

Unprecedented avian encounter: hybrid of Northern Shoveler and Australian Shoveler discovered in Gajaldoba, West Bengal, India

This research article presents the second photographic documentation of the hybrid of Northern Shoveler *Spatula clypeata* and Australian Shoveler *Spatula rhynchotis* within the environs of Gajaldoba, Testa Barrage, West Bengal, India, noted on the morning of 08 February 2024. Gajaldoba Barrage, positioned at coordinates 26.754 N, 88.590 E, stands as a prominent habitat for waterfowl. The Gajaldoba Birding site encompasses two distinct sectors: the primary river barrage and a smaller marshland situated on the opposing bank. The observation of the hybrid Australian Shoveler occurred within the marshland segment of the barrage, characterized by vegetative cover along the river's edge and the presence of stagnant water.

The Australian Shoveler, a member of the Anatidae family, is indigenous to Australia and New Zealand



Hybrid of Northern Shoveler *Spatula clypeata* and Australian Shoveler *Spatula rhynchotis* record from Gajaldoba, West Bengal, India. © Dorjee Bachung.

(Fullagar 2010; del Hoyo & Collar 2014). This species exhibits sexual dimorphism, notably characterized by the male's vivid plumage throughout most of the year. Distinguished by a blue-grey head and neck, complemented by a distinct white crescent band at the base of its prominent black spatulate bill, the male Shoveler stands out. Its breast displays a mottled pattern of brown and white, transitioning to a pure white hue during the nuptial moult in May (Caithness et al. 2002).

The observation of the hybrid of Northern Shoveler and Australian Shoveler in Gajaldoba was recorded on 08 February 2024, by the first author during routine avian surveys in the area. The hybrid of Northern and Australian Shoveler was identified by its white facial crescent mark which is clearly visible in this duck, a feature not present in the Northern Shoveler. The expert ornithologist, Dr. Asad Rahmani, identified this species and suggested it could be a hybrid of the Australian Shoveler. Detailed field notes

were meticulously compiled, encompassing aspects such as location, habitat characteristics, behaviour, and any accompanying avian species. The inclusion of this duck species enriches the diverse avifauna of the region, renowned for its abundant biodiversity and distinctive ecosystems. Notably, Vishwakarma et al. (2022) previously documented the hybrid between the Australian and Northern Shoveler at Pobitara Wildlife Sanctuary, Assam, during the same time period, indicating their presence since 2021.

The sighting of the hybrid Australian Shoveler in Gajaldoba raises questions regarding its migratory routes and potential habitat preferences outside its known range. Further research is warranted to explore the factors influencing the presence of the species in new areas and its interactions with local ecosystems. The documented record of the hybrid Australian Shoveler in Gajaldoba underscores the importance of ongoing monitoring and conservation efforts to protect avian biodiversity. Continued research and observation are essential for understanding the dynamics of migratory bird species and ensuring their long-term survival. The sighting adds to the avian biodiversity of the region and underscores the importance of continued monitoring and conservation efforts. Detailed observations of the habitat and behaviour of

the hybrid Australian Shoveler are presented, along with implications for further research and conservation initiatives.

References

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