

## Sighting of Indian Pitta *Pitta brachyura* in north Gujarat

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On 20.v.2005 we spotted an Indian Pitta *Pitta brachyura* at 09:38 hrs, in the forested environs (24°24'N 73°00'E) of Bora village, Sabarkantha district (Gujarat). It was perched 8 m above ground, on the primary branch of a *Ficus bengalensis* tree in a degraded dry deciduous forest, with sparse vegetation and agriculture on either side. This region forms the southern portion of the Aravali Hills.

Indian Pitta is known to occur in well-

wooded regions of India, south of 1,200 m in the Himalaya range, central India, Bihar, Jharkhand, some parts of Western Ghats, and south Gujarat (Ali 1996, Grimmett et al. 1999). In Gujarat it is reported from Saurashtra (Dharmakumarsinhji 1956), but there is no record of its presence in north Gujarat. The distribution maps in Grimmett et al. (1999) and Kazmierczak (2000) indicate that it is a summer visitor only to parts of south Gujarat.

After our initial sighting, the Indian Pitta was either sighted or heard three times in summer (June) and 16 times during the monsoon (July-September), in various types of habitat. A majority of the sightings were in the dry deciduous forest. The details on the forest type, altitude, coordinates and place for each sighting and number of birds seen are given in Table 1.

**Table 1: Details on sighting location of Indian Pitta in the forests of north Gujarat region (May-September 2005)**

No.	Place of sighting (# sighted)	Forest type	Co-ordinates	Altitude (m)
<b>I Summer (May &amp; June)</b>				
1.	Near Vanaj (1)	Moist deciduous	23°59'N 73°18'E	407
2.	Near Ajepur (2)	Agriculture fringe	23°59'N 73°14'E	298
3.	Vagheshwari village (1)	Dry deciduous	23°50'N 73°15'E	319
<b>II Monsoon (July-September)</b>				
4.	Near Pansa (1)	Dry deciduous	24°17'N 72°50'E	460
5.	Borli village (1)	Dry deciduous	24°16'N 72°49'E	495
6.	Trishulia Ghat (2)	Dry deciduous	24°15'N 72°48'E	412
7.	Near Viramveri (2)	Dry deciduous	24°17'N 72°47'E	428
8.	Piplavali Vav (3)	Dry deciduous	24°14'N 72°48'E	331
9.	Ghareda (1)	Dry deciduous	24°16'N 72°47'E	295
10.	Rapat (2)	Dry deciduous	24°14'N 72°48'E	338
11.	Harivav (2)	Dry deciduous	24°14'N 72°47'E	297
12.	Khokhra Ghat (1)	Dry deciduous	24°13'N 72°47'E	349
13.	Isharia village (1)	Thorn mix dry deciduous	24°17'N 72°43'E	383
14.	Way to Guda village (2)	Dry deciduous	24°20'N 72°45'E	433
15.	Near Bhayala village (1)	Dry deciduous	24°17'N 72°44'E	?
16.	After Viramveri (2)	Dry deciduous	24°17'N 72°45'E	447
17.	Ranpur bungalow (1)	Riverine forest	24°18'N 72°55'E	310
18.	Danta to Hardad (1)	Dry deciduous	24°11'N 72°47'E	339
19.	Danta to Hardad (1)	Dry deciduous	24°11'N 72°49'E	376

The above sightings establish the fact that the Indian Pitta is not only a summer visitor to Gujarat, but also remains in the monsoon season, as mentioned by Dharmakumarsinhji (1956), based on his sighting and breeding records from the Saurashtra region. Though we saw displaying birds along the upper slopes of river valleys with dense shrub undergrowth and trees till the end of September, we could not locate a nest as evidence of its breeding

in north Gujarat. It has been reported to breed regularly in valleys close to the base of the hill in Gir forest and occasionally in other parts of Saurashtra (Dharmakumarsinhji 1956).

Our observations update the distributional range for this species.

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## Nest structure variation in Common Tailorbird *Orthotomus sutorius* in Kutch, Gujarat

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(With one photograph online at: www.indianbirds.in)

Common Tailorbird *Orthotomus sutorius* is seen throughout the desert district of Kutch (Gujarat, India). Here its nesting season is from June to September, when broad-leaved monsoon plants appear. The usual nest type i.e., a pouch formed by stitching together two leaves, was observed in Bhuj (Gujarat) by S.N. Varu (*verbally*). Ali (1945) suspected that in Kutch, owing to scarcity of large-leaved plants, Common Tailorbirds might be forced to construct a

different type of nest, perhaps a purse of woven fibres, as the *Prinias* (*Prinia* spp.) generally do. He added, "I leave this point to other observers to verify".

On 2.vii.2005 we came across a nest of a Common Tailorbird in Mr Dilip Khatau's farmhouse, on the way to Nani Aral in Kutch. The nest was a cup of soft material, slung from a small shelter of dry and dead date-palm leaves, 1.2 m above the ground. The use of plant leaves, stitched together to

form a pouch, was not present. Neither was green grass, used by Rufous-fronted *Prinia* *Prinia buchanani* and Grey-breasted *Prinia* *P. hodgsonii* in the construction of their nests, present. The nest contained three bluish-white eggs, which a Common Tailorbird was incubating.

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## Nesting of Plum-headed Parakeet *Psittacula cyanocephala* in a building

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This note reports an instance of Plum-headed Parakeet *Psittacula cyanocephala*, which is primarily a tree hole nesting species, nesting in a hole in the wall of a double-storey building in Pune city, Maharashtra state.

The residential area of Kothrud, in the western part of Pune, has a lot of tree cover, primarily road-side, fruit and ornamental trees and plants in the gardens and parks that attract a wide variety of birds. Small flocks of Plum-headed Parakeet are regularly heard, identified by their distinctive "tooi?" calls, as they fly through our neighbourhood. They are often seen feeding in the gardens. The area is also home to the Rose-ringed Parakeet *P. krameri* and Alexandrine Parakeet *P. eupatria*.

Along a busy lane that serves as an access to my housing colony, between September and April 2005, I regularly observed a small flock of Plum-headed Parakeet flying around a two-storey stone-walled house that adjoins the road. The birds were seen landing on the trees around the house and often descending into a custard apple tree *Annona* sp., to eat the

fruit.

From 21.ii.2005 onwards, I observed that a pair was regularly perching around a horizontal crack in the vertical wall of the building just below the flat concrete roof (see photo). The crack was over 30 cm in length and about 5 cm at its widest. One or both birds would descend from the roof and land on the crack or land on the roof and then fly down and perch at the edge of the crack. Both sexes were observed disappearing into the crack and remaining in the hole for the duration of my observations, which lasted 5-10 minutes each time as I did not want to attract the attention of people to the nest.

On 2.iv.2005 I took a few photos of the bird at the hole from the street, an action that caught the attention of the people using the lane. A road-side bicycle repairer, whose shop is opposite the house, informed me that the parakeets had been nesting there for several years.

A search of observations on the nesting habits of the Plum-headed Parakeet in literature and on the Internet produced only a single reference to a website on parakeets

in which it is recorded that the species occasionally nests in crevices of buildings (<http://home.wanadoo.nl/psittaculaworld/Species/P-cyanocephala.htm>, accessed on 16.iv.2005). All other references to the breeding habits of the species refer to its tree hole nesting habit (Ali & Ripley 1983, Grimmett et al. 1998), although the Delhi Bird Club has beautiful photographs of the bird taking to nesting in a wooden nest-box placed on a tree (Gopi Sundar *in litt.*, April 2005).

During this period, I regularly observed the female going into the nest hole. In addition, on more than one occasion, I also observed the male disappear into the nest hole and remain there for at least several minutes at a time. It is likely that it was involved in incubating eggs and or brooding chicks. However, Ali & Ripley (1983) state that incubation and feeding of chicks appears to be the sole responsibility of the hen and further, the contribution of the male to the process, if any, is unknown. However, L. Namassivayan (*in litt.*, March 2005) informed me that in the Wynaad district of Kerala where he and his