

## SPECIES

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# First record of Chinese Pond Heron (*Ardeola bacchus*) for Sudurpaschim province of Nepal

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## ABSTRACT

This paper presents the new record of the Chinese Pond Heron (*Ardeola bacchus*) from the buffer zone of the Shuklaphanta National Park in Nepal. It is also the first record of species from the Sudurpachim province in far western Nepal. This report includes details of the previous distributional records, the ecology, and the captured pictures of the species.

**Keywords:** *Ardeola*, Sudurpaschim, New record, Shuklaphanta National Park, Nepal

## 1. INTRODUCTION

The Chinese Pond heron belongs to the order Pelecaniformes, the family Ardeidae, and the genus *Ardeola*. The species is widely distributed across east Asia, where it breeds in eastern Russia, Manchuria, SE Tibet, E China, west to Assam, N Burma, Andaman Islands, and Japan in East Asia and moves towards Myanmar, Laos, Thailand, Vietnam, Cambodia, Malaysia, Singapore and Philippines in South East Asia during the non-breeding season (Viswanathan, 2016). The species is listed as Least Concern in the IUCN Red List with a stable population (BirdLife International, 2016). It is vagrant to South Asian countries, with records of sightings from India, Pakistan, and Bhutan (Viswanathan, 2016).

The distinctive chestnut maroon color of the head, neck, and breast and slaty backed mantle, as well as scapular, distinguishes it from other species of pond herons during the breeding season, and it is almost inseparable from Indian Pond herons in non-breeding and immature plumages (Grimmett et al., 2011; Robson, 2000). The species prefers naturally occurring shallow aquatic habitats such as swamps, marshes, river banks, streams, and dry grasslands as well as manmade fishponds and rice fields, and feeds primarily on insects, fishes, and amphibians.

## 2. MATERIALS AND METHODS

An opportunistic survey was carried out in Shuklaphanta National Park (ShNP) and its buffer zone area from June 27 to July 2 of 2023, during which the bird was recorded on July 2 at 2:45 p.m. from the Beldadi area in the buffer zone (Figure 1). The survey team sighted one male Chinese pond heron (*Ardeola bacchus*) in breeding plumage foraging with three Indian pond herons in the recently planted rice field (Figure 2). The bird stood still for a while and then walked slowly foraging for the insects. Nikon COOLPIX P900 camera was used for taking

photographs and the GPS coordinates of the location were recorded on GPSmap 62s.

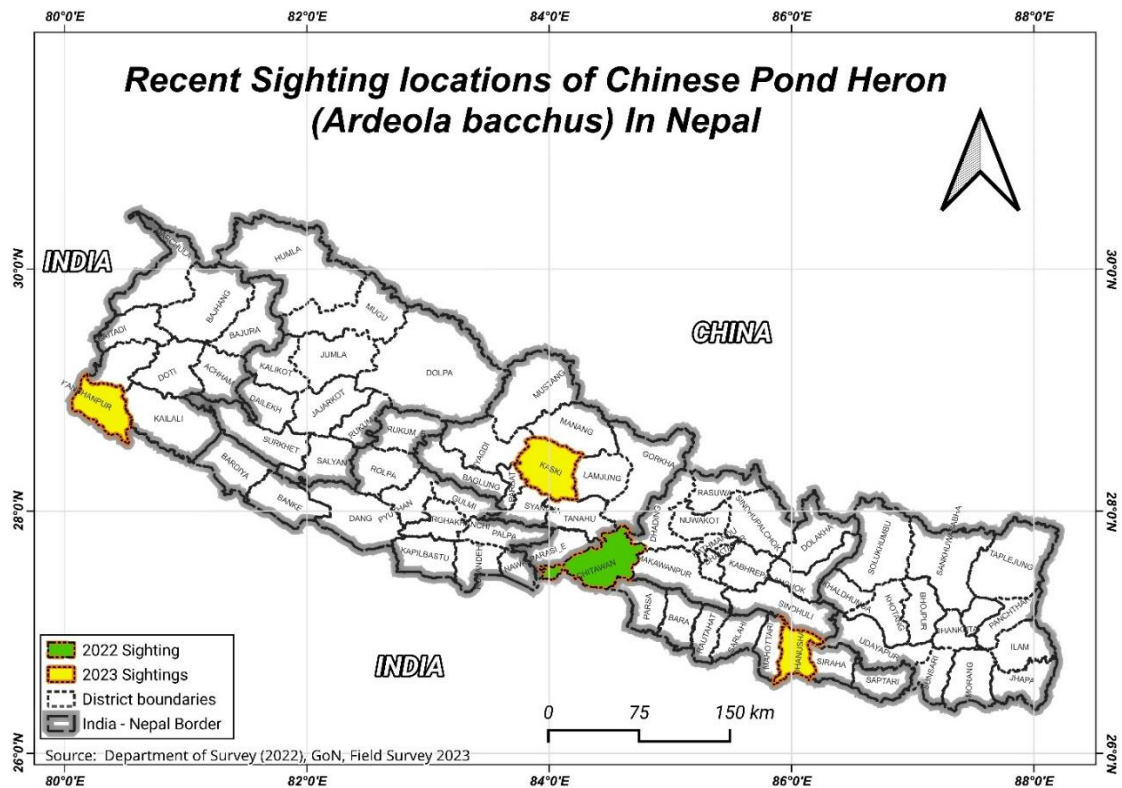


Figure 1 Sighting site of Chinese Pond Heron in the buffer zone of Shuklaphanta National Park, Sudurpaschim province, Nepal

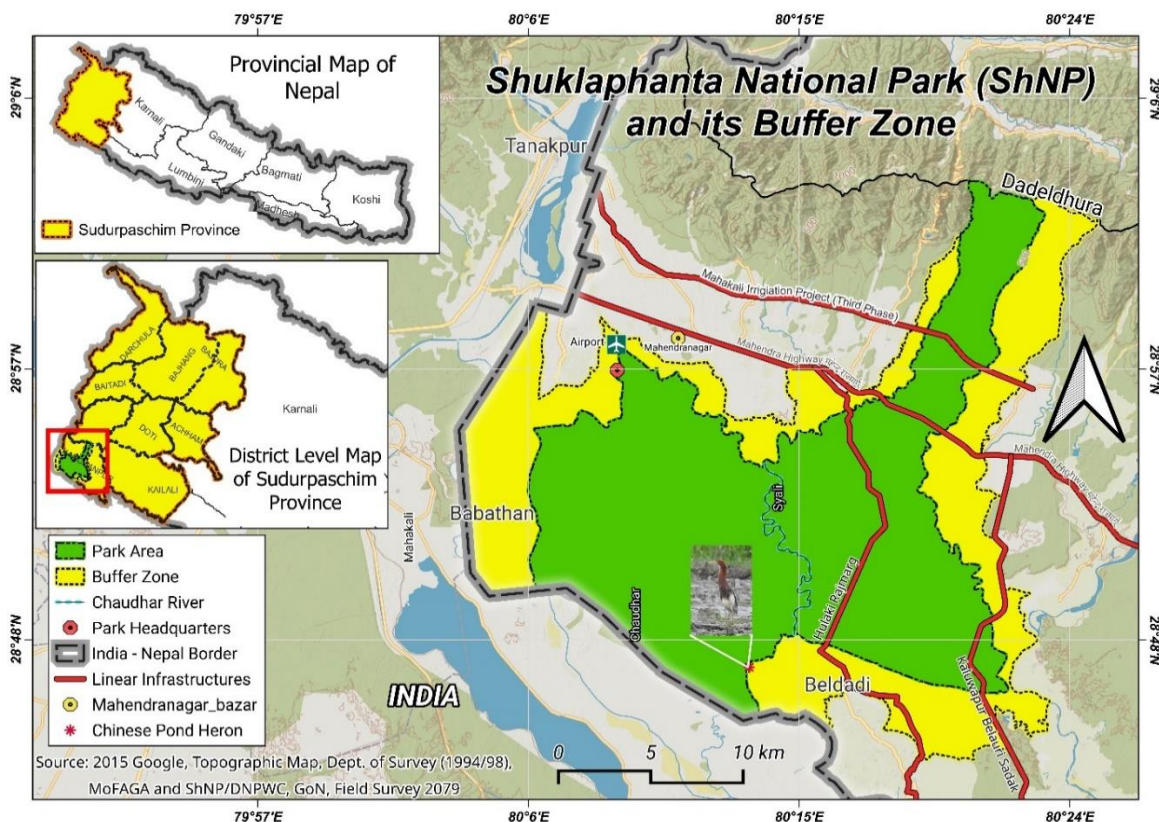


Figure 2 Chinese Pond Heron foraging in the observation site with Indian Pond Heron



### 3. RESULTS

This sighting of *Ardeola bacchus* is the first from the Sudurpaschim Province in far western Nepal. Previously, the species had been recorded for the first time in Nepal from the farmland in the buffer zone of Chitwan National Park on June 1, 2022, in central Nepal by the photographer duo of Prem Bomjan and Raju Tamang (Figure 3). The species was also sighted from Pokhara Valley in Kaski district in western Nepal on May 20, 2023, and Dhanusa district in eastern Nepal on July 2, 2023 (Figure 3).

This is also the westernmost sighting of the species in Nepal. With the addition of this species, the avifaunal species in ShNP reaches 461. The recent increase in observation of new bird species from far west Nepal especially from ShNP and its buffer zone area highlights the importance of this park for avifauna conservation in the region (Giri et al., 2020; Poudyal et al., 2022). There have been several vagrant records of the species from Southeast Asian countries, such as for India from Brahmaputra valley in Assam Barua and Sharma, (1999), Choudhury, (2010), Saikia and Bhattacharjee, (1990), Choudhury, (2009), eastern Arunachal Pradesh Maheswaran, (2008), Singh, (1995), Srinivasan et al., (2010), Chennai, Tamil Nadu Kaninde, (2013), Rajasthan (Poonia et al., 2013), for Pakistan from Qurumber National Park, Ghizer district Khan et al., (2015), and Bhutan from Punakha (Viswanathan, 2016). Among these recordings, only one from Bhutan reported two individuals, while other sightings were of only single individuals (Viswanathan, 2016). Apart from South East Asia, this species also has been reported in Australia Carter and Baxter, (2007) and Britain (McInerney and Stoddart, 2017).





**Figure 3** Recent sighting locations of Chinese Pond Heron in Nepal

#### 4. CONCLUSIONS

Recent lone individual sightings of the species from Nepal suggest this species a vagrant in the country. As all the sightings are from early monsoon season and recently planted paddy fields, the species can be considered a monsoon migratory bird for Nepal. Other similar sightings from different parts of the world indicate an expanding range of species distribution.

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#### Author contribution

Photos taken by SD and HD; draft and map preparation by SD and MA; proofreading and corrections by SD and MA.

#### Informed consent

Not applicable.

#### Ethical approval

The animal ethical guidelines are followed in the study for species observation & identification.

#### Conflicts of interests

The authors declare that there are no conflicts of interests.

#### Funding

The study has not received any external funding.

#### Data and materials availability

All data associated with this study are present in the paper.

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