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The Chinese Pond-Heron *Ardeola bacchus*: Addition to the avifauna of Maharashtra and Jammu & Kashmir

The Chinese Pond-Heron *Ardeola bacchus* closely resembles the more widespread Indian Pond-Heron *A. grayii*, particularly in non-breeding and immature plumages. However, it is slightly larger by 8–10 cm, and the distinctive breeding plumage allows for reliable separation from the Indian Pond-Heron only during the breeding period. Chinese Pond-Heron breeds in eastern Asia, including north-eastern India, China, Russia, Japan, and Myanmar (Martínez-Vilalta et al. 2020). Northern populations migrate southward post-breeding, while southern populations (Indian and Indochinese) are largely sedentary (Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). The species is known for a certain degree of vagrancy as it has been recorded

from distant regions such as Alaska, Norway, Australia, and Sri Lanka (Martínez-Vilalta et al. 2020). In India, it is rare outside its north-eastern stronghold, with isolated reports from Bhavnagar, Gujarat (Parasharya, 1983), Tal Chhappar Wildlife Sanctuary, Rajasthan (Poonia et al. 2013), Pauri Garhwal, Uttarakhand (Bisht et al. 2024) and multiple records from West Bengal, Odisha, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala (eBird 2025). In north-western India, the species has been reported from Qurumber National Park, Gilgit-Baltistan (Khan et al. 2015). Here we report two incidences of its sighting outside of its usual range.

Nandur Madhmeshwar Bird Sanctuary, Nasik, Maharashtra

On 27 April 2025 at 0900 h, during a return migration bird-watch at Nandur Madhmeshwar Bird Sanctuary, first Ramsar site of the state (19.983°N, 74.030°E), in Nasik District Maharashtra, AM and other birders photographed an unfamiliar pond-heron. After scanning the images of bird by the authors it was confirmed as a Chinese Pond-Heron [60]. The bird was in full breeding plumage, with maroon-chestnut head, long lanceolate plumes from the nape, a dark slaty back, and white under parts. The bird was seen again on the following two mornings in the same area. This constitutes the first record of Chinese Pond-Heron, with photographic evidence from the state of Maharashtra, India.

Wular Lake, Jammu & Kashmir

On 06 May 2025, while birding near Wular Lake (34.363°N, 74.650°E; 1680 m asl) in Jammu & Kashmir, SM observed a pond-heron foraging near a reed patch at 1350 h. The bird appeared slightly larger and noticeably different from the more common Indian Pond-Heron in the area. Upon photographing the individual, SM was excited to confirm its identity as an adult Chinese Pond-Heron. The bird was in full breeding plumage, characterized by a maroon-chestnut head, slaty-black mantle, white underparts, a black-tipped bill, and a prominent yellow orbital patch [61]. There were no previous records of this species from Jammu & Kashmir before this sighting and it is included in the bird checklist of Jammu & Kashmir (Kichloo et al. 2024; Kichloo 2025) based on this observation.

These observations suggest that the species may be more widespread in western and north-western India than previously thought and highlight the importance of continued bird monitoring in the region. Birders in these areas are encouraged to be vigilant for further occurrences of this species.



60. Chinese Pond-Heron photographed at Nandur Madhmeshwar Bird Sanctuary, Maharashtra on 27 April 2025.

Photo: Showkat Maqbool



61. Chinese Pond-Heron photographed from Wular Lake, Jammu & Kashmir on 06 May 2025.

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Nesting association between 'Eastern' Finn's Weavers *Ploceus megarhynchus salimalii* and Black Drongos *Dicrurus macrocercus*

During the 2025 nesting season, we documented an active breeding colony of the 'Eastern' Finn's Weaver *Ploceus megarhynchus salimalii* in the Kanchanbari grassland of the Bhuyanpara Range, Manas National Park, Assam. Nesting was first observed in early April on a *Premna bengalensis* tree (26.747°N, 91.100°E), at a height of seven m; however, the site was soon abandoned. A larger colony was established shortly after on a nearby *Vitex glabrata* tree (26.746°N, 91.102°E), at a height of five m, and the colony grew to 27 nests by mid-May. Male display, nest weaving, and female nest inspections were observed. The nesting tree was surrounded by *Saccharum narenga*, *Imperata cylindrica*, *Phragmites karka*, and *Alpinia nigra*. [62, 63].

62. Finn's Weaver breeding colony on a *Vitex glabrata* tree in Manas National Park.

63. Screen grab from video footage showing a Black Drongo near the Finn's Weaver colony.

64. Drongo nest on a *Premna bengalensis* tree.

All photos: Jommani Kalita