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## A Record of Lesser- *Anser erythropus* and Greater-White-fronted Geese *A. albifrons* from Gujarat, India

Shreeram M. V. & Arpit Deomurari

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Shreeram M. V., 256/15, 2nd Floor, 7th Main, 17th Cross, BTM 2nd Stage, Bengaluru 560076, Karnataka, India. Email: [mvshreeram@gmail.com](mailto:mvshreeram@gmail.com) [SMV]  
Arpit Deomurari, "Avani", Anand Colony Road No-1, Near "Gurukrupa", Opp. "Rushi" Apartment, Vikasgruh Road, Jamnagar 361008, Gujarat, India.  
Email: [deomurari@gmail.com](mailto:deomurari@gmail.com) [AD]

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On 14 December 2013, one of us (SMV) accompanied a group of birders and photographers to the Nava Talav area (23°12'N, 71°44'E) of the Little Rann of Kachchh, on a birding and photography tour. As SMV approached the lake, he came across five foraging geese of the *Anser* species that seemed to resemble Greylag Geese *A. anser* from a distance. As the group neared the geese, a few things struck SMV as odd. The geese were much smaller in size than a typical *A. anser*. All of them had a faint white mark at the base of their beaks. One of them had a golden eye-ring, and the colour of their legs was orange. That is when SMV realised that they were looking at the much rarer white-fronted geese. After photographing the birds [176, 177], they went back to Grimmett *et al.* (2011) and



177. First two – *A. albifrons* and Last one *A. erythropus*.



Photos: Arpit Deomurari

176. Left- *A. albifrons* and Right *A. erythropus*.

identified the geese they had seen as four adult Greater White-fronted Geese *A. albifrons*, and one adult Lesser White-fronted Goose *A. erythropus*. There was a separate gaggle of c. 20 Bar-headed Geese *A. indicus* with which these white-fronted geese were loosely associating.

SMV informed AD about the sighting, who visited the same place on the morning of 25 December 2013 along with Kunan Naik, Yogendra Shah, and Krinal Hedau. AD also observed these five birds foraging on the lakeside in marshy vegetation, for a full day.

Many photographers have also photographed these birds in January 2014. There were two Lesser White-fronted Geese on 07 January 2014 (Ganpule 2014), and six birds on 27 January 2014 (Cullen 2014).

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

C. Abhinav & Devinder Singh Dhadwal

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C. Abhinav, Village & P.O. Ghurkari, Kangra 176001, Himachal Pradesh, India. Email: [drabhinav.c@gmail.com](mailto:drabhinav.c@gmail.com). [CA]

Devinder Singh Dhadwal, ACF, H.P. Forest dept., Wildlife circle Dharamsala 176215, Himachal Pradesh, India. Email: [dd123.singh@gmail.com](mailto:dd123.singh@gmail.com). [DSD]

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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