

<b>Abbreviation</b>	4=Immature - stage unknown.	7=Head & body.	<b>Brood patch</b>
Brd. Ptch. = Brood patch.	5=Adult.	8=General moult.	1=Absent.
c.f.m = Captive from market.	6=Full grown but stage unknown.	<b>Plumage</b>	2=Present but details not recorded.
Plu = Plumage.		1=Down.	3=Skin smooth, glossy, free of feathers.
Tars. = Tarsus.	<b>Moult</b>	2=First year (Juvenile).	4=Skin smooth, network of blood vessels noticeable.
Wt. = Weight in grams.	1=No moult.	3=Intermediate.	5=Skin thickened, blood vessels not seen, fluid layer under epidermis, brood patch resembles second degree burn.
<b>Key to table</b>	2=Wing.	4=Adult.	6=Skin wrinkled, dried up, begins to form scales.
<b>Age</b>	3=Tail.	5=Eclipse.	7=Skin becomes smooth, feather calami formed, brood patch begins to be covered up.
1=Nestling.	4=Wing & tail.	6=Breeding.	
2=Juvenile (First Year).	5=Head.	7=Partial breeding.	
3=Subadult.	6=Body.	8=Stage unknown.	

## Distribution of White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* in India and a new record from Andhra Pradesh

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The White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* has been described as a winter visitor to “Assam, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, irregularly in the rest of the Indian peninsula and in the Maldive and Andaman Is.” (Ripley 1982). Ali and Ripley (2001) give a few additional references of sightings from Pakistan. Surprisingly, without any supporting evidence, Baker (1929) stated, “In India...common all down the East coast.” This, despite Blanford’s (1898) statement, “This Tern has not been clearly identified from any part of India west of Tipperah [=Tripura]...”. Whistler and Kinnear (1937) also emphasised this discrepancy. When Abdulali and others spotted it on Mahim Causeway, Bombay city (=Mumbai) on 26.iii.1950, he wrote, “...has not been recorded before from anywhere in peninsular India,” (1950).

Since Abdulali’s observation, several records of this square-tailed marsh tern have been published from India and we summarize these here, placing them roughly into three zones: western coast, eastern coast and inland records.

### Western Coast

Gujarat: On 12.v.1955, it was spotted at Jasdan, purportedly the second such record from the area (Shivraj Kumar 1955). Mundkur (1987) saw it on 14.v.1985 at Jamnagar. Parasharya and Mukherjee (2001) spotted three birds at Porbander on 27.iv.1997. On 6.vi.2004, Varu (2004) reported it from Devisar Tank, Bhuj.

Maharashtra: Twenty-seven years after Abdulali’s record, it was reported once again from Bombay (Mumbai), this time from Colaba Point by Sinclair (1977). Prasad (2004) gives a summary of records from western Maharashtra.

Goa: Lainer (2004) reports sightings between August-September 1998.

Kerala: On 27.iv.1997, Ravindran (2001) saw up to three birds on different occasions between 12-15.ix.1998 at Kole wetlands, Thrissur. On 25.iv.2003, Mathew (2003) saw one at Thattekkad. Ravindran (2004) reports sightings from Kole wetlands in March, April and September 1998-2000.

### Eastern Coast

Eastern Coast: Perennou and Santharam (1990) recorded it as “a regular and common passage migrant along the Coromandel (i.e., East) coast,” including “a large roost of c. 50,000 migrant terns in Kaliveli (Tamil Nadu) (which) held over 2,000 whitewinged black terns.” [“During late 1989 and 1991, the Whiskered Tern congregation at Kaliveli was not more than 5,000 birds,” (*in litt.* S. Balachandran).]

Orissa: Rao et al. (1994) include it in their checklist of birds for Chilika Lake. [“Occurs regularly in small numbers of 100-200. Seen throughout the year except May-June. In July-August 10-30 birds would be seen in breeding plumage. Was difficult to differentiate from September onwards, from Whiskered Terns, due to its wintering plumage,” (*in litt.* S. Balachandran).]

Tamil Nadu: Melliush (1966) saw it on 30.iv.1966 at Pulicat Lake, Chennai and described it as “...something extraordinary and entirely unfamiliar”. Fifty birds were ringed in December 1970 at Point Calimere (Raju and Shekar 1971). Sugathan (1983) lists it as a common migrant at Point Calimere Sanctuary. Kannan (1986) recorded about “a hundred” on 17.iv.1983 at Adyar Estuary in Chennai. See Perennou and Satharam’s (1990) record, below. [“Present in Point Calimere, but none have been ringed even

though 500 Whiskered Terns have, between 1980-2000,” (*in litt.* S. Balachandran).]

### Inland

Jammu and Kashmir (J&K): Pfister (2001) records one on 23.vi.1995 in Ladakh. Naoroji and Sangha (2004) saw two birds on 3.ix.2000, at Trishul Tso, Ladakh, one of which was in breeding plumage and the other a juvenile. They did not see any other terns.

Punjab: Undeland also recorded three and four birds on 10.v.1998 and 26.vii.1998 at Harike Bird Sanctuary (Robson 1998a).

Rajasthan: On 9.iv.1996, a male in breeding dress was seen at Phulera Lake, Jaipur by Sangha and Vardhan (1998). Craig Robson spotted a single bird at Suriwal Lake near Ranthambhor Tiger Reserve on 6.xii.2001 (Robson 2002).

Jharkhand: Baillie (1946) reported a single bird on “Lakes” from 6-11.v.1945, Hazaribagh town.

Delhi: Jackson (1969) reported it from Najafgarh Jheel on 5.v.1968. Vyas (1996) saw one bird in breeding plumage on 9.vi.1986 at Okhla Barrage. He also saw one in first winter plumage on 20.x.1996, again at Okhla and three on 30.viii.1997, at Madanpur village (Vyas 2002). Undeland reported (Robson 1998a) four birds at Okhla on 25.viii.1997 and one on 9.viii.1998 (Robson 1998b).

Karnataka: Thejaswi (2005) observed six birds in September 1999, at Kunthur Lake (Chamarajanagar district, Karnataka) amidst a “huge flock of over 2,500 Whiskered Terns *Chlidonias hybridus*, all in flight...”

On 9.v.2005, we had gone birdwatching (06:30-08:30hrs) to Osman Sagar (17°22’N, 78°18’E; a.k.a. Gandipet), one of the lakes that supply water to Hyderabad city (Andhra

Pradesh). This was primarily to investigate a newspaper report about the presence of flamingos (Phoenicopteridae) there. The water-spread had shrunk drastically and standing on the bund we could easily see the opposite shoreline and count the birds on it through a scope. Flying about over the water were four or five River Terns *Sterna aurantia* and 10-12 Whiskered Terns *Chlidonias hybridus*, both in breeding plumage. As we watched them, we saw a smallish tern that, on first glance, looked like a Black-bellied Tern *Sterna acuticauda*. However, this one was different. Its square white tail glistened against the darker shades of its remaining plumage. Black feathers covered its entire belly, chest, throat, head, nape, back, and under-wing coverts. Its wings were grey. The plumage was a combination of vividly contrasting shades of white, grey and black. What we were seeing was a White-winged Tern *Chlidonias*

*leucopterus* in full breeding plumage! The bird worked an area of water close to us and all three of us had excellent, long and repeated views as it flew about. This is the first report of this species from Andhra Pradesh, and thus it should be added to the state's checklist (Raju 1985, Taher and Pittie 1989).

It is clear that on migration the White-winged Tern is more common along the eastern (EC) and western coasts (WC) of India, than it is in central (inland) India, and recent reports of its presence on the eastern coast support Baker's (1929) assumption (Table 1). Records from central India are few. The first was from Raipur (Madhya Pradesh) from before 1929, most probably on the authority of D'Abreu (Baker 1929). Ali and Ripley (2001) erred in dating D'Abreu's record from 1935, based on his paper in the *Journal* of the Bombay Natural History Society (D'Abreu 1935), when it had

already been reported by Baker from before 1929. The other records from inland locations are from Jammu and Kashmir, Punjab, Rajasthan, Delhi and Karnataka (Table 1).

Ali and Ripley (2001) state, "Possibly less vagrant than appears, as liable to be overlooked among the numerous Whiskered terns with which it keeps in winter, and is impossible to distinguish from satisfactorily before it starts moulting into its distinctive summer dress." Its gregarious nature and the fact that it "keeps" with Whiskered Terns is well-documented (Henry 1971, Roberts 1991, Grimmett et al. 1998, Harrison 1999, Kennedy et al. 2000) and is reinforced in Table 1 where 50% of the observers recorded seeing White-winged Terns accompanying a flock of the commoner Whiskered Terns. This emphasises the cardinal rule of observing every single bird, even in a flock!

Table 1: White-winged Tern: Inland vs. coastal records and presence of other terns when it was sighted.

Author (Year)	Observation date	Other terns present	Coastal	Inland
Abdulali 1950	26.iii.1950	Gull-billed	Mumbai (WC)	—
Baillie 1946	6-11.v.1945	No information	—	Hazaribagh
Baker 1929	—	No information	—	Raipur
Jackson 1969	5.v.1968	Whiskered	—	Delhi
Kannan 1986	10-29.iv.1983	Whiskered, Little	Chennai (EC)	—
Lainer 2004	18.viii.1998, mid-Sept.			
and 1 <sup>st</sup> week of Oct.	No information	Goa (WC)	—	
Mathew 2003	25.iv.2003	No information	Thattakad (WC)	—
Melluish 1966	30.iv.1966	Gull-billed	Pulicat Lake (EC)	—
Mundkur 1987	14.v.1985	Whiskered	Jamnagar (WC)	—
Naoroji & Sangha 2004	3.ix.2000	No other tern	—	Ladakh
Parasharya & Mukherjee 2001	27.iv.1997	Whiskered	Porbander (WC)	—
Pfister 2001	23.vi.1995	No information	—	Ladakh
Raju & Shekar 1971	xii.1970	No information	Pt. Calimere (EC)	—
Ravindran 2001	12-15.ix.1998	Whiskered	Kole (WC)	—
Ravindran 2004	iii-iv.2000	Whiskered	Malappuram (WC)	—
Robson 1998a	25.viii.1997	No information	—	Okhla
Robson 1998b	10.v; 26.vii; 9.viii.1998	No information	—	Harike; Okhla
Robson 2002	22-26.i.2002	No information	—	Suriwal Lake
Sangha & Vardhan 1998	9-10.iv.1996	No information	—	Jaipur
Shivraj Kumar 1955	12.v.1955	Whiskered	Jasdan (WC)	—
Sinclair 1977	27.x.1974	Whiskered	Mumbai (WC)	—
Thejaswi 2005	ix.1999	Whiskered		Chamarajanagar district, Karnataka
Varu 2004	6.vi.2004	Whiskered	Bhuj (WC)	—
Vyas 1996	9.vi.1986	Whiskered	—	Okhla
Vyas 2002	20.x.1996; 30.viii.1997	Whiskered, Gull-billed	—	Delhi
This study	9.v.2005	Whiskered	—	Hyderabad

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## Horned Lark *Eremophila alpestris* in Arunachal Pradesh

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On 11.x.2004 I photographed a Horned Lark *Eremophila alpestris* in Arunachal Pradesh. While Ali and Ripley (1987) report the species from all along the Himalayas including Bhutan and NEFA (earlier name for Arunachal), Grimmett, et al. (1998), and Kazmierczak (2000) have completely excluded Bhutan from its range and put a question mark on Arunachal Pradesh. Whatever be the reason for this change in status it suggests that sightings of this species in Arunachal have been very scarce at best.

The photographs accompanying this note speak for the identification and I will not delve on it in detail. The bird appears to

be a sub-adult / first-winter female, from the thinness of the gorget and the lack of the forecrown black band. The races *elwesi* and *longirostris* differ in body size and length of beak (Ali and Ripley 1987).

Not having the bird in hand and not having seen any *longirostris* I can only say that the beak length did not appear to be incompatible with it being *elwesi* as indeed the distribution as per Ali and Ripley (1987).

The bird was seen early in the morning at 3,600m altitude along a road cutting in a well-wooded (and well-watered) conifer forest, quite unlike the "Tibetan facies" that this species is partial to. However, there is a record of this species even from Delhi

(Kelsey, et al. 2001: <http://www.delhibird.org>). The bird allowed close views for several minutes. On flying away to the top of a dead tree it uttered a subdued lark-like warbling. (Photo: [www.indianbirds.in](http://www.indianbirds.in)).

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