

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 (email to tonyp@bigpond.net.au or andrew.silcocks@birdlife.org.au). Submissions to BARC should be submitted electronically wherever possible.

Full Name: Martin Schulz	Office Use
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Address: 2-8 Buttenshaw Drive, Coledale, NSW 2515	Phone No:
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Species Name: Cinnamon Bittern	Scientific Name: <i>Ixobrychus cinnamomeus</i>
Date(s) and time(s) of observation:	10/7/2019 between 1957 and 2000hrs
How long did you watch the bird(s)?	Approx. 3 minutes
First and last date of occurrence:	10/7/2019 – went back to the same location at 2032 and 2050hrs on the same evening but did not see it again. It was not present anywhere along the length of this road before dusk and between 1915 and 2020hrs on the following evening (11/7). Also CI Parks have not had any reports of sightings.
Distance to bird:	As close as approx. 1.5m

Site Location Start of Greta Beach Road, approximately 470m from North-South Baseline junction, Christmas Island (MGA Zone 48 - 573686/8840671). Altitude = 280m.

Habitat (describe habitat in which the bird was seen): No surface water present, including all puddles in the road had dried up. Edge of road is regenerating rainforest backed by tall closed forest, deep soil phase (from vegetation map, Christmas Island Parks, 2019).

Sighting conditions (weather, visibility, light conditions etc.): Good viewing conditions: light south-easterly breeze, few clouds, half moon, no rain, approx. 27 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 to Johnstone and Darnell (2017) it is listed as a vagrant to Christmas Island. A female in emaciated condition that subsequently died and is now lodged in the Museum of Victoria (B24113) was found in 2002 on the Island and was the first documented record of the species from an Australian territory (Mike Carter in the journal <i>Australian Field Ornithology</i> 20, 55-58).
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Were other observers present Do any of the other observers disagree with your identification, if so, who? (please give names, addresses and phone numbers)?

I was with a Christmas Island Parks planner: Ben Phillips. Address: c/- Christmas Island Parks, P.O. Box 867, Christmas Island, WA, 6798. Phone: 08 9164 8700; Email: Benjamin.Phillips@environment.gov.au

How confident are you of your identification?, e.g. 70%, 100%. If not 100%, why not?
100%.

Please confirm that you are willing for BARC to display your images (fully credited with your name) electronically
YES although photos are not great as they were taken with my phone as I did not have my SLR with me at the time (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. I do not know anything about the occurrence of this species on Christmas Island other than it is listed as a vagrant in (after Carter & Johnstone and Darnell (2017). Also listed by the same authors as a vagrant to nearby Cocos (Keeling) Islands.

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 but looking up the internet suggest that it was an adult male due to apparent absence of any streaking on the underparts. Given the lack of heavy streaking it is unlikely to have been a juvenile/immature.

(3) *size and shape:* Small and distinctly the shape of an *Ixobrychus* bittern but strange to see one away from a waterbody (although no permanent waterbodies present on the island). Its typical resting pose when eyeing me was semi-squat with the body, head and bill held in a rigid 45 degree position and not moving when in this pose (see accompanying photo).

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

The first impression when seen in the headlights of the 4wd was a small bright rufous-coloured bittern (the colour reminiscent of the Nankeen Night Heron; perhaps even brighter).

Moult: Unknown. Although plumage looked fresh and in good condition as was able to get within 1.5m of the bird.

Colour of head: In the light of the head torch which may have affected colouration seen: even rufous brown merging with the same colour on the neck and back. The crown and forehead slightly darker with a slaty grey tone. A distinct and contrasting white streak on the midline from the rear side of the head on to the neck. Possibly a small whitish patch was present in the chin area (not totally sure about that). There also appeared to be a white line between the eye and the top of the upper mandible.

Colour of neck: In the light of the head torch which may have affected colouration seen: As mentioned above an even rufous brown continuing from the same colouration on the head to the upper back. The upper neck appeared slightly darker on top with a slaty grey shade. No streaking or spotting visible. Just as mentioned above a distinct white streak extending from the lateral midline of the back of the head on to the neck (see attached photos).

Colour of underside of body which may have affected colouration seen: In the light of the head torch: No streaking and spotting visible. The upper and middle sections of the underparts were an even paler more cinnamon-buff yellow in the light of the torch visibly distinctly lighter than the upper back and top of neck. This lighter colouration gradually merged into the darker colouration on the upperparts. The lower underside was not visible and so I cannot comment on its appearance. A small whitish patch was present in the chin area.

Colour of back and wings when in rest: In the light of the head torch which may have affected colouration seen: An even rufous brown with areas of paler and darker colouration (the latter with an almost purplish tinge in the light of the head torch) but all merging indistinctly together. No streaking or spotting visible.

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

Bill: In the light of the head torch which may have affected colouration seen: Long, distinctly bittern-like, In head torch light appeared faded yellow with darker grey-black on upper surface of upper mandible. The yellowish colouration extended to the eye.

Eyes: In the light of the head torch: Yellowish.

Legs/feet: In the light of the head torch which may have affected colouration seen Even mid-grey with possibly a slight greenish tinge on feet and legs with the former very long.

(6) *calls* – on several occasions it gave a weird double-note call which is probably a stress call as I was close to it taking photos. No other calls 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?*

Not seen to forage. It had no injuries and appeared to be moving freely. It was seen on its own so had no interactions with other species. At first it was on the side of the road on the ground in a semi-frozen pose reminiscent of the Australian Little Bittern (see one of the accompanying photos). When we got out of the vehicle and took photos it slowly walked off the road into the adjacent rainforest. When about one metre from the edge of the road we left it alone. So it was not seen to fly at all.

"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?

Its small size eliminated any herons, especially night herons. Its semi-squat pose when eyeing me with the body, head and bill all held at an approx. 45 degree angle immediately suggested an *Ixobrychus* bittern. Four species within this genus have been recorded as vagrants (including the Cinnamon Bittern) on Christmas Island (after Johnstone and Darnell (2017): Although I have not seen either the Yellow or Schrenck's Bittern I have ruled these species out as possibilities due to:

a) Yellow Bittern *Ixobrychus sinensis*: *Male:* lacked the distinct black cap, buffy-coloured wing coverts which are even visible when not flying and the contrasting black primaries and secondaries. No black was visible on these feathers at all (see attached images). *Female/Immature/juvenile:* lacked any visible streaking markings on the underside, wings or back.

b) Schrenck's Bittern *Ixobrychus eurhythmus*: *Male:* Similar to the Yellow Bittern lacked the contrasting wing coverts with darker primaries and secondaries, black on the crown. *Female/Immature/juvenile:* lacked any visible streaking markings on the underside, wings or back.

c) Black Bittern *Ixobrychus flavicollis*: It was too small and lacked the distinctive markings (e.g. dark blackish upperparts contrasting with the large buffy yellow marking on the sides of the neck and streakings on the underparts) of this species. I have a lot of experience with this species, such as from the Illawarra District where I live.

Another possible species which may occur as a vagrant on Christmas island was ruled out:

d) Australian Little Bittern *Ixobrychus dubius*: Not yet recorded on Christmas Island or nearby Cocos (Keeling) Islands (e.g. Johnstone and Darnell 2017). Similar reasons as for the Yellow Bittern. I also have seen this species on a number of occasions on the Australian mainland.

Additionally, it was not a **Chinese Pond Heron *Ardeola bacchus*** or **Javan Pond Heron *A. speciosa***, which have both been recorded as vagrants on Christmas Island (Johnstone and Darnell 2017) due its smaller size, distinctive pose when stationary, and colouration e.g. lacking distinctive white markings on the wings and lower to mid-underparts and lacking any streakings (in immature birds). It also was not the **Striated Heron *Butorides striata*** which occurs as a vagrant on Christmas Island due to its smaller size, rufous-brown to buffy-brown overall appearance (compared to greyish appearance in the Striated Heron), lack of a distinct black cap, lack of any streaking, distinct yellow legs and feet (appeared greyish with a tinge of green in the bird observed) and the bird's distinct pose when stationary.

Was the description written from memory? Yes and from photos as I knew it was a matter of time before it disappeared and considered photos were the most important thing to obtain before it disappeared.

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 vagrant species in the region.

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Please email all material



