

## Status of the Bridled Tern *Onychoprion anaethetus* in Sri Lanka

### Dear Editors

The Bridled Tern *Onychoprion anaethetus* has historically been considered a migrant to Sri Lanka (Henry 1971, Phillips 1953, 1978). However, in July 2003 an unspecified number of this species was recorded nesting on Udaccharutivu, a small islet in the Adam's Bridge area off the north-west coast (Perera 2003). Perera & Ilangakoon (2016), referring to a seabird study made by them, state that they observed Bridled Terns on the continental shelf and over deep water beyond the shelf off Beruwela and Mirissa between September 2008 and April 2009. They claim therefore that their observations contradict land-based studies of migration of Bridled Tern by De Silva (1987, 2003, 2011) as he did not record birds from Colombo after November. Although their argument is not clearly stated they seem to imply that all Bridled Terns in Sri Lanka are residents and therefore a migration does not take place.

A plausible explanation for the presence of Bridled Tern after November 2008 is that the birds are migrants wintering in offshore waters, as suggested in De Silva (2003), possibly supplemented by resident birds. Perera & Ilangakoon (2016) recorded 2,592 sightings of this species at two sites over an eight-month period; this is well within the numbers documented in migration by other studies, thus the data of Perera & Ilangakoon (2016) essentially confirms the prediction in De Silva (2003).

Perera & Ilangakoon (2016) base their assertion on the migration studies of De Silva (1987, 2003, 2011) but do not consider other significant land-based studies by Hoffmann (1975, 1978) which recorded migration in August and September 1972, 1973 and 1974. He estimated that over 100,000 Bridled Terns passed the Galle Buck lighthouse, Colombo, southwards between 14 and 22 August 1974 and suggested that the birds could be migrating from breeding grounds in the Laccadive Islands (Lakshadweep) to their wintering grounds. Between 10–15 September 1978, van den Berg *et al.* (1982) observed migration at Galle Buck lighthouse, estimating that 45,360 birds moved south in five days and suggesting that at least 250,000 Bridled Terns migrate annually off Colombo in September. De Silva (1987, 2003, 2011) observed the migration from 1981–1994 and estimated that in peak years more than 400,000 Bridled Terns migrate southwards in sight of land.

Ali & Ripley (1983) stated [Bridled Terns] 'Disperse after breeding over the Arabian Sea to the coasts of Pakistan, western India and Sri Lanka'. Rasmussen & Anderton (2012) commented, 'A marked southbound passage [of Bridled Tern] occurs in late summer/early fall off west coast of [Sri Lanka]'. In a newspaper article de Silva Wijeyeratne (2015) stated, 'One of the biggest passages of seabirds is the southward movement off the west coast of Sri Lanka which

peaks around August and September'. It is clear therefore that southward migration of Bridled Tern occurs annually off the west coast of Sri Lanka, and that two distinct populations of Bridled Tern, one migratory, the other resident (numbers unknown), may be seen around Sri Lanka.

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