most likely it is not the case (David James pers. comm. April, 2014). Frigatebird records from the eastern seaboard of India are very few and this is the first record of this genus from West Bengal. As this specimen was the sole basis for the inclusion of Christmas Island Frigatebird in the Indian checklist (Praveen et al. 2013), we propose that the species be rejected from the same and it should also not figure in the list of threatened birds of India.

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References

The Red-breasted Goose *Branta ruficollis* is one of the most attractive geese in the world, but it is also one of the rarest, and is listed as Endangered by the IUCN (BirdLife International 2014). It breeds on the Taimyr, Gydan, and Yamal peninsulas of Russia, and winters along the western coast of the Black Sea, at certain favourite spots in Bulgaria, Romania, and Ukraine while small numbers also winter in Azerbaijan. Though this bird figured in several checklists of birds of India (see below), recent works (Grimmett et al. 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012) have listed it as hypothetical.

On 13 March 2014 we were casually birding while going to our native village in Saharanpur District, Uttar Pradesh. We took a detour from the Ganga Barrage, which is about 12 kms from Bijnor, a district headquarter of Uttar Pradesh (29°22′N, 78°02′E; c. 220 m above MSL), to watch flocks of Bar-headed Geese *Anser indicus* and other waterfowl in adjacent swampy meadows. We saw hundreds of Bar-headed Geese and spotted a Greater White-fronted Goose *A. albifrons* in a big flock of the former. As we were returning from the site, SP spotted a different bird in another flock of Bar-headed Geese, which was foraging...
on ground. We examined it carefully through binoculars but could not identify it. We noted details like its dark brown foreneck and breast, black belly, white stripe on flanks, and white rear belly. A search in Grimmet et al. (2011) was unfruitful. RP took some photographs, for the record, as the bird was too far for his 300 mm Nikkor lens [129-131]. Though SP insisted on a closer shot, RP refused to cross the swampy land as he was dressed for an occasion, and he also did not want to disturb the flock. We scanned the whole area for any other similar birds, but none were seen.

Festivities of Holi meant that we had little time to search the Internet, or post photos on social networking sites, for help with identification. We returned to Kaladhungi on 16 March 2014 and tried to locate the bird at same spot, but we did not find it. The next day, RP emailed a photo to Soumyajit Nandy who suggested it could be a Red-breasted Goose; then we matched our photographs with other on in the internet. After confirming that our bird was a male Red-breasted Goose, RP uploaded its photograph on the Indian Birds and Birds of India Facebook groups, and soon realised the value of this record.

There have been three previous instances when the Red-breasted Goose was reported from India, however, the evidence provided is not over-whelming and hence these records were considered provisional. They are listed below in chronological order.

1. A report in the Bengal Sporting Magazine of April 1836, VIII, p. 247 of one shot near Nagpur from amongst a group of four (Blyth 1870). Blanford (1898) and Finn (1915) dismissed this anonymous record, the latter stating categorically, ‘I have looked this up, and quite agree with Blanford that the author of this did not know what he was talking about…’ (p. 70).

2. Baker (1904) identified this bird from the description provided by M. S. Mondy (sic) who saw four, on the banks of River Brahmaputra, along with Greylag Geese sometime in 1904 winter. Though Baker mentions the observer took a ‘very careful note of its appearance,’ and provided a, ‘minute description,’ these details are found wanting in his note.

3. Several years later, Baker suggests that Mondy (sic) saw only a ‘single’ while he himself saw a ‘flock of five’ that went past his steamer while travelling on the Brahmaputra in March 1907 (Baker 1929), contrary to his own earlier statement.

Hence, this record serves the best evidence for allowing this bird to be listed in the Indian bird checklist.

Our bird is definitely a vagrant as the nearest known present-day wintering areas are in Turkey. The precise winter distribution of Red-breasted Goose varies according to the severity of the weather from the Crimean peninsula to the Dobrudza region of Bulgaria. In cold weather, small numbers are occasionally seen on the Aegean shore of Greece and Turkey. Migration is believed to follow a relatively narrow route south down the Ob to Kazakhstan and then east to the Black Sea. There may be other, currently unknown, staging sites and knowledge of the migration route, particularly in Siberia, should therefore be considered incomplete. It is also possible that some wintering grounds remain undetected, and use of these areas during mild weather may account for the variation in winter survey totals in recent years (BirdLife International 2014). The species used to spend the northern winter in Iran along the Caspian Coast until 1950s, but with changing water levels, the main non-breeding area moved over 1000 kms west to the west coast region of the Black Sea in Bulgaria and the birds are being satellite tracked from Bulgaria to Russia to unravel their migration routes (http://bspb-redbreasts.org/).

Association of Red-breasted Goose with Greater White-fronted Goose is well-known and they often migrate together back in spring (Kear 2005). Though this is the first photographic record of the Red-breasted Goose in India, it should be treated as a rare vagrant to the country.

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References


