

The photos were uploaded in a Facebook group dedicated to bird identification where tern experts including Killian Mullarney suggested an Arctic Tern, most likely an adult (vs third-calendar-year) based on the full black cap. Though the bill appears longer than the previous two individuals, it still falls within the known variation of Arctic Tern. Photographs not being sharp evoked some concern on the identification but multiple features on this individual favoured an Arctic Tern over Common Tern. Though this bird was identified later, it is chronologically the first for the season from South Asia.

Discussion

The only well-documented South Asian record of Arctic Tern for a very long time was of an adult male in breeding plumage collected (NHMUK#1949.Whi.1.17133) by B. B. Osmaston from Rangdum [=Rungdum] plains of Suru valley, Ladakh, far inland, on 02 July 1928 (Whistler 1936) [146]. While field identification of Arctic Terns is difficult considering the Common Terns that linger in the Arabian Sea in July, good photographs of most individuals are identifiable to species-level. Field identification of Arctic Terns purely based on translucence in primaries can be tricky in tropical seas due to unusually worn Common Terns that bleach their plumage in tropic sun. Hence, head structure and dark tips to primaries are more useful pointers for an Arctic Tern in India. The lack of prior photographs from anybody in South Asia would indicate that the species may have been genuinely rare and 2024 may have been anomalous, at least considering in the last decade. Alternatively, more Arctic Terns may be lying unidentified in the vast number of Common Tern photographs taken in the past decade by South Asian birders. The plumages of the birds indicate three different individuals, and in fact different from the birds seen from Mumbai (see elsewhere in this issue). In fact, the sixth national record for UAE, also the first on the coasts of Arabian gulf, was of a second-calendar-year Arctic Tern reported this year on 12 August (Campbell 2024), the date matching the general season as ours. There are two other Asian inland records of Arctic Terns in 2024, in eBird, one from central Russia in April (Coe 2024) and another from Mongolia in May (Batkhuu 2024), which support the hypothesis that 2024 may have been anomalous. The number of records in the coasts of Indian Ocean, including the historical record from Ladakh, might also indicate an overland movement of a small population of these birds, perhaps at great heights, and might have been gone unnoticed. These might belong to the northern Asian population of this circumpolar breeder.

Praveen J. (Image used with permission by NHMUK, London)



146. Arctic Tern specimen (NHMUK#1949.Whi.1.17133) from Ladakh preserved at the Natural History Museum, London.

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Occurrence of Arctic Tern *Sterna paradisaea* in Mumbai

Arctic Terns *Sterna paradisaea* are long distance fliers migrating every year from the Arctic to the Antarctica and back; they cover more than 40,000 kilometers every year following the summer sun. They usually leave their breeding grounds in mid-July and reach Antarctica in November, meandering their way, following wind currents and food availability, sometimes taking several months to reach Antarctica. However, they normally take a more direct route in mid-March back to the Arctic through the Pacific or Atlantic (Alerstam et al. 2019; Hatch et al. 2020).

During the monsoon months of July, August, and September of 2024, we had deluge of pelagic birds in Mumbai coasts including Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus*, Lesser Noddy *A. tenuirostris*, Lesser Frigatebird *Fregata ariel*, Christmas Island Frigatebird *F. andrewsi*, Masked Booby *Sula dactylatra*, Wilson's Storm-Petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*, Swinhoe's Storm-Petrel *Hydrobates monorhis*, Parasitic Jaeger *Stercorarius parasiticus*, Long-tailed Jaeger *S. longicaudus*, Bridled Tern *Onychoprion anaethetus*, Sooty Tern *O. fuscatus*, Saunders's Tern *Sternula saundersi*, and White-cheeked Tern *S. repressa* (<https://ebird.org/region/IN-MH-MC/bird-list?yr=cur>). The stormy weather over the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean possibly contributed to this.

On 06 August 2024, fourteen of us made a trip by ferry to Elephanta Island from Gateway of India, Mumbai. On the way, a frigatebird was seen gliding, a Lesser Crested Tern *Thalasseus bengalensis* flew by swiftly; several Bridled Terns, swarms of Common Terns *S. hirundo*, and a few Gull-billed Terns *Gelochelidon nilotica* were flying, fishing, and perched on buoys and boat anchor cables. On reaching the jetty, a couple of Lesser

Noddies were circumambulating the ferry and six were perched on a railing outside the local jetty office.

At the Elephanta Island jetty (18.972°N, 72.930°E), a single tern was perched on a net covered thermocol buoy; it appeared darker than the other Common Terns that we had seen on the way. AS, RA, and Vandana Rajhansa photographed the bird and on looking at the images MM noticed that the beak was too slight for it to be a Common Tern and it appeared hunched and therefore requested the other birdwatchers to take more photographs. Luckily it flew to another buoy and perched besides a Bridled Tern. We could observe it for more than twenty minutes.

In the flight photographs, the overall pale underwing had a narrow dark trailing edge with neat and dark tips to the primary feathers; the secondaries were worn, evenly light pearl-grey, translucent with white tips, without any dark grey markings (contra Common Tern) [147–148]. All ten primaries were worn and appeared to be of the same generation. The black bill was shorter than that of a Common Tern. The forked tail had long tail streamers. The bird was overall grey with a neat black cap, short legs, a white rump and tail with grey underparts. There was a hint of red in the legs and feet. In the perched photographs, the shorter neck and hunched appearance is quite apparent [149–150]. Based on all these features, it was identified as an Arctic Tern.



147. Arctic Tern flying towards a perched Bridled Tern, showing dark tips to primary feathers with a pointed tip to P10 (10th primary) and darker median coverts. 06 August.



148. Arctic Tern with full black cap, grey body and dark tips to primaries from below. 06 August.



149. Arctic Tern giving a hunched appearance with short neck and bill. 06 August.



150. Arctic Tern with short legs and bill. 06 August.

On the next day, PT photographed the same bird on the curved roof of the Elephanta Island jetty office [151–152]. This tern was perched adjacent to a Bridled Tern. The tern had dark wings with shorter legs and neck (contra Common Tern). The bill was short, black with a tiny pale-yellow tip. Forked tail with streamers longer than a typical Common Tern were visible. Photographs again showed a grey underbody with a white rump and tail, black tips to primary feathers, and translucent secondaries.



151. Along with a Bridled, the Arctic Tern shows dark grey wings, short neck and legs. 07 August.



152. The worn pointed tip to P10 (10th primary) on the Arctic Tern indicates that it is the same bird as the on the previous day. 07 August.

Based on our photographs, the Arctic Tern was aged as a likely third-calendar-year bird rather than an adult based on darker grey on the median primary coverts and upper-wing. Adult Arctic Terns have very light grey on upper-wing while the darker grey on the forewing is typically a sub-adult feature. (Killian Mullarney, in email dated 21 August 2024). This bird is considerably worn than individuals typically seen in Europe and higher latitudes; possibly due to the strong tropical sun.

An Arctic Tern was photographed from Sassoon Dock (18.9139° N, 72.8238° E) and Elephanta Caves multiple times between 27 and 31 July 2024 as well, but was reported much later after our photographs got identified as this species. From available photographs, it appeared rather similar to our bird. Hence, this individual was probably present there for at least a few days but was overlooked by bird-watchers until we saw it on 06 August 2024. However, it was not seen there after 07 August. From 29 August 2024 until 07 September 2024, an Arctic Tern was seen quite regularly at Sassoon Dock in South Mumbai. This individual's head pattern [153–155] was slightly different from the bird that we saw at Elephanta Island as all photographs showed a broad white front contra our individual that had almost a fuller black cap. The bird was also comparatively lighter on its upper parts. Therefore, it is presumed that there were at least two Arctic Terns in Mumbai region. Birders who visited after 11 September 2024 did not see that tern.



153. Arctic Tern showing long tail-streamers and short bill on 02 September.



154. Arctic Tern showing broad white front on 02 September.



155. Arctic Tern showing short legs and well-defined dark tips to the retained primaries on 02 September.

Ali: Mayuresh Khatavkar

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Rusty-tailed Flycatcher *Ficedula ruficauda* from Nangal, Punjab, India

On 13 April 2024, at about 1745 h, while birdwatching in the woodlands of the Nangal Wildlife Sanctuary (31.396°N, 76.364°E; 364 m asl) in Nangal, Rupnagar district, Punjab, India, PSA observed two *Muscicapa* flycatchers and a flock of Small Minivet *Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*. One of the flycatchers was identified as an Asian Brown Flycatcher *M. dauurica*. The second one turned out to be a Rusty-tailed Flycatcher *Ficedula ruficauda*, based on its rufous rump to tail, plain underparts, and grey upperparts (Clement



156. Rusty-tailed Flycatcher at Nangal (Dorsal View).



157. Rusty-tailed Flycatcher at Nangal (Lateral View).

Both: Paramoor Singh Artaai