

Though white-fronted geese are generally easy to differentiate from Greylag Geese, identification to species level can be problematic when seen individually or in large mixed flocks. The Lesser White-fronted Goose, as its name suggests, appears slightly smaller than the Greater White-fronted Goose, when both of them are seen together. An adult Lesser White-fronted Goose has a diagnostic half-moon white patch on its forehead, a more sloping forehead and a smaller head, a short pink bill, and a golden eye-ring as shown in our pictures; all these features being absent in Greater White-fronted Geese.

Both species are migratory. The Greater White-fronted Goose is apparently a regular winter visitor to the northern plains, from the Indus Valley to eastern Uttar Pradesh, with scattered records elsewhere (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). It has been recorded twice in Gujarat (Ali 1954; Kaushik 2009); this record appears to be the third. The Lesser White-fronted Goose is even rarer, being considered a winter vagrant (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). From India, it has been recorded from Jammu & Kashmir, Haryana, Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, West Bengal, and Assam (Rahmani 2012), with no records from Gujarat. Hence, this appears to be the first for the state.

According to BirdLife International (2014), the Lesser White-Fronted Goose is listed as Vulnerable in the IUCN Red List because its key breeding population in Russia has suffered a rapid population reduction, and an equivalent decline is

predicted to continue. The Fenno-Scandinavian population also has undergone a severe historical decline, and has not yet recovered (Rahmani 2012). Hence, this from the Little Rann of Kachchh is noteworthy for the conservation policy makers of the state, and the country.

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# European Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria* at Pong Lake, Himachal Pradesh, India

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In April and May 2013 we frequently visited Nagrota Surian, an area of Pong Lake in Himachal Pradesh, India, for observing late spring migration of birds. On 28 April 2013 at 0850 hrs, a *Pluvialis* plover was observed and photographed by CA on the shore of Pong Lake (32°03'N, 76°06'E, c. 400 m asl). The first impression of the bird was of a 'stocky' Pacific Golden Plover *P. fulva* that had started moulting into its breeding plumage. The bird was observed for c. 15 min. The bird was seen again at 1250 hrs., on the same day. On the basis of his observations and photographs CA identified it as an European Golden Plover *P. apricaria*. The images were sent to Bill Harvey who later confirmed this (*in litt.*, email dated 05 May 2013).

On 05 May 2013, the same plover was sighted again about 250 m away from the original place of sighting. The bird was observed for about an hour. It was not interacting with other waders present in the vicinity. We observed it extracting insect larvae from the grass and from cattle dung.

While CA was prone on the ground, trying to photograph the bird, it came as close as 10 m to him before being disturbed by a grazing buffalo. It flew some distance and settled close to a

Pacific Golden Plover. It clearly showed dominance over the latter and chased it away whenever it came too close. While the two species were feeding close to each other, the differences between them were observed carefully. The European Golden Plover was significantly larger and bulkier than Pacific Golden Plover, with a comparatively smaller bill, and finer golden markings on its wings [178, 179]. At 1150 hrs we spotted one more European Golden Plover. Both the birds were silent throughout the observation. They remained in the area for at least eight days.

## Description

The main features that we noted are as following:

The first bird was in partial breeding plumage with discontinuous black running from breast to belly. Its face did not have black except for a smudge [180]. The second bird had almost moulted into its breeding plumage, with white stripes on either side continuing up to neck, supercilium, and forehead. The crown, hindneck, and upperparts were blackish, spotted with gold. Almost unbroken black underparts indicated the possibility



178. European- and Pacific- Golden Plover.



181. The other individual of the European Golden Plover.



179. European- and Pacific- Golden Plover.



182. European Golden Plover showing characteristic white underwing coverts and axillaries.

180. European Golden Plover.



**Table 1.** Records of the European Golden Plover *Pluvialis apricaria* from the Indian Subcontinent

Year	Location	Details	Remarks	References
Undated	Dibrugarh, Assam	Two specimens by E. C. Stuart Baker	Specimen untraceable (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012) and hence not independently verifiable	Baker 1931
Undated	Unknown	Single specimen was obtained by Capt. Hanna	Record not verifiable	Baker 1931
1872	Gwadar, Balochistan, Pakistan	Single specimen by Blanford in January 1872	Specimen presently in B.M.N.H. (Natural History Museum, London)	Blanford 1898
1876	Karachi, Sindh, Pakistan	Sight record by Blanford	Unconfirmed as per observer himself	Blanford 1898
1877–1878	Sehwan, Sindh Pakistan	Single specimen procured by Mr Brooks	Specimen presently in B.M.N.H.	Blanford 1898
1880	Lucknow, Uttar Pradesh	Reid (1887) mentions a skin of this species in the Provincial Museum (=Lucknow State Museum) that he re-identified as this species. There is no location mentioned.	It is assumed that the bird must have been shot in the Lucknow area. This is probably the same record mentioned by Blanford (1898), and Baker (1931). Rasmussen & Anderton 2012 could not trace this specimen. Probably the same is still in the Lucknow State Museum and requires re-examination.	Reid (1887)
1919	Karachi, Sindh, Pakistan	One female collected on 07 January 1919	Presently in the collection of the Bombay Natural History Society (B.N.H.S.)	Abdulali 1969
1990	Kutch, Gujarat	A single bird was caught and ringed on 14 November 1990	Biometrics available, and match with this species'. Authors mention a prior record from Kutch but that record was actually of Pacific Golden Plover <i>P. fulva</i> . (Ali 1945).	Akhtar & Tiwari 1991
1996	Harike, Punjab	A first winter bird was recorded by an unknown observer on 01–08 December 1996	Unconfirmed sight record as per compiler himself.	Robson 1997
2001–2003	Chilika Lake, Orissa	Six birds in January 2001, 50 in January 2002, and 53 in January 2003; listed without any species description.	Record ignored. This seems to be an unreliable source, listing unlikely species, e.g., Long-billed Plover, from the same location.	Nayak 2006
2005	Dibru-Saikhowa National Park, Assam	One bird on 28 August 2005 listed without any species description.	Record withdrawn. (Ranjan Kumar Das, <i>in litt.</i> , email dated 24 June 2014).	Das 2006
2007	Sagar Island, Paraganas district; West Bengal	Five birds listed without any species description during a survey from 07 to 13 January 2007.	Record ignored. This seems to be an unreliable source listing unlikely species, e.g., Solitary Snipe, from the same location.	Sharma 2008

of it being a male. Its face was not completely black and had some white spots [181]. We also saw both birds in flight, when the white axillaries and underwing coverts were clearly visible [182]. The legs of these birds didn't extend beyond their tails in flight.

## Discussion

The European Golden Plover breeds on Arctic and sub-Arctic Tundra in Iceland, northern Scandinavia, Finland, northern Russia (*altifrons*), and Britain (Chandler 2009). It is a vagrant to the Indian Subcontinent (Kazmierczak 2000), from where there are not more than nine confirmed records (Table 1). The present sighting of the European Golden Plover at Pong Lake probably represents a first record for Himachal Pradesh, and the first photographic record, for the Indian Subcontinent. The species is 'so easily passed over but also so unmistakable' (Finn 1906), as it is easily mistaken for Pacific Golden Plover. Therefore, birdwatchers should keep an eye for the bird.

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