

## 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.



Chinese Pond-Heron *Ardeola bacchus* in breeding plumage captured by camera trap in Bhitarkanika National Park, Odisha.

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

- Ali, S. & S.D. Ripley (1987).** *Handbook of the Birds of India and Pakistan, together with those of Bangladesh, Nepal, Bhutan, and Sri Lanka.* Oxford University Press, Delhi, 261 pp
- Choudhury, A. (2008).** Recent sightings of Chinese Pond-Heron *Ardeola bacchus* in Assam. *Indian BIRDS* 5(6): 185.
- Gokulakrishnan, G., C. Sivaperuman & D. Meena (2020).** Birds of Narcondam Island, Andaman and Nicobar Islands with an updated checklist. *Journal of the Andaman Science Association* 25(1): 50–69.
- Gopi, G.V. & B. Pandav (2007).** Avifauna of Bhitarkanika mangroves, India. *Zoos' Print Journal* 22(10): 2839–2847.
- Hoffmann, T.W. (1996).** New bird records in Sri Lanka and some connected matters. *Journal of the Bombay Natural History Society* 93(3): 382–388.
- Kaninde, S. (2013).** Sighting of Chinese Pond Heron *Ardeola bacchus* from Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India. *Indian BIRDS* 8(6):158.
- Khan, B., E. Hussain, T. Mundkur, S. Abbas & G. Khan (2015).** Chinese Pond Heron *Ardeola bacchus*: an addition to the avifauna of Pakistan. *Birding Asia* 24: 136–137.
- Kushlan, J.A. & J.A. Hancock (2005).** *The Herons.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 456 pp.

**Pandav, B. (1996).** Birds of Bhitarkanika mangroves, eastern India. *Forktail* 12: 9–20.

**Parasharya, B.M. (1983).** An erithristic pond heron. *Pavo* 21(1&2): 107–108.

**Poonia, S.S., M. Sharma & H.S. Sangha (2013).** Chinese Pond Heron *Ardeola bacchus* in Rajasthan, India. *Indian BIRDS* 8(6): 159–160.

**Rasmussen, P.C. & J.C. Anderton (2005).** *Birds of South Asia: the Ripley guide*. First edition. Smithsonian Institution & Lynx Edicions, Washington DC & Barcelona, 2 vols. 378 pp & 683 pp.

**Singh, P. (1995).** Recent bird records from Arunachal Pradesh, India. *Forktail* 10: 65–104.

**Venkatraman, C., P. Padmanaban, S. Shrinivaasu & G. Sivaleela (2016).** Faunal diversity of Bhitarkanika mangroves, Odisha. *Records of the Zoological Survey of India* 116(part 4): 407–430.

#### Acknowledgements

The authors are thankful to chairman and member secretary, Odisha Biodiversity Board for allowing us to carry out the study in Bhitarkanika National Park. We are also grateful to the divisional forest officer, Rajnagar Wildlife Division for all logistical support during the execution of study. Also, authors are thankful to all field assistants who assisted in fixing the camera traps in the field.

**Swarup Ranjan Mohanty<sup>1</sup>, Prasanna Behera<sup>2</sup>, Tiasa Adhya<sup>3</sup> & Satyaranjan Behera<sup>4</sup>**

<sup>1&4</sup> Odisha Biodiversity Board, RPRC Campus, Nayapalli, Bhubaneswar, Odisha 751015, India.

<sup>2&3</sup> Fishing Cat Conservation Alliance, Texas 77868, USA.

<sup>3</sup> Centre for Conservation of Natural Resources, The University of Trans-disciplinary Health Sciences and Technology, Bengaluru, Karnataka 560064, India.

Email: <sup>4</sup>behera.satyaranjan@gmail.com (corresponding author)

**Citation:** Mohanty, S.R., P. Behera, T. Adhya & S. Behera (2023). First photographic record of Chinese Pond-Heron from Bhitarkanika National Park, Odisha. *Bird-o-soar* #193, In: *Zoo's Print* 38(3): 22–24.