

## Acknowledgements

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## Further comments on White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* distribution in the Indian Sub-continent

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I read with interest the article on the distribution of White-winged Tern *Chlidonias leucopterus* in *Indian Birds* 1 (4): 81-83. I have only visited north-western India twice. Rajasthan and Gujarat, on a birding trip, between 5-17.i.1999 and Harike Lake, Punjab, between 6-10.ii.2001. On both these occasions I recorded this species, which led me to conclude that perhaps White-winged Tern is a regular winter visitor to these parts.

Earlier I had spent most of my birding hours in the winter season near Pune, Maharashtra and Goa where I had failed to record this species. However during the monsoon of 2003, between 16.viii-23.x., I spent three or four early morning hours sea-watching from Fort Aguada (Goa) and between 3.ix.-29.x.2003, I made frequent and regular trips to the Chapora estuary tern and gull roost. White-winged Tern was recorded at Chapora on nine days between 9.ix-21.x., with the maximum number of at least eleven on 21.x. (Prasad 2004). It is obvious these terns were on passage as this species is extremely rare in Goa in winter.

On River Mula-Mutha near Pune, Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybridus* was fairly common in the winters of 1992-1996 when I became very familiar with this species. In Goa too there was a large flock of Whiskered Terns present on virtually all visits to Chapora estuary in September-October 2003, with 50-60+ birds present from 16.ix.2003 to 11.x.2003, which allowed for good comparison between the two species. I made detailed drawings and notes (available on request) of each White-winged Tern record to confirm identification, except in Goa, where in the larger flying flocks it was not always possible to get a detailed description of each bird.

In winter the plumage of White-winged Tern is usually more marked than that of

Whiskered and any such bird with a more contrasting wing pattern (dark secondaries, outer primaries and leading edge) is worth investigating, but it is the white rump that is diagnostic, although good views are needed to see this feature. In September and October juvenile birds are present at Goa and the colour of the rump is more difficult to detect because of the contrasting brown 'saddle' but Whiskered has a more scaly patterned saddle and usually a less marked upper-wing pattern than White-winged. In perched birds White-winged has a more noticeably fine bill and a distinctive dark spot behind the eye on the ear coverts, often crescent-shaped, curving up towards the crown, which is diffusely marked on the adult. Whiskered is larger, stockier and less elegant than White-winged and more similar to one of the smaller *Sterna* species. In Goa the small White-winged Tern flock was usually separate from the Whiskered Tern flock except whilst roosting and after a disturbance of the roost. Often the White-winged Tern flock would appear together from along the river where they had presumably been foraging. Even when the roosting flock was disturbed, which was frequently by Black Kites *Milvus migrans* the White-winged Tern flock would keep together within the larger flock, slowly separating out if time allowed. My records of the White-winged Tern are as follows: Little Rann of Kutch, Gujarat: Three on 4.i.1999 a few kilometers from the Desert Coursers camp, Zainabad.

Harike Lake, Punjab: At least one present from 6-10.ii.2001.

Goa: Chapora estuary: At least six on 9.ix.2003, three to four on 28.ix.2003, nine on 29.ix.2003, at least one on 4.x.2003, one on 5.x.2003, at least one on 9.x.2003, one on 11.x.2003, six on 13.x.2003, and up to 11 on 21.x.2003.

Sri Lanka: Tissamaharama: One on 25.i.2002. Hambantota Lewayas: 15 on 25.i.2002 and six on 26.i.2002.

White-winged Tern records by other observers from western India and Maldives:

Goa: Mandovi estuary, Goa, two adults, three juveniles on 17.ix.1999, Lainer (Pittie 1999). Anjuna sea-watch, Goa, 29 on 18.xi.1999, Lainer (Pittie 1999). Chapora estuary, Goa, one on 18.viii.1998, Lainer (Pittie 1998). Sea at Candolim and Mandovi River, Goa, one in iii.1993, Willoughby, "A scarce winter visitor which has been seen on single occasions," (Willoughby 1996; Harris 1996). Carambolim, Goa, one on 6.ii.1998, Holt (2000). For full review see Lainer (2004).

Maldives: L. Maandhoo, one on 12.xi.1993 and near L. Maavah one on 2.x.1992 (Anderson 1990-1994). "The above are the only records away from Seenu Atoll, where it is fairly regular winter visitor in small numbers, up to six together." (Ash and Shafeeg 1994, who cite the following for this remark: Ali and Ripley 1987; Anderson 1990-1994; Ash et al. in prep.; Gadow and Gardiner 1903; Phillips 1963; and Strickland and Jenner 1978).

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