

WHISKERED TERN

Sighting of Whiskered Tern *Chlidonias hybrida* (Pallas, 1811) in Son Beel, Assam



IUCN Red List:
Least Concern
(Birdlife
International,
2018)

A frontal view of the Whiskered Tern in flight (Photo: M. Miraj Hussain)

Son Beel (92°27.00'E & 24°40.00'N), the largest fresh water tectonic lake (*beel*) in Karimganj district of Assam and an Important Bird and Biodiversity Area (IBA) (Islam and Rahmani 2004), is rich in aquatic and avian diversity. The total area of the *beel* is 1500 ha. However, during lean seasons it gets reduced to small fragments of total not more than 500 ha. (Birdlife International 2016).

On 20 April 2016, at around 13:07hrs. we saw an uncommon bird flying over sub-merged paddy field at the outer edges of the *beel* near Debodwar (24°43'4.89"N & 92°26'15.76"E). After careful observation, we concluded it as Whiskered Tern (*Chlidonias hybrida*) by looking at its plumage, bill structure and head pattern, apart from its other morphological features (Plates 1 & 2) (Ali & Ripley 1987, Grimmett *et al.* 2013). The bird was seen to be in its breeding plumage with white cheeks contrast with black cap and grey underparts. The bird was seen swooping and pecking in the water. Once it swooped on a domestic duck attacking on its head. We saw it for two minutes until it flew away.

Class: Aves

Order: Charadriiformes

Family: Laridae

Chlidonias hybrida
[Whiskered Tern]

Species described by
Pallas in 1811



Sighting location of Whiskered Tern (*Chlidonias hybrida*) in Son Beel, Assam

Whiskered Tern (*Chlidonias hybrida*), breeds in Kashmir and erratically in North India, however, it is widespread during winters (Grimmett et al. 2013). It can be differentiated from White-winged Tern by larger bill, grey rump concolorous with back and tail, and different head pattern (Ali & Ripley, 1987). The current IUCN status of this bird is Least Concern

and population trend is to be considered stable (Birdlife International 2018). However, the current status of this tern in Assam is considered as resident, winter visitor and common (Choudhury 2000).

A total of 89 species of birds have been reported in and around this Son Beel (Chakravarty et al. 2015); however, Whiskered Tern was not included in the list. We have gathered 52 sighting records of this species in Assam since 1949 from secondary sources (Table 1). According to Choudhury (2000) this species is commonly distributed in Assam. Because of its Least Concern status and commonness, this species might not have been given importance to be recorded, hence the

Global Distribution:

Native: Afghanistan; Albania; Algeria; Angola; Armenia; Australia; Austria; Azerbaijan; Bahrain; Bangladesh; Belarus; Benin; Bosnia and Herzegovina; Botswana; Brunei Darussalam; Bulgaria; Cambodia; Central African Republic; Chad; China; Côte d'Ivoire; Croatia; Cyprus; Czech Republic; Egypt; Equatorial Guinea; Ethiopia; France; Gambia; Germany; Ghana; Greece; Guam; Guinea; Guinea-Bissau; Hong Kong; Hungary; India; Indonesia; Iran, Islamic Republic of; Iraq; Israel; Italy; Japan; Jordan; Kazakhstan; Kenya; Korea, Republic of; Kuwait; Lao People's Democratic Republic; Latvia; Lebanon; Liberia; Libya; Lithuania; Macedonia, the former Yugoslav Republic of; Madagascar; Malawi; Malaysia; Mali; Mauritania; Micronesia, Federated States of; Moldova; Mongolia; Montenegro; Morocco; Mozambique; Myanmar; Namibia; Nepal; Niger; Nigeria; Northern Mariana Islands; Oman; Pakistan; Palau; Palestinian Territory, Occupied; Papua New Guinea; Philippines; Poland; Portugal; Qatar; Romania; Russian Federation (Central Asian Russia, Eastern Asian Russia, European Russia); Saudi Arabia; Senegal; Serbia; Sierra Leone; Singapore; Slovakia; Somalia; South Africa; South Sudan; Spain; Sri Lanka; Sudan; Swaziland; Switzerland; Syrian Arab Republic; Taiwan, Province of China; Tajikistan; Tanzania, United Republic of; Thailand; Timor-Leste; Togo; Tunisia; Turkey; Turkmenistan; Uganda; Ukraine; United Arab Emirates; Uzbekistan; Viet Nam; Western Sahara; Yemen; Zambia; Zimbabwe

Vagrant: Barbados; Belgium; Burkina Faso; Burundi; Cameroon; Cape Verde; Christmas Island; Congo, The Democratic Republic of the; Denmark; Djibouti; Eritrea; Finland; Gibraltar; Iceland; Ireland; Lesotho; Luxembourg; Maldives; Malta; New Zealand; Norway; Rwanda; Seychelles; Sweden; United Kingdom; United States



A lateral view of the Whiskered Tern in flight (Photo: M. Miraj Hussain)

Table 1: Sightings of Whiskered Tern in Assam from 1949 onwards (chronological order)

S. No.	Date of Sighting	Locations	Sighted by	No. of individuals sighted	References
1	10-12-1949	Palasbari Kamrup, Assam	Walter N. Koelz	1 (male)	www.vertnet.org accessed on 17-11-2016
2	11-12-1949	Palasbari Kamrup, Assam	Walter N. Koelz	1 (female)	www.vertnet.org accessed on 17-11-2016
3	12-12-1949	Palasbari Kamrup, Assam	Walter N. Koelz	1 (female)	www.vertnet.org accessed on 17-11-2016
4	13-12-1949	Palasbari Kamrup, Assam	Walter N. Koelz	2 (females)	www.vertnet.org accessed on 17-11-2016
5	15-12-1949	Palasbari Kamrup, Assam	Walter N. Koelz	1 (male), 1 (female)	www.vertnet.org accessed on 17-11-2016
6	22-05-1950	Palasbari Kamrup, Assam	Walter N. Koelz	1 (male), 1 (female)	www.vertnet.org accessed on 17-11-2016
7	25-05-1950	Palasbari Kamrup, Assam	Walter N. Koelz	1 (male)	www.vertnet.org accessed on 17-11-2016
8	11-03-1951	Palasbari Kamrup, Assam	Walter N. Koelz	1 (female)	www.vertnet.org accessed on 17-11-2016
9	10-05-1953	Palasbari Kamrup, Assam	Walter N. Koelz	1 (male)	www.vertnet.org accessed on 17-11-2016
10	9 th March 1987- 16 th Feb. 1988	Sibsagar, Assam	Anwaruddin Choudhury	Not mentioned	Forktail Vol. 6 (1991): 35-42
11	1994	Dibru-Saikhowa National Park, Assam	Anwaruddin Choudhury	Not mentioned	Indian Birds Vol. 2 No. 4 (July-August 2006)
12	1995	Deepar Beel Wildlife Sanctuary, Assam	Barman <i>et al.</i> 1995	Not mentioned	PAVO Vol.33 (182): 25-40
13	1999	Kaziranga National Park, Assam	M. Baruah & P. Sharma	Not mentioned	Forktail Vol. 15 (1999): 47-60
14	24-02-2004	Kaziranga National Park, Golaghat	John Allcock	-	www.ebird.org accessed on 07-04-2017
15	25-02-2004	Kaziranga National Park, Golaghat	John Allcock	-	www.ebird.org accessed on 07-04-2017
16	February 2007	Dheer Beel, Assam	Sinha <i>et al.</i> 2015	1	Indian Birds 10 (3 & 4)
17	13-05-2010	Deepor Beel, Guwahati	Migrant Watch	50	www.ebird.org accessed on 07-04-2017
18	10-06-2010	Sakuli Beel, Jorhat	Migrant Watch Group	200	www.ebird.org accessed on 07-04-2017
19	11-08-2011	Sakuli Beel, Jorhat	Migrant Watch Group	200	www.ebird.org accessed on 07-04-2017
20	24-04-2013	Kaziranga National Park, Golaghat	Gerlinde Taurer & Christoph Moning	10	www.ebird.org accessed on 07-04-2017
21	18-11-2013	Zoo cum Botanical Garden, Guwahati	Forest Venkat	-	www.ebird.org accessed on 07-04-2017
22	19-11-2013	Zoo cum Botanical Garden, Guwahati	Forest Venkat	-	www.ebird.org accessed on 07-04-2017
23	20-11-2013	Guwahati, Kamrup	Forest Venkat	-	www.ebird.org accessed on 07-04-2017
24	21-11-2013	Guwahati, Kamrup	Forest Venkat	-	www.ebird.org accessed on 07-04-2017
25	22-11-2013	Pobitora Wildlife Sactuary, Morigaon	Forest Venkat	-	www.ebird.org accessed on 07-04-2017
26	23-11-2013	Darrang	Forest Venkat	3	www.ebird.org accessed on 07-04-2017

S. No.	Date of Sighting	Locations	Sighted by	No. of individuals sighted	References
27	25-11-2013	Nimati Ghat, Jorhat	Forest Venkat	12 (approx.)	www.ebird.org accessed on 07-04-2017
28	16-02-2014	Maguri Beel, Tinisukia	Arnab Bora	1	www.ebird.org accessed on 07-04-2017
29	29-04-2014	Tezpur	Jan Smith	5	www.ebird.org accessed on 05-05-2017
30	16-11-2014	Nameri, Nagaon	Mihir Joshi	1	www.ebird.org accessed on 07-04-2017
31	17-02-2015	Maguri Beel, Tinisukia	Maitreya Sukumar, Shashank Dalvi	2	www.ebird.org accessed on 07-04-2017
32	10-04-2015	Guwahati	Alfred Raab	-	www.ebird.org accessed on 07-04-2017
33	14-04-2015	Nabagraha, Guwahati	Ann Crawford	-	www.ebird.org accessed on 07-04-2017
34	15-04-2015	Nabagraha, Guwahati	Ann Crawford	-	www.ebird.org accessed on 07-04-2017
35	25-04-2015	Maguri Beel, Tinisukia	Bng Liocichlas (Group Account), Vinay Das, Sachin Shurpali, Dipu Karuthedathu, Praveen J	2	www.ebird.org accessed on 07-04-2017
36	03-05-2015	Tezpur	Andre Weiss	18	www.ebird.org accessed on 07-04-2017
37	09-05-2015	Deepor Beel, Guwahati	Somoyita Sur, Geetha Venkatraman & Jaydev Mandal	50	www.ebird.org accessed on 07-04-2017
38	01-04-2016	Maguri Beel, Tinisukia	Chetna Sharma, Geeta Goswami, Saurabh Sawant	30	www.ebird.org accessed on 07-04-2017
39	01-04-2016	Maguri Beel, Tinisukia	Chetna Sharma	-	www.ebird.org accessed on 07-04-2017
40	01-04-2016	Maguri Beel, Tinisukia	Taksh Sangwan	4	www.ebird.org accessed on 07-04-2017
41	01-04-2016	Maguri Beel, Assam	Taksh Sangwan	Not mentioned	www.ebird.org accessed on 07-12-2016
42	02-04-2016	Maguri Beel, Tinisukia	Chetna Sharma, Geeta Goswami, Saurabh Sawant	-	www.ebird.org accessed on 07-04-2017
43	02-04-2016	Maguri Beel, Tinisukia	Chetna Sharma	-	www.ebird.org accessed on 07-04-2017
44	13-04-2016	Deepor Beel, Guwahati	Somoyita Sur	30 (breeding plumage)	www.ebird.org accessed on 07-04-2017
45	11-05-2016	Deepor Beel, Guwahati	Somoyita Sur	15	www.ebird.org accessed on 07-04-2017
46	03-07-2016	Pobitora Wildlife Sactuary, Morigaon	Dhurba Saikia	1	www.ebird.org accessed on 07-04-2017
47	03-07-2016	Pobitora Wildlife Sanctuary, Assam	Dhruba Saikia	Not mentioned	www.ebird.org accessed on 07-12-2016
48	26-03-2017	Kaziranga National Park, Golaghat	Frank Antram	1	www.ebird.org accessed on 05-05-2017
49	27-03-2017	Maguri Beel, Tinisukia	Pankaj Lad	1	www.ebird.org accessed on 05-05-2017
50	29-04-2017	Deepor Beel, Guwahati	Hemant Kirola	8	www.ebird.org accessed on 05-05-2017

S. No.	Date of Sighting	Locations	Sighted by	No. of individuals sighted	References
51	10-05-2017	Avian Park, Cinnamara, Jorhat	Miraj Hussain	10	<i>Pers. Obs.</i>
52	-	Manas National Park, Assam	Anwaruddin Choudhury	Not mentioned	http://manasnationalpark.co.in/pdf/birds.pdf accessed on 07-12-2016

less record. However, Barua and Sharma (1999) and Choudhury (2006) have mentioned that the species is uncommon in Kaziranga and Dibru-Saikhowa National Parks in Brahmaputra Valley. Except for Sakuli Beel, Jorhat, where Migrant Watch Group recorded 200 individuals, in all other records, the number of bird was small (Table 1). Being a winter visitor, the presence of this species should not be ignored. Hence this is necessary to know if the species is ignored by birdwatchers elsewhere in Assam, or in recent times, this species has not been sighted in large numbers.

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