

BirdLife Australia Rarities Committee

Unusual Record Report Form

This form is intended to aid observers in the preparation of a submission for a major rarity in Australia. (It is not a mandatory requirement) Please complete all sections ensuring that you attach all relevant information including any digital images). Submissions to BARC should be submitted electronically wherever possible.

Full Name: Martin Schulz	Office Use
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Address:	Phone No:
	Email:

Species Name: Purple Heron	Scientific Name: <i>Ardea purpurea</i>
Date(s) and time(s) of observation:	7/6/2019 between 1315 and 1330hrs
How long did you watch the bird(s)?	Approx. 15 minutes
First and last date of occurrence:	7/6/2019 – have been back to the general location several times since and not seen it again (including another visit today). Also CI Parks have not had any reports of sightings.
Distance to bird:	As close approx. 50m

Site Location South Point Road, South Point, Christmas Island (MGA Zone 48 - 571502/8833044).

Habitat (describe habitat in which the bird was seen): Road passes through regenerating phosphate mining area. No surface water present. Adjacent to patch of primary rainforest.
Sighting conditions (weather, visibility, light conditions etc.): Good viewing conditions: light south-easterly breeze, few clouds, sunny, no rain, approx. 29 degrees Celsius.

To your knowledge, is the species seen frequently at this site? No not seen frequently e.g. my first observation of the species in five visits to the island covering some 6 months in total. According Johnstone and Darnell (2017) it is listed as a vagrant to Christmas Island. A very rare visitor to the Australian region with it first being accepted on the Australian list in 2013 (BARC 2013 report).
Were other observers present Do any of the other observers disagree with your identification, if so, who? (please give names, addresses and phone numbers)?

No I was on my own setting up microbat detectors.

How confident are you of your identification?, e.g. 70%, 100%. If not 100%, why not?
100% with confirmation from Rohan Clarke.

Please confirm that you are willing for BARC to display your images (fully credited with your name) electronically YES although photos are not great (these are attached in the same or a second email).

Other details: e.g. Do you have historical and or anecdotal information/comments relating to the prior occurrence/status of the species within or near this location?

No. South Point is rarely visited by bird watchers as far as I am aware. There is some suggestion reading various sources on the internet that the previous sighting(s) on Christmas Island may be unconfirmed.

Physical Description of Bird - Please describe only what you saw:

(1) *No. of individuals present (living or dead):* One live individual present.

(2) *age (adult, juvenile, immature) and sex:* As I am unfamiliar with this species I am unclear of the sex. Rohan Clarke suggested it was a juvenile.

(3) *size and shape:* Large and distinctly heron-like. Unlike Australian herons of this size had a distinctive almost bittern-like posture when standing still.

(4) *plumage colour and pattern (including any details of moult):*

Moult: Unknown.

Colour of head: buffy brown with some dark streaking on the crown; a narrow dark facial stripe extending from bill, below eye toward back of head. Below this stripe whitish.

Colour of neck: Neck very long rufous on the upper side with indistinct darker streakings, mostly on mid-section. Underside of neck whitish with some streaking on the sides apparent.

Colour of underside of body: Off-white.

Colour of back and wings when in rest: Purplish-brown.

(5) *Colour of bill, eyes and legs/feet:*

Bill: Long, distinctly heron-like and yellowish on the lower side and dark blackish on the upper side almost as an extension of the facial strip.

Eyes: relatively small and distinctly yellow.

Legs/feet: Long and distinctly yellow with dark purplish colouration on the posterior side of the legs. Trailed in flight.

(6) *calls* – it made no sound that I heard.

(7) *behaviour, movements, flight pattern, and anything else that might help to identify the bird e.g. feeding, interactions with other birds, describe where the bird was – on ground, in canopy, flying etc. Were comparisons made with other species?*

It was seen on its own so had no interactions with other species. Mostly it foraged on the edge of the road, where it appeared to be feeding on grasshoppers. When it finally flew and left the area it briefly tried unsuccessfully to perch in the outer foliage of a primary rainforest tree before flying out of view. In feeding it stood motionless almost frozen like a bittern and then would quickly lunge at large grasshoppers which were common and active along the road edge. When flying its flight was slow and very heron like (I have attached a bad photo of it in flight).

"Please insert extra page(s) for this section"

Please indicate other species with which you think it might be confused and how these were eliminated?

Firstly eliminated it as a *White-faced Heron* an individual of which is currently present on the Island due to much larger size, distinctive almost bittern-like posture when still, lacking the white face and lacking the general grey plumage including neck area.

Ruled out *White-necked Heron* (not recorded from Christmas Island, Johnstone & Darnell 2017) as it lacked the distinctive white neck and head contrasting with the blackish wings and backs. Instead the neck was orangy-buff with some streaking and the wings/back were purplish-brown in colour.

Ruled out Great-billed Heron (not recorded from Christmas Island, Johnstone & Darnell 2017) as it lacked the overall greyish-brown plumage, thinner bill and yellowish legs which were darker on the posterior side.

I have a lot of experience with all the above species.

I also ruled it out as a *Grey Heron* which has not been recorded from the Island and I have not personally seen on the basis of size and shape (less thickset), lacking a broad black eye line which ends in a plume, lacking the white neck with distinct black streaking, and lacking the grey wings and back instead being purplish in tone.

Was the description written from memory? No

Were photographs taken? (please include where possible) Yes – see attached and in WA Birdline.

What experience have you had with the species in question? (Did you know it was a Rare bird when you first saw it?)

I have not seen this species before but am fully aware that it is a Rare bird in the region.

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Please email all material







