



## The highest elevation record of river tern (*Sterna aurantia*) in the Indus River Basin

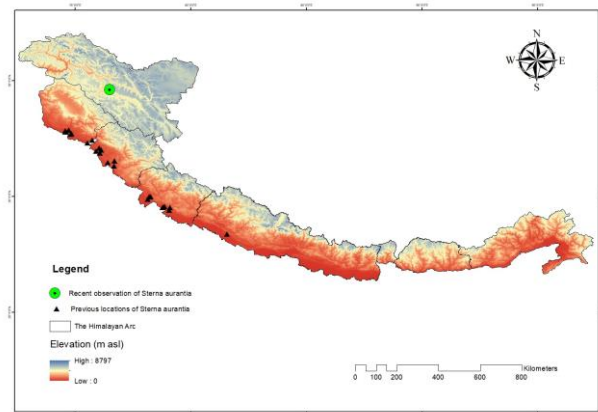
The river tern (*Sterna aurantia*) is considered to be a globally vulnerable species. It is a native breeding resident of eastern and central Pakistan, Pan India (except the Trans-Himalayan region), Bangladesh, Myanmar, Thailand and Cambodia. It is a non-breeding resident in Nepal, southern Bhutan, Laos and Vietnam with vagrant records from Afghanistan and Iran (Zheng *et al.* 2020, BLI 2021). It breeds on sandy islands in freshwater lakes and rivers, and rarely estuaries.



**Figure 1.** River tern, *Sterna aurantia* in flight over the Indus River

During our field visits to Kargil for the project of ‘Biodiversity Conservation Strategy and Action Plan of UT of Ladakh’, we recorded three individuals of *S. aurantia* (Fig. 1) in flight over the Indus River (34.6233°N, 76.4756°E) on 8 August 2021 at 13:11 hr. The species is reported to be sedentary with short nomadic movements at a recorded average elevation of 600 m a.s.l. (Gochfeld *et al.* 2020). The maximum elevation recorded so far is 1,611 m a.s.l. (iNaturalist 2022). Our observation reports the highest elevation record of *S. aurantia* at an altitude of 2,706 m a.s.l. (Fig. 2).

Long term monitoring studies on the ecology related to climate change are needed for future conservation of these threatened species. Such studies will benefit from advanced population monitoring, a better understanding of demographics, and aspects limiting populations as well as alterations of species’ breeding distributions and wintering ranges.



**Figure 2.** Map of the present (green circle) and previous (black triangles) observations of the river tern in the Himalayan Arc region

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