



SLNHS Field Visit Report #2.19 - 24th Feb 2019

Diyasaru Uyana Wetland Park, Thalawathugoda

Participants: Yasmin Samarawickrama, Prasantha Jayasekara, Dayani Sri Nandalochana, Anouchka Wijenaiké, Nishan Perera, Peter Rezel, Ayoma Nethsinghe and daughter, Nandalal Ranasinghe, Vasantha Jayasuriya, W.P.Somasunderam, Dharshana Ranathunga, Padmini Seneviratne. Organizer - Ninel Fernando for SLNHS. Arjun Gunawardena did not participate though he had booked.



The early morning excursion on part of the waterways of the Diyawanna wetland system at Diyasaru park started with all participants getting to the location well on time. Unfortunately, the boatmen were late. After some fretting on the part of the participants who did not want to miss the 'early birds', we were waterborne after a delay of 30 mins.

It was a nice, dry morning with no mist to hamper the view. The four boats glided along the meandering waterways where we saw many common water birds, some with fluffed out feathers, probably still on their night perches. It was a good opportunity to see many birds in their natural habitat at close quarters and often at eye level.

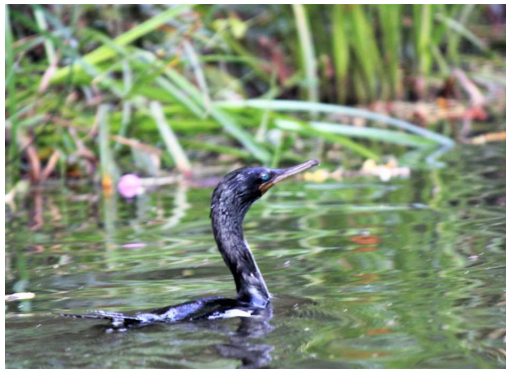


The first to be seen close up was a Spot billed Pelican. Next, a Purple heron was seen scanning the water intently from its low roost. Many Little Egrets were perched on twigs and two White-breasted water hens on the waterline completed our first sightings. Common Kingfishes and a Pied Kingfisher were also seen close up by the water side. Further up the water ways, a Pheasant tailed Jacana was seen in the

middle distance strutting on the lily pads, Indian Pond-herons, little cormorants, a purple heron, grey herons, purple water hens and an intermediate egret too were on the water. There was a flutter of excitement on seeing a crocodile but fortunately, only a small one. We were informed only young ones were seen in this wetland and are not threat to boaters. A flight of lesser whistling ducks flew overhead as did some black-headed Ibis and a few little grebe. We were a satisfied lot with a pleasant morning's sightings of many common water birds in a natural habitat.



Median Egret



Little Cormorant

We were about to dock on an island when a flock of five or six Rosy starlings were spotted fairly close up. But alas, did not offer any photo opportunities.

We then took a walk along a meandering path on the island with many *Maha Bovitiya* [*Melastoma malabathricum* L] and *Dang* trees [*Syzygium cariophyllum*] in bloom. The small *Dang* trees have been planted to provide food for birds once they start fruiting and were abuzz with bees at the time.

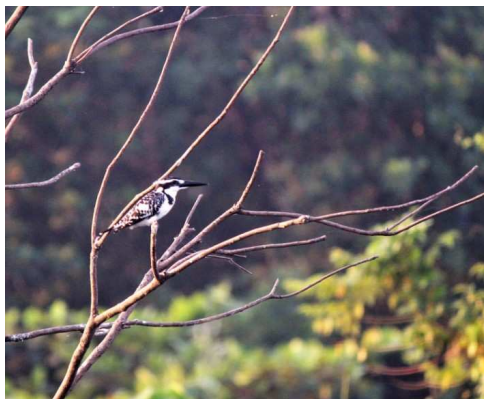


Maha Bovitiya



Purple Coot

The Pond apple trees [*Annona glabra*] though an invasive, provide fruits which are eaten by birds and also widely dispersed by them. We were then led by our guides to a trap for Fishing cats set for catch, collar and release.



Pied Kingfisher



Purple Heron

Our guides informed us that this island, No 9 was one of 12 in the Wetland Park and that the Park was the territory of 5 resident cats including two females. One collared cat was sadly run over on the expressway. Tunnels for small animals under the expressways are an urgent need as these cats have wide ranges.

The information from collared specimens' show they roam far and wide along storm drains under the city streets to connect with other wetlands.

Once on land and while partaking of a cool drink, our members expressed an idea that the Diyasaru Park should be a place we should visit two to three times a year, either to see birds ,the butterfly park, or get a permit for the night camp to take a boat ride to observe fishing cats.



We were appreciative of the planning and care of this wetland which maintains a good environment for birds, butterflies and wetland fauna and flora within the city. However, some of the waterways seem to be clogged with water hyacinth. This problem has to be seen to urgently.

All in all, Diyasaru Park is a place worthwhile for a morning or evening excursion. This cannot be said of some so-called wetland parks which have been sanitized to cater to humans only.

Some have been seen to use weed killers to control weeds on the banks of the lakes. Hopefully, lessons learned at Diyasaru Park would make the wetland



system a better place for fauna and flora as well as become the lungs and the kidneys of the city. They should be places where nature is managed without being constricted and where city people can relax and enjoy nature within a short distance of their homes.

Note: Many participants wrote in expressing their satisfaction on the NHS tour and the Diyasaru Park. The early notice given was also appreciated so they could plan to keep the morning free. Some who wished to join could not be accommodated due to the limit on seats on the boats. We will try to organize another tour in a dry month for those who had to be left behind.

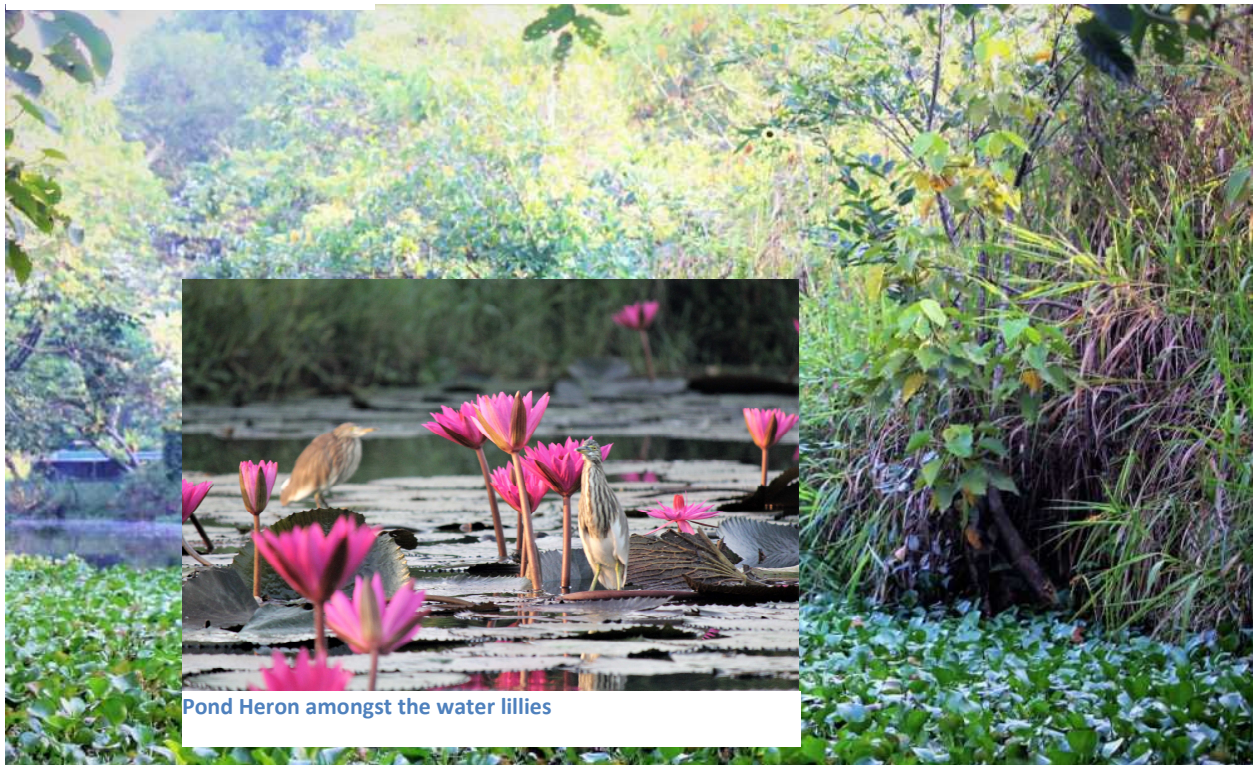
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Pond Herons



Purple Heron



Pond Heron amongst the water lillies