

Sighting of Black Noddy from Porbandar: an addition to the avifauna of Gujarat and a first photographic record from India

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On 7 August 2018, a Tuesday, my sister Devayaniba Vaghela and her 5-year-old son Harshavardhansinh were visiting Porbandar. At around 13:50 hrs, on the beach in front of Hotel Lord's Inn – the beach is locally known as 'chowpatty' (21° 37' 52" N, 69° 36' 31" E) - they saw an unusual bird perched on the sand. Since my nephew knows I am interested in birds, he asked his mother to photograph the bird and send the images to me. As per their observation, the bird looked quite tired and was unable to fly. My nephew approached quite close to it but still the bird did not fly but walked away a few steps. It is possible that the bird was either exhausted and fatigued or sick.

They duly forwarded the photos to me. However, I could not identify it. I forwarded the photos to Bhavesh Trivedi, who informed me that this was a noddy sp. (*Anous* sp.), but he was not sure of the identity of the bird. I, then shared the photos in a Whatsapp group. Devangbhai Kotecha and Pranavbhai Vaghasiya identified it as a Black Noddy (*Anous minutus*).

[The observers took four photos of this bird. All the four photos show a very dark noddy, with a brownish tinge in plumage, a pale band on the wing coverts is visible on folded wing, the bill is long, narrow and slender and looks longer than the length of head and it has a distinct white patch on forehead and white crown.

There are three species of noddy seen in India; the Black Noddy, Brown Noddy (*Anous stolidus*) and Lesser Noddy (*Anous tenuirostris*); the identification of these three species is quite challenging and all are quite similar with 'exceptional views and careful study needed in regional waters to separate Black Noddy from (especially) Lesser Noddy' (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

The Brown Noddy is the largest of the three noddies. It has dark brownish upperparts, short and heavy bill, restricted pale cap with white forehead, black lores and paler underwing lining. The Lesser

Noddy is small, with slim bill, pale grey lores, grey plumage and pale grey cap grading to evenly grey sides of face. The Black Noddy is also small in size, with very dark (blackish) plumage, long and thin straight bill, white forehead and cap contrasting with dark lores and black wing lining similar to rest of underparts (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

Here, it can be seen that this individual is quite dark, but with a brownish tinge and the pale greater covert bar contrasts slightly with dark upperparts, which is possible due to extreme wear of plumage. The bill is very long and slender, and looks longer than head length. The overall dark plumage with long and slender bill is indicative of this being a Black Noddy. In the Oriental Bird Images website, few images of a Black Noddy in June 2017 from Hong Kong are posted, wherein the plumage looks very worn (dark brownish-black) and the bird shows a pale greater covert wing bar, and looks somewhat similar to what was observed here. However, since the identification of Black Noddy is quite difficult, we sent the images to Klaus Malling Olsen and Hadoram Shirihai, both very experienced with the species.

Klaus Malling Olsen replied (in litt., email dated 16 August 2018) that 'the very long, narrow and slender bill fits Black Noddy as well as genuine white forehead. The plumage is very dark, with a brown tinge, which appear with wear in noddies. The pale areas could be explained by extremely downworn feather parts, which is illustrated in Olsen & Larsson (1995)'. Hadoram Shirihai replied (in litt., email dated 18 August 2018) that 'I agree that it could be Black Noddy due to compact feel and long straight thin bill, but still it is difficult to be sure. It seems to me too pale and too brownish for Black (but may be an extremely worn bird?); the jizz and more dusky hue of plumage is pointing to Black Noddy, so 'possibly Black Noddy'.

For India, there are three previous records of Black Noddy; specimens were collected from near Lakshadweep Islands, west of Nicobars and a third from the mouth of the River Ganges (Praveen et al. 2014); the authors state that the record from the Ganges could be in Bangladesh and that this record is best treated as common for both India and Bangladesh. There are a few sight records from Sri Lanka, some of which could pertain to this species (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). De Silva (2011) states that the species is probably more common than records suggest. Thus, a few sightings from Sri Lanka are known. However, there are no sightings from the western coast of peninsular India. The regionally occurring subspecies is probably *worcesteri* but this requires confirmation (Praveen et al. 2014).

For this individual seen in Porbandar, Klaus Malling Olsen stated unequivocally that this was a Black Noddy while Hadoram Shirihai suggested that this was a 'possible' Black Noddy. Based on the

comments given by the two experts, we are inclined to treat this as a Black Noddy and accept this record from Porbandar as that of a Black Noddy with extremely worn plumage. The Black Noddy is not listed in the checklist of birds of Gujarat (Ganpule 2016) or in the first update to the Gujarat checklist (Ganpule 2017). Thus, this is an addition to the avifauna of Gujarat. Also, this is the first photographic record from India and also a first sighting from the western coastline of the country.

We thank Hadoram Shirihai and Klaus Malling Olsen for helping with the identification. We are grateful to Praveen J. and Jaypalsinh Jadeja for their help – Eds]

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Sighting of Hen Harrier at Nal Sarovar: a first photographic record for Gujarat

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show only one sighting of the species from the state, which is from Velavadar National Park. I have seen and photographed a small group of 5 to 7 Hen Harriers in Tal Chappar Wildlife Sanctuary, Churu Dist., Rajasthan, in December 2012 and also learnt that they have been irregular winter visitors to the sanctuary over the last few years. Thus, I had seen the species earlier and was aware of the identification features to look for in this species.

On 1 April 2018, a Sunday, at around 10:40 hrs, while returning back from a routine bird watching trip in the outskirts of Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary, I suddenly saw an unusual looking harrier sp. quartering quite low and flying fast towards me as I was walking around the boundary of a castor field. I got a bit curious seeing this bird, which appeared quite different to me at first glance. As it flew closer, I immediately noticed that it appeared a bit big and bulky and had short but broad wings. The facial appearance was owl-like, with paler markings and it looked quite different from a Montagu's or Pallid Harrier, which I have been observing closely for several years. This harrier seemed to be in search of prey and when it saw me, it immediately changed its course, flying towards the other side of the field. Before I could get my camera equipment and take any images, the bird flew quite fast over the field. I tried pursuing it to get some good images. Unfortunately, I managed to just take 3 flight images of the bird but luckily, managed to capture the under-wing markings, which are helpful in identification. I had already realized in the field that this harrier was quite unusual and was very keen to look at the images in detail to identify it. After reaching home, on

The Hen Harrier (*Circus cyaneus*) is an uncommon winter migrant in India, mainly wintering in the North-eastern states, and along the foothills of the Himalayas (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). It is not as widespread as the other wintering harriers like the Pallid Harrier (*Circus macrorous*), Montagu's Harrier (*Circus pygargus*) or the Eurasian Marsh Harrier (*Circus aeruginosus*), which are fairly common and widely distributed in India. The Hen Harrier is also a passage migrant and widespread winter visitor to Nepal and Bhutan. It is a monotypic species and breeds throughout Europe, from northern Spain to the Russian Far East, and also in Central Asia (Orta *et al.* 2018).

For Gujarat, Dharmakumarsinhji (1955) mentions the Hen Harrier for Saurashtra but gives it as 'not common' and does not mention any specific sightings. Grimmett *et al.* (2011)