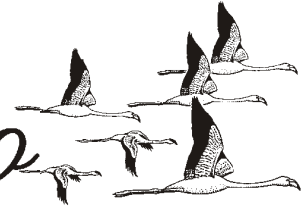




Flamingo



Newsletter of the Bird Conservation Society, Gujarat

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EDITORIAL

I had an opportunity to visit villages of Santrampur taluka of Panchmahal district while participating in 'Krushirath', a state government programme in May 2005 and 2006. It was an excellent opportunity to look at the bird community around. It is a period usually considered not conducive for birdwatching and hence, one fails to record certain important information.

Indian Grey Hornbill *Ocyeros birostris* was sighted at Santrampur and at three other villages. Often a pair of hornbill was seen on old Peepal trees (*Ficus religiosa*) in outskirts of city feeding on figs of peepa or Neem fruits (*Azadirachta indica*). Availability of huge fruiting trees in the reserve forest may be responsible for the survival of the hornbills. The *Ficus* trees (Peepal, Banyan, Umaro) bear fruits 3 to 4 time in a year. Moreover, fruiting in an area is not synchronous. Hence ripe fruits are available to the birds at least on some trees throughout the year; *Ficus* trees are very important for frugivorous birds. Now a day, *Ficus* trees are not being preferred for roadside plantation. From the sacred groves also, larger trees are disappearing. We need to protect these tree species for conservation of hornbills and other frugivorous birds.

The Indian Grey Hornbill has disappeared from many well-wooded, forested area of Gujarat. When the hornbills have survived at Santrampur under so much anthropogenic pressure, we need to understand niche specificity of the species in a given landscape for its conservation.



Photo by: Clement Francis

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BCSG and Flamingo

Bird Conservation Society, Gujarat (**BCSG**) was founded in 2000 with the objective of conservation of birds of the state through field research, documentation, training, awareness activities, networking with like-minded NGOs; and lobbying for protection of birds and their habitats. It is the only statewide network of bird-watchers, ornithologists and conservationists of Gujarat striving to achieve the above goal.

BCSG brings out a quarterly newsletter – '**Flamingo**' for its members. Articles, notes, interesting bird sightings, important bird area, information/appeal regarding conservation issues, field programme reports related to Gujarat State are published in the Flamingo. For publication of articles/notes in the Flamingo, both the common English and scientific name must be given when a bird species is mentioned for the first time and later on the common English name only. Common English names and scientific names should follow Manakadan, R. and Pittie, A. (2002). Standardized English and Scientific Names of the Birds of the Indian Subcontinent –2002. Newsletter for Birdwatchers 42 (3): 1-35. If the nomenclature is adopted from other source, full reference should be given.

An Account of Some Bird Introductions into Kachchh

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Lying on the extreme north-west part of the map of India the main landmass of Kachchh (excluding the completely arid areas of the *Ranns*) is situated between 22° 47' to 24° N and 68° 25' to 71° 11' E. For the most part this interesting region has a semi-desert eco-system. However the coastal areas to the south and south-west used to have sufficient ground water supply for irrigation and fertile soil that made it possible to develop well irrigated farms (*wadis*) and plantations having fruit trees along with ornamental garden trees. In the middle of Kachchh there are hilly ranges running parallel east to west. These hills are covered by hardy semi-desert plants and also grass and so some of them are protected as tree and grass preserves known as '*rakhals*' (*vidis*).

Over the years some birds have been introduced in Kachchh from time to time. It is a known fact that in nature, natural selection plays a key role. Distribution of taxa is commensurate with the existing ecosystem of a given area. Any attempt of introduction of species alien to such an area should be dependent upon prior thought, an experimental basis and so on. If care is not taken it could result in creating an imbalance. This has happened in the case of the introduction of Greater Coucal - *Centropus sinensis* as it would be described later in this account.

Helmetted Guinea-fowl- *Numida* sp.

Wild-caught Guinea-fowl were brought from the Sudan and were introduced in the *Chadva* '*rakhal*' in the early 1930s. A total of about 100 birds were released. The semi-desert ecosystem having grass cover and trees such as *Acacia nilotica*, *A. catechu*, *Prosopis cineraria* etc. as also Shrubbery consisting of *Zyziphus* sp., *Grewia* sp. and so on suited the exotic birds who settled down in the hilly terrain interspersed with flat ground and bred in it over the years. No competition for food or sharing the habitat with the endemic species such as the Black Francolin (partridge) *Francolinus francolinus* or the Grey Partridge – *Francolinus pondicerianus* was noticed.

However, the Guinea-fowl being larger in size and having less protective coloration in comparison with the endemic species more easily fell prey to the Jungle Cat *Felis chaus*, Caracal - *Felis caracal* and other predators present in that habitat. Its nests and young were also more vulnerable. The number of the introduced Helmetted Guinea-fowl remained constant at about eighty individuals till 1948. After the independence of India and the merger of the former state of Kachchh with the Indian Union, this species totally disappeared owing to the lack of protection and consequent poaching.

It may be mentioned here that a similar introduction of the African Helmetted Guinea-fowl was carried out in the Barda hills by the then state of Nawanagar (Jamnagar), and those birds met with a similar fate after the year 1948.

Painted Francolin (partridge) - *Francolinus pictus*

It is a well established fact that the Black Francolin and the Painted Francolin do not co-exist. The former is present in this region from Kachchh up to Deesa in north Gujarat and south of that line and further eastwards the Painted Francolin holds sway. At the present time it may be mentioned here that unrestricted snaring of both the Grey and Black Francolins has taken a heavy toll of their numbers and as a result of that the latter has now totally disappeared east to Bhuj.

Continuing with the main theme of this account, in the early 1940s some Painted Partridge (Francolin) were released in the scrub below the coastal sand dunes west of Mandvi having vegetation like *Acacia nilotica*, *Prosopis cineraria* along with a ground cover of grasses and clumps of *Leptadenia spartium*, *Sericostoma pauciphorum*, *Pseuda* sp. etc. In a short span of time of a couple of years there after no trace remained of the introduced Francolin! No data for this phenomenon nor any information as to the interaction between *F. francolinus* and *F. pictus* is available.

Greater Coucal (Crow-Pheasant) - *Centropus sinensis*

The introduction of this species in Kachchh in the mid-thirties of the twentieth century was an unfortunate occurrence for the prevailing ecosystem of this semi-desert area. As time went on this bird spread all over, occurring even in scrub covered areas. Every plantation or irrigated farm has one or more pairs according to its size. This species is highly territorial and does not tolerate its kind within the occupied area and relentlessly drives away the intruder. It is extremely destructive to the eggs and young of the endemic bird species. While searching for insect food the Coucal methodically looks for birds nests in hedges, shrubs etc. This has significantly contributed to the reduction in numbers of resident species in gardens.

Alexandrine Parakeet – *Psittacula eupatria*

The Alexandrine Parakeet along with the next species was also introduced in Kachchh in the thirties of the last century. No information is available about number of birds released or the exact place of introduction. However during my long stay at Vijaya Vilas Palace (about 8 km west of Mandvi): from the late summer of 1947 to about the end of that year I used to hear the loud unmistakable calls of the Alexandrine Parakeet every morning and along with that I often saw 4 to 5 of these psittacines as they flew in from the direction of Mandvi port. This of course gave the indication that they roosted some where in or near that town. Thereafter I used to come across half a dozen birds regularly during my birdwatching walks in the plantation. I heard them calling in Mandvi too. In one of my visits to Mandvi in 1964 I found a couple of pairs nesting in the holes of the old fort wall surrounding that ancient town. On November 9, 1964 I saw only one pair of this parakeet. One could only conjecture whether the birds I noted in the plantation of Vijaya Vilas and in Mandvi were from the original stock released or subsequent escapees from cages. On the other hand it is also not possible that so many birds could be kept in cages as pets.

Plum-headed (Blossom-headed) Parakeet - *Psittacula cyanocephala*

As mentioned earlier, this species was released at about the same time as the last one, but no information was available as to its fate thereafter. Among the earlier lists prepared by A. O. Hume and

published in 'Stray Feathers' (Vols. III and IV, 1875 and 1876 respectively), it is recorded in Kachchh. This parakeet was neither met with by Hugh Pallin nor Capt. C. D. Lester both of whom surveyed Kachchh prior to the publication of their books (entitled 'The Birds of Cutch') in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries respectively; and Dr. Salim Ali also did not see it. Though he has published Hume's list in his 'The Birds of Kutch' published in 1945.

One fact is quite clear and that is the Rose-ringed Parakeet *Psittacula krameri* was very common and abundant in Kachchh and hence though there was no dearth of nesting sites, the competition for feeding was acute. Thus the introduced species may not have been able to establish itself or propagate their kind. It also needs to be mentioned here that over the years I have noticed a reduction in the number of *P. krameri* which perhaps is the result of wide spread spraying of pesticides on fruit trees and crops.

As far as it concerns my own sighting of the Plum-headed Parakeet, while watching birds in the Vijaya Vilas Palace grounds on January 22, 1965 I came across three of these birds, a female and two Juveniles. They were on a tall *Eucalyptus* tree near a large plot in which the 'bajra' crop was ripening. I pointed out the parakeet to the caretaker of the plantation and enquired from him whether he had come across more such birds. He replied that there was one more bird, which was shot along with *P. krameri*, which were causing a lot of damage to the ripening crop. From the description he gave of the bird shot it appeared to me that it was possibly a male. After this I heard and saw one Plum-headed Parakeet in my own grounds in Bhuj (date not recorded) but as I had direct sunlight coming into my eyes its sex could not be determined. The three birds seen in Mandvi could not be from the original lot that was released 30 years earlier.

Red-whiskered Bulbul - *Pycnonotus jocosus*

With a well wooded plantation containing fruit trees, ornamental large garden trees along with a number of banyan trees - *Ficus* sp. (the figs of which were greatly relished by *P. cafer*) I thought it would provide a suitable habitat for the Red-whiskered Bulbul if it was introduced into the large plantation at Vijaya Vilas (Mandvi). So during my visit to Bombay early in 1950 I bought over a dozen *P. jocosus* from the Crawford Market and brought them

with me to Bhuj. I released them in the Vijaya Vilas plantation in late May 1950. There was no competition either for food or living space with the endemic species of birds there, so the introduced bulbuls settled down in their new environment. On my visits there I regularly saw them but saw no actual breeding activity. However I once came across a nest of this species built in a large banana plant at the base of the stems of two leaves. A Red-whiskered Bulbul kept on visiting the nest, which at that time was empty. It was a round cup having the shape and size typical of the Pycnonotidae. I last saw two Red-whiskered Bulbuls on January 28, 1973. Owing to two consecutive droughts in 1970 and 1971 along with paucity of rain in 1972, the level of ground water in the wells at Vijaya Vilas went deep down to the extent that sea water started seeping in. Much of the lush vegetation dried up and *Prosopis juliflora* eventually spread all over the plantation. This caused

the complete disappearance of the Red-whiskered Bulbul. It is obvious that this species could not withstand the rigors of a semi-desert ecosystem that its habitat changed into due to the causes described above. Though actual breeding activities were not observed in my opinion, some breeding must have taken place during the period of over twenty years that the bird survived there, for it is well known that a bird of that size cannot live that long in the wild.

References:

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Mass Mortality of Sea Gulls at Lakhota Lake, Jamnagar, Gujarat

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Mass mortality of sea gulls was reported in and around Lakhota Lake, Jamnagar City, Gujarat during January 2006. This was shocking news for the bird lovers in the midst of fear about 'Bird Flue' epidemic.

As we all know, the sea gulls are migratory birds, visiting the Indian subcontinent during winter. These birds come to Gujarat in large numbers on extensive coastline and large network of inland wetlands. Amongst several waterbirds visiting freshwater wetlands, the gulls (Lariidae) create spectacular scene at Lakhota Lake, Jamnagar City which is a freshwater body in the centre of town. Very large number of ducks, coots, cormorants, pelicans and gulls spend their winter in this urban lake. Besides being a place of recreation, many people visit temple on the edge of this lake.

During second week of January 2006, the unusual and sudden death of gulls was reported at Lakhota Lake, Jamnagar City. Amongst the dead gulls, majority were juveniles. Later from the carcass specimens, these dead gulls were identified as Slender-billed Gull (*Larus genei*). According to local people, the gulls started dying since the first week of

January 2006. The mortality of gulls increased during the second week and deaths of about 30 to 40 gulls were recorded. The Gujarati and English daily newspapers reported the deaths of more than 600 gulls! In the last week of January there was an additional report of death of around 500 gulls in coastal area that has largely gone un-noticed. The local and national daily newspapers highlighted the matter for several days. The news channels also gave special coverage to the incidence and telecasted the news in midst of fear about spread of Bird Flue. Mortality of gulls was not only a matter of concern for the nature lovers and bird-watchers of the town but also for the people around as it was a matter of their sentiments. The people feared the deaths due to secondary poisoning to birds through fishes poisoned by fishermen (to obtain larger haul of fishes in short period) or due to water and so fishes turned toxic because of dumping of biomedical waste in the lake by the municipality. People also suspected the poisoning due to food offered locally.

The carcasses were collected by the State Forest Department and sent to High Security Animal Disease (HSAD) Laboratory, Bhopal, Madhya

Pradesh, for detailed investigation. The HSAD Lab reports revealed mortality due to consumption of excessive amount of soda bicarbonate.

Many persons come to the lake for morning/evening walk or jogging and offer food /eatables (locally known as 'Ganthia' prepared from gram flour fried in oil) to gulls. Acrobatics of the gulls to pick up the food material also provide entertainment to the viewers. Daily about 50-60 kg of 'Ganthia' are offered. These 'Ganthia' are prepared and sold at the lake by local vendors. Normally, a little amount of soda bicarb is added while preparing 'Ganthia' to soften it. But according to local persons, most of the *Kandoi* (preparing and selling 'Ganthia' and other fried savories) around the lake use excessive quantity of soda bicarb (and detergents too) to make it cheap. These 'Ganthia' for birds were available at Rs. 35 to 40 per Kg only and this was the culprit. Excessive amount of soda bicarb and washing soda used in 'Ganthia' poisoned the birds. In fact, the bird lovers strongly suspected 'Ganthia' to be the source of poisoning, as 'Ganthia' available for birds were sold at half the price than those sold for human consumption. Hence, the birdwatchers and nature lovers immediately requested people not to offer any food to the gulls. The State Forest Department as well as the Jamnagar Municipal Corporation also enforced prevention of food offering. This action

certainly brought halt on mortality of gulls. The report confirmed the suspicion that cheaper quality of 'Ganthia' was the cause of this mortality.

Keeping in mind the severity of the incidence, Jamnagar Municipal Corporation (JMC) should take following mitigating measures to maintain the prevailing biodiversity and sanctity and serenity of aquatic environs of Lakhota lake:

- a) Offering food to birds or animals shows peoples' sympathy (Jivdaya). It may not be banned; but JMC should monitor the quality of the food sold.
- b) Fishing in this lake situated in the centre of the city should be banned. This required not only for maintaining religious sentiments of people, but also for maintaining food source for birds, and thereby maintaining recreational value of the lake.
- c) Use of pesticides, biocides, or fish-killing drugs is a legal offence. JMC should enforce this.
- d) JMC should not dump biomedical waste in the lake. There are strict rules for the disposal of biomedical waste, which should be observed by JMC. They should allot a new dumping site, on outskirts on the city, for disposal of biomedical waste on permanent basis.

Acknowledgements: I thank Shri Chirag Solanki and Shri Kunal Joshi from Jamnagar for providing me required information.

VULTURE CELL – BCSG

The BCSG is running a 'Vulture Cell' and publishing a newsletter "Gyps" dedicated to vulture conservation. For further details please contact:

Shri Snehal Patel, 81, Sarjan Society, Athwa Lines, Surat. e-mail: snehalpatel81@rediffmail.com, (9825110283)
OR **Shri Kartik Shartri**, Ashokwadi, Panchvati, Ellisbridge, Ahmedabad- 380 006. e-mail: kartikshastri@hotmail.com

Vulture Help Line

If you find an injured vulture, please contact following persons for rescue:

Surat: Snehal Patel -9825110283

Ahmedabad: Sohun Mukherjee- 9376121616

Anand: Dhaval Patel- 9898142170

Mahuva: Ruchi Dave- 9998047755

BIRDING NOTES

First Breeding Record of Tickell's Blue-Flycatcher from Kachchh

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I saw a pair of Tickell's Blue-Flycatcher (*Cyornis tickelliae*) at *Chaduva Rakhhal* – about 25 km North-West to Bhuj on 28th July 2006. One of the birds went inside an old ruined house. I followed it and found its nest with two chicks. The chicks were brown in colour with yellowish throat. The nest was cup-shaped, made up of grass and situated inside a hollow in the wall. I again visited the place on 3rd August 2006 and found that the nest was empty. Tickell's Blue-Flycatcher is a winter visitor to Kachchh. Shri Himmatsinhji had recorded it first

time at Vijaya Vilas Palace, Mandvi on 10th January 1966 (JBNHS 53(1)). Thereafter, Shri Navin Bapat and S. N. Varu had recorded it at Suteshwar (Bhuj) on 13th October 1991. After a long gap, again Shri Varu recorded it at *Chaduva Rakhhal* on 12th and 23rd March 2006. However, there is no any previous record of its breeding from Kachchh.

Reference:

Himmatsinhji, M. K. (1966). Another bird record from Kutch. *J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* 63(1): 202-203.

Changes in the Species Diversity

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After a long time I was confined to my home for a continuous period of ten days because I was indisposed. I was astonished to note the change that has taken place in the species composition in my own garden.

The first and remarkable change being the presence of Rose-ringed Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*). Somehow till about a few years ago (our garden is now thirty-five year old) there were no parakeets to be seen. But now there seems to be a flock of ten birds resident to the garden. My late grandfather had issued strict instruction against planting a fruit tree in the garden, as it used to cause nuisance of trespassing and kids pelting trees to beget fruits. The second change noticed was planting of large trees in center of the garden, as the flowerbeds are no longer being cultivated. Parakeets are attracted to the *chikoo* and mango trees in the garden. Even the Asian Koel (*Eudynamis scolopacea*) has become resident now, in the past it used to arrive in the early part of summer and leave by mid of monsoon. Unfortunately due to loss of flowering trees and flowerbeds the Purple Sunbirds (*Nectarinia asiatica*) no longer nest in the garden.

We used to have twenty years old tall Eucalyptus and Indian Cork tree (*buch*) trees on the periphery of the garden. These trees used to attract a group of Oriental White Ibis (*Threskiornis melanocephalus*) that used to regularly roost in these tall trees. Black Ibis (*Pseudibis papillosa*) nested in the adjacent Eucalyptus tree. Both gone, as few trees were lost to the 1998 cyclone and others were disturbed by a new electricity supply line. Similarly, more than two hundred Small Bee-eaters (*Merops orientalis*) that used to roost in the Eucalyptus tree too have stopped visiting. Ever since the swimming pool converted into fishpond, pumped dried, the White-breasted Kingfisher (*Helcyon smyrnensis*), that used to frequent our garden, is no more seen. The kingfisher used to be very tolerant to humans in its vicinity.

Amongst the nesting birds that have left our garden are – Common Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*), Purple Sunbird, White-throated Munia (*Lonchura malabarica*) and House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*). The new arrivals are Shikra (*Accipiter badius*) and Common Babbler (*Turdoides caudatus*). The ones that have stayed are, Red Collard-Dove (*Streptopelia tranquebarica*), Little Brown Dove

(*Streptopelia senegalensis*), Greater Coucal (*Centropus sinensis*), Common Tailorbird (*Orthotomus sutorius*), House Crow (*Corvus splendens*), Oriental Magpie –Robin (*Copsychus ularis*), Black Drongo (*Dicrurus macrocercus*) and Red-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*).

It is indeed intriguing how changes in vegetation in your backyard can make such a vast change in the species diversity.

Black-breasted Weaver in Surendranagar

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I had been on Surendranagar - Lakhtar Highway with a friend for birdwatching on 6th August 2006. At about 20 km from Surendranagar, we observed on a roadside reed, a group of weavers which looked a bit different from the common Baya Weaver (*Ploceus philippinus*). Upon careful observation, we saw the brilliant yellow crown contrasting with the black throat, nape and breast but there was no streaking on breast and nape. This species resembled the Black-breasted Weaver (*Ploceus benghalensis*). It was in the breeding plumage. Its description is as under:

Male: Size 12-14 cm, brilliant yellow crown, and black throat extending up to the breast; black nape and partially streaked mantle.

Female: Size same, gray crown, yellow supercilium and black mustachial strip with broken faint brown band on the breast.

The commonly found species in this area is the Baya Weaver. Unlike Baya, it didn't show yellow breast and yellow mantle with streaking. Also it didn't have any streaking on the breast and mantle, which differentiates it from the nearest possibility of it being a Streaked Weaver. With the help of pictures taken on both the instances and consulting the experienced birdwatchers from Surendranagar, this bird was identified as the Black-breasted Weaver.

We visited the same place again on 11th August 2006, but we didn't find them there. So we made our way further towards Lakhtar vidi (grassland) where interestingly, we observed nesting

of a huge flock of Baya Weaver and a little distance away, was the Black-breasted Weaver, which we were looking for; It was preparing the nest.

Black-breasted Weaver has never been observed in this area before. According to Grimmett *et al.* (1999), this species is mainly from Indus and Gangetic plains of Northern India. However, the species has been recorded as individual sighting in Bhavnagar and Tarapur in Gujarat*. The current record shows its presence and breeding status in this area as well.

Reference:

Grimmett, R., C. Inskipp and T. Inskipp (1999). Pocket Guide to the Birds of Indian Subcontinent. Oxford University Press, Mumbai.

*[There are several published records of occurrence and breeding of Black-breasted Weaver in Vadodara, Kheda, Anand, Ahmedabad, Bhavnagar and Rajkot districts. The current record of the species has helped to fill up the gap in our knowledge about its presence in Surendranagar district. Streaked Weaver is much more uncommon species than the Black-breasted Weaver in Gujarat. There are hardly one or two authentic records of the occurrence of Streaked Weaver from Gujarat. So any claim of sighting of Streaked Weaver is viewed with suspicion. Members are requested to refer the field guide and compare the characters of the species with the picture in it carefully before reaching any conclusion. Photographic evidence is always welcome. Eds.]

Birdwatching at Ratanmahal Wildlife Sanctuary

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BCSG and Prakruti Mitra Mandal, Dahod organized a workshop on 'Birds of Gujarat' at Ratanmahal Sloth Bear Sanctuary, Dahod during 17-19th February, 2007. The workshop was attended by delegates from all over the state. The participants reported the site (Kanjeta Guest House) in the sanctuary on 17th. The next day morning was spent for birdwatching along the main road leading to the top of the 'mahal'. Places like 'Popatia Kuva' and 'Pipargota' were quite rewarding. Even at the workshop venue at Kanjeta, Indian Silk Cottons (*Bombax ceiba*) and Flame of the Forest (*Butea monosperma*) were in full bloom and attracted Flowerpeckers, Sunbirds, Warblers and other nectar-loving birds like magnets.

After morning birdwatching, the workshop was inaugurated by Shri Pradeep Khanna, Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forest. Shri Ajay Desai briefed the participants objectives of the workshop and felicitated Shri Lavkumar Khachar, Shri Lalsinh Raol and Shri Jummabhai Moria. Lectures by dignitaries were often delightfully interspersed with shrill calls of Crested Serpent Eagle. In surrounding trees one could observe nesting of Indian Roller and Yellow-

throated Sparrows who carried on undeterred with their own business. Ratanmahal Sactuary appeared to be harbouring good avifaunal diversity, augmented further by winter visitors. One of the commonest birds there appeared to be Yellow-throated Sparrow, which was present in abundance. Sightings of forest birds like Grey Junglefowl, Black-headed Oriole, various woodpeckers, barbets and Chloropsis etc. gladdened all birdwatchers. Evening spent at the sunset point of the sanctuary was a pleasant experience.

During a discussion session on 18th February night, Shri Mukesh Bhatt from Nature Club, Surat played some of his recordings of calls of various nocturnal birds. It was interesting to notice that a Mottled Wood Owl was attracted to the vicinity in response to the playback of the calls of its species.

On 19th the participants visited the camp site developed by Forest Department. The site being in the valley and close to the water stream was much greener than other parts of the sanctuary. Shri Ajai Desai and his team of Prakruti Mitra Mandal deserve full complements for very nice arrangement including delightful food to make this workshop a success.

List of the birds sighted during 17-19 February 2006 at Ratanmahal Wildlife Sanctuary (Contributed by: M. U. Jat, S. N. Varu, Kamal Bhatt, Ashwin Pomal, Nandita Muni, Mukesh Bhatt, Ashok Mashru, D. N. Rank, Piyush Patel and others)

1. Little Green Heron (*Butorides striatus*)
2. Indian Pond-Heron (*Ardeola grayii*)
3. Cattle Egret (*Bubulcus ibis*)
4. Black Ibis (*Pseudibis papillosa*)
5. Oriental Honey-Buzzard (*Pernis ptilorhynchus*)
6. Black Kite (*Milvus migrans*)
7. Shikra (*Accipiter badius*)
8. Besra Sparrowhawk (*Accipiter virgatus*)
9. White-eyed Buzzard (*Buiastur teesa*)
10. Bonelli's Eagle (*Hieraetus fasciatus*)
11. Crested Serpent-Eagle (*Spilornis cheela*)
12. Lesser Kestrel (*Falco naumanni*)
13. Common Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*)
14. Grey Francolin (*Francolinus pondicerianus*)
15. Grey Junglefowl (*Gallus sonneratii*)
16. Indian Peafowl (*Pavo cristatus*)
17. Red-wattled Lapwing (*Vanellus indicus*)
18. Common Sandpiper (*Actitis hypoleucos*)
19. Yellow-legged Green-Pigeon (*Treron phoenicoptera*)
20. Blue Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*)
21. Spotted Dove (*Streptopelia chinensis*)
22. Little Brown Dove (*Streptopelia senegalensis*)
23. Alexandrine Parakeet (*Psittacula eupatria*)
24. Rose-ringed Parakeet (*Psittacula krameri*)
25. Plum-headed Parakeet (*Psittacula cyanocephala*)
26. Asian Koel (*Eudynamis scolopacea*)
27. Greater Coucal (*Centropus sinensis*)
28. Collared Scops-Owl (*Otus bakkamoena*)
29. Jungle Owlet (*Glaucidium radiatum*)
30. Spotted Owlet (*Athene brama*)
31. Mottled Wood-Owl (*Strix ocellata*)
32. Alpine Swift (*Tachymarpis melba*)
33. Asian Palm-Swift (*Cypsiurus balasiensis*)
34. Crested Tree-Swift (*Hemiprocne coronata*)
35. White-breasted Kingfisher (*Halcyon smyrnensis*)
36. Small Bee-eater (*Merops orientalis*)

37. Indian Roller (*Coracias benghalensis*)
38. Brown-headed Barbet (*Megalaima zeylanica*)
39. Coppersmith Barbet (*Megalaima haemacephala*)
40. Small Yellow-naped Woodpecker (*Picus chlorolophus*)
41. Lesser Golden-backed Woodpecker (*Dinopium benghalense*)
42. Yellow-fronted Pied Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos mahrattensis*)
43. Brown-capped Pygmy Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos nanus*)
44. Black-shouldered Woodpecker (*Chrysocolaptes festivus*)
45. Common Swallow (*Hirundo rustica*)
46. Red-rumped Swallow (*Hirundo daurica*)
47. Bay-backed Shrike (*Lanius vittatus*)
48. Rufous-backed Shrike (*Lanius schach*)
49. Eurasian Golden Oriole (*Oriolus oriolus*)
50. Black-headed Oriole (*Oriolus xanthornus*)
51. Black Drongo (*Dicrurus macrocerus*)
52. Ashy Drongo (*Dicrurus leucophaeus*)
53. White-bellied Drongo (*Dicrurus caeruleus*)
54. Greater Racket-tailed Drongo (*Dicrurus paradiseus*)
55. Brahminy Starling (*Sturnus pagodarum*)
56. Common Myna (*Acridotheres tristis*)
57. Indian Treepie (*Dendrocitta vagabunda*)
58. House Crow (*Corvus splendens*)
59. Jungle Crow (*Corvus macrorhynchos*)
60. Common Woodshrike (*Tephrodornis pondicerianus*)
61. Large Cuckoo-Shrike (*Coracina macei*)
62. Black-headed Cuckoo-Shrike (*Coracina melanoptera*)
63. Small Minivet (*Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*)
64. Common Iora (*Aegithina tiphia*)
65. Gold-fronted Chloropsis (*Chloropsis aurifrons*)
66. Jerdon's Chloropsis (*Chloropsis cochinchinensis*)
67. Red-vented Bulbul (*Pycnonotus cafer*)
68. Large Grey Babbler (*Turdoides malcolmi*)
69. Jungle Babbler (*Turdoides striatus*)
70. Tickell's Blue-Flycatcher (*Cyornis tickelliae*)
71. Grey-headed Flycatcher (*Culicicapa ceylonensis*)
72. White-browed Fantail-Flycatcher (*Rhipidura aureola*)
73. Asian Paradise-Flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi*)
74. Black-naped Monarch-Flycatcher (*Hypothymis azurea*)
75. Red-throated Flycatcher (*Ficedula parva*)
76. Franklin's Prinia (*Prinia hodgsonii*)
77. Common Tailorbird (*Orthotomus sutorius*)
78. Common Chiffchaff (*Phylloscopus collybita*)
79. Oriental Magpie-Robin (*Copsychus saularis*)
80. Black Redstart (*Phoenicurus ochruros*)
81. Indian Robin (*Saxicoloides fulicata*)
82. Blue-headed Rock-Thrush (*Monticola cinclorhynchus*)
83. Great Tit (*Parus major*)
84. Eurasian Tree Pipit (*Anthus trivialis*)
85. Yellow Wagtail (*Motacilla flava*)
86. Thick-billed Flowerpecker (*Dicaeum agile*)
87. Tickell's Flowerpecker (*Dicaeum erythrorhynchos*)
88. Purple Sunbird (*Nectarinia asiatica*)
89. Crimson Sunbird (*Aethopyga siparaja*)
90. Oriental White-eye (*Zosterops palpebrosus*)
91. House Sparrow (*Passer domesticus*)
92. Yellow-throated Sparrow (*Petronia xanthocollis*)

Hypocolius and Black Stork in the Little Rann of Kachchh

Chiku Vora¹, Faruk Chauhan¹, Shivbhadrasinh Jadeja² and Vishal Thoria³

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We visited the Little Rann of Kachchh for bird watching on 29th October 2005. On our way to Dehgam (small village close to Kharaghoda), we sighted a Hypocolius (*Hypocolius ampelinus*) perching on top of Babul tree (*Acacia nilotica*). We also sighted near Dehgam three Houbara Bustard (*Chlamydotis undulata*) at 17:45 hrs. Although the birds were just 30 meters away from us, we could not identify their sex due to dim light.

On 2nd November 2005 afternoon, once again we visited same area of the Little Rann. We checked water points and found some clue about presence of

small mammals. We found several footprints of Wolf (*Canis lupus pallipes*), Jackal (*Canis aureus*) and Jungle Cat (*Felis chaus*). We also sighted six Black Storks (*Ciconia nigra*) near the water point and Common Cranes (*Grus grus*), Western Marsh - Harriers (*Circus aeruginosus*) along with other birds on the waterbody.

Houbara Bustard is known to occur in the Little Rann of Kachchh. However, sighting of Hypocolius and Black Stork are new records for the area.

Sighting of White-winged Black Tern at Nalsarovar

Kasam Sama¹ and H. Kamat

¹Vekaria Village, via Sanand, Tal. Viramgam, Dist. Ahmedabad

Seven White-winged Black Terns (*Chlidonias leucopterus*) were sighted at Nalsarovar on 8th June 2006 at 12:00 hrs at a distance of about 200 meters West of the Forest Guest House. These birds were seen sitting on a vast patch of decayed floating vegetation, occasionally diving or taking short distance flights. Careful observation revealed that two White-winged Black Terns were in their breeding plumage whereas five birds were in their non-breeding plumage. Other birds in vicinity included Whiskered Terns (*Chlidonias hybridus*), Little Terns (*Sterna albifrons*), Common Terns (*Sterna hirundo*), Black-headed Gulls (*Larus ridibundus*), Lesser Whistling-Duck (*Dendrocygna javanica*), Common Coot (*Fulica atra*) and two unidentified large sized gulls. Incidentally, we sighted White-winged Black Terns at the same location on 25th June 2006 (6 birds, 2 in breeding plumage, 1 in partial breeding plumage and 3 in non-breeding plumage) and on 2nd July 2006 (5 birds, 1 in breeding plumage, 1 in partial breeding plumage and 3 in non-breeding plumage). White-winged Black Terns are known to be winter visitors frequenting fresh water wetlands and coastal areas.

Although considered to be widespread (Grimmett *et al.*, 2001), their reports from Gujarat are very scanty.*

Reference:

Grimmett R., C. Inskipp and T. Inskipp (2001). A Pocket Guide to Birds of Indian Subcontinent, Oxford University Press, New Delhi.

*[Published reports of the occurrence of White-winged Black Tern in the Gujarat State are very few. It has been recorded from Jasdan, Dist. Rajkot on 12th May 1955 by Shivraj Kumar (*J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* 53(1): 130); at Jamnagar on 14th May 1985 by Mundkur (*J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* 84(1): 208); at Porbandar on 27th April 1997 by Parasharya and Mukherjee (*J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* 98(1): 113-114); at Zainabad, Dist. Surendranagar on 4th January 1999 by Anand Prasad (*Indian Birds* 1(5): 117); at Devisar Tank, Bhuj on 6th June 2004 by Varu (*Newsletter for Ornithologist* 1(5): 77). An excellent review of the distribution of this species in India is given by Aashish Pittie and others in *Indian Birds* 1(4): 81-83, 2005.]

Heronries in Kachchh during 2005

S. N. Varu¹ and A. S. Pomal²

¹ Junavas, Temple Street, Madhapar, Ta. Bhuj-Kachchh 370 020.2. C/o Ponlal Jewellers, Volda Chowk, Bhuj-Kachchh 370 001.

On 14th August 2005 we saw a heronry of Cattle Egrets (*Bubulcus ibis*) on several trees in Rajendra Park, near Hamirsar Lake of Bhuj city. Six trees of Peepal, Neem and Eucalyptus were used for nesting. Out of total 138 nests counted, 57 nests were with fledglings while 81 nests were abandoned after breeding activity was over.

On 21st August 2005, we visited Vadasar Check Dam of Bhuj Taluka (27 km South - West of Bhuj). This Check Dam is built for recharge water. Fifteen Mesquite Trees (*Prosopis juliflora*) were occupied in the heronry. There were in all 450 nests of Cattle Egrets and 4 nests of Little Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax niger*) with fledglings.

Painted Storks (*Mycteria leucocephala*) had 3 nests, one in incubation stage and two under construction.

On 26th August 2005, Bandhavallo Check Dam at Vandhay village of Bhuj Taluka was visited. This site is 25 km South - West of Bhuj and is built for recharge water. Here *Prosopis juliflora* and *Acacia nilotica* trees were used for nesting. There were 450 nests of Cattle Egrets, of which 400 were with fledglings, 40 with chicks and 10 in incubation stage. The heronry also included Eurasian Spoonbill (*Platalea leucorodia*), Darters (*Anhinga melanogaster*) and Little Cormorants. There were 30 nests of Eurasian Spoonbills, of which 25 nests were

with chicks, while incubation was going on in 5 nests. We recorded 11 nests of Darters, 10 were with fledglings while incubation was going on in one nest. Out of 25 nests of Little Cormorants, 20 nests were with fledglings and 5 nests were with chicks.

At Palasva village of Rapar Taluka (About 150 km North-East of Bhuj) two heronries were found; one at Munjasar talav and another at Movaria talav, both are utilized for irrigation purpose. These sites were visited on 4th September 2005.

Munjasar talav: There was a colony of Eurasian Spoonbills, Painted Storks and Great Cormorant (*Phalacrocorax carbo*) on 200 Mesquite Trees. Each species was on a separate tree. There were about 300 nests of Spoonbills. Incubation was going on in 250 nests and chicks were seen in 50.

We counted about 150 nests of Painted Storks. Incubation was going on in 100 nests and 50 were under construction. Painted Storks were found bringing twigs in their beak. There were 40 nests of Great Cormorants in incubation stage.

Movaria talav: The heronry here included nesting of Great Cormorants, Eurasian Spoonbills and Little Cormorants. There were 57 nests of Great Cormorants on a single Tamarind Tree with incubation in progress in all the nests. The nests of Eurasian Spoonbills and Little Cormorants were distributed on 6 Mesquite Trees. There were 50 nests of Eurasian Spoonbills and 50 of Little Cormorants, all in incubation stage.

All these sites are noticed for the first time in Kachchh, which is worth recording.

A Visit to Paneli Vidi Prasad Ganpule

Parshuram Pottery Works, Opp. Nazarbaug Station, Morbi 363642. e-mail: prasadganpule@yahoo.com

I with my brother Rohit and friends visited Paneli Vidi near Morbi on 26th November 2006 at around 16:00 hrs. It is a *vidi* (grassland) near Morbi town in Rajkot District. At a small Check Dam in the *vidi*, we saw a juvenile of Greater Grey-headed Fish-Eagle (*Ichthyophaga ichhyaetus*). It was a very well wooded area and we were very much surprised to see this eagle. It had whitish belly with streaking on breast and head. It had completely grayish bill and white thighs. The large size was also indicative. I managed to take a photograph and confirmed its identity from the books (Kazmierczak, 2000, Grimmett *et al.*, 1999). I have been frequently visiting the *vidi* since last three years during all the seasons but this is the first time that I have seen this species. The next visit to this Vidi was on 29th December 2006 early in the morning to search for the eagle, but in vain. However, we did manage to see at least 3 Grey-necked Buntings (*Emberiza buchanani*) along with at least 30 Marshall's Iora (*Aegithina*

nigrolutea) at different parts of the *vidi*. I have frequently seen a large number of Marshall's Iora at this *vidi* in the winters too.

References:

- Kryszewski (2000). A Field Guide to the Birds of India. Om Book Services, New Delhi.
- Grimmett R., C. Inskipp and T. Inskipp. (1999). Pocket Guide to the Birds of the Indian Subcontinent. Oxford University Press, New Delhi.
- [Greater Grey-headed Fish-Eagle (*Ichthyophaga ichhyaetus*) has been recorded as vagrant in Gujarat State as both the books referred above show only two marks on the map of Gujarat. Recently, the species has also been reported from Kevdi Lake near Mandvi in Surat District on 30th January 2006 by Shri Mukesh Bhatt and published in *Flamingo* 4(1&2): 22. Hence this is an important record for Gujarat. Eds.]

VULTURE UPDATE

These are some of the sighting of vultures in Kachchh recorded by Shri S. N. Varu , Ashwin Pomal and others during 2005.

Date of observation	Place	Vulture spp	Activity	Birdwatcher
29.09.05	Poladia, Ta –Mandvi	WBV -20	Feeding on carcass	S. N. Varu, J. K. Tiwari, Bhuj
29.09.05	Dumra, Ta –Abdasa	WBV-01	Soaring	S. N. Varu, J. K. Tiwari, Bhuj
04.11.05	Moti Mau, Ta – Mandvi	WBV -08	Resting on tree (banyan, coconut), some nesting	S. N. Varu, Ashwin Pomal, Bhuj
4.11.05	Poladia, ta –Mandvi	WBV -09, EGV -05, EV -05	Near carcass	S. N. Varu, Ashwin Pomal, Bhuj
4.11.05	Kothara, ta –Abdasa	WBV -33, LBV -01, EGV -02	Soaring, near carcass and some WBV nesting	S. N. Varu, Ashwin Pomal,
04.11.05	Suthri, Ta –Abdasa	WBV -13	soaring, nesting on building	S. N. Varu, Ashwin Pomal, Bhuj
04.11.05	Jakhau, Ta –Abdasa	WBV -08	Nesting and Resting on Banayan tree	S. N. Varu, Ashwin Pomal, Bhuj
04.11.05	Palarghuna, Ta –Nakhatrana	LBV -04	Nesting	S. N. Varu, Ashwin Pomal, Bhuj
22.12.05	Poladia, Ta- Mandvi	WBV-100	Near carcass	S N. Varu, M. B. Khatri, Ashwin Pomal, Bhuj
22.12.05	Poladia, Ta- Mandvi	EGV-150	Near carcass	S N. Varu, M. B. Khatri, Ashwin Pomal, Bhuj

BCSG EVENTS

- A workshop on 'Birds of Gujarat' at was organized by the BCSG and Prakruti Mitra Mandal, Dahod at Ratanmahal Sloth Bear Sanctuary, Dahod during 17-19th February, 2007. This workshop was attended by 50+ delegates from all over the state and several forest department officials. The workshop was inaugurated by Shri Pradeep Khanna, Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forests. Shri Ajai Desai briefed about the objectives of the workshop. Issues related to birdwatching, conservation, monitoring of sanctuaries etc. were discussed. The senior birdwatchers Shri Lavkumar Khachar, Shri Lalsinh Raol and Shri Jummabhai Moria were felicitated on the occasion. Identification of species from bird calls was demonstrated by Shri Mukesh Bhatt by playing recording of different owls and nightjars during post-dinner session. The participants also visited the campsite developed by the forest department. Noteworthy bird sightings in this area

were Lesser Kestrel, Crested Serpent-Eagle, Alpine Swift, Grey-headed Flycatcher and Large Cuckoo-Shrike. A list of the birds recorded during three days camp is published in the 'Birding Notes' section of this newsletter.

- A one-day workshop on the 'Status of Vultures in Gujarat State' was organized by Dr. Bakul Trivedi, Shri Kartik Shastri and Shri Snehal Patel of the Vulture Cell at Vanchetana Kendra, S. G. Road, Ahmedabad on 9th December 2006. Dr. Vibhu Prakash (BNHS) and his colleagues from RSPB along with around 50 participants attended the workshop. Shri Pradeep Khanna, Additional Principal Chief Conservator of Forest remained present throughout the day and gave his valuable inputs. Several members made presentation about the status of vultures in their area. The workshop concluded with remarks that the vulture population is declining at an alarming rate and needs sincere and serious efforts urgently to conserve them.

BCSG PS PROGRAMMES

• Annual General Body Meeting: Thol Bird Sanctuary 16th December 2007: The AGB meeting of the BCSG will be held on 16th Dec at Thol Bird Sanctuary. Registration fees is Rs. 100/-. A birdwatching programme is also arranged alongwith. A vehicle from Ahmedabad to Thol and back to Ahmedabad is arranged. Those who want to participate should inform to Dr. D. N. Rank, Anand (02692-260129/ 93774 83233).

Last date for confirming participation is 1st Dec. Tentative schedule of the programme is as under:

7:00	Reporting at Van Chetna Kendra, Sarkhej – Gandhinagar Road, Near Gurudwara, Ahmedabad for vehicle
8:00 -10:00	Bird-watching at Thol BS
10:00 -10:30	Tea and break-fast
10:30 -13:00	AGB Meeting and election
13:00	Lunch
16:30	Return to Ahmedabad

RECENT PUBLICATIONS ON BIRDS OF GUJARAT

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- Chhokar, J. S. (2006). Indian Pitta (*Pitta brachyura brachyura*) sighted at the IIM-Ahmedabad campus. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* 46(2): 29.
- Gadhvi, I. R. and P. P. Dodia (2006). Indian White-backed Vultures *Gyps bengalensis* nesting in Mahuva, Bhavnagar district, Gujarat, India. *Indian Birds* 2(2): 36.
- Jethva, A. B. (2006). White-backed Vultures *Gyps bengalensis* in Gujarat. *Indian Birds* 2(4): 108-109.
- Khacher, I. (2006). A flight down memory lane – 1: half a century of birds! *Indian Birds* 2(6): 178-179.
- Khacher, L. and B. Rughani (2006). Slender-billed Curlew *Numenius tenuirostris* Vieillot – A probable new addition to Indian birds. *J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* 103(1): 99-100.
- Khacher, L. (2006). The Sarus Crane *Grus antigone* is on its way out. *Indian Birds* 2(6): 168-169.
- Mavadia, D. (2006). Painted Sandgrouse at Kevadia colony, Gujarat. *Indian Birds* 2: 23.
- Soni, V. C. and R. Jadav (2006). Ecological importance of the Khirsara Vidi (grassland), Gujarat, India, considering avifauna as an indicator group. *Newsletter for Birdwatchers* 46(6): 83-86.
- Tere, A. (2006). Sun-bathing by Yellow-legged Green-Pigeon *Treron phoenicoptera* at Vadodara, Gujarat, India. *Indian Birds* 2(2): 34-35.
- Tiwari, J. K. and Anupama (2006). Nest structure variation in Common Tailorbird *Orthotomus sutorius* in Kutch, Gujarat. *Indian Birds* 2:15.
- Tiwari, J. K., S. N. Varu and A. O. Langa (2006). Eurasian Sparrowhawk *Accipiter nisus* in Kachchh, Gujarat, India. *Indian Birds* 2(4): 107.
- Trivedi, P. and V. C. Soni (2006). Significant bird records and local extinctions in Purna and Ratanmahal Wildlife Sanctuaries, Gujarat, India. *Forktail* 22: 39-48.
- Vyas, R. (2006). The fate of a small population of the Indian White-backed Vultures *Gyps bengalensis* in Vadodara (Gujarat, India). *Indian Birds* 2(5): 140-141.

SOME INTERESTING BIRD SIGHTINGS

1. Sociable Lapwing (*Vanellus gregarius*) -27 in freshly sown wheat field at Navianai village near Bechraji (Mehsana District) on 23rd Nov. 2006 -Mujahid Malik of Rann Rider Tours and Travels (Dasada, District Surendranagar).Times of India dated 26th November
2. Black Stork (*Ciconia nigra*)-3 at Deri dam, near Dantiwada, Banaskantha District on 25th February 2006 -Uday Vora, Gandhinagar
3. Asian Brown Flycatcher (*Muscicapa dauurica*)-1 at Khadoti village, near Dhuvaran, Taluka-Khambhat, District Anand on 13th January 2006 -B. M. Parasharya and Anika Tere, Anand.
4. Oriental Turtle -Dove (*Streptopelia orientalis*) -8 near Bordevi, Girnar Taleti, Dist. Junagadh. on 13th Dec. 2005 -Kartik Upadhyay, Vadodara.
5. White-bellied Minivet -1 was seen near the Pakhdo hill in Moti-Virani village -Jugal Tiwari , Moti-Virani, Kachchh.
6. Black-capped Kingfisher (*Halcyon pileata*) near Khavda town in Banni area, Kachchh on 7th November 2006. - Jugal Tiwari , Moti-Virani, Kachchh.
7. Crested Bunting (*Melophus lathami*) male -1 near Shamlaji on 10th Jan. 2005 – V.A. Vora, Gandhinagar.
8. Mallard (*Anas platyhyhchos*)-3 and Greater Flamingo (*Phoenicopterus ruber*)-600 at Bhaskarpura wetland, Lakhtar Taluka Surendranagar District on 22nd February 2006 -Chiku Vora, Surendranagar.
9. Eurasian Wryneck (*Jynx torquia*)-1 pair of, Rain Quail in the *Vidi* in the outskirts of Gondal on 8th September 2006-Dhaivat Hathi and Rajdeep Jhala.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

• While visiting the Pascham area in Banni night when I leave him free. There is no fear of cat or dogs in Kachchh, Gujarat, (7th November 2006), I came across one Albino Little Brown Dove in Khavda area. Common Cranes (at least 20,000) are seen in the wetlands like *Chhari-Dhand*, *Servo Dhand*, *Vakeria Dhand*, *Hodko Thath* and *Baghadia Thath*. *Dhand*, *Kar*, *Thath* and *Chachh* are the local names for the seasonal waterbodies in Banni area of Kachchh, Gujarat, India, These wetlands in good monsoon and following winters serve as the best wintering, staging, roosting and, feeding ground for migratory birds. Many heronry birds also nest in these areas.

While I was returning from Banni grasslands, I saw a nightjar on road at 19:30 hrs. I took some pix and kept taking pix from close quarters, I was surprised to see that the nightjar was not flying; it finally struggled to move with broken wing. I caught the nightjar carefully and found him with a broken wing bleeding. The nightjar is with me for last 3 days. It accepts insect food by hand and even takes some water when offered. I am keeping the bird in a bamboo basket and do not know what to do with it, I do not think the nightjar will be able to fly. The wing injury is healed now and the bird moves walking in

my house. I will release him when I leave him free. There is no fear of cat or dogs in my house when all the doors are closed. Can anyone tell me how to keep this nightjar?

- Jugal Tiwari , Moti-Virani, Kachchh.

• This has reference to your query regarding the number of Marshall's Ioras (*Aegithina nigrolutea*) seen in winter (30 in number). This could be a result of some local migration. During my earlier visit to *vidi* on 19th July 2007 at around 16:00 hours, I saw 2 male Marshall's Ioras in full breeding plumage wherein the yellow collar was very distinct. I intend to visit the *vidi* frequently in the winter months to recheck the same. Also I have checked the call of Common Iora (*Aegithina tiphia*) in the website www.indiabirds.com. Also in my visit to Gir forest on 10th and 11th June 2007 I saw Common Iora in good numbers in breeding plumage calling lustily. (Reader's birding note is published in the current issue)

-Prasad Ganpule, Morbi

• 'Flamingo' (Jan-June 06) has much interesting material. You are lucky to have so many birds and so many interested members.

-Zafer Futehally, Bangalore.

FROM THE PRESIDENT

While I was writing about water bodies, I was reminded of the developments over the last century on 'Chhachhla Dhandh' in western Banni of Kachchh. During the rule of Maharao Khengarji, the grand father of our senior bird watcher Himmingshji (Bawa Saheb), Greylag Geese regularly wintered in large number there. In those days Greylags were not regularly wintering visitors else where in Gujarat. The geese have stopped using the Dhandh, if my information is correct and today are to be regularly seen around Ahmedabad in Central Gujarat! So the poser is, why are they not using Dhandh? That they have shifted actually to an area with greater human disturbance should make us think. For one or more reasons the Dhandh has undergone changes, possibly salinity increased, surrounding grass overgrazed and these changes had started manifesting themselves before the many reservoirs were constructed in Kachchh and fresh water flows into the Banni obstructed and well before the spread of "Ganda Bawal" into the Banni. All water bodies undergo hydrological changes and maintaining them in pristine condition requires the highest level of management –human intervention can not be avoided. Incidentally, the geese favoured a shift to the environs of Ahmedabad possibly because of better irrigation and rising of wheat and other winter crops. I wonder whether the development the Thol reservoir coincided with the shift. Anyway, the arrival of the Narmada waters will induce great opportunities to experiment and learn. In any case, they will throw up great challenges.

Should, the Nal Sarovar for instance, be filled in the event of a draught? Should surplus water be permitted to drain into the Little Rann? Both the Nal Sarovar and the Rann are natural flood water recipients so doubts about artificially inundating them may be valid. This is not true say of the Thol or the Khijadia Water Bird Sanctuaries even so, management becomes essential, only the levels need to be determined.

The first question to be asked is why have we wanted an area notified as a protected area? The most glaring example which just can not be overlooked is that of the Porbandar Water Bird Sanctuary. This sanctuary was notified on the strength of its astounding display of Lesser Flamingos. It was every ones concern that the area would get "reclaimed" and built over and the magnificent heritage of Porbandar would be lost. The irony is that the notification has resulted in just this. The flamingos have shifted precisely because what they sought –the blue green algae scum on shallow sewage water was gone as the water deepened. The place is a vast cesspool breeding million of mosquito larvae. Should the place be denotified? Would draining away of the water make it attractive for the flamingoes to return –they are in the vicinity –or should it be developed into a general water bird sanctuary? As it stands today, it is a health hazard and monument to our general ignorance about hydrology. This is not a criticism rather a challenge to amateur and professional conservations, biologists and managers.

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