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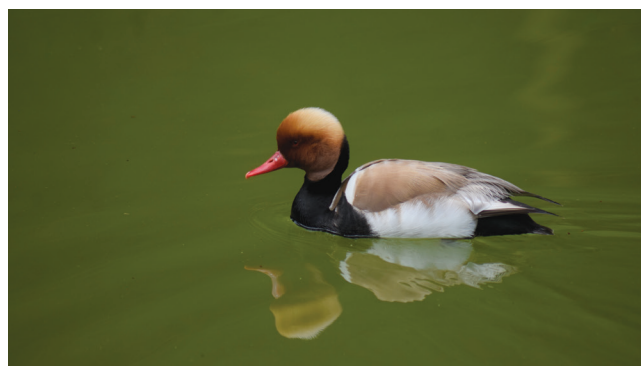
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A Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina* at Lampokhari Lake, Sikkim, India

On 14 April 2025, between 1410–1450 h, a male Red-crested Pochard *Netta rufina* was observed and videographed at Lampokhari (Aitar or Ghati Tso) Lake, Dalapchand village, Pakyong District, Sikkim, India (27.187°N, 88.675°E; 1,500 m asl). During a follow-up visit on 18 April 2025, the bird was again sighted and photographed swimming and foraging alongside domesticated Mallards *Anas platyrhynchos domesticus* [214]. It was identified as a male Red-crested Pochard based on rounded rusty-orange head, long bright red bill, black breast, pale flanks, brown upperparts, and a black tail (Grimmett et al. 2011, 2019) [215].



214. Red-crested Pochard photographed alongside domesticated Mallards at Lampokhari Lake, Sikkim.



215. Male Red-crested Pochard photographed in Lampokhari Lake, Sikkim.

This record appears to be the fourth report of the species from Sikkim. Earlier records include one from Kartok Lake, Gyalshing District on 05 March 2021 (Sherpa 2021), another from Bedang Tso Lake, where a female was observed in November 2022 (Dibyendu Ash, in litt. June 2022) and a third from Lampokhari Lake itself on 15 March 2025 (Dhungel & Dhungel 2025). While the species has been reported from Bhutan, Darjeeling, Kalimpong, and Arunachal Pradesh (eBird 2025a), there were no published reports from Sikkim prior to these records (Grimmett et al. 2019).

The global breeding range of the species lies in the region across Black and Caspian Seas, and from Central Asia to western Mongolia and north-western China (Salvador et al. 2022). Some breeding populations have also been reported in western and eastern Europe, the western Mediterranean Sea islands, north-western Africa, and parts of middle-western Asia (Salvador et al. 2022). In India, it is mainly a winter migrant (Grimmett et al. 2011; Praveen 2025), but records from March–April in the Himalaya suggest that some individuals linger into the breeding season (BirdLife International 2016).

The species is a specialist of large wetlands, feeding primarily on aquatic vegetation, but also on invertebrates, amphibians, and small fish (BirdLife International 2016). At Lampokhari, it was observed foraging in areas with abundant tadpoles. The lake and its surrounding area support over 77 bird species (eBird 2025b) and has potential conservation value, particularly given its religious and ecotourism significance.

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A specimen of Sooty Shearwater *Ardenna grisea* from Porbandar, Gujarat

Pelagic birds, which typically live and forage over open oceans, are sometimes blown toward the Indian coast during the monsoon season due to strong winds. These seabirds can become disoriented or exhausted, leading them to appear unusually close to shore or even inland. From May to July 2025, during the peak of the southwest monsoon, 15 such exhausted or stranded pelagic seabirds were discovered along the Porbandar coast in Gujarat. The birds were found at various locations, including Subhashnagar, Chowpaty, Miyani, Lakadi Bandar, Mokarsagar Wetland, and near the Nirma Factory. The stranded birds included four Wilson's Storm-petrels *Oceanites oceanicus*, along with several Masked Boobies *Sula dactylatra*, unidentified shearwaters, and unidentified tropicbirds. While some of the birds were successfully rehabilitated and released, most did not survive (unpublished data compiled by NT).

One of the unidentified shearwaters, found in a weak state on 28 June 2025, at Porbandar Chowpaty (21.628°N, 69.613°E), was handed over to the Porbandar Bird Sanctuary by a good Samaritan. Local forest guard NM alerted birders NT and PP, who shared the sighting and initiated discussions on regional bird discussion groups on the bird's identification. Unfortunately, the bird died the next day. EM formally requested the Gujarat Forest Department to donate the deceased specimen to the Feather Library, a curated collection of salvaged bird feathers, archived with associated biological and ecological data (Munshi & Everett 2025).

The bird was collected by EM on 07 July 2025. The combination of dark body, moderately long tail, long, slender dark beak and whitish underwing coverts matched only Sooty Shearwater *Ardenna grisea* and Short-tailed Shearwater *A. tenuirostris*. These two species differ primarily in size, bill structure and underwing patterns. However, there is a good amount of individual variation in the underwing pattern in both species. Assessing these minor differences in size, structure and plumage of an isolated fast-moving bird is tricky, especially in unfavourable light. Since the bird was in hand, EM could clean the specimen on 22 July and take photographs of underwing, head and beak [216]. EM also recorded the detailed morphometric measurements.

The bird was an immature female. The complete morphometric data are as follows (all lengths in mm): Weight: 429 gm, Wingspan: 1030; Right wing: 467; Body length (bill tip to tail tip): 414; Tail: 108.9; Primary projection: 100.8; Wing to tail: -26.8; Head: 92.5 x 28.4; Bill length: 41.39; Bill width: 13.8;

Gape length: 55.8; Gape width: 24.1; Femur: 45.7; Tibiotarsus: 89.3; Tarsometatarsus: 50.5; Digit (i): 4.4; Digit (ii): 45.8; Digit (iii): 53.5; Digit (iv): 50.7; Claw (i): 0; Claw (ii): 2.8; Claw (iii): 8.4; Claw (iv): 6.3.

We used Flood & Fisher (2020) for analysing the plumage features and measurements. Though the total length of the Porbandar bird fell short of the expected range for Sooty Shearwater, other characteristics matched those of a Sooty Shearwater:

- The wing span and beak length fell within the expected ranges for Sooty Shearwater and does not fit Short-tailed Shearwater.
- The bill proportions matched Sooty better than Short-tailed Shearwater, with the nasal tube noticeably shorter than culminicorn and maxillary unguis.
- The underwing showed a "butter knife" shaped white patch with prominent white median and lesser primary coverts showing dark shafts. The white in the primary coverts was more extensive than the amount of white in the secondary coverts. This is typical for a Sooty Shearwater.
- The throat was darker compared to the chin, which is a supporting feature.

The photographs and measurements were also shared with Robert Flood, who confirmed the identification as Sooty Shearwater (Robert Flood in email dated 11 August 2025).

Sooty Shearwater is one of the most common seabirds in the world. They breed in large colonies in the southern Pacific and southern Atlantic Oceans, particularly on islands off south-eastern Australia, New Zealand, and Tierra del Fuego (Carboneras et al. 2024) and are known for their long-distance migrations from the southern hemisphere to the northern hemisphere. While the species has a broad marine distribution, they are relatively rare in the north Indian Ocean (Anderson et al. 2016; Carboneras et al. 2024) and there is only one previously published record from Indian waters - off the coast of Mangalore, Karnataka in 2023 (Srinivasan et al. 2023; Praveen 2025).

A study skin with extended wing, and individual flight feathers were prepared and preserved by the Feather Library in collaboration with the Research Collections Facility at National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS-TIFR), Bangalore [217]. Tissue samples were also preserved at NCBS Research Collections Facility. The voucher codes for the specimen are FTLB-GJ-152001 (Feather Library www.featherlibrary.com/specimen/ftlb_gj152001/) and NRC-AA-5873 (NCBS Research Collections Facility), linking all associated data and materials.

Table 1. Key measurements of the specimen in comparison with the typical range of Short-tailed and Sooty Shearwater (Flood & Fisher 2020).

	Range for Short-tailed Shearwater	Range for Sooty Shearwater	Specimen
Total length	400-430 mm	430-460 mm	414 mm
Wingspan	910-990 mm	970-1060 mm	1030 mm
Bill length	29-34 mm	37-43 mm	41.4 mm
Ratio of nasal tubes vs total bill length	30.9%	25.7%	27.1%
Ratio of culminicorn vs total bill length	28.0%	34.4%	33.9%
Ratio of maxillary unguis vs total bill length	41.1%	39.9%	39.0%