

Sighting of the Sooty Tern *Sterna fuscata* near Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh, India

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Taher, H., Mani, U., Rao, K. B., & Raha, N., 2011. Sighting of the Sooty Tern *Sterna fuscata* near Hyderabad, Andhra Pradesh, India. *Indian BIRDS* 7 (3): 87–88.

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On Saturday, 28 May 2011, four members of the Birdwatchers' Society of Andhra Pradesh (BSAP) were out on a birdwatching trip to an area about 70 km west of Hyderabad city called Anantgiri Hills. This is a small series of forest-clad hillocks with good tree cover, close to a large temple. Having done some birding in this area, we decided to explore the region further west of this place near a large reservoir called Nagasamundar (aka Kotepally Reservoir). The man-made lake, despite the heat, appeared to be of fair depth close to the dam. The depth appeared to be about 0.6 m at the southern end of the lake where we were standing.

Kotepally Reservoir (17°21'16"N, 77°45'21"E) is located in Ranga Reddy district of Andhra Pradesh and lies about 100 km

west of Hyderabad. From what we could see, the total spread appeared to be between 6 to 8 km² with the current water level being about 70% of the total spread.

We reached this spot at about 1230 hrs. There were c. 20–25 River Terns *Sterna aurantia*, flying about over the water and occasionally diving for food. While watching these birds, we spotted a tern, which seemed markedly different from the others. We concentrated on this bird and took several photographs for aid in identification. The bird was larger than the River Terns that were flying around—this was the first feature we noted. It appeared to be deep black all over the upperparts and spotless white below. There was a white forehead that extended to just above the eyes. The leading edges of the wings appeared to be white and the tail was deeply forked and edged with white again. Referring to the field guides we were carrying, we tentatively identified the bird as a Sooty Tern *S. fuscata*. There was initial confusion with the very similar Bridled Tern *S. anaethetus* but the absence of the white supercilium (marked feature of the Bridled Tern) in the bird we were observing and the upperparts appearing to be uniformly dark (vis-à-vis difference in shade between the dark back and the black head in Bridled), distinguished it readily from the Bridled Tern. Referring to the photograph(s) (Fig. 1) and the field guides, we were able to clinch the identity of the bird as a Sooty Tern.

The Sooty Tern is not known from Andhra Pradesh (Taher & Pittie 1989). According to Ali & Ripley (1987), it is known to breed in considerable numbers in the Laccadive (=Lakshadweep) Islands. It is also reported to breed on the Vengurla Rocks off the western coast of the peninsula, and also in the Andamans (Ali & Ripley 1987). "Vagrants (storm-blown?) have occurred far inland, e.g., Cachar (Assam), Darbhanga (Bihar), Tirunelveli (Tamil Nadu) and in the hill zone of Ceylon," (Ali & Ripley 1987). Rasmussen & Anderton (2005) give the distribution of this species as, "Breeding visitor—Vengurla Rocks (off S. Maharashtra), Lakshadweep, Chagos and perhaps Maldives ... presumably occurs well off W. coast of India. Storm-driven vagrants very rarely occur far inland ..."

Historical records are from Cachar (Baker 1912), Laccadive (=Lakshadweep) Islands—breeding (Betts 1939), Darbhanga (Inglis 1902) and Thattakadu, Western Ghats (Sugathan *et al.* 1996). Ambedkar (1983) gives a record of a sighting from Point Calimere, and another record from Bombay (=Mumbai) (Ambedkar 1981). There is a record of a specimen collected



Fig. 1. Sooty Tern *Sterna fuscata* near Hyderabad, May 2011.

near Calicut (=Kozhikode) (Matthew & Shukkur 1974), and another recent specimen recovered near Valparai in Tamil Nadu (Robin & Rao 2006). Recent sight records for this decade are from the Lakshadweep archipelago, and Kerala. Mike Prince records two individuals seen off Agatthi and Kavaratti Islands in the Lakshadweep group of islands (Prince 2008). One was found at Kallambalam, Kollam, and another at Kothamangalam, both in Kerala, at the end of May 2011 (Sreekumar 2011). A flock was observed at sea off the coast near Kannur on 28 May 2011 (Praveen 2011).

From the distribution map given in Kazmierczak (2000), there are only a few scattered records of the bird, mostly along the western shores, and very few off the eastern seaboard. This is consistent with the records of the species given above. Ali & Ripley (1987) record the species as being, "A pelagic tern seldom coming to land except in the breeding season ... Usually seen in flocks well out to sea." In a straight line, the nearest coast from Koteppally, where we observed the bird, is approximately 350 km.

This record (vagrant) of the Sooty Tern is an addition to the birds of Andhra Pradesh (Taher & Pittie 1989), and appears to be the farthest inland record of the species for India; the earlier inland record could be of a bird from Cachar (Baker 1912), which is about 125 km. from the sea. Once again, our observation seems to emphasize the cardinal rule of birdwatching: to observe each individual even in a large flock of any species.

Acknowledgements

We thank Aasheesh Pittie for assistance and help in identifying the bird from our photographs, and for encouraging us to write and send in our sighting for publication.

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Ring recoveries of Lesser Crested Tern *Thalasseus bengalensis* along the Maharashtra coast, India

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Kasambe, R., & Deshmukh, V., 2011. Ring recoveries of Lesser Crested Tern *Thalasseus bengalensis* along the Maharashtra coast, India. *Indian BIRDS* 7 (3): 88-89.

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According to Ali & Ripley (1987) the Lesser Crested Tern *Thalasseus bengalensis* is, "Resident? According to Ticehurst [it is] the commonest tern of Karachi Harbour and coast-line. [It] Occurs commonly along the western and eastern seaboard of India, Andaman and Nicobar Is., and in Ceylon [Sri Lanka] waters practically throughout the year; more abundant between September and end April. Presumptively breeding on the Makran coast (W. Pakistan), Rameswaram Island, Laccadive and Maldive Is. ... but no direct evidence as yet." Rasmussen &

Anderton (2005) state that it, "Breeds towards end of monsoon in Pakistan ... [It is] Resident, breeding on small islets on Sind coast, possibly Lakshadweep and Maldives, and reported breeding Orissa coast. [It is a] Winter visitor to coasts of rest of region, from Mekran Coast to Sri Lanka, Bangladesh and Andamans ... and Nicobars."

We report three instances of ring recoveries of Lesser Crested Terns along the Maharashtra coast, which are significant in understanding the migration pattern of the species.