

First report of Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena* and sightings of Pallas's Gull *Ichthyaetus ichthyaetus* from Chhattisgarh

The Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena* breeds in the northern Palearctic regions, winters south to the Mediterranean, north Africa and Iran (Ali & Ripley 1987). This species is winter vagrant in northwest of region recorded in Iranian Sistan, northeastern Afghanistan, northern and central Pakistan, western Gujarat, northwestern Himachal Pradesh, western Gangetic plains and also reported from Assam and Bangladesh (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). It winters on open lakes and estuaries. In its habits, it is more secretive than the Great Crested Grebe and is easily overlooked in winter plumage. It often leaps when diving (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). It is slightly smaller than Great Crested Grebe with shorter, stouter neck, square head shape, stockier body which is often pulled up at rest and prominent black-tipped yellow bill. It is reported from Indian subcontinent from Jawai backwaters and Bharatpur in Rajasthan, Gujarat and Uttar



Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena*. © Jageshwar Verma.



Pallas's Gull *Ichthyaetus ichthyaetus*. © Gopi Kishan Sahu.

Pradesh (Grimmett et al. 1998). It has also been reported from Pong Dam, Himanchal Pradesh by Kumar & Paliwal (2015). Various studies at national level by Ali & Ripley (1987),

Rasmussen & Anderton (2012), Grimmett et al. (1998, 2014) and at state level Hewetson (1956) including Vidhabha; D'Abreu (1935) central provinces; Chandra & Singh

(2004) Madhya Pradesh and Chhattisgarh; Chandra et al. (2015); Vishwakarma et al. (2021); Bharos et al. (2020, 2021, 2023); Arjun et al. (2023) all in Chhattisgarh, did not mention occurrence of this species in central India inclusive of Madhya Pradesh, Chhattisgarh and Vidharbha region (Maharashtra).

The site was visited by the third author on 17 February around 1700 h. He noticed a group of eight grebes, when this photograph was examined later, it comprised of two Great Crested Grebe (GCG) *Podiceps cristatus*, five Little Grebe *Tachybaptus ruficollis*, and a Rednecked Grebe (RNG) *Podiceps grisegena* at a little distance, identified by its slightly smaller size than Great Crested Grebe, square head and redneck. Around 65 avian species were present at the tank. To confirm this, he revisited the site the following morning and successfully obtained exclusive images.

The tank was regularly visited till 25 February 2025. All these days three species of grebes remained together but maintained a distance of at least 50 m from several fishing boats and water edges. Till 0700 h grebes were maintained a more or less static thereafter commenced to leap and dive till 1000 h. Thereafter resorted to preening feathers and leisure. During the hot noon hours, intermittent feeding and resting activities continued, confined within a radius of 50–70 m.

At one point, RNG emerged with a piece of food, which was promptly seized by GCG. The bird was still stayed till preparation of this paper. It was further observed that RNG remained under

water for average of 50 to 90 seconds, and emerged out at distance of 20–35 m.

On 22 February between 1700–1800 h, a bird was seen swimming away from us to other shore, disturbed by the fishing boats laying nets. First and second author observed that once it dived with a leap and came out at short distance. No other avian species was present in close proximity. It is probably a vagrant bird strayed in this pocket. This is the first sighting record of the species from Chhattisgarh, central India including Madhya Pradesh and Vidharbha.

Pallas's Gull *Ichthyaetus ichthyaetus*, also known as the Great Black-headed Gull, breeds in west-central Asia and winters in eastern and southeastern Asia. In India, it has been recorded from the Gangetic Plains, Assam Valley, Cachar, the eastern coast, and with a few records from central India (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

During birdwatching on 22 February 2025, between 1700–1800 h, the first and second authors observed this bird at Kurud Dam, Raipur District; however, it could not be photographed adequately. The species is often found solitary, inhabiting large inland lakes and rivers, and is also observed around fishing boats along the coast. It is a widespread winter visitor to coastal areas (Grimmett et al. 1998). A solitary individual was recorded in the state in 2024 at Ruse Dam, Rajnandgaon District (Prateek Thakur, pers. comm.), and several sightings have been reported over the past three years at Gangrel Dam, Dhamtari District (Gopi Kishen Sahu, pers. comm.). The bird sighted on 22 February was probably on its return journey from the eastern coast.

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Citation: Bharos, A.M.K., A. Bharos & J. Verma (2026). First report of Red-necked Grebe *Podiceps grisegena* and sightings of Pallas's Gull *Ichthyaetus ichthyaeus* from Chhattisgarh. Bird-o-soar #285, In: *Zoo's Print* 41(2): 30–32.