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9. THE BLUECHEEKED BEE-EATER *MEROPS SUPERCILIOSUS*, ITS STATUS IN KUTCH AND SAURASHTRA

The Durbar Saheb of Jasdan and myself had the pleasure of visiting the Flamingo City in the Great Rann of Kutch and some of the Bets beyond towards the border of Sind. We saw a party of about six of these large bee-eaters at Nir on 9th June. On the 11th on our return from the Flamingo City we rested during the heat of the day at Nir before going on to the Bets and after imbibing several glasses of lime juice we strolled around the water course. All the time we heard the bee-eaters calling as they sailed around. Following the winding nullah we came across a ten foot high embankment riddled with bee-eater holes, all large and fresh. There were some eighty such holes and by their size we surmised them to belong to *M. superciliosus* and their appearance suggested that they had been in recent habitation. The presence of the birds in the area confirmed our surmise. Later we again saw these fine bee-eaters on Kuar Bet. They were in magnificently fresh plumage. Sálím Ali, in both his *BIRDS OF KUTCH* and the 'Birds of Gujarat' (*J. Bombay nat. Hist. Soc.* 52:2 & 3) mentions it as an autumn passage migrant. It may be noted that in the *HANDBOOK OF BIRDS OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN* Volume 4, Ali & Ripley mention Dharmakumarsinhji's report of the species regularly breeding on the Bhavnagar coast, where incidently it is a regular breeding bird and I myself have seen them

around the aerodrome in August. I might mention here that one of my earliest memories of this fine bird is as a boy when I watched at close range three pairs excavating nest holes near Jasdan. This year I have heard them over Rajkot in late May and they have been heard at Jasdan and so they must have been breeding in the area, or possibly passing onto their breeding location near Bhavnagar.

14, JAYANT SOCIETY,
RAJKOT 360 004,
June 16, 1974.

LAVKUMAR J. KHACHER

10. A DAY AT A NEST OF THE GREAT BLACK WOODPECKER (*DRYOCOPUS JAVENSIS*)

(With two plates)

On a five-day visit to the Periyar Wild Life Sanctuary during the second week of January, 1974, I concentrated on a search for the Great Black Woodpecker which had so far eluded me. On the second day I ran into Mr Robert Horwich, an American researcher on primate behaviour, who said that he had seen a Black Woodpecker almost at that very spot earlier in the morning. Still, in spite of spending three more days at Thekkady I had to leave without so much as a glimpse of the Black Woodpecker.

About a fortnight later Mr Nanu Nair, Wild Life Preservation Officer, Thekkady, informed me that Mr Horwich had found an occupied nest of the Black Woodpecker close to the Picnic Spot. So, at 17.45 hrs on the 2nd of February I was back at the place where Mr Horwich and I had first met on 12-i-1974. There Mr Nanu Nair pointed out a giant tree, quite dead and devoid of all bark, just 20 feet away. At a height of c. 20 m and very near the top was the woodpecker's nest, with the female peeping out. It was on the southern side of the tree, just below a large, shallow, irregular cavity. We were to discover the next day that almost all day the sun fell directly on the nest.

The tree stood in the midst of a good stand of medium sized deciduous trees and dense, thorny underground on a narrow strip of land between the road and an arm of the lake. Hardly a stone's throw from the road, it was exposed to all the noises of busy traffic, loud talk and other evidences of flourishing tourism.

That evening we were able to watch the nest for 55 minutes only (1745 to 1840 hrs). At 1805 hrs the male came and alighted on a tree trunk c. 10 m ESE of the nest. While hopping up he uttered a few very low *quack* notes. The moment the male alighted on the nest tree, the female flew out with a smooth glide, quite noiselessly. The male entered the nest at 1807 hrs after thrusting his bill smartly 3 or 4 times into



Lavkumar, K S. 1976. "The Bluecheeked Bee eater *Merops Superciliosus*, Its Status in Kutch and Saurashtra." *The journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 72, 543–544.

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