The status of the Red-necked Phalarope Phalaropus lobatus in Himachal Pradesh

The Red-necked Phalarope Phalaropus lobatus is the smallest of the three phalarope taxa (Chandler 2009). Like the other phalaropes, it is polyandrous and shows reversed sexual dimorphism, where the females are brighter plumaged and slightly larger than males, and the latter provide all the parental care (Ali & Ripley 1987; Grimmett et al. 1998; Rubega et al. 2020). It has a circumpolar breeding distribution and is found in the coastal regions of the Arctic Ocean, southwards to the Aleutians and the United Kingdom. Its winters are spent as a pelagic, off central-western South America, in the Arabian Sea, and from central Indonesia to western Melanesia (Rubega et al. 2020).

It is rare inland in northern India (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). In this note we discuss the records of the Red-necked Phalarope in Himachal Pradesh. The species is unmistakable in breeding plumage. In non-breeding, and juvenile plumages, we differentiated it from the similar Red Phalarope Phalaropus fulicarius by a finer, all-black bill versus a thicker bill, which sometimes is pale/yellowish at base, of the latter.

Observations

- On 14 May 2011, CA and Devinder Singh Dhadwal visited Pong Lake, Kangra District (32.03°N, 76.06°E; c.410 m asl). We saw and photographed a Red-necked Phalarope. It was feeding along with a small, mixed flock of waders, which mainly comprised Temminck’s Stint Calidris temminckii, Little Stint C. minuta, Wood Sandpiper Tringa glareola, and Kentish Plover Charadrius alexandrinus (Abhinav 2011). It was coming into breeding plumage, with dark grey head and upperparts, and a curved rufous band, running from posterior part of head to the breast.
- On 13 October 2014, CA observed a dark-plumaged Red-necked Phalarope feeding in a small pool of water near the shore of Pong Lake [40]. The cap, band behind eye, back of neck and upperparts were black, the last with pale golden markings. The whitish breast and fore-flanks had a light grey wash. It was identified as juvenile Red-necked Phalarope.
- On 29 April 2015, CA photographed a Red-necked Phalarope in the shallow waters of Pong Lake (Abhinav 2015). It was moulting into breeding plumage.
- AV saw one individual at Gette, Spiti, Lahaul & Spiti District (32.30°N, 78.02°E; c.4,400 m asl) on 23 August 2016. It was predominantly white with a grey mantle, black cap and mask behind eye, indicating that it was an adult in non-breeding plumage.
- On 06 May 2017, CA visited Pong Lake, near Baloh, Nagrota Sunan, a large area of which comprised muddy flats and shallow water. CA spotted four Red-necked Phalaropes feeding in the shallow water [41]. One bird was largely white with a dark grey mantle. It had specks of black over crown, back of neck, and breast, and a hint of rufous on sides of neck—indicating that it had just started getting its breeding plumage [42]. The rest of the individuals had darker upperparts and more extensive rufous on their necks [43]. These birds were seen again on 10, and 21 May. On the latter date they were almost in breeding plumage, having almost black upperparts with pale golden stripes on back, white throat, black neck, and curved rufous band on sides of neck and breast [44]. There was a distinct white spot above the eye. One bird was lighter in plumage, and was probably a male. It was feeding separately, c.300 m from the other three birds. On 28 May, only the suspected male was seen at the same spot [45]. It was not seen again during later visits, thus having stayed at Pong Lake for at least 22 days.
In all the present sightings at Pong Lake, the birds were tame and allowed CA to reach within a few meters. The phalaropes were not feeding in their characteristic spinning motion, but were rapidly swimming and picking food from or near the surface of water. These were also seen walking in very shallow water and sometimes flying to a nearby area.

**Other records of Red-necked Phalarope from Himachal Pradesh**

- den Besten (2004) mentioned the species as uncommon at Pong Lake. Four birds were recorded during his 90 bird counts there, between 2001 and 2003, and no seasonality information is provided.
- Devasar (2006) recorded an individual coming into breeding plumage at Pong Lake on 29 April 2006.
- Goel (2015) recorded one immature individual at Chandra Taal Lake (32.48°N, 77.62°E; c.4,280 m asl) on 18 September 2015.
- Dhadwal & Kanwar (2018) mentioned it as a passage migrant in Pong Lake and Chandra Taal Lake in Himachal Pradesh without giving the total number of individuals.

In the Indian Subcontinent, the Red-necked Phalarope is a pelagic winter visitor, to the southern Pakistan and Gujarat coasts, as well as coasts of south-eastern India, and Sri Lanka. It is rarely recorded inland and is a passage migrant through Pakistan and north-western India with a few scattered inland records elsewhere in the Subcontinent (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; eBird 2020). Ali & Ripley (1987) mentioned that it is, ‘recorded from a few inland localities on spring and/or autumn passage.’ It is more frequent in suitable waterbodies in Rajasthan, during the autumn passage, mainly Sambhar Lake, where it is a regular autumn passage migrant (Sangha 2009, 2017). In northern India, there have been a few wintering inland records of the Red-necked Phalarope, mainly in the north-western region (Sangha 2017). Ali & Ripley (1987), Kazmierczak (2000), and Grimmett et al. (2011) have not mentioned/shown any record of the species from Himachal Pradesh. The latter two works put one circle each over the Union Territory of Ladakh, Punjab, and around Delhi in their distribution map of the species and there have been no records of this species from Uttarakhand and the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir (Pfister 2004; Grimmett et al. 2011; Mohan & Sondhi 2017). There have been a few records from Haryana, close to Delhi (Vyas 2019).

The present records of the Red-necked Phalarope from Himachal Pradesh show that the species is an uncommon but regular passage migrant in the state and is seen on both, spring, and autumn passage. In Pong Lake, it is seen more commonly during spring than in autumn. It may be due to the fact that the water level in this reservoir fluctuates. The habitat at Pong Lake is more suitable for waders during spring migration as compared to autumn migration, because of the receding water level, which creates the muddy flats and the shifting shallow water, ensures a constant supply of food. In autumn, after the monsoon, the water level is either increasing or stable initially and then it starts receding slowly, giving relatively less opportunities for waders. Moreover, the waders stay for longer duration in Pong Lake during spring migration, perhaps for accumulating fat reserves before crossing the mighty Himalayas. Pong Lake is situated in the foothills of the Himalayas, at the edge of India’s northern
A record of the Black-winged Kite Elanus caeruleus breeding in the Lakshadweep Islands, Indian Ocean

The Black-winged Kite Elanus caeruleus has a widespread distribution in the Afrotropical and Indo-Malayan region (Ferguson-Lees & Christie 2001). It is a resident of the Indian mainland and Sri Lanka and has been sighted in the small atoll islands of Lakshadweep off the south-western coast of India (Ali & Ripley 1987). Its first record from Lakshadweep goes back to the latter half of the nineteenth century when Hume (1876) procured specimens from the islands of Amini and Kadamat. He categorized them as regular visitors and dismissed any chances of breeding.

A pair of adult Black-winged Kites, along with two immature birds [46], was observed in the afternoon of 26 June 2020 in a nest near the old building of the Administrator of Kavaratti Island, along the northern part of the island. Initially, we saw only the juveniles, but soon two adults flew into the nest. The nest was cone-shaped, built using twigs and sticks and secured between two to three branches almost at the top of a 30 m high Norfolk Pine Araucaria heterophylla, an ornamental exotic tree of the islands. On observation, we found that the adults fed the juveniles with Domestic Rats Mus musculus. From the size of the juveniles at the time of observation, they might have hatched a few weeks ago, probably in May. They were able to fly, while still being fed by the adults.

---

C. Abhinav & Ankit Vikrant

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

Ankit Vikrant, Department of Space, Earth and Environment, Chalmers University of Technology, Maskingränd 2, 412 58 Gothenburg, Sweden. E-mail: ankitvikrant74@gmail.com [AV]


The small atoll islands of Lakshadweep have confirmed reports of only a few species of breeding land birds: Asian Koel Eudynamys scolopaceus, House Crow Corvus splendens, Rock Pigeon Columba livia, Grey Heron Ardea cinerea, White-breasted Waterhen Amaurornis phoenicurus, Indian White-eye Zosterops palpebrosus, etc., (Daniels 1992; Kurup & Zacharias 1995; eBird, 2020). There are records of

References

46. Correspondence

Amaurornis phoenicurus

Phalaropus lobatus

Grey Heron Ardea cinerea

Rock Pigeon Columba livia

Asian Koel Eudynamys scolopaceus