

## Unusual feeding behaviour of Gull-billed Terns

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On 6 March 2015, I visited a village in the outskirts of Madhavpur, in the Ghed region, approximately 55 kms from Porbandar, along with Manish Kargatiya. The village is around 20 to 25 kms from the sea coast. A flock of around 150 Gull-billed Terns (*Gelochelidon nilotica*) were seen in a dry farm of 'desi chana', also known as chickpea. There was no water nearby and we were surprised to see such a huge flock of these terns and decided to investigate further. We noted that the flock was feeding on green-coloured caterpillars (we could not identify the species) in the farm. They were hunting as if they were hunting over the water. They would fly over the farm and dive to catch the caterpillars exactly as they would dive in the water to catch fish or other aquatic prey. The group would divide in two parts and cover two different farms at a time and again they would get together and hunt at one farm. This same behaviour was seen for almost 4 hours that day, from around 15:30 to 19:30 hrs. We went on the next day to observe this behaviour again, but we did not find a single bird in the area. The farmer who owned the farm told us that that the birds would come again after a couple of days, once there are caterpillars; meanwhile, they go to other farms in the surrounding areas.

The Gull-billed Tern is said to be more insectivorous than other tern species; grasshoppers, dragonflies, moths, grubs,

locusts, earthworms etc. are taken (Gochfeld *et al.* 2018). In winter, it was found to prey mainly on fiddler crabs (*Uca tangeri*) and occasionally on fish and locusts in Guinea-Bissau (Stienen *et al.* 2008). In Sriharikota Island, it was observed feeding on insect road kills (Sivakumar 2004). In Gujarat, it is a widely distributed winter visitor and found across the state mainly in all types of water – sea coasts, tidal creeks, rivers, ponds etc. and occasionally in grasslands and agricultural fields.

Three Gull-billed Terns were seen catching locusts and other insects in agricultural fields near Bhavnagar in September 1999 (Bhatt 2000).

This observation of a large flock of Gull-billed Terns feeding in agricultural fields is interesting and points to the species being beneficial to farmers. The large flock observed here consuming caterpillars all afternoon would have, without any doubt, been helpful to the farmer in removing these pests from the field. Almost no studies are done regarding this behaviour of the Gull-billed Tern during the non-breeding season (in winter) in India and this documentation can be of help to researchers in identifying bird species beneficial to agriculture in India.

### References

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## Arctic Skua from Nal Sarovar

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Sunil Kini

The Arctic Skua, (*Stercorarius parasiticus*), which is also known as the Parasitic Jaeger, is a seabird (a pelagic species) of the Skua family, *Stercorariidae*. They have a reputation of being avian pirates, as they are known to steal food from other birds. This species breeds in the north of Eurasia and North America, with significant populations as far south as northern Scotland and it is a migrant, wintering at sea in the tropics and southern oceans (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

On 13 October 2018, a Saturday, at around 09:30 hrs, while on a routine bird watching trip inside Nal Sarovar Sanctuary,

from a distance I suddenly saw an unusual looking bird in the waters. I quickly realized that it was a pelagic species and requested the boatman to move the boat slowly towards it. The bird was quite static and floating in the water close to a large patch of reeds. The bird gave us good views and I could photograph it well. I noted that it was a juvenile and probably a vagrant, which lost track during its migration and landed up at Nal Sarovar. This bird was not seen again, in spite of many attempts to search for it by other birders. This leads us to a conclusion that it might not have stayed there for long and may have moved further on in its migration, probably towards the Gulf of Kachchh. The identification of juvenile skuas is tricky but here, since it was seen well and photographed, the identification was confirmed as a juvenile Arctic Skua based on the small fine bill, small head, streaked neck and nape, and upperparts with a rufescent tinge.

There is one inland record of Arctic Skua from the Little Rann of Kachchh, along with a photographic record from the Gulf of Kachchh during a pelagic trip (Ganpule 2016). It has been noted off the Gujarat coast a number of times during pelagic trips (Naik 2016). There is a previous record of a probable Pomarine Skua (*Stercorarius pomarinus*) from Nal Sarovar (Ganpule 2016), but, this is the first record of an Arctic Skua from this area.

### References

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## Black-capped Kingfisher near Veraval

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Ravi Patel

On 11 February 2018, I visited the coastal area near Veraval beach (20° 55' N, 70° 27' E), around 5 kms away from Veraval city, with Divyesh Gheravda and Prem Lalchandani. It is a largely unknown and undisturbed area for birding and is good for bird watching because it is a sandy and rocky coastal area with a small check dam, so fresh water is also present most of the year. We saw Pacific Golden Plover (*Pluvialis fulva*), Ruddy Shelduck (*Tadorna ferruginea*), Asian Openbill (*Anastomus oscitans*), Isabelline Wheatear (*Oenanthe isabellina*), Asian Paradise-flycatcher (*Terpsiphone paradisi*), Ruff (*Calidris pugnax*) and many other common fresh water as well as costal birds here.

While bird watching in this area, I saw a Black-capped Kingfisher (*Halcyon pileata*) perched on a rock by the beach. I called my friends and we took some good images, confirming the identification. On 17 February 2018, I visited this area

again with Pragnesh Patel and Saswat Mishra. We saw the kingfisher again at the same site. This time, we saw it hunt a crab. Another interesting sighting from this area was that of a White-eared Bulbul (*Pycnonotus leucotis*). Though widespread and common in other parts of the state, this bulbul is not common in our area, especially in Gir-Somnath district (*pers. obsv*).

The Black-capped Kingfisher is resident in the coastal areas of Gujarat (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). It is given as an uncommon to rare resident and local migrant in the state (Ganpule 2016). Sightings have been reported from coastal, as well as from inland areas. But, it is not common and this was the first time we had seen this species here. Rank & Parasharya (2005) show sightings from Ahmedpur-Mandvi and Diu (which are not far from Veraval), and state that though it is not common, it is distributed all along the Gujarat coast. This sighting from Veraval is another addition to the sightings of the Black-capped Kingfisher from coastal Saurashtra.

### References

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