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Seabirds foraging alongside a Sperm Whale *Physeter macrocephalus*

The oceanic waters of the Arabian Sea around the Lakshadweep Archipelago are characterized by an abundance of nutrients, supporting a wide variety of marine life including, fishes, cephalopods and planktonic organisms (Murty 2002; James 2011). As a result, these waters serve as vital foraging grounds for large marine fauna, including the Sperm Whale *Physeter macrocephalus* and various seabird species (Moazzam et al. 2020). I describe an observation of seabirds engaged in foraging alongside a Sperm Whale near Kavaratti Island (10.740°N, 72.520°E).

On 31 January 2024, during a research expedition, a Sperm Whale was sighted alongside a flock of seabirds in the Arabian Sea at 1635 h approximately 23 km off the coast of Kavaratti Island. The observation was made through binoculars (Nikon Prostaff P7 8x42) from a research vessel at a distance of at least 200 to 300 m. The whale appeared black in colour with an extremely large head and large body size that was visually estimated to be more than 15 m in length. During its surfacing, for a short time, small spatula-shaped flippers were seen along with typical blows projecting forward and to the left. However, no photographs of the whale could be obtained. Throughout the observation period of five to six minutes, three species of seabirds including 20 individuals of Great Crested Terns *Thalasseus bergii*, and eight individuals of Lesser Crested Terns *T. bengalensis* were observed diving into the sea, plunging beneath the surface to capture prey. Additionally, five Sooty Terns *Onychoprion fuscatus* were observed catching prey from the sea surface. Meanwhile, the whale was observed surfacing three times actively engaging in foraging activities alongside the seabirds.

The Sperm Whale and the seabirds were suspected to be feeding on Purpleback Flying Squid *Sthenoteuthis oualaniensis* as numerous individuals were seen in the vicinity flying with fins first and arms splayed in similar shapes. A high concentration of these squids has already been reported from the northern Arabian Sea upon which Sperm Whales in the region are likely feeding (Moazzam et al. 2020). Seabirds are known to prey upon juvenile and small squids (Croxall et al. 1996), swiftly diving into the water accurately to seize their prey, the terns demonstrated agile aerial manoeuvres. The potential advantages for seabirds to associate with marine mammals may be heightened under conditions of reduced prey availability or limitations in accessing prey at depth as shown in research elsewhere (Ashmole 1971; Clark & Mangel 1984). The observed foraging behaviour of the Sperm Whale aligns with established knowledge regarding the species' feeding habits. The presence of Sperm Whales in proximity to the Lakshadweep Islands underscores the importance of these waters as critical habitats providing essential resources for marine mammals and seabirds.

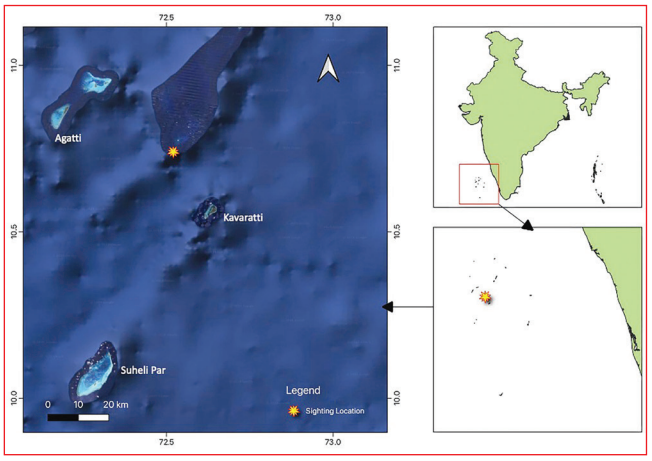

Figure 1: Map showing the location of the observation.

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Status of the Eurasian Siskin *Spinus spinus* in the Indian Himalaya

The Eurasian Siskin *Spinus spinus* is a monotypic species that breeds across Europe and Asia, from Scandinavia to Greece, east to Siberia and south to Iran. The breeding range extends to north-eastern China, possibly to Kamchatka in north-eastern Russia and the Hokkaido Island in Japan (Clement 2020). The bird winters in northern Africa, Cyprus, Middle East, Korea, Japan, China, and Taiwan (Clement 2020). India falls outside of its breeding range and usual migratory paths and is considered a vagrant to the Indian Subcontinent (Grimmett et al. 2011; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012) with confirmed reports only from Arunachal Pradesh, Himachal Pradesh, and Ladakh (Pop et al. 2022) apart from its regular occurrence around Gilgit (eBird 2024). This note documents two observations in 2024 by two different groups in Arunachal Pradesh and Jammu & Kashmir and reviews its present status in India.

The first observation was on 19 January 2024 at 0755 h from Helmet Top (28.150°N, 97.005°E; *c.*2,300m asl) near Walong, north-eastern Arunachal Pradesh. After birding, we (KAS, GS, SBS, STL, & BH) walked down *c.*100m and settled near a small waterhole which was being visited by a few species like