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Recent records of Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* from the northeastern coast of India

The Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus*, an IUCN Near Threatened wader, breeds along the coasts and offshore islands of the Palearctic, the Middle East, Central Asia, western and far eastern Russia, and adjacent areas of China (BirdLife International 2024). It winters on the coasts of Africa, Arabia, India, China, Hong Kong, and South Korea (Hockey et al. 2020). Rasmussen & Anderton (2012), who relied primarily on historical records and museum collections from the Indian Subcontinent, noted that these birds are regular along the coast of Pakistan but irregular along both the western and eastern coasts of India. However, the updated status in the checklist of Indian birds, supported by eBird data, indicates that they are fairly regular winter visitors along the western Indian coast from Gujarat to Kerala (eBird 2024; Praveen 2025). Historically, this species has been considered to be rarer on the eastern coast than the western coast of the Indian Subcontinent (Ali & Ripley 1980; Santharam 1982; Balachandran 1995). In India, it is currently believed to be a common winter visitor along certain stretches of the eastern coast, ranging from Tuticorin in Tamil Nadu to Kakinada in Andhra Pradesh (Praveen 2025). There have been numerous recent observations along the eastern coast of India, particularly from the beaches and backwaters of Tamil Nadu, most notably near Point Calimere and Pulicat Lake (eBird 2024). Additional recent records exist from Andhra Pradesh, around the mouths of the Godavari and Penna rivers, where flocks of up to 16 individuals have been reported (Ravindranath 2023). In contrast, records from further north, along the eastern coast, specifically in Odisha and West Bengal, remain notably scarce (Praveen 2025).

An avifaunal survey (Gopi & Pandav 2007) conducted in the coastal habitats of Bhitarkanika, the second largest mangrove forest along the coast of India, identified the Eurasian Oystercatcher as a common species. However, a general faunal survey (Behera et al. 2021) in the nearby Gahirmatha Wildlife Sanctuary considers this species to be rare there. There also exist a few photographs of the Eurasian Oystercatcher from this area and further east, within the estuary of the Subarnarekha River (Bandi 2014; Chand 2023). This species is considered vagrant in Southeast Asia, with sparse records from the Malay Peninsula and Archipelago (Mann 2008; Putra et al. 2018; Chowdhury 2020; Robson 2020).

During a routine shorebird survey in the Sunderban Biosphere Reserve on 28 January 2023, we, MS, AS, and SM, found a solitary Eurasian Oystercatcher **[60]** among a group of Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*. All the birds were standing in shallow tidal water on a sandflat at the eastern side of Lothian Island, South 24 Parganas, West Bengal (21.652°N, 88.349°E). The observation was made at approximately 1330 h, under clear and sunny conditions, as the rising tide gradually submerged the sandflat's edges. SM approached the bird to capture close-up photographs, while AS and MS observed it with binoculars and a spotting scope. SM managed to photograph the individual, an adult distinguished by its red eye, unlike the drab color typically found in immatures (Hayman et al. 1991; Robson 2020). We watched the bird for about six minutes, closing the distance to *c.*80 m before it flew off toward the G-plot, approximately seven km southeast of Lothian Island.

Following our observation, we shared the photographs with DR, RJ, MM, and SJJ, all officials from the forest department. They assisted in tracking previous records of this species within the Sundarban Biosphere Reserve and alerted forest patrolling staff to remain vigilant for any further sightings in their jurisdiction. After our visit, this species has been reported from Gobardhanpur Beach (21.615°N, 88.405°E) within the G-Plot area on 23 February 2023 (West Bengal Rarities 2023) and from Frezarganj Beach (21.570°N, 88.243°E), near the Ganges River mouth and ***c.***14 km southwest of Lothian Island, on 09 April 2023 (Sarkar 2023). More recently, on 31 January 2024 at approximately 1230 h, AKD photographed two adult Eurasian Oystercatchers near the same sandflat at Lothian Island where we had documented a sighting the previous year **[61]**. The sightings of Eurasian Oystercatchers for two consecutive years in the Indian Sundarbans, along with recent records from the coast of Orissa, raise questions about whether this species is a vagrant or a regular visitor to the northeastern coast of India. The Eurasian Oystercatcher has also been spotted inside the Sundarbans National Park and Tiger Reserve, where two adults were seen at Narantalar Char, a sandbank on the western side of the Gosaba River, on 01 December 1998 (Chatterjee 2004). One of the forest guards, who guided Prakiti Samsad's team, referred to these birds as *'gajar-thuti'* (Apurba Chakraborty pers. comm, February 2024), a Bengali term that translates to carrot-billed. It accurately describes the distinctive bill colour of the species and suggests that the Eurasian Oystercatcher may not be unfamiliar to the people of the Indian Sundarbans.

Supratim Mukherjee

60. Eurasian Oystercatcher amongst Eurasian Curlews on 28 January 2023 at Lothian Island.

Ashim Kumar Dandapat

61. Eurasian Oystercatchers on 31 January 2024 at Lothian Island.

This species also occurs within the Bangladesh Sundarbans, but it is not certain if it is a vagrant or a regular winter visitor (Thompson et al. 1993; Thompson & Johnson 2003). However, two or three individuals have been sighted infrequently in the Bangabandhu char between 2013-2024 (Chowdhury 2020; Azmiri 2024). There is also a historical record of breeding. In late April of 1922, Stanford and Fawcus discovered a pair of birds, with the female incubating eggs on a shoreline located approximately 160 km south of Khulna, within the Sundarbans of Bangladesh (Stanford 1937). On subsequent visits, Fawcus observed birds renesting near the same spot and even observed their young in the same breeding season.

The Eurasian Oystercatcher has three distinct subspecies across its range (Hayman et al. 1991) – *longipes*, *osculans*, and the nominate *ostralegus*. The nominate *ostralegus* is the European race, which winters in the northwest African and west African coast (Hockey et al. 2020; BirdLife International 2024). The race *longipes* breeds in central Eurasia and winters on the coasts of East Africa, Arabia, India, and Bangladesh (Chowdhury 2020; Hockey et al. 2020). The race *osculans* breeds in far eastern Asia (northeast coast of Russia, China, and North Korea) and winters primarily on the coast of eastern China, but it may extend to Myanmar, Bangladesh, and the Malay Archipelago (Wells 1999; Chowdhury et al. 2014; Hockey et al. 2020; Robson 2020). The subspecies of the individuals found breeding in the Bangladesh Sundarbans remained undetermined, as no skin was collected (Stanford 1937). However, Ali & Reply (1980) mentioned this record as *osculans* subspecies (Ali & Ripley 1980). Recent photographic records have confirmed that both *longipes* and *osculans* subspecies winter in the Bangladesh Sundarbans (Chowdhury & Melville 2018). Individuals of the *longipes* race are usually recorded along much of the Indian coast during winter (Praveen 2024). Previous records of oystercatchers from the northeastern coasts of India did not call out subspecies (Chatterjee 2004; Gopi & Pandav 2007; Behera et al. 2021).

The subspecies observed at Lothian is expected to be *longipes*, which typically migrates to India via the Central Asian flyway (Wetlands International 2024). The presence of a prominent white collar on the foreneck in non-breeding plumage rules out the possibility that the birds observed at Lothian in both 2023 and 2024 belong to *osculans* (Melville et al. 2014). Furthermore, the race *osculans* also lacks white on the rachis of the outer two or three primaries (Ali & Ripley 1980; Hayman et al. 1991). In flight, the leading bird in **[61]** exhibited white on the rachis of all its primaries, especially noticeable on the first two, further confirming that it cannot be considered as *osculans*.

The *longipes* subspecies can be identified by a nasal groove that extends more than halfway along the bill (ratio>0.5), in contrast to the *ostralegus* race, where the groove extends less than halfway (Hayman et al. 1991). However, the presence of a shorter nasal groove does not definitively exclude *longipes* (Rusticali et al. 2002). The image of the two individuals, observed at Lothian Island on 31 January 2024, failed to retain details about the length of the nasal groove, making it difficult to ascertain precisely where the nasal grooves terminate. Nevertheless, visual inspection of the birds in **[61]** seems to suggest that both individuals are close but slightly lower than this ratio. Since the trailing bird has some brown on its back, it is highly likely to be *longipes*. On the leading bird, the extent of the black breast below the wing-bend seems to suggest that it too might be a *longipes*; however, it is unclear if its hunched posture influenced the visible shape & extent of its black-breast, hence the subspecies remains inconclusive.

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A Lanceolated Warbler *Locustella lanceolata* from Nal Sarovar, Gujarat, India

On a rainy afternoon, on 27 September 2024, on the outskirts of Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary (22.8179°N, 72.0453°E; 35 m asl), I, along with fellow birders and bird guide Memud Multani, set out in the hope of photographing some of the passage migrant species, such as, Red-tailed Shrike *Lanius phoenicuroides* and Red-backed Shrike *L. collurio*, which are usually seen during autumn migration in Gujarat. The habitat in the area we visited consisted of open scrublands around a water body and some paddyfields. While looking out for a Rock Bush-Quail *Perdicula argoondah* by the road side, one of my fellow birders spotted a shy bird in a bush beside us. As the bird was too shy and skulking around the base of the bush, it was difficult to identify it. Our guide, Memud Multani, assumed it to be a Grasshopper Warbler *Locustella naevia*, which is observed during the passage migration and winter season in and around Nal Sarovar. We played the song of a Grasshopper Warbler but this individual did not respond and stayed low at the base of the bush. We waited and moved away a little. After some time, for hardly a few seconds, the bird perched in the open and we could take a few photographs **[62, 63]**. Even after waiting for a long time, the bird did not appear in the open again and was not observed subsequently. We tried to look for the individual again at this location for the next two days but were unable to find it again. We posted the photographs on the social media and after discussions on different platforms over the next few days, it was re-identified and confirmed as Lanceolated Warbler *L. lanceolata*, which is a very rare species for western India. Over the next few days, other birders tried to lookout for the bird, but were unsuccessful in finding the bird again at this location.

The identification of Lanceolated Warbler and its separation from Grasshopper Warbler is challenging. The main features to be noted in a Lanceolated Warbler vis-à-vis Grasshopper Warbler are as follows: extensive throat, breast and flank streaking, presence of malar stripe, a thicker based bill, prominent and contrasting streaking on crown, evenly wide and well-defined edges to tertials, and pattern of markings on undertail-coverts (Shirihai & Svensson 2018). Many of these features were visible in the photographs we took and the identification was further confirmed based on these features.

Chattopadhyay (2023) reviewed the status of Lanceolated Warbler from mainland India; for western India, a few records from Gujarat have been listed but these were all treated as unconfirmed. Recent confirmed records of this species have been mainly from West Bengal while a historical specimen record exists from Uttar Pradesh. But there are no accepted records of this species from western India and hence, this is the first confirmed sighting of Lanceolated Warbler from western India. This species also represents an addition to the avifauna of Gujarat as it was not listed for the state of Gujarat by Ganpule et al. (2022) but was listed in an appendix of that work (which listed unconfirmed/hypothetical species) with the comments, such as, 'unconfirmed sightings from Kachchh' and 'inadequately documented'.

I thank my fellow birders Shreenivas Ghaisas and Dattatray Kulkarni for encouraging me to write the report of such a rare observation. We are grateful to Memud Multani for his field expertise and dedication towards finding such a rare species. I specially thank Lars Svensson, Nils van Duivendijk, and Arend Wassink for confirming the identification. I am grateful to Prasad Ganpule for his help in the initial identification and for getting the identification confirmed from experts. Special thanks to Sunil Kini, Hemant Dhadanekar and Chinmay Rahane for their constant support.

62. Lanceolated Warbler at Nal Sarovar.

63. Lanceolated Warbler at Nal Sarovar.

BOTH: Krutarth Kshirsagar