

Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis* at Harike Lake, Punjab, India

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During a birdwatching trip to Harike Lake (31°18'N, 75°05'E; Punjab, India), 6th-10th February 2001, I spotted a duck, east of the gurdwara, on 7th February, which I did not recognise. The duck was at a range of about 300 m. I set up my Kowa ED TS613 telescope at 30x magnification, and after obtaining good views, sketched and took notes of all the visible features. Light conditions were good-it being a normal sunny winter day. The bird was awake, with its head upright, but it was not diving and showed very little activity. On this day it appeared to be about the same size as a Common Pochard *Aythya ferina*.

On 10th February, at about the same location, presumably the same bird was relocated. This time, after a closer comparison, it appeared to be slightly smaller than the Common Pochard, which were closer on that day, and hence gave a more accurate size comparison. During this second sighting the bird was sleeping with its bill tucked into its back feathers but with its head showing, which it would only occasionally lift to show the bill.

The overall impression was a duck with white under-parts and grey upper-parts but with a white and black patterned head. At that distance, subtle colour differences were not noticeable. The tail was held out of the water at 45° and was noticeably long and thin, about the same size as that of a Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*. On both days I only had side views of the bird.

Description from both sightings

An obvious duck-slightly smaller than Common Pochard-with a grey bill that was particularly short and thick.

Its head including the throat, neck and nape was white except for two dark grey to black areas. The first was a dark grey crown stripe, which extended and narrowed to a point near the bill and which extended narrowly down the nape and seemed greyer on the nape. The second was a blackish triangular wedge well below the eye, on the ear

coverts. The wedge narrowed to a point near the bill and the rear thick end became more diffuse and gave a stripy effect towards the nape.

Apart from the head and nape the entire upper parts including the visible wing, wing coverts, scapulars, mantle, back, rump, upper-tail coverts and tail were grey, a paler colour than the dark areas on the head. On both days a medium-sized black area was noted at what appeared to be the primary tips.

On the first day there was no visible dark area on the breast and the entire under-parts including throat, belly, breast, flanks and under-tail coverts appeared white. On the second sighting the breast appeared to be grey, about the same colour as the upper-parts but as this was not seen on the first day it was probably localised to the centre of the



Fig. 1. Drawing of original field-sketch Harike: 7th February 2001

breast. The bird was seen from the side on both occasions so the view of the breast was not optimum. On the second day the tail under-parts presumably the under-tail coverts were seen to have a slightly yellowish tinge. The tail was long and thin, similar to a Northern Pintail.

After the first sighting I consulting my field guide and it became obvious that the bird was a Long-tailed Duck *Clangula hyemalis* and a rare record for India, so when it was relocated three days later on the 10th of February in the same area, I was determined to get more detailed information. I again made further drawings and notes, but as the bird was sleeping and only raised its head occasionally, I could only gather as much information as possible from a static bird.

This Long-tailed Duck was in typical winter plumage but it is not easy to determine the sex in a species with so many plumage variations-suffice to say that it was probably a duck or first winter drake.

The lack of brown in the plumage does not in any way detract from this record, as at a range of about 300 m, browns and greys are not distinguishable except perhaps in contrast.

The raised tail is the typical non-feeding posture for this diving duck, which otherwise swims with the tail open against the water.

Previous records

Ali & Ripley (1983) give six records for the Indian Subcontinent: three from Pakistan at Baluchistan (1933 & 1938) and Sind (1936) and two from India at Hokarsar, Kashmir (1939) and Sadiya Frontier Tract, NE Assam (1935). These refer to the records of: Prater (1936) at Sind; Reeve (1938) near Quetta, Baluchistan; Ludlow (1940) at Hokarsar, Kashmir and Parsons (1935) from north-eastern India.

Ali & Ripley (1996) give three further records from Uttar Pradesh, Nepal, and Arunachal Pradesh. These additions presumably refer to records from Dehra Dun, Uttar Pradesh (Mohan *et al.* 1992), Kosi Barrage, Nepal (Grimmett *et al.* 1998; Inskipp & Inskipp 1991; Inskipp 1988; Kazmierczak 2000) and the Arunachal Pradesh record appears to be a correction of the record previously given as NE Assam. The Sadiya Frontier Tract is on the border between Assam and Arunachal Pradesh. This correction is due to the fact that before 1947 Assam also constituted Arunachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Mizoram and Nagaland. Before 1947 Arunachal Pradesh was The North-East Frontier Agency (NEFA), comprising the Kameng, Subansiri, Siang and Luhit frontier divisions (Ali & Ripley 1983). Only one record is given from the north-east (Arunachal Pradesh) in the distribution maps in Grimmett *et al.* (1998) and Kazmierczak (2000).

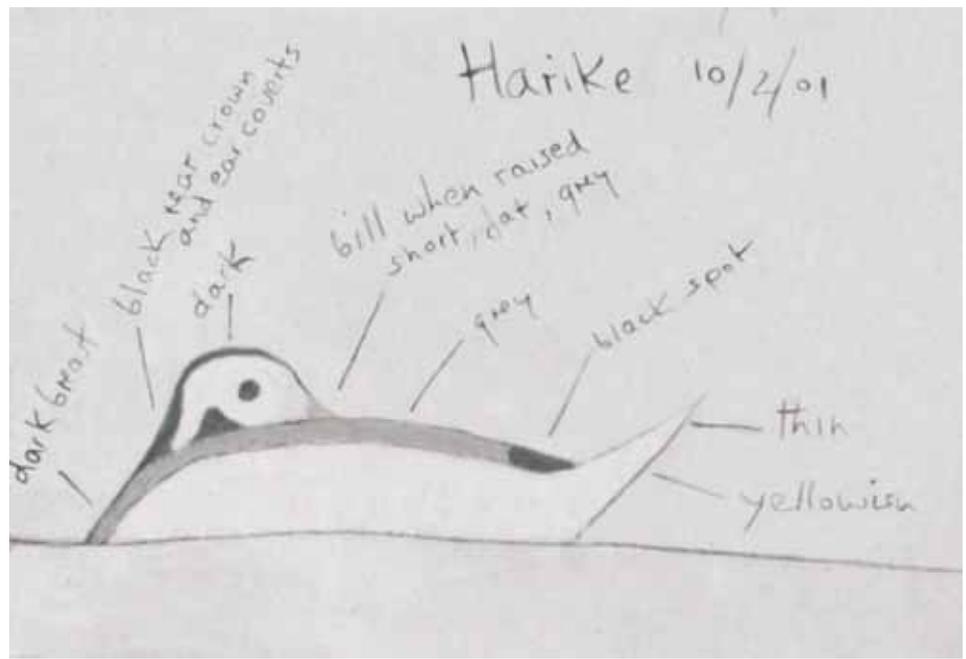


Fig. 2. Drawing of original field-sketch Harike: 10th February 2001

Ali & Ripley (1983) state that some of the six records cited by them were records of small flocks of 'a half dozen or so,' and Grimmett *et al.* (1998) and Kazmierczak (2000) give the site at Quetta, Pakistan as a multiple record. Given that six of the eight previous records were during 1933-1940, it is possible that this species is being overlooked by birdwatchers of recent. A more careful watch in the appropriate areas might yield more records in the future.

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