

14. RANGE EXTENSION OF THE PURPLERUMPED SUNBIRD *NECTARINIA ZEYLONICA*

While preparing an overview of the birds of Gujarat for the Dr. Sálím Ali Centenary issue of the *JBNHS*, I was struck by how very little qualitative information existed on the natural history of our region. We really have very generalised knowledge of bird distributions; it therefore becomes all the more pertinent to suggest to friends, particularly those on weekend birdwatching excursions, to record all the birds they come across. I have been writing brief notes on seemingly small observations, which can indeed change many of our perceptions. We must be cautious in recording new species and not be casual about seemingly common-place species.

I have been particularly careful to look at every sunbird coming my way and in doing so, have been rewarded with recording a purplerumped sunbird *Nectarinia zeylonica* in Ahmedabad on February 5, 1998. In my overview I had noted "Sálím Ali has only a single unconfirmed sight record" and had gone on to suggest that "resident birdwatchers of Vadodara and Surat may well come across a good many more". Unless seen in extremely even light, sunbirds do not reveal their scintillating colours, no doubt because the iridescence is due to refraction of sunlight rather than pigmentation.

For *Nectarinia zeylonica* Ripley (1982) sums up: "Range — Peninsular India from Nasik in a line east to Jabalpur and east to East Pakistan at Dacca, south in Bombay (sight record for Panchmahals Dist., Gujarat...) MP., Orissa, Andhra to Goa, Mysore, Madras and Kerala..." Ahmedabad is way north of the believed range,

though it is significant that the coastal plains north of Bombay have no limit indicated and I suspect this species is commoner than believed in southern and central Gujarat.

By this note, I would like to convince amateur birdwatchers to scrutinise the common birds of their areas. Had I not, for example, paused to look at a small group of apparently purple sunbirds *N. asiatica* at the Centre for Environment Education (CEE), I would not have had the pleasure of seeing a bright male *zeylonica*. The sunbirds were fluttering under the shrubbery just outside the window — agitated perhaps, by some cat or snake. There were a couple of fully plumaged *asiatica* males contrasting nicely with the bird under review. Significantly, the purplerumped sunbird, according to Ali (1996) has no well defined nesting season, but I am tempted to believe that in the northern parts of its range, breeding coincides with the flowering of our native trees, shrubs and climbers as it does with the other three sunbirds of the genus *Nectarinia*: the small *N. minima*, the maroonbreasted *N. lotenia* and the widespread purple *N. asiatica*. In conclusion, in Gujarat we need to keep a watch for *minima* and *lotenia* which, like the purplerumped sunbird, may be more widespread than hitherto believed.

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