

First photographic evidence of Indian Grey Hornbill (*Ocyrocus birostris*) from Navsari Agricultural University, Gujarat, India

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The Indian Grey Hornbill is the only species of hornbill found in Gujarat state in western India. It is an arboreal species, which prefers open deciduous forests and lightly wooded areas, old orchards, roadside avenues, the neighbourhood of cultivation and habitation with *Ficus benghalensis* (banyan) and *Ficus religiosa* (peepal) trees (Ali, 1941; Ali & Ripley, 1987; Whistler, 1949). Syconia or figs of the different *Ficus* species is considered the most important food of Indian Grey Hornbills (Kasambe, 2011). Hornbills are considered as "birds of the forest" but 44% records of the Indian Grey Hornbill have been from around city park areas in India (Datta *et al.*, 2018).

In Gujarat, the Indian Grey Hornbill is recorded from forested areas of south and central Gujarat, and Gir forests (Ganpule, 2016). In the Navsari district in south Gujarat the species is very common and can be frequently sighted at Vansda National Park and surrounding forest areas (Jambu and Patel, 2021). However, it has not been recorded previously in the urban Navsari landscape, which is about 55 km away from the known locations of the Indian Grey Hornbill.

Navsari Agricultural University (NAU) has a 400 hectare campus and harbours wooded land-

scape far away from natural forested areas. It is located on the historical "Dandi marg" road in Navsari district. The bird was first sighted in 2019 by Dr. Surendra Gohil (pers. comm.) near the college of forestry arboretum but it was an unconfirmed sighting as there was no photographic evidence. The staff of the Forestry College also reported frequent sightings of new 'big bird' near the arboretum between December 2021 to February 2022. During January 2022, Jayesh and Jayanti, two staff of the Forestry college, reported the same 'big bird'. Google images and calls were used to confirm the bird. During the visit to the college of forestry arboretum on 6th January 2022, the call of hornbill caught our attention and after thorough scanning through binoculars, a pair of Indian Grey Hornbills was sighted and photographed for the first time in NAU Campus, Navsari. Hornbills were located with the help of local staff in the NAU campus. First, record photographs of the species were taken and species were identified and confirmed using standard field guides (Grimmett *et al.*, 2011; Rasmussen and Anderton, 2012). The periodic observations were collected through direct sightings using binoculars and calls of the birds.

Subsequently from total 22 visits to the farm area of the university campus between 6 Jan-

uary to 31 March 2022, the hornbill pair was sighted a total of 26 times at different locations in the campus. Of the total 26 sightings, 12 were recorded from the arboretum, seven from block plantation, five from banana pseudo-stem unit, one from orchard and one from the library. Hornbills were sighted on Arjuna tree (*Terminalia arjuna*), Red sander (*Pterocarpus santalinus*), Kaim tree (*Mitragyna parvifolia*), and Saru trees (*Casuarina equisetifolia*). A pair was also observed eating figs of *Ficus religio-*

sa and *Ficus benghalensis* trees despite there being 15 different fig species and other fruiting tree species available in university campus. Online citizen science project data also shows that the Navsari agricultural university has no Indian Grey Hornbill sightings before 16 February 2022 and this species was not reported previously from the area (eBird, 2022). This record will extend the geographic distribution of Indian Grey Hornbill in Navsari district of South Gujarat region.



Fig. 1. A. Fruits of *Ficus benghalensis* (Photo: Minal Patel); B. Fruits of *F. religiosa* (Photo: Minal Patel); C. Pair of Indian Grey Hornbill (Photo: Minal Patel); D. Indian Grey Hornbill (Photo: Soufil Malek)

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