The White-eared Night Heron *Oroanassa magnifica* in Manas National Park: A new species for Assam, India

The White-eared Night Heron *Oroanassa magnifica* is an elusive nocturnal bird species of the family Ardeidae. It is primarily distributed in southern China and northern Vietnam, with scattered records from northern Laos (Pilgrim et al. 2009; Martínez-Vilalta et al. 2023). Known for its secretive behaviour, it inhabits dense subtropical and tropical moist lowland riverine forests and streams. With a global population suspected to be between 1,500 and 15,000 mature individuals, the species is classified as Near Threatened by the IUCN (BirdLife International 2025). Recent records have extended its known range in South Asia. It was first recorded from Bihar (Shafi et al. 2018) followed by multiple records in the Sundarbans, Bangladesh (Sadi et al. 2023), and more recently from the Namdapha National Park, Arunachal Pradesh (Hub Network 2025). Here, we document the first occurrence of the species in Assam, based on camera trap photographic evidence captured from the Manas National Park in February 2017.

The species was observed in Doimari area (26.787°N, 91.012°E) of the Manas National Park in the state of Assam in India along the Indo-Bhutan border (Fig. 1). As a part of 2016–2017 Annual Phase IV monitoring, two camera traps facing each other were deployed in a grid in Manas National Park. An individual of the species was captured on 09 February 2017, at 0009 h **[264]** and on 16 February 16 2017 at 0459 h **[265]** in the same location placed across a pebbled stream with stagnant pools of water. The area was characterized by semi-evergreen forest with riparian vegetation along the stream, at an elevation of approximately 138 m above sea level. The area was frequented by wildlife such as the Sambar *Rusa unicolor*, Barking Deer *Muntiacus vaginalis*, Gaur *Bos gaurus*, and Crab-eating Mongoose *Urva urva*.

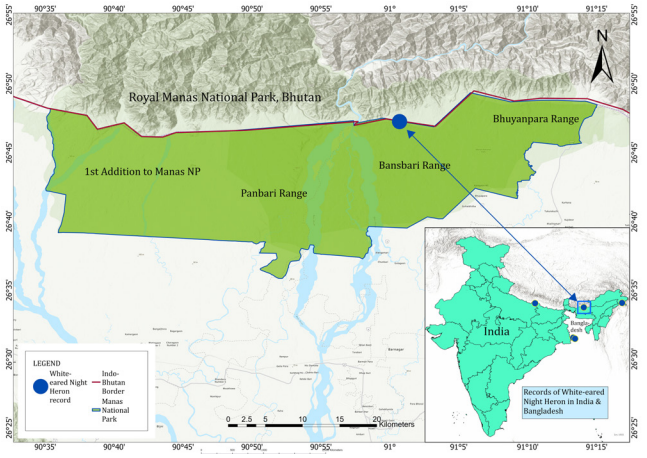

Fig 1. Site of White-eared Night Heron photographs and the distribution of other records in South Asia in relation to this site. Note, multiple Bangladesh records are shown as a single dot.

All photos: Trail cameras

264. The camera-trap photo of the juvenile White-eared Night Heron showing white spots on the wings.

265. Juvenile White-eared Night Heron showing white underparts, supercilium and blackish crown.

The camera trapping exercise, designed to monitor tigers, co-predators, and prey, under the Phase IV of All India Tiger Estimation, primarily focused on these species, which was a major reason for the 'bycatch' species being overlooked. Furthermore, while all photo-captured species are segregated, the two images of this species, captured at close range, were partially overexposed, initially making species identification difficult. In fact, when this photograph was made, this White-eared Night Heron was not in our radar as the 2016 report from Bihar was published only in 2018 (Shafi et al. 2018). In 2025, a detailed analysis of bird photos was done. Our photos showed a prominent white band across large eyes, a short, black crest, and short bill; wings were black-brown, marked with white spots along feather tips; tail was short and black. The bird had a stocky body and relatively short yellow legs. All these confirmed the species as a juvenile White-eared Night Heron and not a juvenile Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* (Brazil 2009). The identification was also validated through independent reviews (Arpit Deomurari and Nilutpal Mahanta *pers. comm.*, in August 2025). This constitutes the first confirmed record of the White-eared Night Heron in Assam, India (Choudhury 2000; eBird 2025).

The recent reports of White-eared Night Heron from the foothills of Himalaya, in Bihar, Assam, and Arunachal Pradesh, indicates that the species' preferred microhabitat and ecological conditions remain intact in this zone. Hence the species' actual distribution may be significantly wider than previously assumed, potentially encompassing other underexplored, forested riparian zones of eastern and north-eastern India highlighting the need for targeted survey methods to assess its distribution and ecology.

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Coprophagy in Little Stint *Calidris minuta*, at Mamachiwadi beach, Maharashtra, India

Coprophagy is the behaviour of consuming faeces, and includes the consumption of faeces of other species (heterospecific coprophagy), or consumption of faeces of other individuals of the same species (allocoprophagy), or consumption of one's own faeces (autocoprophagy) (Hirakawa 2001). It is observed in various animal groups, including mammals, insects, and even some birds (Hurd et al. 1991; Soave & Brand 1991). The diet of Little Stint *Calidris minuta* consists mostly of invertebrates (del Hoyo et al. 1996; Snow & Perrins 1997). However, heterospecific coprophagy and allocoprophagy are sometimes considered non-feeding behaviours that inoculate the gut with microbes found in other individuals (Engel & Moran 2013).

On 16 April 2024, we visited Mamachiwadi beach (19.476°N, 72.755°E; 20 m asl), in Palghar District, Maharashtra, to observe migratory birds. At 0745 h, we noticed that the tide had receded and saw a few people defecating on the beach in the open. At the same time, we observed three Little Stints feeding on human faecal matter lying on the beach. While watching these long-distance migrants feeding on human excrement was unpleasant, we photographed the feeding behaviour for record purposes. The birds repeatedly approached the spot and fed on the waste. It is unclear to us whether the birds were feeding on the actual faeces or insects there in. We could not find any literature on Little Stint engaging in coprophagy, however, it has previously been documented in Ruddy Turnstone *Arenaria interpres* (Kasambe & Kasambe 2022). Hence, our report of Little Stint engaging in coprophagy is an important addition to its diet and foraging behaviours during migration.

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A Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* x Northern Pintail *Anas acuta* hybrid at Sultanpur National Park, Haryana, India

In a thrilling encounter, the authors were fortunate to witness a rare hybrid of the Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* x Northern Pintail *Anas acuta*, at Sultanpur National Park, a designated Ramsar site in Haryana, India on 12 January 2025 **[266]**. On the morning of our visit, we spotted a single male Mallard x Northern Pintail hybrid foraging among a flock of Eurasian Coot *Fulica atra*, Gadwall *Mareca strepera*, Northern Pintail, and Northern Shoveler *Spatula clypeata*. The bird was photographed with a female Northern Pintail **[267]**. It was interesting to note that we did not observe even a single Mallard in the wetland at this time.

The individual displayed morphological features of the two species: The green head of the Mallard but not as bright and distinctive, and greyish-blue pointed tail feathers like the Northern Pintail, and showed a triangular white patch on the neck, and mottled brown and grey body, with a dark grey bill, long and pointed, resembling that of a Northern Pintail. The Mallard x Northern Pintail hybrid is an uncommon occurrence in the wild (Gunter 1941; Sharpe & Johnsgard 1966; Clark et al. 2020), resulting from the cross-breeding of the two species, and this often happens where habitat of both species overlap during breeding seasons or mating time (Guay et al. 2014). However,

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266. Mallard x Northern Pintail hybrid at Sultanpur National Park.