

subsequently resighted in Xuan Thuy. However, I rediscovered the same individual in three successive winters in Mai Po, Hong Kong, on 5 November 2002, 4 November 2003 (Plate 1) and 29 October 2004. Subsequently, it was photographed on 23 November 2004 by Phippen Ho (Plate 2), and it was seen again on 23 December 2004 (Ma Tsz Kit *in litt.* 2005) and by S. Chan, K.W. Ma and myself on 29 December 2004. No other sightings of this bird have been recorded in Hong Kong or elsewhere.

## DISCUSSION

To summarise the observations, this bird was recorded in its first winter in Japan, in its fifth winter in Vietnam, and its seventh, eighth and ninth winters in Hong Kong. By its fifth winter the bird's bare part colours resembled those of adults. Information about the age of maturity is lacking (Hancock *et al.* 1992, del Hoyo *et al.* 1992), but Melville *et al.* (1999) discussed the age of some captured individuals from the satellite-tracking project and stated that birds develop completely white primary feathers by their fifth calendar year. The bird also provides the first known longevity record: 9.5 years up to the last observation on 29 December 2004. The closely related Eurasian Spoonbill *P. leucorodia* lives up to at least 28 years (Cramp and Simmons 1977).

The date of its appearance in Hong Kong was very similar in the three consecutive years. Although Mai Po is not systematically searched for colour-ringed Black-faced Spoonbills, this site is very well watched by birdwatchers and bird photographers. The observations may therefore indicate that the timing of migration is consistent. They also hint that birds may pass through Hong Kong to the wintering site in Red River delta. However, in 2004, the bird was still present at Mai Po on 29 December and in wing moult, indicating that it was wintering in Hong Kong. It may have changed its wintering location because feeding and loafing habitats in the Xuan Thuy Nature Reserve in Vietnam have become gradually degraded by human disturbance and

conversion of the intertidal flats into mangrove plantations (Yat-tung Yu and Swennen 2001).

Observations of colour-ringed Black-faced Spoonbills become more difficult with time because the colour of rings fades through wear and from the sun. Observers should be cautious when identifying ring colours.

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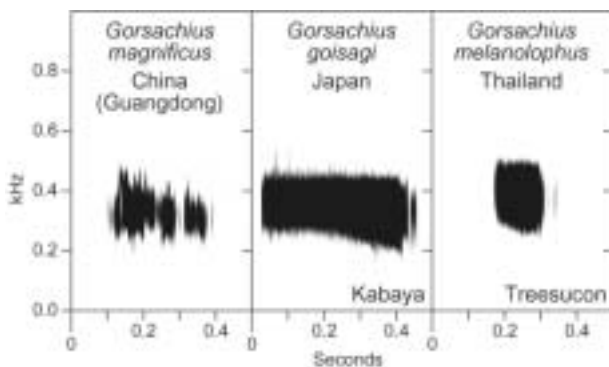
# Vocalisation of the White-eared Night Heron *Gorsachius magnificus*

BEN KING

On 29 March 2003, I tape-recorded the territorial call of White-eared Night Heron *Gorsachius magnificus* near Chebaling Nature Reserve in northern Guangdong Province, south-eastern China. Prior to this, there appears to be no published description or tape recording of a vocalisation of this heron.

White-eared Night Heron has been known at this site for several years: sightings are regularly made along a small river near the reserve in the evening just before dark, sometimes in the morning before sunrise, and sometimes along the river at night.

On the evening of 27 March 2003, I saw an unidentifiable heron fly by just before dark. No vocalisations



**Figure 1.** Sonograms of territorial calls of White-eared Night Heron *G. magnificus*, Japanese Night Heron *G. goisagi* and Malayan Night Heron *G. melanolophus*. Note that the sonogram of White-eared Night Heron is of poorer quality owing to a rather faint recording because of the roar of the river.

were heard. On 28 March, I was better positioned and got a view of a blackish heron with a broad white streak on the side of the upper neck. As it flew over me, backlit by the sky, I noted the short (c.3–4 cm) projection of its feet beyond the tail-tip. Then, landing on a tree on the opposite side of the river, it raised its full crest. It called several times and then flew down-river. Its blackish plumage with a broad white streak on the side of the upper neck eliminated all other herons except Black Bittern *Dupetor flavicollis*. The full crest and short foot projection beyond the tail tip (c.10 cm in Black Bittern: D. Warakagoda verbally 2003) excludes this species however.

On the evening of 29 March, the night heron called for about 10 minutes from a site just up-river from where I was standing and I recorded all but one of the calls on tape. Then the bird flew down-river, overhead, emitting the same call in flight and landed on the same perch as the previous evening (showing the white neck-streak and full crest) and called a few more times, before flying again overhead, circling higher and disappearing.

The call (presumably a territorial call) was a deep, throaty, raspy *whoaa*, about 0.3 seconds in duration, 0.2–0.5 kHz, repeated at 5–15 second intervals (Fig. 1). This call could easily be mistaken for a large owl. By comparison, the call of Malayan Night Heron *G. melanolophus* is a deep, mellow hoot *whoop*, about 0.15 sec. in duration, 0.25–0.5 kHz, lacking the throaty, raspy quality of the White-eared Night Heron. At close range, a shorter lower second note can be heard. The Malayan Night Heron's call is very much like the well-spaced introductory notes of the long call of the Helmeted Hornbill *Buceros vigil*, which ends in maniacal laughter. The call of Japanese Night Heron *Gorsachius goisagi* is a hollow, mellow hoot *whoop*, a little over 0.4 sec. in duration, 0.2–0.5 kHz, repeated at intervals of 1–2 seconds, often for long periods. The call is similar to that of Malayan Night Heron, but it is longer in duration and down-turned at the end.

In June 1983, in a park in a small city in Honshu, Japan, I was shown a perch from which a Japanese Night Heron called at length each evening in May in

the period before nesting. Further, in June 1987, I heard Malayan Night Heron in south-east Thailand making its distinctive call for an extended period from a single place. The observations of White-eared Night Heron described above suggest a similar behaviour. Together, these observations suggest that the Asian *Gorsachius* night herons have a territorial call given in the early evening hours, often from a particular perch, especially in the breeding season.

### Systematic notes

While most authors (e.g. Peters 1931, Hancock and Kushlan 1984, Sibley and Monroe 1990, del Hoyo *et al.* 1992, Clements 2000) consider *Gorsachius* to be a genus separate from *Nycticorax*, Payne and Risley (1976) and Traylor (1979) placed the herons of the genus *Gorsachius* in the genus *Nycticorax*. The *Gorsachius* calls described here and their behavioural usage and context have no counterpart in the genus *Nycticorax* (Hancock and Kushlan 1984). This adds to the suite of characters that distances *Gorsachius* from *Nycticorax*, such as the shorter bill, several different skull and skeletal characters (Payne and Risley 1976), plumage differences and solitary nesting, supporting the separation of *Gorsachius* and *Nycticorax*.

While *G. melanolophus* and *G. goisagi* are quite close morphologically, *G. magnificus* has a different plumage pattern and a longer, more pointed bill (though still shorter than *Nycticorax* spp.). Further, its spotted juvenile plumage resembles juvenile *Nycticorax* spp. more than that of *G. melanolophus* or *G. goisagi*. However, the call and its usage described herein suggests its closer affinity to *Gorsachius*. Further study is necessary to elucidate the generic status of *magnificus*.

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