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The occurrence of Grey Hypocolius *Hypocolius ampelinus* in Kutch, Gujarat, India

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Previous records of Grey Hypocolius *Hypocolius ampelinus* in the Indian subcontinent are given, and details of recent records from Kutch, Gujarat, India are detailed, with information on arrival and departure dates, behaviour, food and biometrics of trapped birds.

The earliest record of the occurrence of the Grey Hypocolius *Hypocolius ampelinus* in the Indian subcontinent was one collected on 6 March 1875 in Larkana district, Pakistan (Blanford 1875). It was next recorded by Duke on 26 April 1877 from Kalat in Baluchistan, Pakistan. There were apparently no further records until 14 November 1930 when Dr Salim Ali collected a specimen from Kihim, Colaba district, Maharashtra, India (Ali 1931). There was another gap of nearly 30 years before two were collected on 22 and 23 March 1960 at Kuar Bet, north of Pachham Island, on the edge of the Great Rann of Kutch (Shekar 1960).

Based on these records, Ali and Ripley (1987) described the species as a rare vagrant to the subcontinent. Roberts (1992) referred to Ali and Ripley's comments on status, but noted that recent sightings in Pakistan may indicate that it is an irregular but not uncommon visitor to the remote desert tracts in more southern latitudes of Baluchistan. He referred to a pair seen in 1942 by A. F. P. Christison at Dalbandin in the Chagai; more recently, he and R. Passburg had seen small parties of this species in the Hab valley region (west of Karachi) between 3 February and 6 March 1984, including a flock of 16 birds on 17 February. In the same locality Asad Ali and R. Passburg saw Hypocolius in some numbers in 1986 and 1989. Roberts saw 25 to 30 birds going to roost in pairs at Zangi Nawar lake in the Chagai desert on 1 May 1985; they behaved excitedly and called continuously.

J.K.T. studied the Grey Hypocolius for five seasons at Fulay village, Kutch (Fig. 1), whilst working on first the Bird Migration Study Project (1990-1991) and subsequently the Grassland Ecology Project (1992 onwards).

Situated between the villages of Chhari and Fulay, in the vicinity of the latter village, is a 5 km² patch of thin scrub jungle, most of which lies in a dry riverbed starting from near the former village. This was the main study area of the various activities of the Grey Hypocolius. S.N.V. (accompanied by some members of the Pelican Nature Club) was the first person to see this species in Kutch. This was a female in a *Salvadora persica* bush near Chhari-

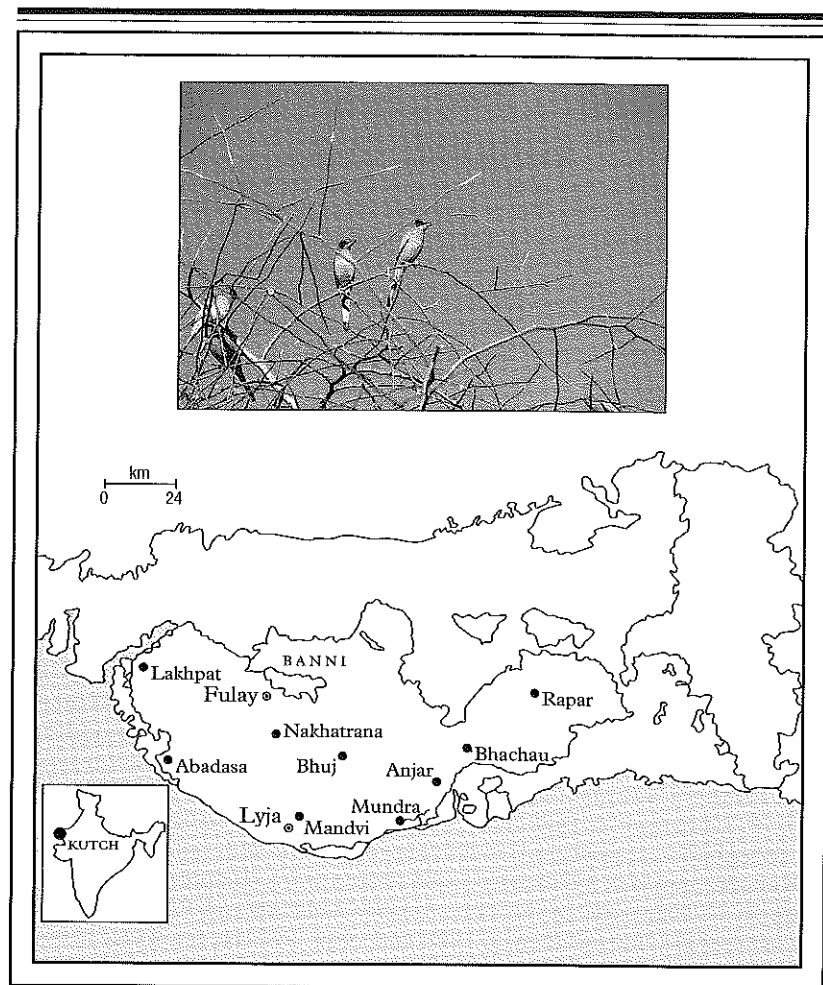


Figure 1. The location of Fulay village, Kutch and inset Grey Hypocolius.

Dhand on 23 January 1990. On the same afternoon they came across a female drinking water at the village tank of Fulay. Thereafter, Hypocolius were seen, usually in small numbers (2 to 6), but sometimes in larger numbers, in the scrub and near the village up until 1994. The trees preferred by the birds were babool *Acacia nilotica* and piloo *Salvadora persica*.

Apart from keeping a watch from time to time on the Hypocolius in the study area, two surveys were carried out to look for the species in the Banni grassland; however, J.K.T. failed to find it there. It appears that it may be

more worthwhile to search for it in the areas to the east and for some distance west of the Chhari-Fulay habitat. J.K.T. toured the Mandvi sub-district of Kutch on 6 February 1994, where he unexpectedly came across a female Hypocolius in the environs of the Lyja creek. She was feeding on the berries of a *Salvadora persica* growing at the foot of the coastal sand dunes. This locality is situated about 15 km west of the minor port of Mandvi and about 70 km SSW of Fulay-Chhari.

Arrival and departure

The month of arrival varies considerably, although local movements in Kutch might take place after arrival which would confuse the picture. Thus the incoming and outgoing birds may stay on in some places other than the study area of Fulay, depending on food availability and other factors. Information on the movements of this species elsewhere in India and Pakistan are required to elucidate the situation. The details of dates and the numbers of birds seen are given in Table 1. The first two birds were recorded in January 1990 and the earliest birds to arrive were in November 1993. The maximum count was 150 birds in 1993.

Food and feeding habits

Throughout the period they were watched the Hypocolius were seen to feed on the ripe berries of *Salvadora persica*. Flocks or individual birds fed in the outer and middle canopies, hanging on to thin branches and twigs and picking the berries. Feeding was observed on many occasions in association with White-eared Bulbuls *Pycnonotus leucotis* and Rosy Starlings *Sturnus roseus*.

General behaviour and calls

If the birds were approached too closely while feeding they became alarmed and suddenly flew off, emitting single 'que-ee' calls. They flew high, circled around and either settled again 15-25 m away or disappeared altogether. On settling down on the top of or on the side of a tree they do not remain long, soon diving into the canopy. The birds were gregarious, and when in flocks or loose groups they produced pleasant 'piew-piew' notes which perhaps are short-distance contact notes. There were two types of calls: one, already described, was uttered during feeding and when the birds were going to roost. The other sounds like 'qu-e-ee' and is uttered when the birds take flight. This could be an alarm call or a flight contact call. When caught in mist-nets, they emit harsh 'quee, quee, quee' distress calls. If any other members of the group are nearby they immediately fly close to the net, sometimes getting entangled themselves. These calls were tape-recorded and subsequently replayed to attract and net more Hypocolius.

Locality	Date	Time	Numbers	Activity
Fulay	23 January 1990	10h00	1, 1	Feeding on <i>Salvadora</i>
"	24 February 1991	11h00	1	"
"	25 February 1991	16h00	1	"
"	5 March 1991	08h30	2, 4	"
"	24 March 1991	16h00	1, 1	"
"	3 January 1992	16h00	1	"
"	13 February 1993	18h40	1, 2	"
"	6 March 1993	09h40	30	
"	6 March 1993	18h35	30 + 14	Roosting
"	2 April 1993	16h00	4	Sighted by Muhammad (BNHS local assistant)
"	9 November 1993	16h00	12	
"	12 December 1993	09h15	45 in 2 flocks	Seen with S.N.V.
"	13 December 1993	09h00	50 in 2 flocks	
"	20 December 1993	09h00	150 in 3 flocks	
"	26 December 1993	17h20	1, 1 imm., 2	
"	27 January 1994	09h50	1, 1	
Lyja Creek	6 February 1994	17h45	1	
Fulay	10 February 1994	09h40	1	
"	19 March 1994	08h00	6	
"	22 March 1994	18h35	16 in 2 flocks	
"	7 April 1994	17h30	1	Seen with Nigel Lindsey

Table 1 Sightings of Grey Hypocolius in Kutch, 1990-1994

Interactions with other species

While foraging for food and whilst feeding the Hypocolius chased away White-eared Bulbuls and Rosy Starlings. Once a male was seen chasing away a Bay-backed Shrike *Lanius vittatus*.

Behaviour while resting and roosting

The Hypocolius in the riverbed fed exclusively on the berries of *Salvadora persica* - Shekar (1960) examined the crop contents of a female collected at Kuar Bet on 22 March 1960 and found about 20 berries of this species. The birds utilize the middle canopy of thorny *Acacia nilotica* trees for resting during the heat of the day from 11h00 to about 15h00, often resting alone. They go to roost in groups or flocks (maximum of 44 birds) after sunset at 18h30-19h00.

Locality	Date	Numbers	Reference
Kirthar hill range, Larkana, Sind, Pakistan	6 March 1875	1	Blanford (1875)
S. Kalat, Baluchistan, Pakistan	26 April 1877	1	
Kihim, Kolaba, Maharashtra, India	14 November 1930	1	Ali (1931)
Dalbandin, Chagai, Pakistan	September 1942	1 pair	Roberts (1992)
Kunver Bet, Kutch	22 + 23 March 1960	1, 1	Shekar (1960)
Hab valley, west of Karachi, Pakistan	3 February - 6 March 1984	up to 16	Roberts (1992)
Zangi Nawar Lake, Chagai, Pakistan	1 May 1985	25-30	Roberts (1992)
Hab valley, west of Karachi, Pakistan	1986 + 1989	?	Roberts (1992)

Table 2 Records of Grey Hypocolius from the Indian subcontinent (up to 1989)

Locality	Date	Sex	Wing (mm)	Bill (mm)	Tarsus (mm)	Tail (mm)	Weight (gm)
Kihim, Kolaba, Maharashtra	14 November 1930		98	15.0	22.0	-	-
Kunvar Bet, Kutch	22 March 1960		96	14.0	23.0	96	-
"	23 March 1960		99	14.5	25.0	105	-
Fulay, Kutch	9 March 1993		96	18.0	21.5	94	55.0
"	10 March 1993		98	20.0	25.0	104	52.5
"	10 March 1993		96	19.0	24.0	94	44.0
"	12 March 1993		98	19.5	24.0	101	52.5
"	14 December 1993		100	19.0	27.0	102	55.0
"	16 December 1993		100	19.0	27.0	96	-

Table 3 Biometrics of Grey Hypocolius ringed/collected in India

Survey

On 10 March 1993, a survey of the area north and north-east of Fulay-Chhari was undertaken in the Banni grassland on foot and on cycles, covering an area of about 50 km². Part of this area is covered by many trees of *Acacia nilotica* and a few of *Salvadora persica*. The areas in the vicinity of the settlements of cattle owners, namely Chhachhlo, Bhagadio, Nānā Sarādā, Motā Sarādā, Abdā Jhil and Mithdi were covered; however, no Hypocolius were seen. J.K.T. carried out a second survey of the Banni on 16 February 1994, but again no Hypocolius were located. This confirmed M.K.H.'s theory that this species does not inhabit the Banni, except rarely on passage, because it

prefers to live in a special biotope, situated on sandy soils and in dry streams or riverbeds. It requires an ample supply of food, the presence of suitable trees with thorny canopies and, apparently, a readily available supply of drinking water. The Banni grassland is an alluvial plain and, although there are *Acacia* trees near the settlements, *Salvadora* does not grow there to the same extent as it does further inland in Kutch; the plain also lacks watercourses or other readily available sources of water.

CONCLUSIONS

It appears that the Grey Hypocolius may be a regular winter visitor/passage migrant in some parts of Kutch. This area, excluding a large part of the great expanse of the Rann, lies between 22°47'N to 24°00'N and 68°25'E to 71°11'E in the north-western corner of India, directly south of the Sind province of Pakistan. A regular stream of migratory birds passes through this area in autumn and spring. The Great Rann of Kutch does not seem to act as a barrier as some ringing recoveries in Sind have demonstrated. Further information and surveys in other parts of the district, and in other areas of India and Pakistan, are required to clarify the status of this species in the subcontinent.

The scrub jungle which the Hypocolius inhabits is under constant threat of destruction at the hands of the cattle-grazers of the area, who are clearing it to cultivate the land on which it stands. Apart from this about 300 camels belonging to these people frequently browse on the leaves of *Acacia nilotica* and the shoots, leaves and clusters of berries of *Salvadora*. Apart from providing suitable habitat for the Grey Hypocolius, it is an important nesting and roosting biotope for a number of uncommon species.

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The Bengal Florican *Eupodotis bengalensis* in Indochina

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This paper summarizes and reviews our knowledge of the Bengal Florican *Eupodotis bengalensis* in Indochina, and documents recent sightings in Vietnam. The paper discusses possible patterns of migration and dispersion and how movements may be linked to breeding. Finally the conservation outlook in Vietnam is assessed.

The Bengal Florican *Eupodotis bengalensis*, together with its diminutive cousin the Lesser Florican *E. indica* are two small, strongly sexually dimorphic species of bustard endemic to the Indomalayan (Oriental) Realm. Both species are in decline and are now seriously at risk of extinction as a result of the loss of their grassland habitats (Collar and Andrew 1988).

The nominate form of the Bengal Florican is confined to the Indian subcontinent, where it is believed to be a resident in the remaining grasslands of the Nepal terai, whilst in India it survives and breeds in many disjunct pockets of habitat in Uttar Pradesh, West Bengal, Assam and Arunachal Pradesh (Narayan and Rosalind 1990). In addition, a second little-known subspecies *E. b. blandini* is known from Cambodia and Vietnam, where it appears to be a partial migrant. This short paper summarizes our current knowledge of this enigmatic Indochinese subspecies and provides some recent information on its occurrence and habitat in south Vietnam.

THE QUEST

For many years Jean Delacour and his colleagues had been aware of reports of bustards in Soai Rieng (Svay Rieng) Province, Cambodia, but believed them to be mistaken. However, on 6 January 1927 Delacour, P. Jabouille and W. P. Lowe stopped at Soai Rieng where the local Resident [Senior Administrator] M. J. Blandin informed them of the seasonal occurrence of bustards in the province. On 12 January, Blandin presented them with a live female Bengal Florican (Delacour 1929a).

The quest for the Bengal Florican in Indochina began in earnest at the end of June 1928 following Blandin's telegram to Jabouille informing him that the annual passage of floricans had begun. A native collector was immediately despatched with instructions to collect as many males in breeding plumage as possible (Delacour 1929a, Jabouille 1929). After seven or eight days of fruitless searching, Blandin and the collector drove 80 km north of Soai Rieng