

## Red-billed Tropicbird in Surat

**Chitra Patel:** 182-183, Suyognagar Soc., nr. Althan tenaments, Bhatar rd., Surat 395007. chitrapatel42@gmail.com



On 25 June 2015, an unidentified bird was rescued by a local NGO of Surat at Punagam (21°12' N, 72°52' E) Surat, Gujarat. When we (Ashish Chaudhari and Chitra Patel) got the news, we approached the NGO but unfortunately the bird perished before any treatment could be provided. On seeing the photographs, we got confused between Caspian Tern (*Hydroprogne caspia*) and Tropicbird (*Phaethon* spp.), but with the help of field guides (Kazmierczak 2000, Grimmett *et al.* 2011), and from the presence of tail streamers, we could easily eliminate Caspian Tern. Thereafter, we got the identification confirmed from Mukesh Bhatt, Dr. Sarita Subramaniam and Prasad Ganpule as Red-billed Tropicbird (*Phaethon aethereus*) of the races, which occurs in the Persian Gulf and Arabian Sea. It was probably an immature or sub-adult bird.

Red-billed Tropicbird is Pelagic and is usually seen off western coasts, from Mekran Coast (SW Pakistan) to SW coast of Sri Lanka (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). It nests mainly on oceanic and offshore islands and is usually solitary, but may congregate with flocks of feeding Terns. It mainly feeds on fish and squids. Red-billed Tropicbird can be identified by its

red bill, white tail-streamers, black barring on mantle and scapulars, and has much black on primaries.

This individual could have been blown towards the coast because of the monsoon winds or due to the cyclonic

disturbance which was present at the time and would have reached the coastal region of south Gujarat. There is only one previous record of Red-billed Tropicbird from Gujarat; a sub-adult bird was photographed 50 km from the Gulf of Kachchh, in the sea (Gandhe 2014). Hence this record from inland Gujarat is significant and noteworthy. This bird is not listed in the 'Checklist of the Birds of Gujarat' (Parasharya *et al.* 2004) and hence needs to be added.



### Acknowledgements:

I am very thankful to Mukesh Bhatt, Dr. Sarita Subramaniam and Prasad Ganpule for helping me with identification of this bird.

### References:

- Gandhe, A. 2014. Seabird observations off the western coast of India. *Indian Birds* 9 (5&6):Pp 137-138.
- Grimmett, R., Inskipp, C., & Inskipp, T., 2011. *Birds of the Indian Subcontinent*. 2nd ed. Oxford University Press & Christopher Helm, London.
- Kazmierczak, K., 2000. *A Field Guide to the Birds of India, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh and the Maldives*. 1st ed. Pica Press / Christopher Helm, London.
- Parasharya, B. M. , Borad, C. K. and Rank, D.N., 2004. *A Checklist of the birds of Gujarat*. Bird Conservation Society, Gujarat.
- Rasmussen, P. C., & Anderton, J. C., 2012. *Birds of South Asia: the Ripley Guide*. 2nd ed. 2 vols.: Smithsonian Institution and Lynx Edicions, Washington, D.C. and Barcelona. □

**“My chief interest in bird study has always been its ecology, its life history under natural conditions and not in a laboratory under a microscope. By travelling to these remote, uninhabited places, I could study the birds as they lived and behaved in their habitats.” – Dr. Salim Ali.**