

Short-tailed Shearwater *Ardenna tenuirostris* from Namkhana, West Bengal: A first record for India

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Short-tailed Shearwater *Ardenna tenuirostris* is a pelagic migrant that breeds in Tasmania, and off the coast of southern Australia. It normally undertakes a trans-equatorial migration, wintering north of Japan, near the Aleutian Islands, with some birds moving north of the Bering Strait (BirdLife International 2013). However, vagrants are known to occur in the Indian Ocean, particularly during spring, as indicated by two May specimens collected from Pakistan and Sri Lanka (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005), and a recent record off the Bangladesh coast (see elsewhere in this issue).

On 27 April 2013, one of us (PG), along with Chandan Maity of Patharpratima, visited Muri Ganga River, a distributary of the Hooghly River in South 24 Parganas district, West Bengal. Weather was sunny but strong SE winds were blowing towards the mainland. While travelling upstream of the Hatania-Doania River (21°46'N, 88°12'E), PG observed two dark birds on the

river at 1130 hrs, and managed to capture a couple of images [138, 139]. The birds allowed close approach to about 6–7 m, and when flushed, flew towards Ghoramara Island, and settled on the water. The images were transmitted for identification to AD who further forwarded them to SKS, and the Bengalbird Google Group. Though the first photograph was not completely conclusive, the second photograph, showing both birds, was more helpful, and several birders familiar with this species identified it from the photograph.

Both pictures showed a blackish-brown shearwater with a small bill, and a compact body with wings extending beyond the tail tip. In Fig. 1 the bird in the foreground has an all dark beak, greyish throat with a blackish head, steep forehead and short neck. The dark beak eliminates all other dark shearwaters that occur in the region except the hypothetical Sooty Shearwater *P. griseus*. The shorter beak, steeper forehead and the colour tones of head and throat, which gives a helmeted appearance, are clear indications of a Short-tailed Shearwater. The birds show two generations of feathers and the wings are very worn, probably too worn for a first-year bird; it is more likely these are retained flight feathers from almost a year ago, which were perhaps moulted in the north Pacific wintering area (Jeff Davies, *pers. comm.*, July 2013). This worn plumage is a further confirmation of the identity, as Sooty Shearwater should show fresh feathers at this time of the year (David Bakewell, *pers. comm.*, July 2013).

This is a first record of the Short-tailed Shearwater from India. However, there are apparently regular sightings off the western coast of the Malayan peninsula, which makes sightings further north quite probable (Jeff Davies, *pers. comm.*, July 2013). There had not been any reports of tropical storms before the sighting date and hence these birds may not have reached here wind-blown from the southern latitudes. On the contrary, perhaps they occur regularly in this area during April–May, and more visits to the seas during spring might help in confirming the same.

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138. Short-tailed Shearwater.



139. Short-tailed Shearwater.