

Javan Pond Herons *Ardeola speciosa* on the Cocos (Keeling) Islands from 2011 to April 2019

Four submissions to BARC

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Introduction

There are only two accepted records of Javan Pond Heron *Ardeola speciosa* in Australia. The first was BARC case 628 concerning a bird at the Cocos (Keeling) Islands on 27th November 2009 submitted by Peter Barrand. That was possibly the same bird first reported in the February and March of that year by John Barkla and by Ian McAllan in April. Case 661 concerned a mainland record at Kununurra, WA in January 2011. The original Australian occurrence of this species was in Darwin in March 2007. It was a much publicised event that even had television coverage and there can be no doubt about its authenticity but it has never been submitted to BARC. The report is published in McCrie & Noske (2015). Nonetheless, because of that occurrence the species was included as an Australian bird in Christidis & Boles (2008). Apart from an occurrence in June 2010 on Christmas Island (James & McAllan 2014), all other reports of which we are aware, have been on Cocos. In addition to the 2009 record, we have photographic evidence of another four. Each is presented below for assessment by BARC. The photos are in chronological order and as it happens, show the development of breeding plumage thus providing reliable identification criteria.

Case 1: December 2011 on West Island



11th, 12th & 14th December 2011

Photos by Pamela Jones

Case 2: Summer 2013/2014 on Home Island



15th January 2014

Photos by Andrew Wood

On right adjacent to a Nankeen Night-Heron.

These photos were taken at low tide on the reef between Home Island and Pulu Ampang. When found by a Birding Tours Australia group in November 2013 the bird was in non-breeding plumage so couldn't be identified. When seen by Kevin Bartram & Scott Baker in December 2013 it had developed sufficient breeding plumage to reveal its identity. This was even more evident when Mike Carter, Andrew Wood and Dawn Nyland saw it on 15th January 2014. What was presumably the same bird was seen by Geof Christie and Pamela Jones in June and July of that year.

Case 3: Summer 2017/2018 on West Island. This bird frequented the goat paddock at 'The Farm'. In addition to the locals, it was seen by many people on tour groups, e.g. Birding Tours Australia, as well as private visitors.



Top left, 17th Nov. 2017, (sodden after rain, Geof Christie); top right, 7th Dec. 2017 (Mike Carter); bottom left, 2nd Jan. 2018 (Geof Christie); bottom right 4th Feb. 2018 (Ian McAllan).



31st February 2018 (Geof Christie)

Case 4: Summer 2018/19 on West Island. At least from 26th Nov. 2018 to 18th April 2019, the period when Geof Christie was resident on the island. This bird mainly frequented areas at the northern end of the runway including the lagoon and rubbish tip.



From left to right and top to bottom, all photos by Geof Christie
26th Nov. & 19th Dec. 2018, 9th Jan., 19th Feb., 24th Feb. & 5th Mar. 2019
 Note the twin eye-stalks of the fiddler crabs a suspected food source for this Pond Heron projecting above the water in two of the above.

Identification

The orange buff on head, neck and upper breast with a black back is diagnostic of adult breeding-plumaged Javan Pond Heron. In Chinese Pond Heron, which is of more

frequent occurrence on Cocos, the head, neck and breast is chestnut-maroon. In Indian Pond Heron, which is a potential vagrant to Cocos, the head, neck and breast is pale buff and the back maroon not black (Robson 2008; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012; Eaton *et al.* 2016). Each of the subject birds had developed from small traces to extensive tracts of this adult plumage prior to departure. Another character of Chinese Pond Heron not exhibited in Javan Pond Heron noticed by Geof Christie that can also show in birds not showing breeding plumage is illustrated below.



Chinese Pond Heron Cocos 30th October 2015 Photo by Geof Christie
 Note that only in this species the yellow skin that forms the supercilium ***continues and curls around behind the eye***. Compare for example, bird in Case 3 above.

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