

First record of Gull-billed Tern (*Gelochelidon nilotica*) in Jhansi District, Uttar Pradesh



Gull-billed tern (Non-breeding stage)



Gull-billed tern (Breeding stage)

IUCN Red List:

Global — Least
Concern

Aves

[Class of Birds]

Charadriiformes

[Order of small, medium-
large birds]

Laridae

[Family of Seabirds]

Gelochelidon nilotica

[Gull-billed Tern]

Species described by
Gmelin in 1789

There are 44 species of Terns worldwide. Only 23 species of terns occur in India. Terns are seabirds in the family Sternidae that have a worldwide distribution and are normally found near sea, rivers, or wetlands. Previously considered a subfamily of the gulls, Laridae, they are now usually given full family status and divided into eleven genera. They are slender, lightly built birds with long, forked tails, narrow wings, long bills, and relatively short legs. Some terns are resident to the Indian Subcontinent while some are winter migrants (Vinicombe, 1989).

Jhansi district in the southwestern part of Uttar Pradesh lies between 25°07' and 25°57' north latitude and 78°10' and 79°25' east longitudes. The area is chiefly drained by the river Betwa and minor rivers like Dhasan and Pahuj. The Betwa and Pahuj rivers are tributaries of Yamuna and Dhasan is

tributary of Betwa. In the district, number of tanks, ponds and reservoirs have been constructed by building dams across the major and minor streams for storing water for irrigational and domestic purposes. These include Pahuj Dam, Sukhma Dukma Dam, Lachuraghat, Saprar Dam, Paricha Dam and Dongri

Global Distribution:
Europe, North Africa
through the Middle East
& South-Central Asia to
Western China & Thailand



Gull-billed tern flying over the deep water of reservoirs

Reservoir. While working on a project funded by Waterbird Society (November 2016-January 2017), our team recorded Gull-billed terns for the first time in three reservoirs of Jhansi district. The species was identified as Gull-

billed tern (*Gelochelidon nilotica*) in breeding and non-breeding stages with the help of Ali (2002), Grimmett et al. (2007), and Grewal & Pfister (2013). It is Least Concerned according to IUCN Status, however the population is suspected to be in decline owing to habitat loss and degradation in the core of its range (del Hoyo et al. 1996).

Gull-billed tern is a common winter visitor to coasts and inland. It also occurs in Europe, Africa, Asia and the Americas (Grimmett et al., 2007). The highest population of Terns were reported in December at Pahuj Reservoir (35) followed by Saprar Dam (12) and Sukhma

Dukhma Reservoir (11). During the observations it was observed that this bird is a medium-sized tern. Its face and underparts were white



Gull-billed tern sharing habitat with Cormorant and Egret

and it had a black cap that extended from the base of the bill to the nape of the neck in the breeding stage. The bill and legs were black. The back, upper wings and upper tail were light gray. The bill was relatively thick or heavy for a tern species. Unlike other terns that plunge into the water bodies to catch small fish, the gull-billed tern fed primarily over marshes, mudflats, and scrub vegetation. They were seen flying above deep water as well as shallow regions of the water bodies. They shared the habitats with Lesser whistling duck (*Dendrocygna javanica*), Common coots (*Fulica atra*), Little Egret (*Egretta garzetta*), Great Egret (*Casmerodius albus*), Intermediate Egret (*Mesophoyx intermedia*), cormorants (*Phalacrocorax species*), Black-headed Gull (*Larus ridibundus*) and River tern (*Sterna aurantia*). The Gull-billed tern is a winter visitor in the region. Its presence has been reported from Okhla Bird Sanctuary (Khanna & Nitu 2017), National Chambal Sanctuary, Hastinapur Wildlife Sanctuary (Khan et.al., 2013) in Uttar Pradesh. This is the first reporting of Gull-billed Tern in Jhansi district. The occurrence therefore adds to the checklist of birds of Jhansi.

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