

Heuglin's Gull *Larus fuscus heuglini* in the Andaman Islands

S. Rajeshkumar, Jaison John, C. Raghunathan & Kailash Chandra

Rajeshkumar, S., John, J., Raghunathan, C., & Chandra, K., 2017. Heuglin's Gull *Larus fuscus heuglini* in the Andaman Islands. *Indian BIRDS* 13 (5): 132–133.

S. Rajeshkumar, Zoological Survey of India, Andaman and Nicobar Regional Centre, Horticulture Road, Haddo, Port Blair 744102, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, India.

E-mail: rajeshkumar0802@gmail.com (Corresponding author)

Jaison John, Department of Environment and Forests, South Andaman Division, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, India.

C. Raghunathan, Zoological Survey of India, Andaman and Nicobar Regional Centre, Horticulture Road, Haddo, Port Blair 744102, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, India.

Kailash Chandra, Zoological Survey of India, M-Block, New Alipore, Kolkata 700053, West Bengal, India.

Manuscript received on 16 January 2017.

Heuglin's Gull *Larus fuscus heuglini* is a large white-headed gull with an unclear taxonomic position and complex identification. Along with several other races, it is currently treated as a subspecies of the Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*. The systematics and evolutionary relationships of this group were revised by Collinson *et al.* (2008). Heuglin's Gull breeds in the northern latitudes, from northern Siberia, the Kola Peninsula eastwards to the Taymyr Peninsula, and winters from south-western Asia to eastern Africa, through the Indian Subcontinent, with records from South Africa, eastern China, South Korea, and a few scattered records from South-east Asia (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Burger *et al.*, 2016). It has been recorded as a passage migrant in the Indian Peninsula (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), with most birds wintering all along the Indian coasts. Records exist from the Maldives (Ash & Shafeeg 1994), Sri Lanka (Lamsfuss 1996), and the Chagos Archipelago (Carr 2016). The species is rare in South-east Asia, with records from Malaysia, Singapore, the Cocos (Keeling) Islands, and Indonesia (Trainor *et al.* 2011). The subspecies of the Lesser Black-backed Gull that widely winters in India is the Steppe Gull *L. f. barabensis* (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Bourne (1996) stated that Heuglin's Gull is the commoner of the large white-headed Gulls found in South Asia. According to Rasmussen & Anderton (2012), the only dark-backed large gull noticed in South Asia is Heuglin's Gull, being much darker than the Steppe Gull.

On 23 November 2016 at 1210 hrs, a single bird was observed and photographed by JJ on the north-eastern side of

Tarmugli Island (11.60°N, 92.55°E), located in the Mahatma Gandhi Marine National Park (*henceforth*, MGMNP), Wandoor, South Andaman Island [170]. The bird was swimming near the seashore and then landed with a flock of Eurasian Whimbrel *Numenius phaeopus* on a small sand bar that was 25 m from the shore area. We were unable to identify it at the time of the sightings. The size of the bird, as noted by JJ, was larger than the Anatids, particularly Lesser Whistling Duck *Dendrocygna javanica*, and Andaman Teal *Anas gibberifrons albobularis*, which are commonly observed on the island. A few photographs were sent to SR for identification.

The bird was initially identified as a Lesser Black-backed Gull based on the following morphological characters: Fairly large, white-headed, white-bodied gull, with heavy apple-green bill slightly curved at the tip, black ring markings on both mandibles, the presence of a prominent gonyx on the lower mandible, strong streaks and drops on the nape and neck, fine streaks around the eyes, dull red orbital ring, long pinkish legs, wings mostly dark grey and slightly brown and white at the tip of primaries. Dark grey mantle, some lesser coverts with brownish feathers or edges, and bill with dark sub-terminal band: all this indicates a Heuglin's Gull. Steppe Gull usually shows a paler mantle than this (but can be similar to a pale Heuglin's), more rounded head, and short yellowish legs. This individual had brownish feathers on the lesser- and median coverts, and a few brownish feathers on the scapulars too. In Heuglin's- and Steppe Gulls, this is typical of second winter birds. Most retained coverts and scapulars have molted by the third winter, and the birds are similar to adults, with dark primary coverts and a few dark-centered outer secondaries (Olsen & Larsson 2003).

Amongst the rarer taxa of large white-headed Gulls, the Caspian Gull *L. cachinnans* is characterised by its long sloping forehead, long slender bill without curved tip, pale pinkish to yellowish legs, much lighter grey mantle, which was absent in this bird (Olsen & Larsson 2003). Mongolian Gull *L. smithsonianus mongolicus* would also be equally pale-backed, and would not show such a dark grey mantle as this bird (Olsen & Larsson 2003). This gull, probably in its second winter plumage, is unlike a Taimyr Gull *L. f. taimyrensis*, a form of Lesser Black-backed Gull but usually synonymised with Heuglin's Gull (Dickinson & Remsen 2013; Praveen *et al.* 2016). At this age, a Taimyr Gull would show a paler, slate-grey mantle, and not a darker greyish mantle like this individual. The head markings in a Taimyr Gull are more pronounced, with streaking on the crown, concentrated fine streaking around the eyes (giving the effect of an 'eye patch') and rather extensive and coarse streaking on the hind neck,



Jaison John

170. Heuglin's Gull at Mahatma Gandhi Marine National Park, South Andaman.

which is lacking here (Olsen & Larsson 2003). Similarly Vega Gull *L. s. vegae*, which at this age has even more extensive head and nape markings than a Taimyr Gull, can also be excluded. A second winter Vega Gull has a heavily streaked head, with dark 'blotches' on its nape and sides of upper breast, and also on the flanks, which is not seen here (Olsen & Larsson 2003).

In India, large white-headed gulls are common on the western coast, but taxonomic treatments are complex (Praveen *et al.*, 2014; Ganpule, 2016). The characters present in this bird are enough to separate it from other large white-headed gull taxa.

The present observation of a Heuglin's Gull is the first report for the Andaman & Nicobar Islands, and is also a significant, off the mainland, record from the Bay of Bengal, including the South-east Asian region.

Acknowledgements

SR would like to thank the Department of Environment and Forest, South Andaman Division for support and also thanks to reviewer and editor for providing extremely useful comments that have improved the manuscript. First author would like to thank Dr. Christopher N. Gibbins for his clarification and suggestions. JJ would like to thank forest guards and field assistants for their enormous support during visits.

References

Ash, J. S., & Shafeeg, A., 1994. Birds of the Maldivian Islands, Indian Ocean. *Forktail* 10: 3–34.

Bourne, W. R. P., 1996. The larger white-headed gulls wintering around the southern

coasts of Asia. *Sea Swallow* 45: 86–91.

Burger, J., Gochfeld, M., Kirwan, G. M., Christie, D. A., de Juana, E., & Garcia, E. F. J., 2016. Lesser Black-backed Gull (*Larus fuscus*). In: del Hoyo, J., Elliott, A., Sargatal, J., Christie, D. A. & de Juana, E. (Eds.). *Handbook of the Birds of the World Alive*. Lynx Edicions, Barcelona. (Retrieved from <http://www.hbw.com/node/53986> on 27 December 2016).

Carr, P., 2016. Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*: a species new to the Chagos Archipelago, British Indian Ocean Territory. *BirdingASIA* 26: 124–125.

Collinson, J. M., Parkin, D. T., Knox, A. G., Sangster, G., & Svensson, L., 2008. Species boundaries in the Herring and Lesser Black-backed Gull complex. *British Birds* 101: 340–363.

Dickinson, E. C., & Rensen, J. V. J., (eds.) 2013. *The Howard and Moore complete checklist of the birds of the world: 1. Non-passerines*. 4th ed. Eastbourne, Aves Press. Vol 1 of 2 vols. Pp. i–i, 1–461. U.K.

Ganpule, P., 2016. Observations of probable Taimyr Gulls *Larus fuscus taimyrensis* at Okha, Gujarat, India. *Indian BIRDS* 12 (1): 1–4.

Lamsfuss, G., 1996. On the larger gulls as winter visitors to India and Sri Lanka. *Ceylon Bird Club Notes* 1996 (May): 39–44.

Olsen, K. M., & Larsson, H., 2003. *Gulls of Europe, Asia and North America*. Christopher Helm, London.

Praveen, J., Jayapal, R., & Pittie, A., 2014. Notes on Indian rarities—2: Waterfowl, diving waterbirds, and gulls and terns. *Indian BIRDS* 9 (5&6): 113–136.

Praveen, J., Jayapal, R., & Pittie, A., 2016. A checklist of the birds of India, *Indian BIRDS* 11 (5&6): 113–172.

Rasmussen, P. C., & Anderton, J. C., 2012. *Birds of South Asia: the Ripley guide*. 2nd ed. Washington, D.C. and Barcelona: Smithsonian Institution and Lynx Edicions. 2 vols. Pp. 1–378; 1–683.

Trainor, C. R., Imanuddin & Walker, J., 2011. Heuglin's Gull *Larus heuglini* on Wetar Island, Banda Sea: the first Indonesian record. *Forktail* 27: 95–96. 📷

Bohemian Waxwing *Bombycilla garrulus* at Rualing, Lahaul, Himachal Pradesh: A second record for India

Raj Rawal, C. Abhinav & Manoj Sharma

Rawal, R., Abhinav, C., & Sharma, M., 2017. Bohemian Waxwing *Bombycilla garrulus* at Rualing, Lahaul, Himachal Pradesh: A second record for India. *Indian BIRDS* 13 (5): 133–135.

Raj Rawal, Village Rualing, P.O. Lote 175133, District Lahaul and Spiti, Himachal Pradesh, India. E-mail: raj955556@gmail.com [RR]

C. Abhinav, Village & P.O. Ghurkari, Tehsil & District Kangra 176001, Himachal Pradesh, India. E-mail: drabhinav.c@gmail.com [CA]

Manoj Sharma, Village Shankarapur, Ramnagar 244715, District Nainital, Uttarakhand, India. E-mail: treesswift@gmail.com [Corresponding author.] [MS]

Manuscript received on 22 February 2017.

Lahaul, located in Himachal Pradesh, is a remote high altitude valley that receives heavy snow in winter. Rualing village (32.61°N, 76.93°E; c. 3200m asl) is located on a mountain slope, surrounded by fields that are interspersed with juniper *Juniperus* sp., willow *Salix* sp., and apple *Malus pumila*. On 25 January 2017, the weather was extremely cold and the area had received very heavy snowfall; the ground was covered with 01–1.5 m of snow. On 26 January 2017, at 1445 hrs, RR heard a strange bird calling from the trees outside his house. From the roof of his house he discovered a grayish-brown, starling-sized bird, with black on its head, a visible crest, white, yellow, and red markings in its wings, and a yellow tail band. The bird was feeding on the berries of a juniper tree. Five more birds were seen in the same tree, also feeding, moving from branch to branch. The flock was seen for 15 min before the birds flew; they were not seen again. RR took some photographs [171, 172]; based on

these, and the description of the birds, they were identified as Bohemian Waxwings *Bombycilla garrulus*.

Of the three species of waxwings occurring worldwide (Dickinson & Christidis 2014), the Bohemian Waxwing has a Holarctic range, occurring in North America and northern Eurasia (Vaurie 1959). Two races, *B. g. pallidiceps*, and *B. g. garrulus* represent the species. The latter breeds in northern Europe and northern Asia, with its normal wintering range extending from western Europe to central and eastern Asia (Dickinson & Christidis 2014). The nearest known wintering area, north of India, is Kashgar (39.47°N, 75.98°E; c.1300 m asl) in Xinjiang, China, (Cheng 1987), though recent records have only been from further north at Urumqi (43.82°N, 87.60°E; c.840 m asl; China Ornithological Society 2006, 2007).

There are a few records of the species from Pakistan (Roberts 1992; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012), where it was first recorded