First photographic record of Chinese Pond-Heron from Bhitarkanika National Park, Odisha

Bhitarkanika National Park is situated on the east coast of India, in the state of Odisha between 20.5508°–20.7842° N & 86.8009°–87.0508° E. The area is a highly productive ecosystem and has significant biodiversity. It is well-known for the river deltas of Brahmani and Baitarani which bring abundant alluvial deposits, helping create India’s second-largest mangrove forest.

Mangrove vegetation, rivers, estuaries, mudflats, and aquatic bodies are the primary habitat types in this region. Research on the avian diversity of Bhitarkanika is scarce and limited.

An initial checklist of the birds of Bhitarkanika was created in the early 1990s (Gopi & Pandav 2007). In 1997, the first checklist of birds from Bhitarkanika reported 169 species (Pandav 1996) followed by other checklists with 263 species (Gopi & Pandav 2007) and 264 species (Venkatraman et al. 2016) in next two decades.

The grid-wise population estimation of the Fishing Cat Prionailurus viverrinus was conducted in Bhitarkanika National Park of Rajnagar Range, Odisha. During this survey, photographs of the Chinese Pond-Heron were captured in camera trap (Browning Strike Force Pro XD Trail camera) on 15, 16, and 19 June 2022. The camera traps were installed at a height of about 2.5 ft above the ground near a pond (20.6305° N & 86.8693° E) inside the mangrove area created by the forest department for the management practice of wildlife. The Chinese Pond-Heron was an adult male roaming around the pond for food. After the Chinese Pond-Heron was captured by the camera trap, literature review revealed that this might be the first photographic record of the species from the Bhitarkanika National Park.

The identification of the Chinese Pond-Heron is always confused with the Indian Pond-Heron and Javan Pond-Heron. The Chinese Pond-Heron is identified in the breeding season by its dark back and red chestnut head and neck. Adult Indian Pond-Heron has a distinctive creamy grey head,
throat, and breast. The head has long white plumes, the neck is creamy, and the mantle and scapulars are reddish-brown. In breeding plumage, adult Javan Pond-Heron has a pale brownish head and neck with white head plumes, a deep caramel breast, a white belly, and a blackish mantle and scapulars.

The Chinese Pond-Heron breeds in Russia, China, the Korean peninsula, Japan, northern Myanmar, northeastern India, and the Andaman Islands in winter (Kushlan & Hancock 2005; Rasmussen & Anderton 2005). It has also been recorded as a vagrant in Sri Lanka and coastal southeastern Bangladesh (Ali & Ripley 1987; Hoffmann 1996). The species had been recorded before in various states of India like Manipur (Ali & Ripley 1987), Gujarat (Parasharya 1983), Arunachal Pradesh (Singh 1995), Assam (Choudhury 2008), Tamil Nadu (Kaninde 2013), Rajasthan (Poonia et al. 2013), and also in Narcondam Island, Andaman, and Nicobar Islands (Gokulakrishnan et al. 2020).

The sightings of Chinese Pond-Herons in breeding plumage in Gujarat, Rajasthan, and Tamil Nadu show that the species may be easily ignored or overlooked, especially in non-breeding plumage, given its remarkable similarity with the common Indian Pond-Heron *Ardeola grayii* (Khan et al. 2015). The present study confirmed the first scientific observation with photographic record of Chinese Pond-Herons for the state of Odisha. However, the species had been sighted from Nalabana, Chilika by group of bird watchers during 2006. After that, the species has not been observed elsewhere in Odisha (Shri Hrudananda Jena, pers. comm., a trained bird watcher of Chilika Wildlife Division, Govt. of Odisha). Current study concluded that the total number of bird species is 265 in the Bhitarkanika National Park. As it is considered extant (resident) in India, further research is required to study the possible occurrence of the species in different parts of Odisha for its conservation.

References


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