Table 1. Identification of first cycle Common Gull subspecies. There are some overlap and variation of features amongst the subspecies. The table below shows identification pointers in typical birds

Sl. No.	Feature	*canus*	*heinei*	*kamtschatschensis*
1	Head and body	Extensive streaking on head, breast and underparts. Overall plumage is darker than *heinei* but lighter than *kamtschatschensis*.	Sparse head striations giving it an almost clean white look. Brown spots on lower hindneck making a half collar. Usually, unmarked white underparts. Palest plumage amongst the three.	Heavily marked head, strong streaking from breast to undertail coverts. Darkest plumage amongst the three.
2	Uppertail coverts	Marked uppertail coverts.	Unmarked uppertail coverts, rarely has some spots.	Marked uppertail coverts.
3	Underparts, vent and undertail coverts	Unmarked lower belly to vent and marked undertail coverts.	Completely unmarked.	Well-marked lower belly to vent and marked undertail coverts.
4	Underwing pattern	Brown tips to underwing coverts and axillaries. Buff colour overall lacking contrasting dark trailing edge.	Largely white underwing with contrasting dark trailing edge to the wing. Some light brown tips to underwing coverts and axillaries.	Strongly marked underwings. Dark brown tips to underwing coverts and barred axillaries.

individuals.

The Common Gull, sometimes also known as the Mew Gull, is distributed much across the northern Eurasia, and has three subspecies, - *L. c. canus, L. c. kamtschatschensis,* and *L. c. heinei* (Moskoff et al. 2021). Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) state that birds in our region are presumed, on geographical grounds, to be of the subspecies *heinei*, though the nominate *canus* is known to occur as near to our region as the Persian Gulf.

The subspecies identification of Common Gull has been discussed in detail by Adriaens & Gibbs (2016) and the same is covered in Table 1. We provide a commentary **[255–257]** on the three Common Gull individuals we found and the visible features that match *heinei*, in comparison with the other two less likely subspecies, arguing our birds to be a *L. c. heinei*. Lou Bertalan and other members in the Facebook Group *Western Palearctic Gulls* (Pereira 2024b) also suggested this subspecies for the December individual based on white underwing with contrasting darker remiges, and sparse head striation.

Praveen (2025) lists records of Common Gull from India, with records mostly from north-western India. The nearest records from this location are from Gujarat; near Diu and from Bhuj, Kachchh apart from Goa. Though noted from the neighbouring states of Gujarat and Goa, this species has never been reported from Maharashtra and this is the first record of Common Gull from Maharashtra. All previous records from India were of single birds and here we have two birds seen together with a potential third that occurred two months back.

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The Black-bellied Storm-Petrel *Fregetta tropica* from the Indian waters of Arabian Sea

Petrels, shearwaters and storm-petrels (Order: Procellariiformes) are truly pelagic birds spending most of their life at sea and only returning to land to breed. Most species are also highly migratory, following ocean currents and upwellings in search of food during the non-breeding season (Howell & Zufelt 2019; Harrison et al. 2021). Amongst these, the Black-bellied Storm-Petrel *Fregetta tropica* is plentiful in parts of the southern oceans, particularly in the southern Atlantic, but it does not appear to make a regular crossing through the tropical zone. In the southern Indian Ocean, this bird breeds on Kerguelen and Crozet Islands (Medrano & David 2023). During its non-breeding season, Black-bellied Storm-Petrels are highly pelagic birds, typically found close to or beyond the continental shelf, in deep waters (Harrison et al. 2021).

As a merchant navy professional, I have been sailing at sea for the past 25 years, and for the last ten years, I have developed a strong interest in birdwatching. During my time sailing in the Arabian Sea, I make an extra effort to look for seabirds. My first observation of a Black-bellied Storm-Petrel in the Arabian Sea was in the Omani waters on 21 July 2023, and on the same day I got pictures (Kumar 2023a, b). Two years later, I happened to be sailing in the Arabian Sea during the same month. However, my onward leg of the voyage from Sri Lanka to the Persian Gulf in the first week of July 2025 did not produce any Black-bellied Storm-Petrels. In contrast, during my return journey from the Persian Gulf to Singapore, the monsoon winds were at its peak. This resulted in strong southwest winds, rough seas, and waves up to 5m. To avoid the worst weather conditions, we planned our route closer to the Indian coast. The ship's course and the direction of the swell allowed me to continue birdwatching despite the rough seas. With the sea and swell hitting the ship's quarter rather than the bow, I was able to maintain a clear view forward.

My first sighting of a Black-bellied Storm-Petrel during this voyage was on the morning of 22 July 2025, when I saw an individual at about 160 nautical miles southeast of the Oman coast (Kumar 2025a). I was thrilled and hopeful that I might spot one within the Indian waters. My wish came true when I got first sighting in the Indian waters from *c.*170 nautical miles off the Junagadh coast (18.983°N, 68.098°E), Gujarat on 23 July **[258]**. I followed it up with the first Black-bellied Storm-Petrels for Maharashtra on 24 July at *c.*150 nautical miles off the Sindhudurg coast (16.351°N, 70.768°E) **[259]**. On the same day, I added the species to the Goa checklist when I got one *c.*100 nautical miles off South Goa coast (14.808°N, 72.265°E) **[260]** and yet another soon afterwards. In summary, between 22 and 24 July 2025, I recorded a total of 51 different individuals in the northern Arabian Sea (Table 1, Fig. 1); taking extra to ensure no double counting. The large gaps between sightings occurred due to our transit through some areas during the night. While some of the sightings were as individuals or pairs, groups with a maximum of up to 13 individuals, especially *c.*110 nautical miles off the Maharashtra coast, was recorded. All sightings and photographs were carefully catalogued in eBird (www.ebird.org) after the trip.

258. One of the two Black-bellied Storm-Petrels off the Junagadh coast in Gujarat is the first for India after 40 years.

259. Two Black-bellied Storm-Petrels off the Sindhudurg coast is the first for the Maharashtra State.

All photos: Sushil Kumar

260. A single Black-bellied Storm-Petrel off the Goa coast.

Table 1. Sighting details of Black-bellied Storm-Petrel in the northern Arabian Sea during the July 2025 voyage

No	Date	Coordinates	# Birds	State & Country
1	22 July	21.688°N, 62.443°E	1	A'Sharqiyah South, Oman
2	22 July	21.299°N, 63.229°E	4	A'Sharqiyah South, Oman
3	22 July	21.229°N, 63.390°E	7	High Seas
4	23 July	18.983°N, 68.098°E	2	Gujarat, India
5	23 July	18.648°N, 68.589°E	2	Gujarat, India
6	23 July	18.398°N, 68.902°E	10	Gujarat, India
7	24 July	16.351°N, 70.768°E	2	Maharashtra, India
8	24 July	15.906°N, 71.164°E	3	Maharashtra, India
9	24 July	15.490°N, 71.555°E	5	Maharashtra, India
10	24 July	15.445°N, 71.603°E	13	Maharashtra, India
11	24 July	14.808°N, 72.265°E	1	Goa, India
12	24 July	14.749°N, 72.345°E	1	Goa, India

Fig. 1. Map showing the records of Black-bellied Storm-Petrel during the voyage of July 2025. The sea-lane of the vessel is also marked.

I had no difficulties identifying Black-bellied Storm-Petrels as I was already familiar with the species. While they are predominantly black, they have a distinctive white band over the rump, as well as white on the undersides of the wings and flanks **[258–260]**. A broad black stripe runs down the center of the belly **[260]**, though it can sometimes be absent or broken. These birds are larger and bulkier than the more regular Wilson's Storm-Petrels *Oceanites oceanicus*, and they have long legs, which are visible beyond the tail during flight. The legs and feet are black. Black-bellied Storm-Petrels are often seen gliding just above the water's surface, holding their wings horizontally or at a 45° angle. They have a peculiar behaviour of kicking the water's surface with one foot while trailing the other behind, creating a visible wake **[261]**. This behaviour, along with their characteristic wake, makes identifying them relatively easy. Individuals seen were in various stages of wing moult **[260, 262–263]**. In addition to Black-bellied Storm-Petrels, I also observed other expected pelagic birds like the Flesh-footed Shearwaters *Ardenna carneipes*, Jouanin's Petrels *Bulweria fallax*, Wilson's Storm-Petrels, Masked Boobies *Sula dactylatra*, and Red-billed Tropicbirds *Phaethon aethereus* during this voyage.

261. Black-bellied Storm-Petrels often create a visible wake using their trailing foot.

262. A Black-bellied individual undergoing primary and secondary moult.

All photos: Sushil Kumar

263. A Black-bellied individual undergoing secondary moult.

South of Goa, we transitioned into night, and wind-speed decreased considerably as we came closer to the continental shelf. No further Black-bellied Storm-Petrels were seen further along the west coast of India but Wilson's Storm-Petrel numbers started to increase, particularly south of the Tamil Nadu coast. The persistent southwest winds of the monsoon season prevailed for weeks before our transit (Fig. 2). Winds toward the Indian coast were slightly weaker compared to those in the central Arabian Sea. The average weather conditions during this period were as follows: wind speeds of 30–40 knots, wave heights of 4 meters, and average swell heights of 3 meters. Currents varied, and the water depth ranged from 3,000m at deep sea to 200m closer to the shelf. The sea temperature was around 28°C. I believe that the favourable weather conditions played a significant role in allowing me to have such an incredible sighting of these storm-petrels. It may be mentioned that during my return voyage in September, I saw three Black-bellied Storm-Petrels in central Arabian Sea on 10 September 2025 (Kumar 2025).

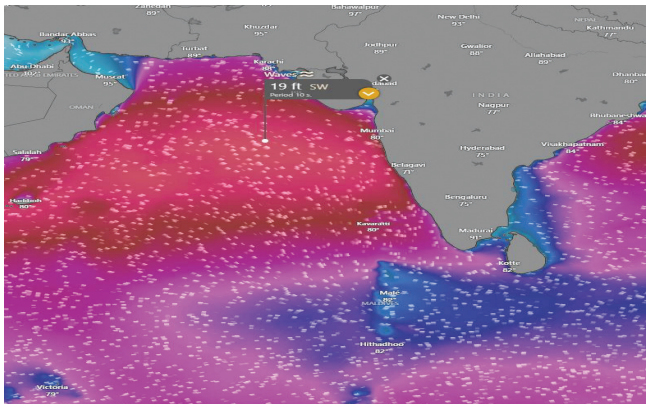

Fig. 2. Wind-speeds in Arabian Sea during the transit that shows rough weather conditions in central Arabian Sea.

For many decades, the only record of Black-bellied Storm-Petrel from the South Asian region was of a specimen from the 'Bay of Bengal' in the Natural History Museum, London (Gibson-Hill 1948); with some debate on the exact date of the record (Praveen et al. 2013). However, the first authentic record from South Asia is one caught about 14 miles south-east of Minicoy Island on 09 September 1960 (Bailey & Bourne 1963). There is another well-documented sight record of three birds from 250 km west-south-west of North Island, Lakshadweep on 20 June 1984 (van den Berg et al. 1991). Subsequently, there have been a few sight records from Sri Lanka as well (Praveen et al. 2013). My records are the first for India after a gap of 40 years and the first ones with photographs from South Asia.

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