

## Sighting of White-faced Whistling Duck *Dendrocygna viduata* near Navsari

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On 13 October 2019, I was birding with four fellow birders – Kamlesh Gandhi, Darsh Patel, Deep Desai and Neera Pandya and we visited several water bodies near Navsari. After the initial disappointment of very few sightings, I noticed some strange ducks, with white heads, near Sultanpur. As they were very far, we had to observe them through a scope and we found that there were more than ten similar looking birds. We tried to take photographs but as they were very far, we were not able to take good photographs but could manage to take some record shots. One thing we were sure about was that these birds were new for us and we had not seen them before.

On arriving home, I started searching in the reference guides for birds of the Indian Subcontinent and found no clue about these ducks. Meanwhile, we were informed that these were White-faced Whistling Ducks (*Dendrocygna viduata*), which are found in South America and some parts of Africa. No previous record, in Asia, was found and so we were very surprised to see this species in a group here. We need to investigate if these birds were wild vagrants or some escaped captive birds. My observations of the behaviour of these birds indicated that they could be wild birds and not escapees as they were very far in the water body and moved away from us when they noticed us. The birds slowly moved to the vegetation in the water

and hid themselves. Normally, birds acquainted with human presence do not show this behavior. Opinions from other experts will be of help in determining the origin of these birds.

[A White-faced Whistling Duck was reported from Jamnagar in February 2017 and the photograph taken at that time was widely circulated amongst experts. It was found that the bird was an escapee from a large private collection near Jamnagar and not a wild vagrant. It was further found that there were more than 50 pairs of White-faced Whistling Ducks in the collection and the birds were not kept in cages. It is possible that the birds seen in Navsari were part of the collection and had locally migrated to other parts of the state.

The White-faced Whistling Duck was recently added to Appendix 2 of the India Checklist v3.1 – the records of species added to Appendix 2 are treated as 'of unknown origin' and the species is not added to the main country checklist (Praveen et al. 2019). We feel that this is the correct decision taken by the India Checklist makers at this stage for the White-faced Whistling Duck. We see no reasons to propose any changes for the treatment of White-faced Whistling Duck for Gujarat. We feel it will not be appropriate to accept this into the Gujarat checklist since it is widely known that a private aviary has the species in its collection in Gujarat and hence it is not added to the Gujarat checklist – Eds]

### Acknowledgements

I am thankful to Nikunj Vedak in helping with the identification of this bird through his mobile app.

### References

Praveen J., Jayapal, R., & Pittie, A., 2019. Checklist of the birds of India (v3.1). Website: <http://www.indianbirds.in/india/> [Date of publication: 16 December, 2019]. □