

Sighting of Chinese Pond Heron *Ardeola bacchus* from Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India

Samyak Kaninde

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Samyak Kaninde, #401, 3rd Block, Doshi Etopia-II, Perungudi, Chennai, 600096. Email: samyakk@gmail.com

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The Chinese Pond Heron *Ardeola bacchus*, which closely resembles the more widespread Indian Pond Heron *A. grayii*, is indistinguishable in the field from the latter except in its breeding plumage. Though it is slightly larger by 8–10 cm, this difference is difficult to judge in the field. The immature, and non-breeding plumages of the Chinese Pond Heron are similar to those of the Indian Pond Heron, and hence it is a very difficult to separate them in those plumages.

Mostly a resident of China and Eastern Asia, it is believed to migrate to the Andaman Islands in winter. Very few records exist from the Indian mainland, all from north-eastern India (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005). *A. bacchus* prefers marshes, paddies, and water bodies, for feeding. Only a couple of photographs of this species, in its breeding plumage, are known from the country. In its breeding plumage, it has a maroon-chestnut head and neck, and slaty-black scapulars / mantle. This note describes the first sighting of this species in southern India, at Kelambakkam Lake, Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India (12°46'N, 80°14'E).

While birding at 0639 hrs on the cloudy morning of 30 March 2013 at Kelambakkam Backwaters, c. 30 km south of Chennai, I saw an unusual pond heron with a dark, chestnut-coloured head, neck and breast, c. 12–15 m from the shore [198]. I recognised that it was a lone Chinese Pond Heron, feeding in the backwaters. After reassuring myself of its identification, I clicked some record photographs of the species; taking more a little later, as it was at the same place till 0719 hrs. Subsequently it flew behind some bushes and was lost to sight. I visited the same place, in the evening, and on following subsequent days in the morning, but

was unable to see the bird. A fellow birdwatcher, Gnanaskandan Keshav, also spotted it in the morning of 2 April 2013, at the very same place, but just for couple of minutes. It disappeared before he could take photographs. It is likely that the bird, on its return migration from the Andamans, might have been blown to the coast by high winds, or unfavorable conditions at sea.

The Chinese Pond Heron is a vagrant to Chennai's coast as there are no previous records of this species from the southern India. It has been reported breeding in Assam, based on birds seen there in partly breeding plumage, is a scarce spring passage migrant in Manipur and the Assam Valley, and is a scarce winter migrant to the Andamans (Rasmussen & Anderton 2005). The distribution maps in the bird guides indicate the Assam population as sedentary; there could be some local migration going on (Grimmett *et al.* 2011).

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198. Chinese Pond Heron (*Ardeola bacchus*) from Right Side View.