
Short Communication

An observation of migrating Black-crowned Night Herons

Nycticorax nycticorax

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The Black-crowned Night Heron *Nycticorax nycticorax* is a common resident in southern Japan, whilst individuals breeding in the northern half of the country are thought to move to more southerly areas for the winter (Brazil 1991). Ringing recoveries have led to the belief that an unknown proportion of the population also winter in The Philippines, parts of southern China (Hainan Island, Guangdong) and Taiwan (Hancock and Kushlan 1984, Bird Migration Research Center 1985, 1987, 1990, 1993). However all recoveries reported are of birds banded as nestlings or fledglings and so it is not clear to what extent these data reflect the occurrence of true migrations or are indicative only of juvenile dispersal. Details of spring and autumn migrations of adult birds in this region, such as timing, size of migrating flocks, and routes taken, appear to be unreported.

At 1000 hrs on 8th April 1995 I observed a group of 10 adult Black-crowned Night Herons from a ferry which was travelling southwest from Tokyo to Miyazaki. I estimate the location to have been 40-50 km south of Cape Muroto, Shikoku (thus approximately 32°46'N 134° 10'E). The flock, which was flying at a height of about 30m, approached the ferry from the south, flew alongside the ship in a southwesterly direction for 10-15 minutes, and then turned and continued to the northeast.

There are two possibilities to account for the occurrence of this flock in the open ocean. First, they may have been birds resident in Japan blown out to sea by a storm. However the weather was calm at the time of the sighting and had been so for the preceding few days so this would seem unlikely. Second, the time of year and the southerly direction from which they approached the ferry suggests that the birds were migrating from their wintering grounds. The departure point for these birds clearly cannot be ascertained. The likely origin may have been in The Philippines, although other possibilities include southern China, Taiwan, or Okinawa Island (H. Ikenaga pers. comm.).

An observation such as that reported here is clearly of limited value when considered in isolation. However if all sightings of this kind were reported, then a clearer picture of the movements of the migratory proportion of the Black-crowned Night Heron population

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would emerge.

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春の渡り時期に太平洋上で観察されたゴイサギ

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日本で繁殖するゴイサギ *Nycticorax nycticorax* の一部は冬期には南方へ移動すると考えられている。日本で標識された個体の国外回収例はフィリピン、中国南部、台湾から報告されているが、それらの個体はすべてヒナの時期に標識されているため、その移動が真の渡りなのか幼鳥の分散を示すものかは、はっきりしない。東京 - 宮崎航路のフェリ - に乗船していた著者は、1995年4月8日午前10時00分に高知県室戸岬沖40~50 kmの太平洋上(推定位置32° 46' N, 134° 10' E)でゴイサギの成鳥10羽の群れを発見した。群れは約30 mの高度で南からフェリ - に近づき、南西に向かうフェリ - にそって10~15分間飛びつづけた後に北東へ向きを変えて飛去した。洋上でゴイサギが観察された理由としてまず考えられるのは、荒天による本土からの迷行であるが、当日および直前の数日間は好天がつづいており、その可能性は低い。観察された季節および飛翔方向は、これらのゴイサギが越冬地からの渡りの途中であった可能性を示唆する。どこから飛来したかは不明だが、フィリピン、あるいは中国南部、台湾、沖縄が考えられる。今回のような観察例が蓄積されれば、渡りをするゴイサギ個体群の移動状況が明らかになっていくだろう。

キ - ワ - ド : ゴイサギ, 渡り