

## Correspondence

### The Black-tailed Gull *Larus crassirostris* from Frasersgunj, West Bengal: A new species for India

On the morning of 18 April 2026, three of us (SG, PP, and RG) visited the westernmost end of Frasersgunj village in southern West Bengal, popularly known as Kargil Sea Beach (21.575°N, 88.238°E). Situated at the confluence of Edward Creek, the site comprises of a sandy beach along the Bay of Bengal coast and is a well-known hotspot for waders and seabirds during autumn, winter, and spring. Notable shorebirds recorded include Red-necked Stint *Calidris ruficollis*, Red Knot *C. canutus*, Great Knot *C. tenuirostris*, Broad-billed Sandpiper *C. falcinellus*, Curlew Sandpiper *C. ferruginea*, and Dunlin *C. alpina*. This site also hosted the Critically Endangered Spoon-billed Sandpiper *C. pygmaea* in 2018. At the time of this visit, a couple of Spoon-billed Sandpipers were present at Susni Island (21.600°N, 88.243°E), across the Edward Creek (Ghosh 2026).

We reached the beach at 0900 h. On that day, high tide was expected at 0950 h, with water levels rising to 4.7 m. At 0930 h, we noticed a large solitary gull *Larus sp.* with dark upperparts that was not associating with the nearby Brown-headed Gulls *Chroicocephalus brunnicephalus*. We photographed this gull at rest and in flight, though its identity remained uncertain at the time.

Later that evening, SG shared the photographs in a *Nature Enthusiasts of WB* Whatsapp group seeking identification. SB considered this gull as a potential rarity and issued an alert in *West Bengal Rare Bird Alert* Facebook group, that ensued a discussion. The perched bird showed dark upperparts, long wings, a pale iris with a red orbital ring, bright yellow legs, and a yellow bill with dark band around gonys and reddish tip [85]. Flight photograph revealed entirely black flight feathers with worn tips lacking white and a worn white tail with broad black terminal band [86]. These field marks conclusively pointed the ID to an adult Black-tailed Gull *L. crassirostris*, a species known to winter in the South China Sea and recorded as vagrant in the Gulf of Thailand. The ragged appearance was possibly due to feather wear and perhaps combined with some oil staining.

Although superficially similar to an adult Heuglin's Gull *Larus fuscus heuglini*, a regular winter visitor to this area, an adult Black-tailed Gull differs in brighter yellow legs, proportionately longer wings and bill, as well as in bill colouration—brighter yellow bill with red tip and black sub-terminal band as seen in this bird, compared to paler yellow bill with red spot at gonys of Heuglin's. In addition, an adult Heuglin's Gull shows an entirely white tail and larger white mirrors on the outer primaries, both absent in our individual.

The Black-tailed Gull breeds in south-eastern Russia, Japan, Korea and eastern China, wintering south to the South China Sea and occurring as a vagrant as far south as Malaysia and as far west as the Gulf of Thailand (Burger et al. 2020). Over the last decade, the species has been reported almost annually from the west coast of Thailand (eBird 2026). Our observation represents by far the most distant occurrence of this species west of its usual range, and the first for India.

Birdwatching activity in the Frasersgunj region has increased considerably in recent years following several significant



85. Black-tailed Gull at Kargil Sea Beach, Frasersgunj, West Bengal. Note the reddish tipped yellow bill with black sub-terminal band.



86. Black-tailed Gull at Kargil Sea Beach, Frasersgunj, West Bengal. Note dark wings with no mirrors and black band in its tail.

Both photos: Shantanu Ghosh

discoveries like the Nordmann's Greenshank *Tringa guttifer* (Das et al. 2024). Since 29 March 2026, many birdwatchers have visited this region daily to see the Spoon-billed Sandpipers and recorded up to 3000 waders in a day. The increasing number of waders using the East Asian-Australasian Flyway at this site highlight the need for conservation of fragile coastal ecosystems of West Bengal.

We are indebted to Chris Kehoe for his help with the identification process.

### References

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