

# WIND-BLOWN PELAGIC BIRDS: FIRST RECORD OF SHORT-TAILED SHEARWATER *ARDENNA TENUIROSTRIS*, WEDGE-TAILED SHEARWATER *ARDENNA PACIFICA*, WHITE-TAILED TROPICBIRD *PHAETHON LEPTURUS*, AND LESSER NODDY *ANOUS TENUIROSTRIS* FOR GOA, INDIA

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## ABSTRACT

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We report four new records of seabirds for the state of Goa, India: Short-tailed Shearwater *Ardenna tenuirostris*, Wedge-tailed Shearwater *Ardenna pacifica*, White-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon lepturus*, and Lesser Noddy *Anous tenuirostris*. Due to storms with torrential rains during June and July 2024, these pelagic birds were wind-blown and found stranded along the coastline. They were subsequently rescued and taken to ReefWatch Marine Conservation, a rehabilitation centre in Benaullim, Goa. However, the majority of these birds did not survive due to various causes.

**Key words:** Goa, New record, pelagic species, seabird wreck

## INTRODUCTION

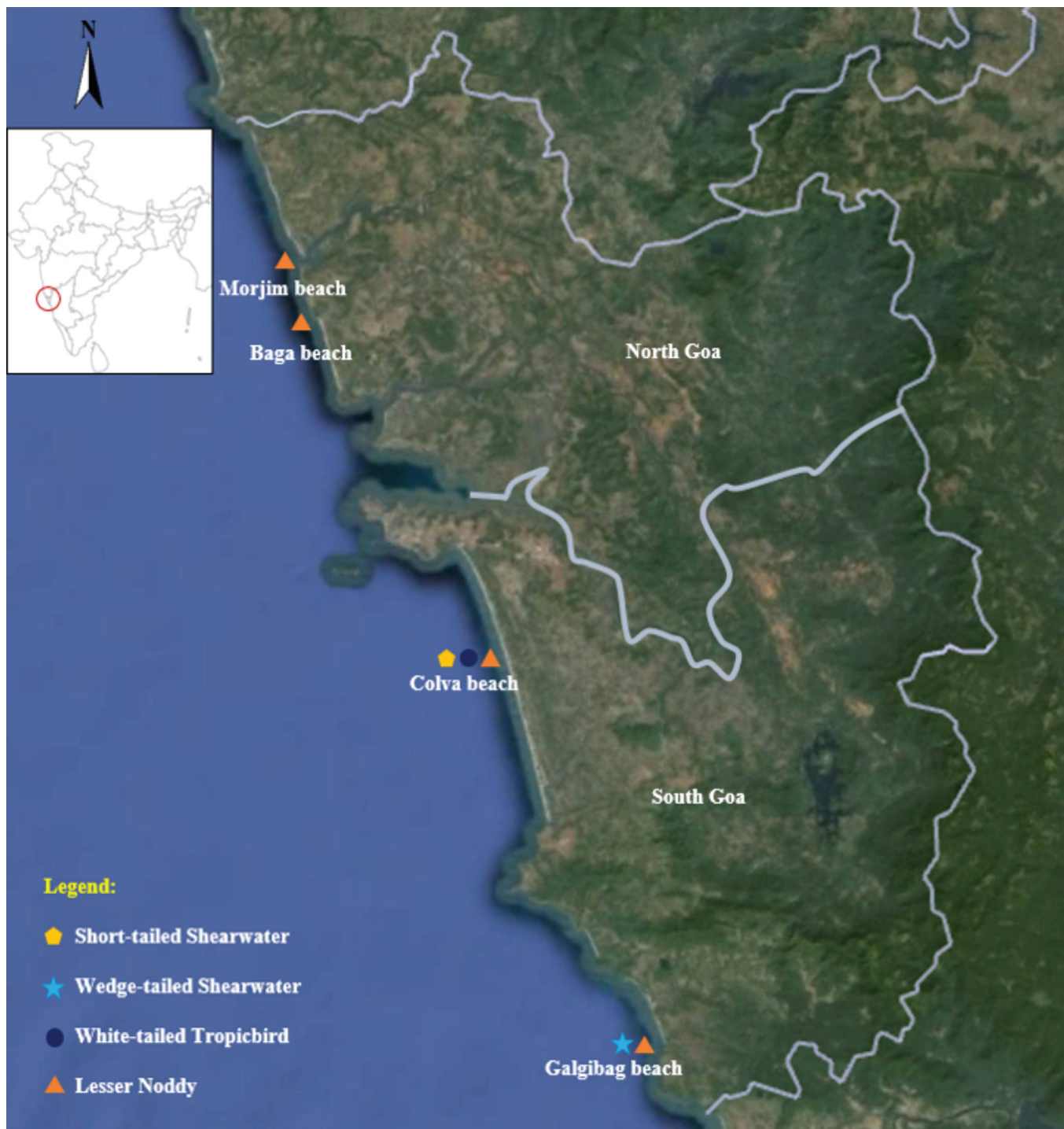
In Goa, India, most—if not all—pelagic birds that arrive along the coast typically breed on offshore islands. The 2024 La Niña brought unusually strong monsoon winds along India's west coast. Torrential rains in July, consistent with similar past events (Karuthedathu & Ukil, 2014), caused many pelagic birds to be blown inland and to become stranded at various locations along Goa's coastline. Amongst them were both young or sub-adult individuals, as well as mature birds, all of which were injured and/or weakened. However, despite the squally weather, these birds were rescued by beach lifeguards and subsequently handed over to the frontline staff of the Goa Forest Department. Injured birds were then picked up by ReefWatch Marine Conservation, a facility based at Benaullim, Goa, which provides veterinary care to stranded marine megafauna. Birds were then transported to their rescue centre in Benaullim. At the ReefWatch Centre, birds received medical treatment and were fed; the surviving birds were later released back to sea along the coast. Unfortunately, the mortality rate was high due to the severity of injuries and secondary infections. Prominent species recorded included Bridled Tern *Onychoprion anaethetus*, Common Tern *Sterna hirundo*, Sooty Tern *Onychoprion fuscatus*, Masked Booby *Sula dactylatra*, and Wilson's Storm Petrel *Oceanites oceanicus*, among others. Notably, four species were recorded for the first time in Goa: Short-tailed Shearwater *Ardenna tenuirostris*, Wedge-tailed Shearwater *Ardenna pacifica*, White-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon lepturus*, and Lesser Noddy *Anous tenuirostris* (Fig. 1)

## OCCURRENCE AND DOCUMENTATION

### Short-tailed Shearwater *Ardenna tenuirostris*

On 03 June 2024, an adult male was found in poor condition, stranded at Colva Beach, Salcete, South Goa (15°16'20"N, 73°54'51"E), and was rescued by lifeguards of Drishti Marine Stranding Network (Fig. 2A–F) (ReefWatch Marine Conservation, 2024a). Overall, the bird was sooty brown in color with a small squarish head, steep forehead, short and thick neck, short bill, pale grey underwing coverts, secondary coverts that were paler than primary coverts, and a short-rounded tail. These characteristics separated it from the similar looking Sooty Shearwater *Ardenna grisea* (Fig. 2B–F). Unfortunately, the bird died a few days later. The cause of death was inconclusive, but veterinarians suspected it was due to complications from hypothermia, pneumonia, and a platyhelminth infection.

The Short-tailed Shearwater, an abundant, medium-sized seabird species from the family Procellariidae, nests off the southern coast of Australia and in Tasmania (Giri et al., 2013). During the non-breeding season, the majority of the population migrates to the northern North Pacific (Carboneras, 1992). However, vagrants have been recorded in the northern Indian Ocean between Oman and the Malay Peninsula (Smith & Cheke, 2000), as well as in Pakistan, Sri Lanka (Rasmussen & Anderton, 2005), and Bangladesh (Thompson et al., 2013), likely due to storm-driven displacement.



**Fig. 1.** Map showing occurrences of new records of pelagic birds in Goa, India. Inset map shows the location of the state of Goa within India.

#### **Wedge-tailed Shearwater *Ardenna pacifica***

On 23 July 2024, a dead shearwater specimen was found at Galgibag Beach, South Goa ( $14^{\circ}57'35''\text{N}$ ,  $74^{\circ}02'57''\text{E}$ ) and was presented to the ReefWatch team by the South Goa Marine Range (Fig. 3A) (ReefWatch Marine Conservation, 2024b). The carcass was completely drenched and moderately decomposed, with the skull exposed. It was identified as a Wedge-tailed Shearwater based on its long, broad wings, distinctive wedge-shaped tail, and pale, stout pinkish beak with prominent dark tip

(Grimmett et al., 2011). The specimen was thin and dark, with a small head and long neck. Its hooked beak ended in a dark, pointed tip, and featured characteristic 'tube-nosed' nostrils at the base. The latericorn (a section of the upper mandible) was long and pointed. The mandibular unguis (the nail at the tip of the lower mandible) was thick at the tip and tapered at the base, while the maxillary unguis (the nail at the tip of the upper mandible) extended prominently over the beak. The specimen also had a whitish breast, belly, and underwings, with a broad dark trailing edge along the wings. The feet were dull pinkish,





**Fig. 2.** Short-tailed Shearwater *Ardenna tenuirostris* (A–F). © Marine Drishti and Coastal Foundation

with three webbed toes, pale claws, and a fourth claw located at the end of the tarsus (Fig. 3B–F). A necropsy revealed urinary tract impaction and cloacal obstruction.

Pale and dark morphs of this “not-so-rare” autumn passage migrant were recorded off the Anjuna coast in 1998 and 2001 (Lainer & Alvares, 2013). However, as per Rasmussen & Anderson (2012), pale morphs are not found in the northern Indian Ocean. Praveen et

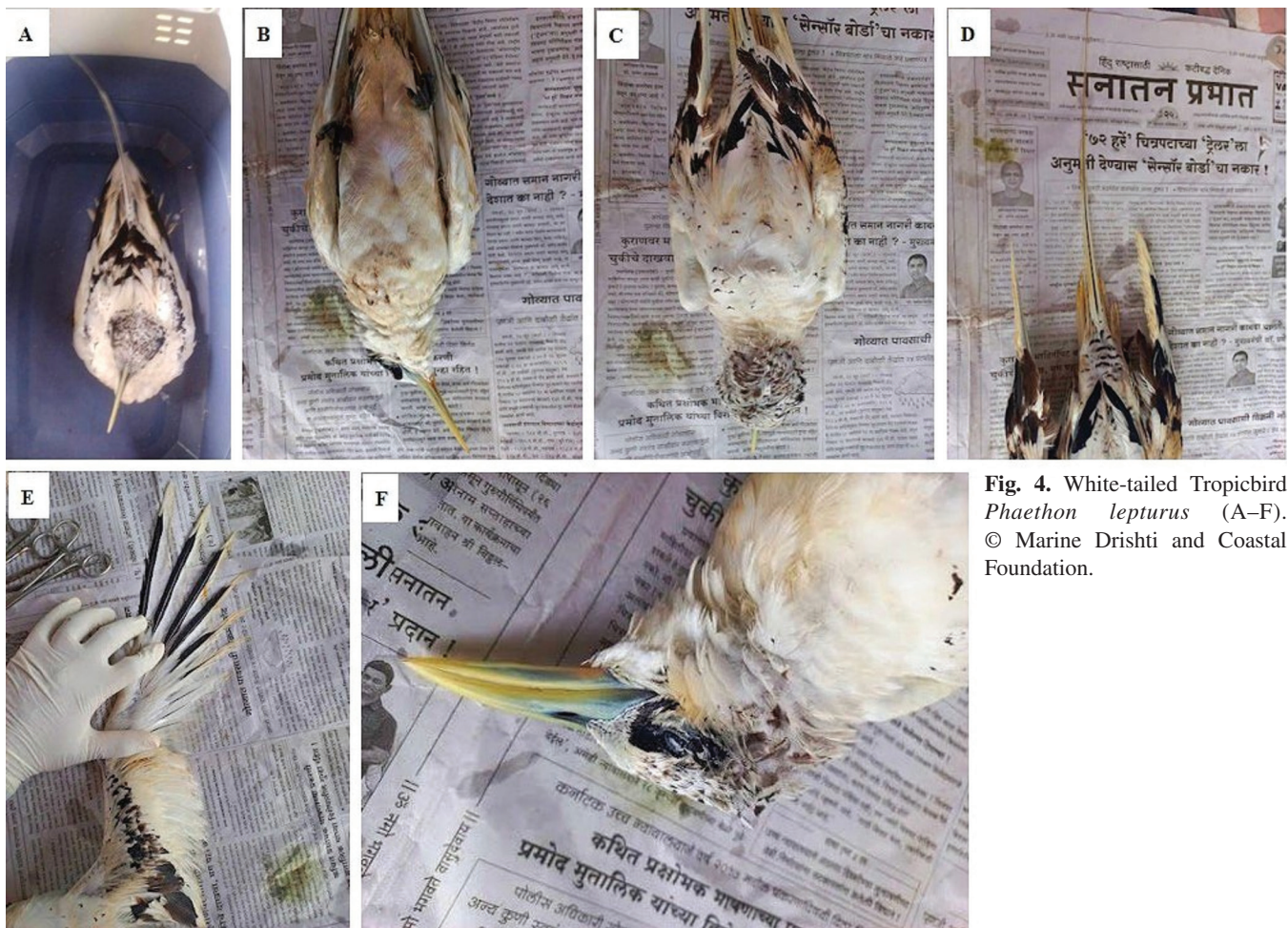
al. (2013) further suggest that the dark morphs may have been the more common Flesh-footed Shearwater *Ardenna carneipes*, while the pale morphs may have been Streaked Shearwaters *Calonectris leucomelas*.

Interestingly, another wind-swept Wedge-tailed Shearwater was rescued from Thane, Maharashtra, in 2021 (Das et al., 2022), suggesting weather-related vagrancy.



**Fig. 3.** Wedge-tailed Shearwater *Ardenna pacifica* (A–F). © Marine Drishti and Coastal Foundation





**Fig. 4.** White-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon lepturus* (A–F). © Marine Drishti and Coastal Foundation.

#### White-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon lepturus*

On 06 July 2024, a single sub-adult individual was found in an exhausted condition at Colva Beach, Salcete, South Goa (15°16'45"N, 73°54'44"E). This bird was rescued by the Shubham Lone and Shankar Paryekar, lifeguards with the Drishti Marine Stranding Network (Fig. 4A) (ReefWatch Marine Conservation, 2024c). Its plumage was predominantly white, with black tips on its wings. It was identified by its distinctive wing pattern, featuring faint black bars running diagonally across the upper wings, and by its black tipped primaries, which contrasted sharply with its white primary coverts. Each tail feather was intact and bore a black patch near the tip, while the central white tail streamers appeared fully

developed, indicating maturity. There were noticeable black areas around the eyes, and its back was barred. The bird had a pale-yellow bill and blackish legs (Fig. 4B–F). Sadly, the bird died on 07 July 2024, most likely due to severe infestation of ectoparasites and endoparasites.

The White-tailed Tropicbird, from the family Phaethontidae, is the smallest of the three tropicbirds species found in the Indian Subcontinental waters (Jamalabad, 2013). It is known to breed in Mascarene, Seychelles, Maldives, Andaman, and Cocos-Keeling Islands (Ali & Ripley, 1983). In peninsular India, the White-tailed Tropicbird has been reported from the offshore waters of Maharashtra, as well as Kerala and Tamil Nadu.



**Fig. 5.** Lesser Noddy *Anous tenuirostris* (A–C). © (A & C): Marine Drishti and Coastal Foundation; (B): Priyanka Verma.

### Lesser Noddy *Anous tenuirostris*

The Lesser Noddy, also known as the Sooty or White-capped Noddy, is a tropical tern from the family Laridae. It is largely confined to the Indian Ocean, where it nests in large numbers in the Seychelles and Chagos archipelagos, and in smaller numbers elsewhere (Ali et al., 2023). The Lesser Noddy is a pelagic species and a non-breeding visitor to Sri Lanka, where it is considered very local and rare, as it is in the Bay of Bengal (Rasmussen & Anderton, 2012).

On 10 July 2024, a single male sub-adult individual was found at Galgibag Beach, Canacona, South Goa (14°57'40"N, 74°02'55"E) (Fig. 5A) (ReefWatch Marine Conservation, 2024d). The bird was spotted and rescued by a tourist and subsequently handed over to the ReefWatch team. It was initially identified as a Brown Noddy *Anous stolidus*; however, further analyses of photographs confirmed the bird was a Lesser Noddy. The bird had a long thin bill, long narrow wings, uniformly dark brownish upperparts, pale lores, and a pale cap that blended evenly into the greyish sides of the head. It also had a moderately forked tail. Unfortunately, the bird died on 11 July 2024, most likely from a severe gut infestation of nematodes, in addition to hypothermia.

On 27 July 2024 and 28 August 2024, two more male adult Lesser Noddies were found stranded at Morjim Beach, Pednem, North Goa (15°37'20"N, 73°43'46"E) (Fig. 5B) (ReefWatch Marine Conservation 2024e) and Colva Beach, Salcete, South Goa (15°16'38"N, 73°54'46"E) (Fig. 5C) (ReefWatch Marine Conservation 2024f). Unfortunately, both birds died within a few days, likely due to extremely heavy nematode infestations, which may have caused hypoproteinaemia and poor overall body condition.

Interestingly, a Lesser Noddy was seen in its natural habitat by groups of birders on 29 August 2024 at Baga, Bardez, North Goa (15°33'40"N, 73°44'44"E) (Fernandes, 2024; Menezes, 2024). In peninsular India, the Lesser Noddy has previously been reported from Gujarat, Maharashtra, Kerala, and Tamil Nadu.

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