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## Western Reef Egret *Egretta gularis* at Chhatargarh RD 507, Bikaner District, Rajasthan, India

On 06 August 2017, while on a birdwatching trip to IGNP canal escape reservoir at RD (Reduced Distance) 507 (28.46°N, 73.25°E) near Chhatargarh, Bikaner District, we spotted, and photographed [39] a single Western Reef Egret *Egretta gularis* at 1020 h. It was perched on a wetland shrub, in the middle of a shallow saline waterbody, alongside Cattle- *Bubulcus ibis* and Little- *E. garzetta* egrets. It was a bird in the dark grey morph and was occasionally using its wings to form a canopy when scanning the shallow waters for potential prey.



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39. Western Reef Egret in Bikaner District, Rajasthan.

The Western Reef Egret can be confused with a dark morph specimen of the Little Egret. An adult Little Egret has a dark bill throughout the year, although it can be paler at the base in winter (Dubois & Yésou 1995). From the image provided, a yellowish lore is visible on the Western Reef Heron, and its bill is not as dark as that of the Little Egret's. Also, stronger, and longer legs, and thicker base of the bill are significant features of a Western Reef Egret. Although the bird looks like a Little Egret, the features listed above outweigh the possibility of dark morph Little Egret.

The Western Reef Egret is mostly found along the western and south-eastern coast of India (Grimmett et al. 2011; Kazmierczak 2000). It tends to be a coastal bird, frequenting various habitats from rocky shores to mudflats (Dubois & Yésou 1995). RD 507 in Chhatargarh is a part of the Thar Desert in Rajasthan, and approximately 720 kms inland from the nearest coast in Gujarat. There are some previous records of Western Reef Egret from Rajasthan (Chhangani et al., 2015; Sharma et al., 2015). Thomas (2017) recorded a single Western Reef Egret near Barkheda Lake outside Jaipur. The Western Reef Egret has been reported further inland, in Jhajjar (Haryana), Dehradun, and Jim Corbett National Park (Uttarakhand); however, no photographs, or documentary evidence of these records is available (eBird 2020).

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