

Recent sighting report on Common Merganser after a century in Chhattisgarh, India

The Common Merganser or Goosander *Mergus merganser* breeds in Ladakh at elevation 3,000–4,000 m and is chiefly a winter visitor commonly found in the eastern Himalayan foot hills. Few occurrence records are from Uttar Pradesh, Maharashtra (Mumbai), Madhya Pradesh (Raipur District), vagrant further south, locally fairly common. It inhabits large rivers and lakes where it keeps in pairs or small parties of 5–8, sexes often seen separated (Ali & Ripley 1987; Grimmett et al. 1998; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012).

In the past, Jerdon (1877) cited instances of its procurement by Samuel Tickell at Chybassa (now Chaibasa in Jharkhand) in central India. Hume & Marshall (1881) cited reports from river Rer (river Rihand is known as Rer in Surguja, northern Chhattisgarh) by Ball, at river Mahanadi, near Arung (now known as Arang, central Chhattisgarh) and further down almost to Sambalpur at river Mahanadi (Odisha) by Blewitt and at the Sone River near Dehree (possibly in Bihar), by E. Stewart, C.S. W Forsyth (Rahmani & Islam 2008). The specimen, available with Bombay Natural History Society (BNHS) was collected from Sambalpur (Odisha) an unsexed Merganser by the ruler of Gangpur on 31 December 1958, two specimens, a male and a female by R.V. Singhi on 1 February

1972 but the site information was missing (Rahmani & Islam 2008).

The Merganser has not been recorded in central India, in past studies carried out by D'Abreu (1931, 1935) & Hewetson (1956), and recent study by Bharos & Bux (2018); but Chandra & Singh (2004) mention its occurrence from Chhattisgarh (location and other details are not mentioned) presumably based on records mentioned by Hume & Marshall (1881).

Our observations

On 14 December 2019 we visited location Futaha-Muda (N 20.536, E 81.689, 333 m) Gangrel Reservoir at river Mahanadi, district Dhamtari, Chhattisgarh and observed birds between 1130 h and 1400 h. During this period, a solitary male Merganser was seen in a lake 10 m from shore which flew away to about 70–80 m. There, it kept on swimming but not feeding. Once it arched its back and submerged its beak in water. Simultaneously (Video -1&2), when beak was pulled out it held nothing, as the videos show. It remained at this distance and did not come closer, and also kept silent. Associated species at close quarters were Red-crested Pochard *Rhodonessa rufina*, Gadwall *Anas strepera*, Tufted Ducks *Aythya fuligula* and Great Crested Grebe *Podiceps*



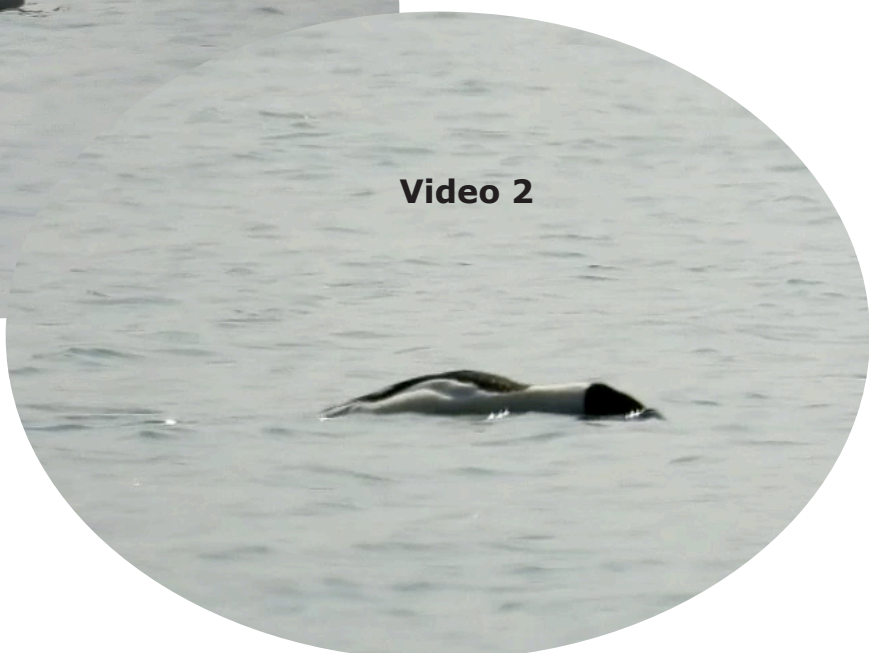
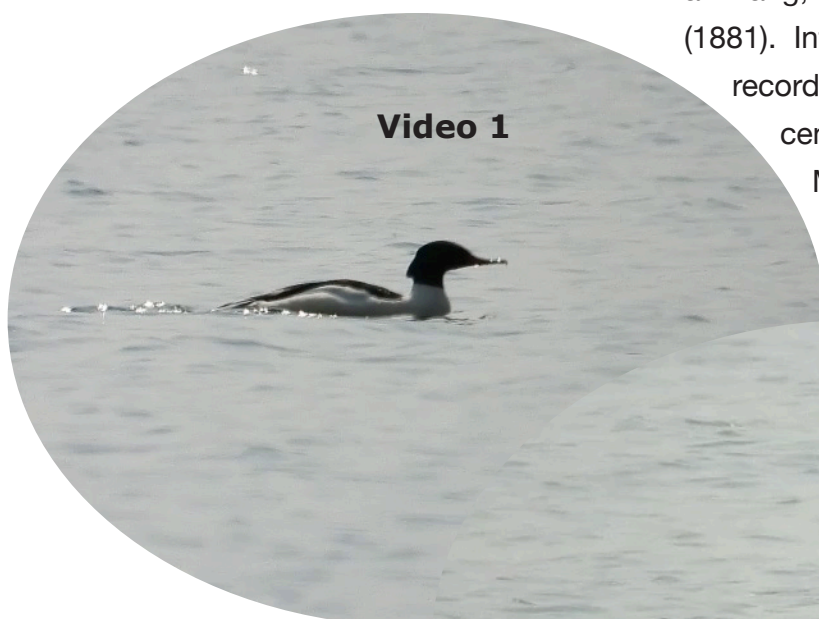
Sighting of Common Merganser at Gangrel Reservoir, river Mahanadi, district Dhamtari, in central Chhattisgarh on 14 December 2019

cristatus but no interaction between them was observed. Next day on 15 Decemeber 2019, the Merganser was not found despite an intensive search in that part of the lake. It possibly may have shifted to other parts where too it could not be found, or possibly had left the lake. The bird observed was photographed and for identification we followed standard literature of Ali & Ripley (1987), Grimmett et al. (1998), and Rasmussen & Anderton (2012), the species was later confirmed by Dr. Asad Rahmani, Former Director, Bombay Natural History Society.

Previously on 28 December 1991, first and third authors observed eight Common Mergansers (sexes undetermined) at Jogdah,

Sone Gariyal Sanctuary (N 24.512, E 82.147) Sidhi, Madhya Pradesh, associated with eight species of ducks, geese, and five numbers of Demoiselle Cranes *Grus virgo* and two Northern Lapwings *Vanellus vanellus* and on 15 October 1992, three birds (sexes undetermined) at the water edgesat the same site (photographs not available). Sharma & Sharma (1991) have reported this species on 1 March 1991 at the same location, but they have not mentioned the number of individuals seen.

Our sighting of Common Merganser at Gangrel Reservoir, river Mahanadi, district Dhamtari, in central Chhattisgarh on 14 December 2019 is thus a report of its sighting after a lapse of 138 years, its last mention is at Arang, river Mahanadi by Hume & Marshall (1881). Interestingly, most of the sighting records of Mergansers found, are from central India and particularly from river Mahanadi.



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