

FEATHER FRAME

TINY OASIS

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Birding for me is perpetual bliss. You see stunning and surprising things (mostly birds!), and you are sure that you may never see it again. But, birding is a continuous journey where, with luck, you continue to see many amazing things. I had an exceptional birding trip at a remote place in Kachchh, Gujarat. The news came from birder friends about a great congregation of birds at Khadir-bet in Greater Rann of Kachchh, and I was aware that this phenomenon would not last long. So, along with a couple of friends, I planned to visit the place immediately on the coming weekend.

This picture was framed in December 2011, near the last of the Border Security Force (BSF) check-post in an incredibly remote part in the Greater Rann of Kutch. Taking a break from the hectic photographic trip of Khadir-bet to witness

one of the largest congregations of flamingos, pelicans, gulls, terns, and other waders, we visited the Wood Fossil Park, which was near Dholavira, and quite inaccessible at that time. This Fossil Park was at the edge of a shallow sea bed, and it being a border area, a chowki was strategically built on a hillock looming over the landmass. The soldiers were aware that there is no potable water within several kilometers of its periphery. So, few meters from the chowki, they had tied a 'non-use' helmet filled with water, to a branch of dry *Acacia* sp. tree. This worked as a 'tiny oasis' and was frequented by bulbuls, prinias, and silverbills for drinking as well as bathing. This gesture by the BSF soldiers was incredibly thoughtful and provided drinking water for the birds in the otherwise dry, desert habitat.



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