

# Seabird travels from Seychelles to Mumbai, dies of exhaustion

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The sooty tern that covered an aerial distance of 3,228 km.(Maharashtra forest department)  
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By [Badri Chatterjee](#), Mumbai

After travelling an aerial distance of 3,228 km from Seychelles islands off East Africa coast to Mumbai region, a sub-adult sooty tern (seabird) succumbed to exhaustion at the Sanjay Gandhi National Park (SGNP) on Wednesday.

The state forest department and Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) said this was a unique identification. “This is a first such documentation of this species covering such a distance and reaching Mumbai. We have decided to preserve its body through taxidermy,” said Sunil Limaye, additional principal chief conservator of forest (wildlife-west).

The bird was first identified and rescued from Parmar Techno Centre premises in Vasai at 11.30am on Monday. “Unlike other birds in this region, the species was unique. It was lying on the ground alive but worn out. We were astonished to see a device attached to its back. The device was removed and we ensured it was hydrated,” said Nitin Parab, an advertising professional, who approached Waliv police for help. The police handed over the bird to SGNP for further veterinary care on Tuesday.

The seabird, known to fly long distances across oceans, had a 5gm satellite tag (GPS logger tracker with ID 183016) attached to its back, and a metal ring (used to tag birds) on its right leg. “The tracker is worth ₹3 lakh and proper paperwork is underway to return it to Seychelles,” said Vijay Barabde, RFO, SGNP.

The Wildlife Institute of India (WII), Dehradun, and BNHS were contacted to trace the source of the bird. “Using the email id provided on the device, we learnt that this bird was tagged along with 14 others by professor Chris Feare’s group WildWings Bird Management on Bird Island, Seychelles, in August 2019,” said Suresh Kumar, senior scientist, WII. He said two of 15 terns were geo-located off India’s west coast on July 13 and added, “However, the other bird’s exact location is yet to be traced.”

Meanwhile, SGNP veterinarian Dr Shailesh Pethe and Kumar said strong localised monsoon winds could have drifted the bird inland 6-8 km away from sea. “Prima facie the bird died due to sheer exhaustion and dehydration,” said Dr Pethe.

The bird’s wingspan was 30 inches and total length 6-8 inches. BNHS developed a map and calculated the exact distance the bird travelled (see map).

BNHS said the bird was a rare coastal migrant, especially for Mumbai region. “There are records of this bird breeding at Vengurla rocks in Sindhudurg. It was first recorded as early as 1881 from Bombay harbour and thereafter several records from the Maharashtra coastline,” said Raju Kasambe, assistant director, BNHS.

Experts said it was an interesting identification. “This is an example of remarkable results being given by satellite tracking technology, but it is disappointing that the bird did not survive. Unfortunately, the government is not willing to ease restrictions on satellite telemetry studies for more such results,” said Dr Asad Rahmani, member, Wetlands International South Asia.

Known to nest on sandy islands and frequenting warm tropical waters, these birds have a dark black back with black to grey flight feathers, narrow white edges on its tail, and a white underbelly extending from the base of its beak, undersides of its wing span and up to its feet.