

Sighting of Mongolian Gull *Larus [vegae / smithsonianus] mongolicus* at Chilka, Odisha

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142. Mongolian Gull *Larus mongolicus*.

Mongolian Gull *Larus [vegae / smithsonianus] mongolicus* is a member of the "Large White-headed Gull" complex whose taxonomy has been revised many times. Formerly considered a race of Caspian Gull *L. cachinnans*, it is now placed as a subspecies either under *L. vegae* (Gill & Donsker 2013) or *L. smithsonianus* (Collinson 2008; Dickinson & Remsen 2013). Species identification is complicated and never conclusive, and its presence in India has been open to doubt (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005).

This note describes the sighting of single adult Mongolian Gull from Chilka Lake in Rambha, Odisha, India (19°30'N, 85°05'E). The bird was sighted on a visit to Chilka Lake in Barkul, Rambha, Satapada, and Mangolajodi marshes during 23–29 January 2013. After a morning trip to the Nalban Sanctuary, and birding around Barkul, we headed towards Rambha. We took a boat ride in a country boat and came across huge flocks of Tufted Ducks *Aythya fuligula* and Brown-headed Gulls *L. brunnicephalus* apart from a few other common birds. We were taken to a place, which was probably the resting place of a flock of about 50 gulls, all of them Brown-headed, but for a larger solitary gull that appeared different. Several photographs

were taken [140–142] and they were posted on the Oriental Bird Images e-group. Its identity was suggested as this species based on jizz that included a large head, heavy bill, and very pale eyes, quite unlike *L. cachinnans*. Other probable races, *heuglini*, *barabensis*, and *taimyrensis* have much darker upper parts than this bird. These pictures were subsequently added to Oriental Bird Images as Mongolian Gull [http://orientalbirdimages.org/search.php?p=2&Bird_ID=941&Bird_Family_ID=&pagesize=1].

These images were also transmitted by Rajah Jayapal to Hans Larsson, who commented that these pictures are most likely a Mongolian Gull on account of the following field-characters:

1. More black in primaries compared with *vegae* (markings on 7 instead of 5–6 primaries).
2. Upper parts too pale for *barabensis* as well as *taimyrensis*.
3. All white head in mid-winter (in *vegae* and *taimyrensis* normally streaked in winter plumage).
4. Structure and bare parts colouration that matched well with this species.

Though the pictures resemble the 'Eastern' population of *L. cachinnans*, from which *mongolicus* is difficult to exclude, the significantly paler mantle of the Chilka individual points to its identification as *mongolicus* (Hans Larsson *pers. comm.*, July 2013).

The Mongolian Gull nests in Mongolia, neighbouring parts of Russia (such as Lake Baikal), north-east China, and possibly South Korea. It migrates south-east to winter in southern and eastern China, and Korea with small numbers reaching Japan (Wikipedia 2013). Though there are no confirmed reports from India, it is probably overlooked in the Bay of Bengal, which is believed to be its southern-most wintering range.

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