

Sighting of the threatened Lesser White-fronted Goose and Greater White-fronted Goose from Thol Bird Sanctuary, Gujarat, India



Lesser White-fronted Goose. Three individual were found mixed with a flock of Bar-headed Geese © Naushad Theba.

‘Thol’ is an artificial lake near Thol Village in Mehsana District, Gujarat. This freshwater lake is surrounded by heavy marshes all around. During 1988, this lake was declared as “Thol Bird Sanctuary”. More than 300 species of various kind of birds were reported, including resident birds and migratory birds (Anon 2019).

In India, amongst few migratory species, Lesser White-fronted Goose *Anser erythropus* and Greater White-fronted Goose *Anser albifrons* are winter migratory species found in different aquatic regions. Lesser White-fronted Goose is listed in the IUCN Red list as a Vulnerable species (Birdlife International 2017). It is a rare and

sparse winter visitor to northern India. It has been occasionally recorded in various states of India, i.e., Kashmir, Uttar Pradesh, Haryana, West Bengal, Bihar, and Assam (Ali & Ripley 1983; Islam & Rahmani 2005; Rahmani 2012). The Greater White-fronted Goose is apparently a regular winter visitor to the northern plains, from the Indus Valley to eastern Uttar Pradesh, with scattered records elsewhere (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). Greater White-fronted Goose has been previously recorded three times (twice in Little Rann of Kachchh and once in Thol Lake) and Lesser White-fronted Goose recorded only in little Rann of Kachchh in Gujarat (Ali 1954; Kaushik 2009; Shreeram & Deomurari 2014). Generally, it is found only



Lesser White-fronted Goose feeding on the grass © Naushad Theba.

two or three birds, separately or mixed with flocks of Greylag Geese *Anser anser* (Ali & Ripley 1983).

During our regular bird watching visit to Thol Lake on 13 February 2018, we observed many migratory bird species in various parts of the lake. While observing the birds near Bhimasan Village, which is a small grassland patch inundated with water (23.144°N, 72.406°E), we observed, Lesser White-fronted and Greater White-fronted Goose with a group of Bar-headed Goose *Anser indicus* and Graylag Goose *Anser anser*.

At 10.29h, in a small group of Bar-headed Goose, we marked three geese that were different from the others; their size was smaller and their color was darker. White color was very prominent at the frontal part of the beak

and also a yellow orbital-ring found as some descriptive parameters for identification of that particular bird. After putting a lot of efforts, observation and taking sufficient pictures it was confirmed as Lesser White-fronted Goose. To observe these birds carefully we used high ended instruments like high magnification binoculars and spotting scopes. We witnessed them for two long hours during which they were

found to be feeding on grass *Cynodon dactylon*.

They flew towards the front portion of the sanctuary when disturbed. We spotted the same group of geese together at around 13.45h. We observed them preening for about 20 minutes and they once again started feeding voraciously. On the very next day, 14 February 2018, at the same location the group of Lesser White-fronted Geese were found once again. During our follow up visit, on 17 February 2018, we found four individuals of Greater White-fronted Geese on the opposite side of the Campsite area (23.132°N, 72.411°E) of the Sanctuary. These birds were found foraging with flocks of Greylag Geese *Anser anser*. Thereafter, we observed three Lesser White-fronted Geese from 13 to 24 February 2018 at the above



Thol lake. LWFG—Lesser White-fronted Goose | GWFG—Greater White-fronted Goose.

mentioned location. We made one monitoring visit to follow up our work, but we could not find any of the Lesser White-fronted Geese after 25 February 2018 to the recent dates. We also observed a group of four Greater White-fronted Geese from 17 February to 8 March 2018, however, on 9 March 2018 only one individual was observed and we assume that these bird species started their return migration from that date onwards.

Based on our observation it was confirmed that the two species of geese were observed and reported for the very first during February–March 2018 in Thol Bird Sanctuary, although it was observed by others in various areas of Gujarat State; however, all sightings were based only on single birds and not a group. The present observation from this part of the Gujarat State may indicate that it might become a regular winter visitor in this area.

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Greater White-fronted Goose mixed with flocks of Greylag Geese
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