

16.ix.2000, while on a visit from Delhi, I had seen a Crab Plover, *Dromas ardeola*, here on the rocky seashore adjacent to the naval base, which is another good record for Mumbai. More recently in 2004, for four months during the rainy season, as part of a study course, I had the opportunity to commute daily from Colaba to Karanja by the naval ferry. An interesting pelagic record in July 2004 was a Parasitic Jaeger, *Stercorarius parasiticus*. On 14.vii.04, in the middle of the channel, it flew right over the ferry. Just ahead of the boat, it swooped low over the water with its characteristic falcon like powerful flight and flew away towards the Middle Ground Island. It was my first sighting of a Jaeger species. The identification is therefore based on the slightly built size, all dark colour and pointed central tail feathers that became visible briefly as the bird swooped low ahead of the ferry. The similar Pomarine Jaeger, *Stercorarius pomarinus* is described as a larger bird compared to the one that I saw.

During my daily trip to Karanja last year, another interesting record was a Great

Bittern *Botaurus stellaris* that flew past the ferry in the middle of the harbour channel on 17.vii.2004. This Great Bittern laboured against strong opposing sea winds and light rains, as it flew southwards from Chembur side that morning. I had good views of it through my binoculars, which I always carried with me during those days for exactly such opportunities. The identification was conclusive since the bird overtook the ferry from behind and flew past quite close, giving me ample time to observe it closely. Great Bittern is a winter visitor and rare in peninsular India. There are no records from Mumbai region for over fifty years (Prasad 2003). This mid July record in 2004 from Mumbai is therefore particularly interesting.

On 3.ix.05 and on an occasion earlier, early one autumn morning two years ago, I encountered migrating flocks of over a hundred Common Terns sitting on rocks alongside the seaside promenade at the United Services Club (US Club), Colaba. They were gone by the afternoon and not again seen during subsequent visits on other days. Compared to the concolorous upperparts, tail and rump of the White-

cheeked, the rump and upper tail coverts in Common Tern are prominently white. In spite of their name, Common Terns are also fairly uncommon winter visitors around Mumbai.

Interestingly, the seashore near the US Club at the southernmost tip of Colaba, together with the 1km long causeway that connects to the 19th century Prong's Reef Lighthouse, is truly a shore birders' delight.

References

- Grimmett, R., C. Inskipp & T. Inskipp. 1999. *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*. Oxford University Press, New Delhi.
- Lainer, H. 2001. Terns of the Vengurla Rocks, A review and update. *J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* 100 (1): 126-135.
- Prasad, A. 2004. Annotated checklist of the birds of western Maharashtra. *Buceros* 8 (2&3): i-ii, 1-174 (2003).

Commander Kanwar Bir Singh is a marine engineer with a passion for ornithology. He has been the key contributor towards inclusion of Lonavla and Khandala, near Mumbai as Important Bird Areas (IBA). He enjoys exploration and hiking and is in the management committee of the Himalayan Club. He is presently serving at Naval Dockyard, Mumbai. He has earlier served onboard many Indian naval ships, including the aircraft carrier INS Viraat.

Nesting of Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus* in Kumarakom, Kerala.

S. Prasanth Narayanan¹, S. Dipu² & Lalitha Vijayan³

¹School of Environmental Sciences, Mahatma Gandhi University, Thevara Buildings, Gandhi Nagar Post, Kottayam 686008, Kerala, India.

Email: narayanank@gamil.com

²Kumarakom Nature Club, Kumarakom Post, Kottayam, Kerala, India.

³Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History, Anaikatty Post, Coimbatore, Tamil Nadu, India.

We report here the nesting of the Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*, which is believed to be a migrant or resident in India (Ali and Ripley 2001) at Kumarakom, which is, situated 14km west of Kottayam and forms a boundary of the Vembanad estuary. Vembanad-Kole wetland has been designated a Ramsar site in November 2002.

On 18.vi.2005 we visited the recently drained, muddy, Malikkayal paddies in Kumarakom where 42 Black-winged Stilts were observed at different locations in the paddies. One of them was found in the cultivated paddy field. We approached that bird in the muddy field for details. The bird was very alert and responded to our presence in no time and it flew away and started giving out alarm call and acted 'broken-wing-drama'. That broken wing action is somewhat similar to the action of the nesting Little-ringed Plover *Charadrius dubius*. It was an alarm signal to all other individuals of the species; immediately they

started flight and encircled the area and made similar call as that of the other bird. It was an indication that some nesting activity was going on that area.

With this inference in mind, keen searching of the muddy field for nest was carried out. We succeeded in finding a nest with two eggs. The nest was situated in the muddy and watery part of the field. It showed a peculiar pattern of construction. The nest had a raised platform with a small disc like central depression. There is no human intervention in this area because of some legal problems, which therefore provided favourable habitat for the birds for nesting. As a result, about four acres of the land remained untouched, which is covered by luxuriant growth of cattails *Typha elephantina* and swamp rice grass *Leersia hexandra*. In a detailed observation fourteen nests at various stages were found at different locations in the same field; two nest are on construction, three nests with two eggs each, five nest with four eggs and

the rest without eggs. Two juveniles were observed in the grassy part of the area. Three nests were found adjacent to the *Leersia hexandra* community. All these nests were placed nearby as a loose colony.

Another five nests were found on 03.vii.2005 in the Vattakkayal paddy fields near to the Malikkayal paddy field; three nests close by and other two slightly apart. Totally, eight eggs were found in these nests. Of these, two nests were made only with clay, without the addition of any other nest materials. The eggs were dull in colour. In the two nesting sites, the material used for constructing the nets were the stems *Leersia hexandra*.

Only two nesting reports were noted from Kerala; the first was from the Karali marshes of Kollam district (12 nests) and the second from Rajagiri College campus, Ernakulam district (1 nest). In total, nineteen nests were found in the two paddy fields of Kumarakom making this the biggest nesting colony ever reported from Kerala.

Acknowledgements

These observations were made during fieldwork for 'Status and Ecology of the Breeding Wetland-birds in the KTDC Tourist Complex, Kumarakom, Kerala'. The first author thanks Dr V. S. Vijayan, Director, Salim Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History (SACON) for the funding, Dr A. P. Thomas, Director, School of Environmental Sciences, Mahatma Gandhi University, Kottayam, Kerala for his support and Dr B. Sreekumar, Kottayam Nature society, Kerala, for suggestions

and help in the field.

References

- Ali, Salim and S. D. Ripley. 2001. *Handbook of the birds of India and Pakistan*. Oxford University Press. New Delhi. Paperback edition.
Neelakantan, K. K. 1996. *Keralakthile Pakshikal* (Birds of Kerala). Kerala Sahithya Academy. Thrissur. (In Malayalam).

Further comments on White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* distribution in the Indian Sub-continent

Anand Prasad

Email: swamianandprasad@yahoo.com

I read with interest the article on the distribution of White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* in *Indian Birds* 1 (4): 81-83. I have only visited north-western India twice. Rajasthan and Gujarat, on a birding trip, between 5-17.i.1999 and Harike Lake, Punjab, between 6-10.ii.2001. On both these occasions I recorded this species, which led me to conclude that perhaps White-winged Tern is a regular winter visitor to these parts.

Earlier I had spent most of my birding hours in the winter season near Pune, Maharashtra and Goa where I had failed to record this species. However during the monsoon of 2003, between 16.viii-23.x., I spent three or four early morning hours sea-watching from Fort Aguada (Goa) and between 3.ix.-29.x.2003, I made frequent and regular trips to the Chapora estuary tern and gull roost. White-winged Tern was recorded at Chapora on nine days between 9.ix-21.x., with the maximum number of at least eleven on 21.x. (Prasad 2004). It is obvious these terns were on passage as this species is extremely rare in Goa in winter.

On River Mula-Mutha near Pune, Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybridus* was fairly common in the winters of 1992-1996 when I became very familiar with this species. In Goa too there was a large flock of Whiskered Terns present on virtually all visits to Chapora estuary in September-October 2003, with 50-60+ birds present from 16.ix.2003 to 11.x.2003, which allowed for good comparison between the two species. I made detailed drawings and notes (available on request) of each White-winged Tern record to confirm identification, except in Goa, where in the larger flying flocks it was not always possible to get a detailed description of each bird.

In winter the plumage of White-winged Tern is usually more marked than that of

Whiskered and any such bird with a more contrasting wing pattern (dark secondaries, outer primaries and leading edge) is worth investigating, but it is the white rump that is diagnostic, although good views are needed to see this feature. In September and October juvenile birds are present at Goa and the colour of the rump is more difficult to detect because of the contrasting brown 'saddle' but Whiskered has a more scaly patterned saddle and usually a less marked upper-wing pattern than White-winged. In perched birds White-winged has a more noticeably fine bill and a distinctive dark spot behind the eye on the ear coverts, often crescent-shaped, curving up towards the crown, which is diffusely marked on the adult. Whiskered is larger, stockier and less elegant than White-winged and more similar to one of the smaller *Sterna* species. In Goa the small White-winged Tern flock was usually separate from the Whiskered Tern flock except whilst roosting and after a disturbance of the roost. Often the White-winged Tern flock would appear together from along the river where they had presumably been foraging. Even when the roosting flock was disturbed, which was frequently by Black Kites *Milvus migrans* the White-winged Tern flock would keep together within the larger flock, slowly separating out if time allowed. My records of the White-winged Tern are as follows: Little Rann of Kutch, Gujarat: Three on 4.i.1999 a few kilometers from the Desert Coursers camp, Zainabad.

Harike Lake, Punjab: At least one present from 6-10.ii.2001.

Goa: Chapora estuary: At least six on 9.ix.2003, three to four on 28.ix.2003, nine on 29.ix.2003, at least one on 4.x.2003, one on 5.x.2003, at least one on 9.x.2003, one on 11.x.2003, six on 13.x.2003, and up to 11 on 21.x.2003.

Sri Lanka: Tissamaharama: One on 25.i.2002. Hambantota Lewayas: 15 on 25.i.2002 and six on 26.i.2002.

White-winged Tern records by other observers from western India and Maldives:

Goa: Mandovi estuary, Goa, two adults, three juveniles on 17.ix.1999, Lainer (Pittie 1999). Anjuna sea-watch, Goa, 29 on 18.xi.1999, Lainer (Pittie 1999). Chapora estuary, Goa, one on 18.viii.1998, Lainer (Pittie 1998). Sea at Candolim and Mandovi River, Goa, one in iii.1993, Willoughby, "A scarce winter visitor which has been seen on single occasions," (Willoughby 1996; Harris 1996). Carambolim, Goa, one on 6.ii.1998, Holt (2000). For full review see Lainer (2004).

Maldives: L. Maandhoo, one on 12.xi.1993 and near L. Maavah one on 2.x.1992 (Anderson 1990-1994). "The above are the only records away from Seenu Atoll, where it is fairly regular winter visitor in small numbers, up to six together." (Ash and Shafeeg 1994, who cite the following for this remark: Ali and Ripley 1987; Anderson 1990-1994; Ash et al. in prep.; Gadow and Gardiner 1903; Phillips 1963; and Strickland and Jenner 1978).

References

- Ali, S. and S. D. Ripley. 1987. *Compact handbook of the birds of India and Pakistan*. Oxford University Press, Delhi.
Anderson, R. C. 1990-1994. Personal observations.
Ash, J. S., R. Howard and A. Moore. (in prep. in 1994). Bird observations and recommendations for bird conservation. Pp 24-28 in M. Holmes, A.M. Hutson and J.M. Morris. (Eds.) *The Maldives Archipelago, Indian Ocean. A report on an investigation of fruit bats and birds*, November 1993.
Ash, J. S. and A. Shafeeg. 1994. Birds of the Maldives, Indian Ocean. *Forktail* 10: 3-34.
Gadow, H. and J. S. Gardiner. 1903. Aves. Pp 368-373 in J. S. Gardiner. (Ed.) *The fauna and geography of the Maldives and Laccadive Archipelagoes*, 1. Cambridge University Press.
Harris, P. 1996. *Goa. The Independent Birders' Guide*. Eastern Publications, Lowestoft.
Holt, P. I. 2000. *Goa: notes on seven trips between January 1996 and November 1999*. Privately published.
Lainer, H. 2004. *Birds of Goa. A reference book*. The Goa Foundation.
Phillips, W. W. A. 1963. The birds of the Maldives Islands, Indian Ocean. *J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* 60: 546-584.
Pittie, A. 1998. Birding notes. *Pitta* 90: 4.
Pittie, A. 1999. Birding notes. *Pitta* 104: 8.
Prasad, A. 2004. Sea-watching, Goa India *Sea Swallow* 53: 47-54.
Strickland, M. J. and J. C. Jenner. 1978. A report on the birds of Seenu Atoll (Maldives Islands). *J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* 74: 487-500.
Willoughby, P. 1996. *Goa: A Birder's Guide* 2nd ed.