



Sighting of Sociable lapwing (*Vanellus gregarius*) from Banni Grassland of Kachchh, Gujarat, India

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Abstract:

*In this paper, we report the recent sightings of the Sociable Lapwing (*Vanellus gregarius*) from new location in Banni grassland of Kachchh district. Further as the Sociable Lapwing is a Critically Endangered Species due to Habitat loss and Hunting understanding its current distribution and abundance is necessary. Thus our sighting is important as the species was found from an unprotected grassland area.*

Key Words: Sociable lapwing, Grassland, Banni, Kachchh

Introduction:

Sociable Lapwing (*Vanellus gregarius*), Family Charadriidae (Plovers) is categorized as Critically Endangered (IUCN 2020, Bird life International, 2021). There are total 11,200 individual are present and they are in decreased gradually (Bird life International, 2021). It is migratory species (Del Hoyo, 1996) and flocks of several thousand birds have been known to gather before migration in Siberia and Kazakhstan, but migration itself usually occurs in small groups of 15-20 birds (Del Hoyo 1996; Johnsgard, 1981). It arrives on its wintering grounds in India and Pakistan by September-October, and in Sudan by late October (Del Hoyo, 1996) However, very occasionally larger flocks of over 100 birds have been recorded (Johnsgard, 1981). They usually stay at wintering ground from September to late March that depends on the weather conditions of the wintering ground. The early Indian records indicate the species migrated in very large flocks (Baker 1922–1930).

The wintering range of Sociable lapwing is lies in the northern and western parts of the India, especially in the states of Himachal Pradesh, Punjab, Haryana, Delhi, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Rajasthan, Gujarat, Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra and some parts of Karnataka and Kerala.

Study Area:

Banni region, situated at 23°19'N to 23°52'N to 68°56'E to 70°32'E comprises around 3000 sq.km area under Bhuj taluka of Kutch district, is home of Muslim nomadic pastoralists and Meghwal Hindus.



Figure 1. Map showing occurrence of Sociable lapwings in Grassland area of Banni (Kachchh).

Banni is located in Arid climate, with high temperature in most of time which reached maximum up to 48°C -50°C during May, June and winter temperature goes down to 2°C -

8°C during December January. Average Annual rainfall, occurring through Southwest monsoon between June to September, is very low of 317mm with coefficient of variation of 65%. However, there is inherent salinity in the soil, pastoral communities dug up Virdas, shallow well of 9-12ft deep that collects rain water in its soil particle, for livestock and themselves. There have been numerous natural wetlands in Banni and the largest one is known as Chhari – Dhandh, a saucer shaped wetland which is recently declared as Conservation Reserve.

Methodology:

Bird survey was carried out during daytime however birds were more active during morning and evening time. Birds were observed using 8×40 (Nikon action) binoculars and identified on the basis of standard books by Kazmierczak (2000) and Grimmett et al. (2011).

Observations:

On January 22, 2021, while surveying at the plains of Bhirandiyara village (Figure 1). At 1310 h a flock of lapwings grabbed my attention, they were slightly smaller than the Red-wattled lapwing *Vanellus indicus* but with white color supercilium and black legs and bill, they are distinguished from Red-wattled lapwing. I could take their



Image 1: Sociable Lapwing in plains of Bhirandiyara Village, Banni Grassland (Kachchh) 22 January 2021



photographs easily, which helped me to identifying the flock as Sociable Lapwing *Vanellus gregarius* (Image 1). With the help of Kazmierczak (2000) and Grimmett et al. (2011).

After identify them, I'm trying to count the total individual of Sociable Lapwing with help of binoculars and I observed total 18 individuals of them; They were primarily resting with little movement, although a few individuals were feeding occasionally.

While observing the surrounding Habitat of the Sociable lapwing, I found 4 individuals of Red-wattled lapwing which are also foraging with the flock of Sociable lapwings; and 9 individuals of Cream-coloured courser *Cursorius cursor* and 8 individuals of Indian courser *Cursorius coromandelicus* are also observed nearby flock of sociable lapwings.



Image 2: Sociable Lapwing in plains of Shervo Village, Banni Grassland (Kachchh), 25 January 2021

On January 25, 2021 while surveying near by the Shervo wetland (Kachchh, Gujarat), At 1357 h, I observed 3 birds in flight. And I also heard the short call "kyek" by one individual during flight (Image 2). On February 02, 2021, at 1040 h, I observed a flock of 24 individuals in flight at different location (490 meters away from the earlier sighting at Bhirandiyara village). Later on February 06, 2021, at 0950 h again while surveying

near plains of Bhirandiyara village, I found only 1 individual foraging in the plains with the folks of Greater short-toed larks *Calandrella brachydactyla* (Image 3).

Table 1: Observations of Sociable lapwing at different study sites

Date	Site	# birds
22/01/2021	Bhirandiyara	18
25/01/2021	Shervo	3
02/02/2021	Bhirandiyara	24
06/02/2021	Bhirandiyara	1



Image 3: Sociable lapwing in plains of Bhirandiyara Village, Banni Grassland (Kachchh), 06 February 2021



Discussion:

During my surveys, a total of 46 sightings of sociable lapwing were noted on 4 different occasions. Though some of the sightings may be of the same individual seen at different times and dates, there is no doubt that more than 24 birds were present in this area.

India has around 465 Important Bird Areas, amid them the Sociable Lapwing is found only in eight Important Bird Areas (Islam and Rahmani 2004). In India, the specie's habitat has majorly declined due to the expansion of agriculture area and spread of exotic plant species like *Prosopis juliflora*. Which results in disappearance of open areas, fallow lands and grass-lands. So the present sighting of the sociable lapwings were doesn't fall into any kind of Protected Area network. Hence, I'm suggest that such grass-land areas should be given more protection; which helps to conserve this critically endangered bird species.

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