

First record of Masked Booby *Sula dactylatra* from Kachchh, India

Sandeep Munjpara, Arjun Potter, Parimal Solanki & Jyoti Tak

Munjpara, S., Potter, A., Solanki, P. & Tak, J. 2009. First record of Masked Booby *Sula dactylatra* from Kachchh, India. *Indian Birds* 4 (3): 112 (2008).

Sandeep Munjpara, Arjun Potter, Parimal Solanki, Jyoti Tak: GEER Foundation, Gandhinagar, Gujarat, India.
Email: sandeepmunjpara@gmail.com

Ms received on 24th June 2008.

The pelagic Masked Booby *Sula dactylatra* has widespread distribution throughout the tropical and sub-tropical oceans. It is 80 cm in length, making it the largest of the boobies. The adult bird is white with light brown patches and a black mask. The flight and tail feathers are also black. It breeds throughout its range on islands in the Atlantic, Indian, and Pacific Oceans. It has four sub-species of which *S. d. melanops* breeds on Socotra, Mait, and other islands off the Somali coast. It probably breeds in the Arabian Sea on the Kuria Muria Islands as well. On the Indian Subcontinent, Masked Booby has been recorded as a pelagic passage migrant off Sind and Makran along the coast of Pakistan, at Ormara Head, Sri Lanka, and Cannanore, India (Ali & Ripley 1987). However, it is quite uncommon on the Indian coastline. Monsoon gales occasionally blow birds to the western coast of India. This species has been recorded near Bombay and Nasik (Ali & Ripley 1987), Lakshadweep and west coastal area of south India, as well as the Maldives (Grimmett *et al.* 2000).

The species was recently recorded in Gujarat coast near Mithapur in Jamnagar district (Trivedi 2003). It has also been recorded in some parts of south Gujarat (Grimmett *et al.* 2000). However, there has been no record of this species on the coast of Kachchh.

Our team from GEER Foundation found a dead Masked Booby on Pingleshwar beach (23°01'N 68°53'E), in Abdasa taluka of Kachchh district (Gujarat, India) on 13th July 2007. This area lies on the northern coast of the Gulf of Kachchh. This is the first record of the species for Kachchh, and the northernmost record from India.

Unfortunately the bird was found dead, washed up at the high tide line of the beach. The body and feathers of the bird were intact, hence it was easy to identify. The bird was found without any external injury. The carcass was quite fresh, in the pre-rigor mortis stage. Its skin was visible. Though the cause of death is not known, it is likely that it drowned at sea. It is interesting to note that all other records of boobies from the Gujarat coast have been either of dead birds or those that died soon after being spotted (Dave *et al.* 2003).

References

- Ali, S. & Ripley, S. D. 1987. *Compact handbook of the birds of India and Pakistan together with those of Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan and Sri Lanka*. 2nd ed. Delhi: Oxford University Press.
- Grimmett, R., Inskipp, C. & Inskipp, T. 1998. *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*. 1st ed. London: Christopher Helm, A & C Black.
- Trivedi, S. H. 2003. Sightings of Masked Booby *Sula dactylatra* at Mithapur - first record for Gujarat. *Flamingo* 1 (3&4): 3-4.
- Dave, R., Dodiya, P. & Dhadhal, J. 2003. Bluefooted Booby on Mahuva coast: A first record for the Indian subcontinent. *Flamingo* 1 (3&4): 4-5.

