

NOTEBOOK

First record of White-bellied Heron *Ardea insignis* from Kamlang Tiger Reserve, Lohit district, Arunachal Pradesh, India

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The White-bellied Heron *Ardea insignis* is designated Critically Endangered due to its small and rapidly declining population (BirdLife International 2019). The species's low density and overall small population, currently estimated at 50–249 mature individuals, is regarded as insufficient for its future long-term survival (Price & Goodman 2015). Today the species is found in the eastern Himalaya foothills in Bhutan and north-east India, in northern Myanmar and maybe also in China, but is now extinct in Nepal (BirdLife International 2019). The bird is considered to be non-migratory and has been found from the lowlands up to 1,500 m, generally above 800 m (Martínez-Vilalta *et al.* 2019).

In India, the White-bellied Heron occurs in Assam and Arunachal Pradesh and the country may host the largest population of the species (BirdLife International 2001), but there have only been limited surveys of the possible sites. The largest number of recent sightings are from the Namdapha Tiger Reserve, Changlang district, Arunachal Pradesh (Maheswaran 2007, 2008, 2014, Das 2010, Srinivasan *et al.* 2010, Krishna *et al.* 2012, Mondal & Maheswaran 2014, Martínez-Vilalta *et al.* 2019).

On 14 March 2019 a White-bellied Heron was recorded in Kamlang Tiger Reserve (27.67°N 96.43°E) for the first time. This 783 km² reserve,

first established in 1989 as a wildlife sanctuary and declared a tiger reserve by the Government of India in 2017—the newest tiger reserve in India—is located in the south-east of Lohit district, Arunachal Pradesh, and is named for the Kamlang River which flows through the area. The southern border of the Kamlang Tiger Reserve adjoins the northern border of Namdapha Tiger Reserve, thus suggesting a continuity in the distribution of the species (Figure 1). This is the first record of White-bellied Heron at a site other than Namdapha Tiger Reserve in Arunachal Pradesh.

The White-bellied Heron was recorded in the Kamlang Tiger Reserve by a camera-trap which was specifically set for monitoring Tigers *Panthera tigris* as part of the All India Tiger Estimation exercise 2018–2019. The camera-trap was installed on the bank of the Tawa River in the north-west of the reserve (precise location withheld in accordance with OBC security policy) at 471 m on 4 February 2019 and was retrieved on 18 March 2019 (Plate 1). The Tawa River flows through the reserve and into the Lang River near the reserve's northern border before joining the larger Lohit River.

Threats such as widespread habitat loss and degradation caused by human settlements with consequential conversion to agriculture, erection of dams, boulder- and sand-mining, poaching/hunting and general disturbance pose serious issues for the survival of the White-bellied Heron (BirdLife International 2019). This is made more serious because the species occurs discontinuously in very low numbers across an area of diverse land forms (Price & Goodman 2015).

This record of the species in Kamlang Tiger Reserve opens up new areas where more extensive surveys are required to improve the understanding of the species's distribution in Arunachal Pradesh where so far only a small portion of Namdapha Tiger Reserve has been surveyed and monitored.

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Figure 1. Map of Kamlang Tiger Reserve, Arunachal Pradesh, India, showing major rivers and boundary with Namdapha National Park.





Plate 1. White-bellied Heron *Ardea insignis* captured by camera-trap set for Tiger *Panthera tigris* on the Tawa River, Kamlang Tiger Reserve, Arunachal Pradesh, India, 14 March 2019.

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