

Correspondence

The Barnacle Goose *Branta leucopsis* in Mote Majra, Punjab, India: An addition to the avifauna of South Asia

On 27 January 2024, at around 1200 h, LMB was watching migratory birds in the waterbody of Mote Majra village (30.59°N, 76.70°E) Punjab, India. There were many migratory species including Bar-headed Geese *Anser indicus*, Northern Shovelers *Spatula clypeata*, Common Teals *Anas crecca*, Gadwalls *Mareca strepera*, and Great Cormorants *Phalacrocorax carbo*. It was a sunny day and he enjoyed photographing the Bar-headed Geese of which 150–200 birds were present. Along with these geese, he spotted a different species but did not take it seriously. In the evening, when he was scrutinizing the images, he found that they were Barnacle Geese *Branta leucopsis*! After checking all the photographs, he realized there were three Barnacle Geese in that flock of Bar-heads [290–291]. Seven images taken between 1211 h and 1233 h had two Barnacle Geese except for the last image where three were visible. He also had several pictures of Bar-headed Geese flying but none of them had any Barnacle Geese. Having got curious, LMB visited the wetland again the next day at 1430 h with an intention of taking more pictures. However, the day was cloudy with thick fog. After an exhaustive search, the three Barnacle Geese were found amongst the mixed flock of Anatids. However, the pictures [292] were not that clear due to the fog. Compared to the previous day, these three were swimming separately away from the flock of Bar-headed Geese. Again, these three did not take to wing at any point during the second visit. Back home, LMB shared the news with senior birders of Chandigarh Bird Club, of which he was a part of.



290. Two of the three Barnacle Geese along with the Bar-headed Geese.



291. Barnacle Geese swimming along with Bar-headed Geese gaggle.



Lalit Mohan Bansal

292. The three Barnacle Geese together on 28 January, but not associating with the Bar-headed Geese gaggle.

On 27 January, JS was also at the same location and he came across two Barnacles at 1150 h. They were initially close to the shore in shallow waters and later moved to deeper waters; always with the Bar-headed Geese. They were still around in the lake when he left the place. He found the birds were smaller than the Bar-headed Geese present at the lake, with black neck and breast, white face and dark back. With the help of photographs [293, 294], the birds were later identified as Barnacle Geese by the members of the 'Birds of Kashmir' and 'Bird ID Please' Whatsapp groups.



293. Two Barnacle Geese in the water while the Bar-headed Geese were resting on the shores.



Both: Jagjit Singh

294. Two Barnacle Geese swimming in the deep waters.

After our visits, the three birds were also reported by Randhawa (2024) at the same site on 29 January after which there has not been any checklists or reports. Hence, the birds stayed there at least for 3 days. The flock of Bar-headed Geese continue to be reported since then for two weeks.

Identification of these geese as Barnacle Geese is

straightforward. The blue-grey, black and white body eliminates many other goose species. The distinctive face pattern with black crown and neck, white face, cheeks and forehead is not shown by any other goose species. All three appear to be adults with the expected black portions being clearly black (and not duller). Barnacle Goose is known to hybridize with a number Anatids, mostly in feral conditions (Reeber 2015), and www.ebird.org/india alone has Barnacle hybrid option with 11 other goose species including the Bar-headed Goose. In fact, there are 59 records of Barnacle x Bar-headed Goose hybrids from Europe; where Bar-headed Goose is a feral species. However, all three birds in our images show no signs of hybridization with any other goose species.

Barnacle Goose has not been reported so far from India or South Asia (Praveen et al. 2024, Praveen & Jayapal 2024). However, it is a goose species that is widely kept in captivity and feral populations, particular in Europe, are well-known (Reeber 2015). Hence, its origins need a little more detailing. Barnacle Goose is a well-known migrant that breeds in the Arctic from Greenland to western Russia and winter mostly in western Europe (Mlodinow & Boesman 2023). However, there are stray records from a number of sites in Asia including Israel, Iran, Kazakhstan, Mongolia, and China (Mlodinow & Boesman 2023). Though provenance of all these birds has not been established, OSME (2024) considers the single reports from Iran, Israel and the regular reports from Kazakhstan as of wild origin. One of the birds found in China also had a ring that was put in the Netherlands (van der Jeugd 2021); hence that bird might have flown north, possibly bred in the Russian Arctic, perhaps at a site much further east than it is known today to breed, and then flown south-east for the winter. Such a behaviour would account for regular records spread across several sites in the eastern Hemisphere including that of the present record. There is evidence that the species numbers are increasing, and consequently expanding in range (Koffijberg et al. 2020; Mlodinow & Boesman 2023) and that would explain these regular out-of-range records.

Despite all these possibilities, there is always a chance that these Barnacle Geese might have escaped from a captive stock kept somewhere in the northern Indian subcontinent, either in India or in Pakistan. However, the fact that there were three together, and were associating with Bar-headed Geese, a likely carrier species for this gaggle, is more supportive of wild origin. Additionally, wings in all three birds looked intact and the birds appeared normal and healthy. Captive or feral birds have occurred a few times in United Arab Emirates (eBird 2024), but always in sites where such captive waterfowl exotics have been released previously. It is quite unlikely that three birds from that population would have reached Punjab and there are no Anatids that migrate from UAE to India to act as a carrier species.

In summary, there is pressing evidence for the wild origin of these geese and our recommendation is to treat it as such. Hence, it should be treated as a first record for India and South Asia.

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Black-winged Pratincoles *Glareola nordmanni* from Kerawalapitiya, Sri Lanka: An addition to the South Asian avifauna

The Black-winged Pratincole *Glareola nordmanni*, is a long winged, and mostly brown pratincole closely related to two other large pratincoles found in Sri Lanka— the resident Oriental Pratincole *G. maldivarum* and the winter visitor Collared Pratincole *G. pratincola* (Warakagoda et al. 2012). Black-winged Pratincole breeds from Ukraine to Kazakhstan (Kamp et al. 2009) and winter mainly in South Africa (Hockey et al. 2005). Both Collared Pratincole and Oriental Pratincole are very similar in appearance to Black-winged Pratincole; inviting confusion in the field. Here, we document a record of Black-winged Pratincole [295] from Kerawalapitiya (07.02°N, 79.88°E) in Western Province, Sri Lanka.



Navodha Malintha Jayathilake

295. Black-winged Pratincole roosting on ground.

Observations

On 17 October 2022, at 1742 h, NMJ spotted two pratincoles at Kerawalapitiya. They were seen on ground, and he managed