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continued on the back inside cover

Cover: Golden-headed Lion Tamarin *Leontopithecus chrysomelas*. Watercolor and acrylics by P. Kritika.



Sighting of Sooty Gull *Ichthyaeetus hemprichii* from the salt pans of Nagapattinam Coast, Tamil Nadu, India

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As part of an ongoing project on coastal birds in Tamil Nadu, we visited the coastal areas of Nagapattinam District on 5 September 2025. During the survey, we explored all potential natural (mudflats, mangroves, and sandy beaches) and human-made habitats (aquaculture, salt pans, and jetties) for shorebirds, gulls, and terns. At approximately 1345 h, we surveyed the Akkaraipettai (10.744° N & 79.828° E) salt pan near Kaduvaiyar River. We located a large flock of gulls and terns within a deceptively abandoned saltpan. On closer approach, we observed species of waders, namely Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*, Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*, Black-winged Stilts *Himantopus himantopus*, and a few unidentified calidrids, gulls (Lesser Black-backed Gulls *Larus fuscus* in adult and immature plumage stages), and terns (Gull-billed Tern *Gelochelidon nilotica* and Greater Crested Tern *Thalasseus bergii*).

We began systematically counting the individuals using a pair of binoculars (Nikon Monarch M5 8x42). During the process, we spotted a lone, relatively small, and distinctive dark gull (compared to the Lesser Black-

backed Gulls) with a bi-coloured bill. We took a series of photographs using a Nikon P950 digital camera to identify the bird; upon close examination, it was confirmed as a Sooty Gull *Ichthyaeetus hemprichii* (Image 1). Key identifying morphological characters—a yellowish bill with a red tip, blackish-brown hood, white collar on the neck sides, dull yellowish legs, and a greyish upper mantle—are all consistent with the description for Sooty Gull (Burger et al. 2020). This maritime species is known to occur in the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, the Persian Gulf, the Gulf of Oman, Pakistan, Kenya, and occasionally reported along the coastal areas of peninsular India (Burger et al. 2020). It is known to breed in parts of the Red Sea and Kenya (Kiunga Island).

Excluding our observation, a total of 23 sightings of Sooty Gull have been reported from the Indian coast (Table 1). The species was more often reported from the west coast (20 out of 23 records) (Figure 1) than from the eastern coast. On the western coast, all states, particularly Kerala and Maharashtra, have well-documented their occurrence. Along the eastern coast, it was recorded

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Table 1. Compilation of previously published records of the Sooty Gull in India, along with additional eBird records (NA—Not applicable).

Location	Coordinate (N, E)	Date and time of observation	Number of individuals & major habitat	Associated birds	source
Sundarbans delta, West Bengal	21.70, 88.85	24th January 2005	NA	NA	Sharma & Zöckler (2007)
Government Museum, Chennai, Tamil Nadu	13.033, 80.283	19 th Century	Single	NA	Kesavabharati (2014)
Puthalam Estuary, Kanyakumari, Tamil Nadu	8.133, 78.300	28 th November 2016	Single bird on salt pans	NA	Sivakumar & Amirtha Balan (2017)
Kothakulam Beach, Thrissur, Kerala	10.379, 76.099	26 th February 2024	Single bird on sandy beach	Brown-headed Gull	Nidheesh (2024)
Thiruvathra Beach, Thrissur, Kerala	10.586, 76.000	9 th Number 2022	Single bird on sandy beach	NA	Dijumon (2022)
Edakkazhiyur Beach, Thrissur, Kerala	10.608, 75.990	12 th November 2022	Single bird on sandy beach	Lesser Black-backed Gull	Sayeer et al., (2022)
Azhikkal Beach, Kannur, Kerala	11.942, 75.296	16 th December 2023	Single bird on sandy beach	Slender-billed Gull, Black-headed Gull, Brown-headed Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull	Nayakkan (2023)
Matool Beach, Kannur, Kerala	11.958, 75.286	17 th December 2023	Single bird on sandy beach	Slender-billed Gull, Black-headed Gull, Brown-headed Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull	Vinod et al., (2023)
Hoode - Kodi Bengare Road - Delta Beach, Udupi, Karnataka	13.433, 74.694	15 th October 2014	Single	NA	Doraiswamy (2015)
Tonka Beach, Uttara Kannada, Karnataka	14.282, 74.425	6 th February 2025	Single bird on sandy beach	Lesser Black-backed Gull	Sahana (2025)
Handigon Beach, Uttara Kannada, Karnataka	14.390, 74.400	4 th February 2025	Single bird on sandy beach	Pallas's Gull, Brown-headed Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Black-headed Gull, Slender-billed Gull, Lesser Crested Tern	Shwetha (2025)
Chapora Estuary, North Goa, Goa	15.600, 73.733	21 st April 2005	Single bird at Estuary	NA	Lainer & Alvares (2013)
Morjim Beach, North Goa, Goa	15.619, 73.731	5 th November 2013	Single bird on sandy beach	NA	Mark (2013)
Chapora river, North Goa, Goa	15.649, 73.835	8 th July 2020	A single bird flying at the Chapora River	NA	Karapurkar et al., (2020)
Near Prongs Lighthouse, Colaba Point, Mumbai, Maharashtra	18.883, 72.800	January 1875	Single bird at Estuary	NA	Hume (1876); Aitken (1903); Prasad (2006)
Coast of Mumbai	18.836, 18.853	22 nd March 2009 & 9 th November 2011	Single bird & off the coast	NA	Macker (2013)
Bhandup, Mumbai Suburban, Maharashtra	19.138, 72.947	25 th January 2017	A single bird flying near the Marsh and saltpan.	NA	Sekar (2017)
Vasai salt pans, Palghar, Maharashtra	19.37547, 72.839	22 nd September 2015	Single bird at Saltpan	NA	Dalvi (2015)
Tukda Estuary, Porbandar, Gujarat	21.536, 69.711	13 th April 2025	single bird on Estuary sand bar	NA	Alvani et al., (2025)
Tukda Estuary, Porbandar, Gujarat	21.532, 69.709	3 rd May 2025	Single bird on Estuary sand bar	Slender-billed Gull, Brown-headed Gull, Pallas's Gull, Lesser Black-backed Gull, Caspian Tern <i>Hydroprogne caspia</i> , Common Tern <i>Sterna hirundo</i> , Sandwich Tern <i>Thalasseus sandvicensis</i> , Lesser Crested Tern, Great Crested Tern, Masked Booby <i>Sula dactylatra</i>	Mansuri et al., (2025)
Mokarsagar Wetland, Porbandar, Gujarat	21.578, 69.747	30 th April 2025	Single bird on Wetland	NA	Gharat & Sonalkar (2025)
Porbandar-Veraval Highway, Odedr Beach, Porbandar, Gujarat	21.545, 69.694	1 st May 2021	Single bird on sandy beach	Lesser Black-backed Gull, Great Crested Tern, Lesser Crested Tern	Karia & Karia (2021)

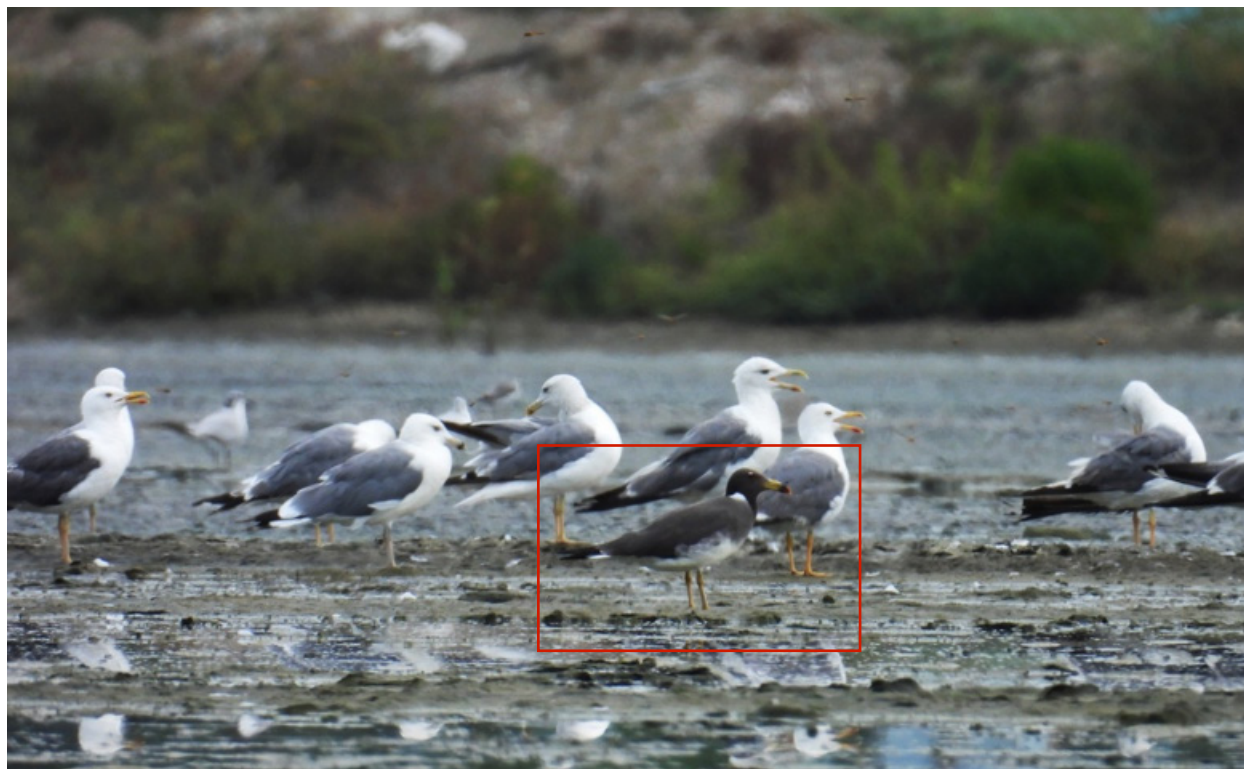


Image 1. Sooty Gull *Ichthyaelus hemprichii* recorded from the salt pans of Nagapattinam, Tamil Nadu (red square). © S. Babu.

three times: once each off West Bengal, Chennai, and Kanyakumari. It was most often documented alone amid mixed flocks of other gulls (Lesser Black-backed Gulls, Black-headed Gulls *Chroicocephalus ridibundus*, Brown-headed Gulls *Chroicocephalus brunnicephalus*, Slender-billed Gulls *Chroicocephalus genei*, and Pallas's Gulls *Ichthyaelus ichthyaelus*) and terns (Greater Crested Tern *Thalasseus bergii* and Lesser Crested Terns *Thalasseus bengalensis*). Most sightings occurred between September and February, except for those in Gujarat, which were in April and May. Based on this compilation of observations, the species appears to be rare and irregular along the east coast.

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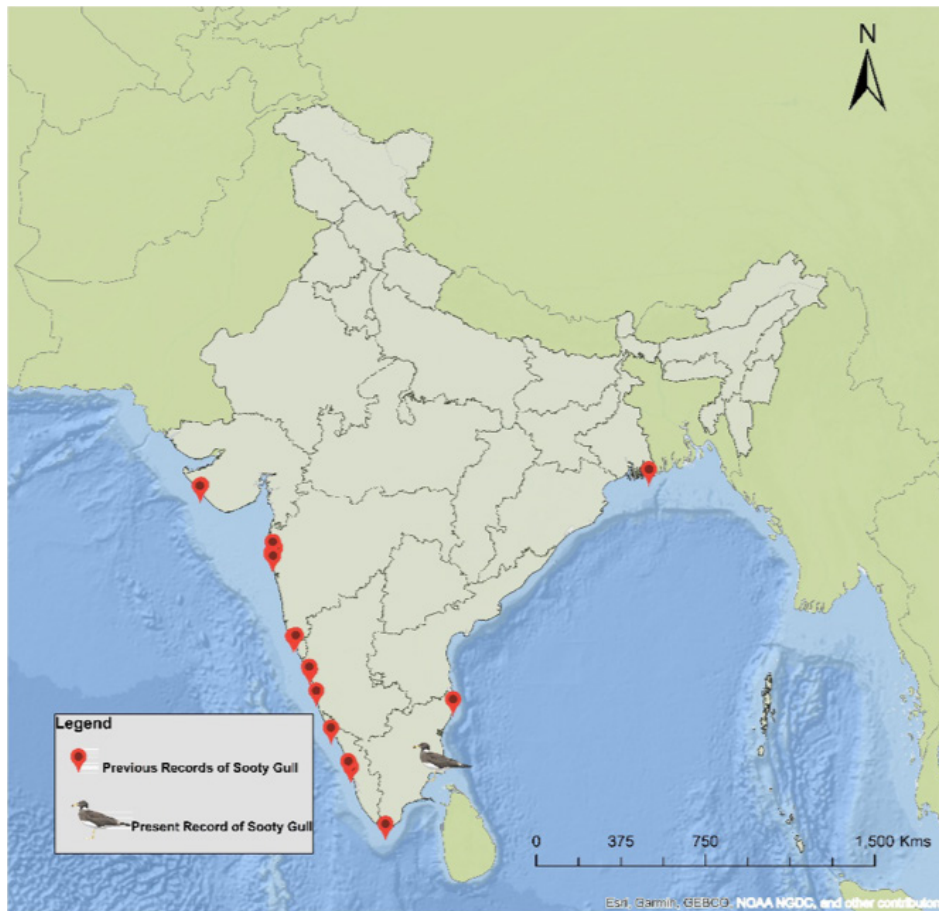


Figure 1. The previous and present records of Sooty Gull *Ichthyaelus hemprichii* in India.

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