

An observation of Asian openbill storks in Singapore

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Subjects: Asian openbill, *Anastomus oscitans* (Aves: Ciconiiformes: Ciconiidae).

Subjects identified by: Tan Heok Hui.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, Kranji, Turut Track, near Neo Tiew Crescent; 31 December 2019, 1450-1512 hrs.

Habitat: Open country farmland.

Observers: Tan Heok Hui and Koh Li Ling.

Observation: Around 30 Asian openbills were observed. Most were perched on a creeper-covered fence adjacent to open grass fields (Fig. 1) while four birds were observed foraging in muddy water in a canal nearby (Fig. 2). Some storks took flight at the approach of several persons walking near the canal. They flew up and subsequently landed (Fig. 3) on trees nearby or on open patches of grass. One was observed flying with what appears to be an apple snail (Mollusca: Gastropoda: Ampullaridae: *Pomacea* sp.) in its bill (Fig. 4).

Remarks: The Asian openbill stork was first recorded in Singapore based on six birds observed at Seletar North in January 2013 (Low et al., 2013). Since (at least) 22 December 2019, thousands of Asian openbill storks have been spotted flying over parts of Singapore, including Kranji, Choa Chu Kang, Punggol, Changi, Yishun and Saint John's Island (Nazren, 2019; Tan, 2019a, 2019b). This species is not a regular migrant to Singapore, but seems recently to be moving rapidly southward down the Malay Peninsula from Thailand where it is common (Low et al., 2013). The movement of such large numbers away from its native home range is speculated to be caused by a severe reduction of food resource brought on by drought in Thailand (Tan, 2019b). This stork is known to feed on apple snails among other prey items like fish, crustaceans, toads and worms (Surya Babu & Thomas, 2019). It is not known if this species will continue to visit Singapore, or if it will become resident there.

References:

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- Surya Babu S & Raju Thomas K (2019) Study on habitat and feeding ecology of Asian openbill stork (*Anastomus oscitans*) in Pokkali wetlands of Ernakulam District, Kerala, India. *International Journal of Zoology Studies*, 4 (2): 50-52.
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- Tan A (2019b) Thousands of Asian openbill storks dot Singapore sky. *The Straits Times* (online edition), 24 December 2019. <https://www.straitstimes.com/singapore/environment/thousands-of-asian-openbill-storks-dot-spore-sky> [accessed on 3 January 2020].



Fig. 1. Part of a flock of openbill storks perched on a fence overgrown with creepers.



Fig. 2. One of four birds foraging in a canal.



Fig. 3. Stork with outstretched legs about to land.



Fig. 4. A stork in flight with an apple snail in its bill.

Photographs by Tan Heok Hui