

8. OCCURRENCE OF THE BARHEADED GOOSE (*ANSER INDICUS*) IN SOUTH INDIA

According to S. Dillon Ripley's SYNOPSIS OF THE BIRDS OF INDIA AND PAKISTAN, the bar-headed goose, a winter visitor to peninsular India, comes mainly to northern India, and south to Chilka Lake in Orissa, and is rare in Gujarat and Deccan but fairly regular in Karnataka in small numbers.

It certainly comes much farther south, to the purplieus of Tiruchi (where it has been shot), and I have seen it at Point Calimere which has a latitude of $10^{\circ} 15'$ to $10^{\circ} 35'$ N, as the BNHS team here must also have. In old ornithological literature, a still more southern sighting is reported: in THE BIRDS OF SOUTHERN INDIA by H. R. Baker and C. M. Inglis, it is said, with regard to this bird, "Mr. Hatchell records it from near Nellore and Cuddapah, and Geese [*sic*], which are probably this species, are reported to frequent the seacoast as far south as Pamban Island." Pamban Island is well above 9° N latitude.

In recent years, I have seen this goose in flocks of about 40 to 50 at two waterspreads south of Tirunelveli town, to both of which I went to observe the small flocks of the greater flamingo (*Phoenicopterus roseus*) which sojourn in them. On 27 January 1983 I visited Karungulam tank (besides Karungulam village and right beside the main road to Tiruchendur, some 15 km from Palayamkottai) and saw, besides the flamingos, a flock of about 40 bar-headed geese which flew away at my approach. Inquiry of the local villagers elicited the information that they were regular visitors to this tank about January. The latitude of

Karungulam is about $8^{\circ} 32'$ N. On 11 January this year (1985) I went to Koonthakulam, some 30 km south-east of Palyamkottai, and on the way saw a regular formation of about 50 white storks (*Ciconia ciconia*, and no doubt *ciconia* again) feeding busily in the grassy scrub besides the road. At Koonthakulam village, there is a mixed heronry of grey pelicans, painted storks, egrets and little cormorants nesting in the trees around, and flamingos haunt the tank right next the village. After a while, the flamingos flew off in a southeasterly direction, and following them I came upon a sizeable waterspread about 1 km away, at which they settled. A number of painted storks and 3 black ibises were on the slushy banks of the water, and a flock of barheaded geese (about 50) on the water. Villagers arriving to fill their water-pots made the birds take wing, and I had a good look at the geese as they flew overhead, and also pointed out to my companions that they were barheaded geese. The latitude of Koonthakulam is $8^{\circ} 28'$ N.

The interesting aspect of these sightings is that there does not seem to be any record of the barheaded goose having been sighted in Sri Lanka, though there is a single record of the greylag. In recent years, migratory birds visiting south India have shifted their haunts considerably, and it could be that it is only comparatively recently that barheaded geese have taken to coming so far south. I do not know if they go to waters still farther south, as in Kanyakumari district.

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