

Sighting of Sooty Gull *Ichthyiaetus hemprichii* near Porbandar: an addition to the avifauna of Gujarat

Konark Karia & Punit Karia: C/o Mijbani Caterers, "Nirant", Bunglow No. 27, Jalaram Colony, National Highway, Porbandar 360575.
konark.karia@yahoo.in



Konark Karia



Konark Karia

On 1 May 2021, while exploring the sea shore on Porbandar-Veraval Highway (around 10 kms away from Porbandar and before Rangbai Temple), a group of terns (*Sterna* sp.) and gulls (*Larus* sp.) were seen roosting on the sea shore. In this group, we saw a dark bird roosting with the terns and gulls. After getting closer and taking some photographs, we were sure that the bird was a Sooty Gull (*Ichthyiaetus hemprichii*) since it had brown-grey upperparts and long two-toned bill which had a reddish tip; the underparts were whitish, with a greyish-brown fore-neck and upper breast. A whitish eye-lid was visible above the eye. As the bird is vagrant to India, we confirmed the identification with Prasad Ganpule, who said it was indeed a Sooty Gull. When we found the bird the first time, it was around 07:00 hrs and the tide was low. On 3 May 2021, at around the same time as before and at low tide, the Sooty Gull

was seen again and photographed. The bird was roosting along with other gulls and terns. We observed that the Sooty Gull was not disturbed by the local fishermen and when they came too close to the bird, it would move to a comfortable distance from the fishermen but it did not leave the roosting site. We visited the area from 1 May to 4 May in the morning and evening but found the bird only two times in the morning when the tide was low.

The Sooty Gull is resident from Baluchistan to the Sindh Coast, Pakistan, breeding sporadically in this area (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012); there are a few records from India. Praveen *et al.* (2014) listed records of this species till 2014; after this, there is a recent record from the western coast of India from Karnataka (Doraisamy 2015). For Gujarat, Ganpule (2019) in his paper on the gulls of Gujarat noted that the status of this species in the state is interesting; the Sooty Gull has been recorded from the Arabian Sea but there have been no records from the coastal areas of the state even though it is present in Pakistan, very near to the Gujarat coast and stated that it could occur in the coastal areas of the state. The Sooty Gull was not included in the recent checklist of the birds of Gujarat (Ganpule 2020). This is the first confirmed record of the Sooty Gull from Gujarat and it is an addition to the avifauna of the state.

References

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