It tried to swallow the prey two-three times but could not do it as the prey was big. I tried to identify the prey in its bill by looking at the photos in the computer but could not identify it. On asking my birder friends, they opined the possibility of the prey being a Zitting Cisticola (*Cisticola juncidis*) or maybe a juvenile of some lark or pipit. The Cattle Egret has varied diet consisting of frogs, snakes, worms, insects etc. but I have not observed or seen it preying on a bird. This was an interesting observation, showing that the Cattle Egret is opportunistic and can prey on birds.

Ashok Mashru: Rajkot. mashruashok@gmail.com



Ashy Prinia *Prinia socialis* nesting near Bhuj, Kachchh

On 10 July 2022, I had gone to photograph Black-headed Munia (*Lonchura malacca*) which are seen in the farmlands around Madhapar-Bhuj, in Kachchh. In the long Napier grass, I saw more than 10 munias busy in nest building. This munia is somewhat uncommon in Kachchh and so I was observing their activities. During this time I saw a pair of Plain Prinias (*Prinia inornata*). A little further, I saw a pair of Ashy Prinias (*Prinia socialis*) building a nest, which was a surprise sighting for this area. As per senior birder Shantibhai Varu, the Ashy Prinia is vagrant in mainland Kachchh with only one previous record near Bhuj. It is thought to be absent in mainland Kachchh though it is seen in some parts of the Little Rann of Kachchh. This nesting record is thus important and shows that the Ashy Prinia does occur here and also nests in this area.

Goswami Dipak: Bhuj. goswamidpk@gmail.com

Bhakti Hirani: Madhapar.



Spring passage sighting of Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo* near Bhavnagar

I was photographing kingfishers on 12 April 2020, early in the morning, in the Shetrunji River, near Bhavnagar. I saw a small falcon fly in the north-east direction and thought it might be the Amur Falcon (*Falco amurensis*) which I had seen a few days ago in this area. I took some photos and saw that there was another falcon which was also seen flying at considerable height. I managed to get better photos of this bird. I saw that these were a pair of Eurasian Hobby (*Falco subbuteo*). The birds seemed to be in their return migration flight and did not perch or come down but continued flying onwards. I continued to visit the area but did not see it again. The Eurasian Hobby is a fairly common autumn passage migrant in Gujarat but is somewhat rare during the spring passage migration season.

Ronit Vasani: Bhavnagar. ronitvasaniv@gmail.com



Painted Sandgrouse *Pterocles indicus* near Jamnagar

On 28 November 2021, I was on a birding trip on Jamnagar-Samana Road with Ashvin Trivedi, Jaypalsinh Jadeja and Swadeepsinh Jadeja. We stopped for a while near Vadpanchasaara Village to explore the hilly area with scrubs which surrounds this village. There, Swadeepsinh Jadeja encountered a male Painted Sandgrouse (*Pterocles indicus*) resting on the ground. On careful observation with binoculars, we also found a female nearby. Both the birds were highly camouflaged in the grass and stones. They allowed us to approach very close and we got good photographs. This is for the first time I have seen this species in Jamnagar District.

I thank Swadeepsinh Jadeja for contributing the photograph given here.

Dr. Maulik Varu: Jamnagar. drmaulikvaru@yahoo.com



Slaty-breasted Rail *Gallirallus striatus* near Valsad

We went for birding at the wetlands on the periphery of Valsad, in South Gujarat, on 13 February 2022. These wetlands are mostly full of grass/reeds. We observed one greyish bird foraging deeper in this grass. At first, we just got a glimpse but we were able to take 2-3 photographs. While looking at the images, it looked different than a crane which is frequently seen in the area. Later on, we identified this bird as a Slaty-breasted Rail (*Gallirallus striatus*) which is quite uncommon here although it is a resident bird in our state. Previously, it has been seen at Dadra and Nagar Haveli, Porbandar, Vansda and Navsari. There are also breeding records from this area. We observed two birds at that time. They kept fighting and trying to push out each other from the area. The birds we observed were adults. After sometime, one bird came to the edge of the reeds to forage and also called several times. This is another record of this species for our area in the winter season.

Dr. Pankaj Maheria: Valsad. drpankajmaheria@gmail.com

Feneel Patel: Valsad. feneelp@gmail.com



Painted Sandgrouse *Pterocles indicus* near Rajkot

It was 2 April 2022, a Saturday, and so I decided to go to Khirasara-vidi (a very good grassland in the monsoon, but in April, a dry area), which is about 18 kms from Rajkot. I intended to photograph Chestnut-bellied Sandgrouse (*Pterocles exustus*) since I had attempted to photograph these during my previous visit but did not succeed. I was in my car, driving slowly on the road, and I noticed sandgrouse about 25 feet besides the road. To my surprise, it was a family of Painted Sandgrouse (*Pterocles indicus*). They were feeding on the rocky ground in the middle of the dried out grass, with the bright sun looming above – the temperature was around 42° C. The adults were hiding the young behind rocks. I could get good photographs. The Painted Sandgrouse is uncommon in Rajkot and there are only a few sightings from this area.

Ketan Sutaria: Rajkot. drketansutaria@gmail.com



Red-backed Shrike *Lanius collurio* at Nalsarovar

On 3 September 2021, I was birding in the Nalsarovar area. There, I saw one Shrike perched on a *Prosopis juliflora* tree. I went closer to take a record photograph but it flew away and settled on a *Salvadora* sp. tree. This time, I managed to take few record photos from a distance. After sharing the photos with experts, I came to know that it was an adult male Red-backed Shrike (*Lanius collurio*). This species is an autumn passage migrant in Gujarat with records mainly from Kachchh and some parts of Saurashtra. The present sighting from Nalsarovar adds to the sightings of this species from Gujarat.

Mehmud: At – Nalsarovar.

References

- Ganpule, P., 2016. The birds of Gujarat: Status and distribution. *Flamingo* 8 (3) – 12 (4): 2-40
- Jat, M. U., 2022. Sighting of Blue-throated Flycatcher *Cyornis rubeculoides* in south Gujarat. *Flamingo Gujarat* 5 (1): 4
- Joshi, M. S., & Vyas, R., 2021. Occurrence of Emerald Dove *Chalcophaps indica* in Vansada National Park, Gujarat. *Flamingo Gujarat* 4 (3 & 4): 1-3
- Khadakkar, A., Dixit, D., & Shah, J., 2016. Sightings of Besra in Polo forest and Shoolpaneshwar WLS. *Flamingo* 14 (4): 5-7
- Shah, T., Shah, D., Desai, J., & Bhil, B., 2018. Two spring 2017 records of Short-tailed Shearwater *Ardenna tenuirostris* from Gujarat, with notes on its identification. *Indian BIRDS* 14 (2): 50–52.



OBITUARY

Dr. D. N. Rank – An educator and scientist par excellence



It is very unfortunate that we have lost Shri D. N. Rank on 27 August 2022, at a young age of 60, so abruptly and unexpectedly! He was the treasurer of BCSG for almost one and a half decades from 2002 to 2017. Dr. Dharamshi Rank was a Senior Professor of Genetics at the Agricultural University, Anand. He was a visionary scientist, an excellent

teacher and yet a modest, down to earth, cheerful and loving human being.

He hailed from Rabarika village of Gir area, Gujarat. He was very diligent and had set for himself higher objectives in life since childhood. He left his home and loved ones at the tender age of ten, to pursue an independent life, in search of higher education that could shape his life. He came to Vallabh Vidyanagar and did his Secondary Education. His graduation was in Veterinary Science. Having completed graduation, he did his Masters in Animal Genetics & Breeding. He then went to Chennai to study for a PhD on Animal Genetics. Having successfully completed his PhD, he returned to Anand and joined the Veterinary Science College, Anand. A modern, present-day genetic laboratory named 'OM Research Laboratory' was established in Anand Veterinary Science College, under his energetic guidance and with his tireless efforts. Subsequently, he helped this lab get acclamation, nationally & internationally. He also had a remarkable contribution in development of genome chips of Gir cattle and Jafarabadi buffalos through research. This research was carried out in the 'Genome Sequencing Laboratory' established in the year 2008. With this chip, it became possible to select high pedigreed animals which produce more milk in different breeds of cattle. Getting international recognition for various cattle breeds of Gujarat, such as Dagri Cow, Kankrej Cow, Kharai Camel, Dumba sheep, Zalawadi goat, Ankleshwari breed of poultry and many more, was a herculean task, but it was made possible only because of the continuous and vigorous efforts of Dr. Rank.

The versatility of Dr. Rank is understood by the fact that eventually, gynaecologists, kidney hospitals and pharmaceutical companies across the nation started extensively using the facilities being provided by the genetics laboratory, for their

various research projects and studies. He made an in-depth study to rope in contemporary technology on a large scale for the service of people. He was a benevolent teacher and extended his priceless guidance and assistance to the students, even from different colleges and universities, who were seeking higher studies or wanted to settle down in life. He always was very helpful to the students. He involved himself in the overall development of his native village, Rabarika. A field visit to Sagai-Malsamot, after joining 'Youth Hostel Association of India' in 1998, was instrumental in generating his interest in birds and nature in general. During this field visit, he got an opportunity to stay with Dr. B. M. Parasharya, who jointly with Dr. Bakul Trivedi, founded BCSG in 2002. Despite the fact that he was the Head of Department of Genetics in the Veterinary Science College, and was busy with various responsibilities, he agreed to work as the treasurer of BCSG. He did not only restrict himself to discharging his duties in the capacity of the treasurer but also helped the society with meticulous management and proper execution of different activities from 2002 to 2017. He also involved the veterinary science students in bird watching. Although there is a greater emphasis on cattle, poultry, and horses in veterinary science studies, he worked tirelessly to increase the veterinary science students' interest in treating birds. He cultivated an interest among the students in avian surgery. Because of his simplicity, moral values, and helpful attitude, he was loved everywhere and by everyone.

Once, during a trek to the Valley of Flowers, he was accompanying Dr. Parasharya, who suddenly got sick during the trek, and Dr. Rank helped in shifting him to the nearest hospital by a helicopter so that he could get prompt treatment! A great example of friendship and reverence! He never compromised with his principles nor did he ever breach college regulations. He performed admirably wherever he associated himself. Even with the demanding schedule of conferences and seminars of the University, he could spare time for BCSG. The memory of Dr. Rank, who was present at the programme of Charotar Heronry Watch and Count organized by BCSG, on 21 August 2022, only a few days before he passed away, would always remain with all those who were with him in that programme. May his soul meet the eternal power and rest in peace. May God give strength to his family members to bear this terrible loss.

- Yagnesh Bhatt