

# Endangered Black-bellied Tern *Sterna acuticauda* Gray 1832 in Odisha needs conservation attention

Himanshu Shekhar Palei

Black-bellied Tern (*Sterna acuticauda*) is an Endangered bird species with a current estimated population size of around 6700-17000 mature individuals globally (BirdLife International 2012). The bird is described as "characteristic of large rivers and marshes" preferring habitats such as the river banks with large sandpits and river islands. Although this species is distributed widely (extending from Pakistan, through Myanmar, Thailand and Indochina), it is scarce throughout its distribution. In India, the species is believed to be a resident on large rivers, extending from Gujarat in the west to Arunachal Pradesh in the east, and Punjab in the north to old Andhra Pradesh in the south. It is winter visitor to Kerala, south India (Grimmett *et al.* 2011). The species is now rare through its range and hardly any quantitative information is available on its population status in India. In Odisha, it was recorded in Bhitarkanika National Park, Chilika Ramsar sites and Chandaka Wildlife Sanctuary (Tiwari *et al.* 2002; Gopi and Pandav 2007; Balachandran *et al.* 2009). Odisha can be considered as a region that could offer long-term survival for the Black-bellied Tern, as three large rivers and several medium sized rivers flow across the state and form several river islands in the eastern part of the state. The Black-bellied Tern was kept under the Near Threatened category and later on shifted to Endangered category in 2012 by IUCN, as the species was rare than it was thought to be. Destruction of breeding habitat, the collection of eggs for food and overfishing are some of the threats reported globally as the reasons for its rapid population decline (BirdLife International 2012).

While carrying out biodiversity survey in different areas of Odisha during 2010 to 2013, I observed Black-bellied Tern from Hirakud Reservoir (21°41'3N. 74'', 83°40'48.6''E), Satakosia Gorge (20°35'51.6"N, 84°46'45.7"E) and Mundali (20°27'2.7''N, 85°44'32.3''E) in the river Mahanadi; Samal Reservoir (21°4' 39.8''N, 85°9' 10.3''E) in the river Brahmani. These were mostly unprotected areas adjacent to human habitation. Sand extraction for development purpose, rampant fishing and disturbance of breeding habitat by fisherman or local people were seen in these areas. Such disturbances add pressure on this Threatened bird in Odisha.

Conservation and protection of the species is now important due to global population decline. Therefore, strict vigil is required to conserve the Black-bellied Tern breeding habitat, by forest department with the participation of NGOs and local people in the form of patrolling and educating the



**Fig 1. Black-bellied Tern with River Tern in Samal Reservoir, Odisha**

masses. Special care should be taken, providing safety to nesting areas to prevent damage of eggs by domestic animal and local people. Furthermore, a long-term scientific study and regular monitoring are urgently required to understand the population status of this endangered bird species in Odisha.

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Aranya Foundation, 625/12, Mars Villa, Panchasakha Nagar, Dumdoma, Khandagiri, Bhubaneswar, Odisha.  
Email: [himanshu.palei@gmail.com](mailto:himanshu.palei@gmail.com)