

SPECIAL REPORT Rising water-level had forced officials of Kalubha and Maleshiri dams to open emergency flood gates

105 blackbucks die trapped after heavy rain in Bhavnagar

EXPRESS NEWS SERVICE

RAJKOT, JULY 2

ARARE monsoon flood in Bhavnagar's Velavadar National Park area has killed at least 105 endangered blackbucks since Friday, forest officials said.

The animals were found trapped in a low-lying area outside the park under water six to seven feet high, the department said. A rising water-level after heavy rain had forced officials of the nearby Kalubha and Maleshiri dams to open its emergency flood gates.

Junagadh Bharat Pathak, conservator of forests (wildlife),

said the dead animals did not belong to the park. "The situation inside the park is under control. Parts of the park are waterlogged but it is shallow," he said.

Bhavnagar district forest officer L.N. Jadeja said some animals had been found injured and rescued. "They were starving for the last three days," he said, rejecting reports of death from malnutrition. Areas around the park, Jadeja said, are home to more than 3,500 blackbucks while the park has 1,200 animals.

Gujarat Forest Minister Daulatray Desai said today an inquiry has been ordered. It will cover all possibilities of death, including availability of food for the



A forestry official removes the carcass of a deer during a flood in the district of Bhavnagar on June 29. Reuters photo

animals in the area.

Since Saturday, the forest de-

partment has started a hunt for missing blackbucks and dead

Inquiry ordered

■ **BARODA:** An inquiry has been ordered into the death of 80 black bucks — an endangered species — near Velavadar in Bhavnagar National Park area last week. Gujarat Minister of State for Forest and Environment Daulatray Desai said here on Tuesday that the inquiry was likely to be over within two to three days and will cover all aspects including availability of food for animals in the area.

PTI

bodies. "A team of 22 officials is on duty, surveying places where

there is a possibility of finding more animals," Jadeja said. He confirmed fears that the death toll might shoot up as the survey goes on. "We have not completed the search, so there are chances of recovering more bodies."

Pathak said the Velavadar National Park authorities were not prepared with any contingency plan as such a flooding is rare in the region. "I have been told by the Bhavnagar district authorities that a similar situation had occurred some 20 years ago. So we were not prepared. It was a natural calamity which the authorities had not anticipated," he said.

Update 22!

ashish kothari

From: Vivek Tiwari <spiderhunters@worldnet.att.net>
To: Natural History of South Asia - General discussion and research <nathistory-india@lists.Princeton.EDU>
Subject: FW: [OB] Velavadar National Park trip report
Date: Wednesday, August 25, 1999 8:31 AM

Good to get a birding report from the threatened grasslands of Western India. Vivek vivek@ee.princeton.edu
<mailto:vivek@ee.princeton.edu> -----Original Message-----

From: Dungan Management Services Limited [mailto:dungan@cinergy.co.je]
Sent: Sunday, August 22, 1999 11:13 PM
To: OrientalBirding
Subject: [OB] Velavadar National Park

Dear All I spent the first two weeks in August visiting various grassland sites in Gujarat and Rajasthan participating in a survey of Lesser Florican. I saw a total of 70 floricans at various sites. By far the best site from a birder's point of view is Velavadar, where I saw 40. Barring some catastrophe, the species is impossible to miss here during the breeding season. Nine or ten males can be seen from the guest house verandah with a bit of scanning, and it is easy to see 25 to 30 per day without trying - the park staff mark each territory with a pole, so you can go round ticking off each male as it jumps! In addition to floricans, interesting birds seen at Velavadar included Red-necked Falcon, Painted Francolin (fairly common), Rain Quail (common), five species of lark including Sykes's Lark (common), Indian Courser - a flock of 500 was reported shortly before my visit; I only saw a few dozen!, Oriental Pratincole (fairly common) and Little Bustard Quail (a few flushed). Mammals seen included 2 Wolves, hundreds of Blackbuck and Nilgai, Jungle Cat, Golden Jackal and Black-naped Hare. I would thoroughly recommend a visit to Velavadar for any birders resident in or visiting India. The accommodation and food is first class, the staff very helpful and knowledgeable, and the park itself really peaceful. At dawn, sitting on the verandah, the only sound is from the clashing of horns of sparring Blackbuck: such tranquillity is a rare commodity in India! Permission to visit in the closed season is required, and readily given. This should be arranged through the Assistant Conservator of Forests in Bhavnagar. The only bad news is the cost - recent massive price hikes for national parks in Gujarat (and perhaps all India?). Entry for non-Indian nationals is now US\$5 per day and accommodation US\$30 per day!! The other sites I visited in Gujarat were rather obscure vidis (protected fodder-producing grasslands) in the Gir / Gondal / Rajkot areas. All are accessed along a maze of village roads and would require a guide to locate. The grassland communities were much the same as at Velavadar, although Painted Partridge, all 3 Bustard Quails, Jungle Bush Quail and Rain Quail were much more in evidence due to better monsoon rainfall than at Velavadar. Again, Sykes's Lark was common throughout. Some of these vidis hold Lion (now well-dispersed around Gir), which adds a certain interest when striding around in long grass looking for floricans! The only site I visited in Rajasthan was a flying visit to Sonkaliya, which produced 4 Lesser Floricans and a male Indian Bustard. The latter is difficult here in the monsoon as the crops are very tall. Apparently, floricans only visit if the rains are good (which they were in Rajasthan this year) - I had little trouble locating them. About 9 hours from Delhi by bus (via Ajmer), Sonkaliya is perhaps the closest site to the capital where these species may be seen. Any birders wanting further details are welcome to contact me. Duncan Wilson

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