

Sighting of Sabine's Gull *Xema sabini* at Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary: An addition to the avifauna of Gujarat

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On the morning of 30 May 2025, at approximately 11:40 am, during a routine birdwatching session along the banks of Nal Sarovar, I spotted an unusual gull. At first glance, it stood out from the commonly observed gull species in the area. Its distinct features immediately caught my attention, prompting me to document it with photographs and consult with fellow bird watchers. I quickly forwarded the sighting details and images to Prasad Ganpule and Devvratsinh Mori, and within half an hour, I received confirmation from them: the bird was identified as a Sabine's Gull (*Xema sabini*). A rare and exciting sighting for the region.



Photo: Iqbal Rajrani

The bird's appearance was striking. Its bill was particularly noteworthy, being smaller in size than other regular gull species and with a distinct yellow tip, which initially led me to suspect it might belong to a different species than the gulls seen here. The Sabine's Gull remained in the same area of Nal Sarovar for nearly twelve days, allowing ample opportunity for observation and documentation. During this period, many birdwatchers and enthusiasts visited the sanctuary to catch a glimpse of this rare vagrant. The gull was last seen on the morning of 11 June 2025, around 8:45 am, when it took flight and disappeared, marking the end of a rare and significant occurrence of a genuine vagrant at Nal Sarovar. Many bird watchers have uploaded photographs of this individual on eBird, and photographs of this bird in flight, preening, etc. are available on the eBird website. This sighting represents a notable addition to the avifaunal records of Gujarat, as Sabine's Gull is not included in the Gujarat checklist (Ganpule et al. 2022). This sighting also highlights the importance of continuous monitoring and documentation of avian life in protected habitats like Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary.

There are very few confirmed sightings of Sabine's Gull in this part of Asia. An earlier record of a Sabine's Gull from Kerala

in May 2013 was the first record of the species from India (Sreenivasan et al. 2013). This sighting from Nal Sarovar is thus the second record of this species from India. The bird from Kerala was thought to be a second-summer bird. The features seen in the Nal Sarovar individual also suggested that it was a second-summer bird. Both the sightings of Sabine's Gull from India have been in May – the Kerala sighting was in the first week of May, while the Nal Sarovar sighting was at the end of May. This suggests that some birds in the return migration may be passing through India, and bird watchers should be alert towards the possibility of its occurrence in the summer months in India.



Photo: Kamruddin Alvani



Photo: Ramzan Kasam Sama



Photo: Sunil Kini



Photo: Sumil Kini



Photo: Sumil Kini

Acknowledgments

I would like to thank Sakkira Begum (Deputy Conservator of Forests, Nal Sarovar Bird Sanctuary), Shri Desai (Assistant Conservator of Forests), D. M Solanki (Range Forest Officer), and all the forest staff for their support. I am grateful to Prasad Ganpule and Devvratsinh Mori for their assistance with species identification and for their help with the draft manuscript. I thank Sunil Kini, Ramzan Kasam Sama and Kamruddin Alvani for sharing photographs for this note.

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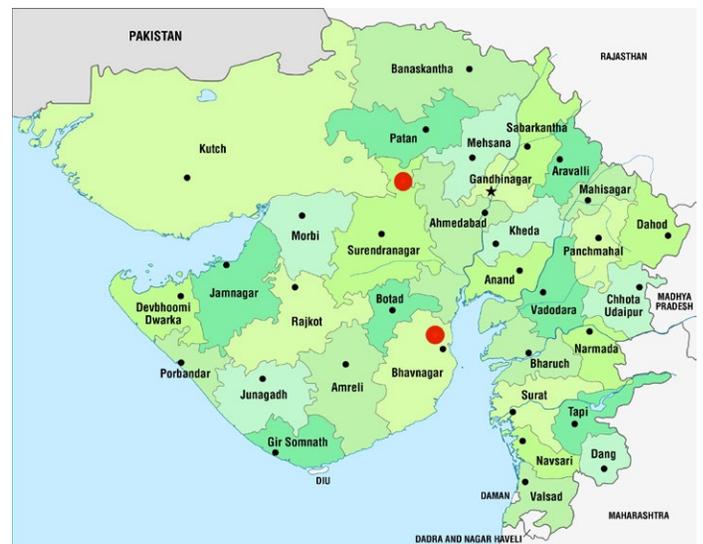
Sighting of Yellow-eyed Pigeon *Columba eversmanni* at Blackbuck National Park, Gujarat

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The Yellow-eyed Pigeon (*Columba eversmanni*), also known as the Pale-backed Pigeon, is a winter migrant to India, with Gujarat being a state where it has been noted as a vagrant. Once widespread across the arid and semi-arid landscapes of Central Asia, its populations have sharply declined due to hunting along migratory routes and the loss of steppe habitats (BirdLife International, 2024).

In Gujarat, the species is considered vagrant (Ganpule et al. 2022). It was first added to the Gujarat checklist following a sight record from the Little Rann of Kachchh in October 2006 (Malik, 2010). However, a photographic record from the same region, taken in December 2005, was later published (Cooper and Kay 2021). This photographic documentation of three individuals confirmed its occurrence in Gujarat and validated its inclusion in the state's bird checklist.

The Yellow-eyed Pigeon is distinguishable from the widespread Rock Pigeon (*Columba livia*) by its paler plumage and striking yellow iris. Gujarat lies along an important migratory corridor connecting Central Asia with peninsular India, making the



Map 1. Map showing reported locations of Yellow-eyed Pigeon (*Columba eversmanni*) within Gujarat.

state significant for monitoring this species. Globally, the bird has suffered steep declines and is now classified as Vulnerable on the IUCN Red List (BirdLife International, 2024). Occasional