

Audubon's Shearwater in Surat: An addition to the avifauna of India

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On 23 July 2009, a volunteer of 'Nature Club Surat' informed me about recovery of a strange looking bird from Surat. It seemed to be suffering from extreme dehydration. Though it was kept in captivity for two days and given treatment, unfortunately, it did not survive. After careful observation of the specimen and with the help of field guide (Grimmett *et al.* 2011), I identified it as an Audubon's Shearwater (*Puffinus lherminieri*). I took several photographs.

Audubon's Shearwater is a pelagic bird and breeds in the Maldives (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). This individual could have been blown towards the coast of South Gujarat due to the cyclonic disturbance which was present at the time.

Audubon's Shearwater is not known to occur in India and hence this is an addition to the avifauna of India.

[The photographs show all the diagnostic features of Audubon's Shearwater; the blackish upperparts with dark sides of breast, whitish underparts, and most importantly, the white wing lining, axillaries and flanks. Hence, there remains no doubt that it is indeed an Audubon's Shearwater (also known as Tropical Shearwater *Puffinus bailloni*).

Regarding its occurrence in India, there are no records shown in the latest reference books (Grimmett *et al.* 2011, Rasmussen & Anderton 2012) for India. A record from Porbandar (Jhala 2016) was most probably this species, but it could not be conclusively identified as photos showing the underwings were not taken. Earlier records referring to *P. lherminieri* were believed to be of Persian Shearwater (*P. persicus*) and this taxon was not considered for the India checklist, though it is stated that "it is very much possible" (Praveen *et al.* 2013). Hence this can be treated as the first confirmed record of this species from mainland India.

It is unfortunate that measurements or blood samples were not taken for this specimen. As given in the editor's note in Jhala (2016), the taxonomy in this species is very complex. Without measurements / DNA analysis, it is not possible to identify it to the sub-species level. However, looking at the beak and head structure, and the pink tarsus seen in this individual, it could be the subspecies breeding on the Chagos Islands, which is currently treated as *nicolae*. Geographically, birds from Maldives, British Indian Ocean Territory or Seychelles are likely to occur here as vagrants. However, without measurements / DNA, it is best to treat this as Audubon's

Shearwater, without going into sub specific identification or describing its origins.

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