

COTTON PYGMY GOOSE: IS THIS THUMBELINA AMONG WATER LILIES REDUCED IN NUMBERS TOO?

Relevant for: Environment | Topic: Biodiversity, Ecology, and Wildlife Related Issues

A male Cotton Pygmy Goose at Nemam lake. Photo: Rama Neelamegam

Amidst work-from-home, many now organise their *soirees* around the telly and root for their IPL team, with diehard supporters wearing face paint and twirling a real white cricket ball.

So, here are two ready images from these unusual times to get a grasp of the Cotton Pygmy Goose's dimensions.

Hold that cricket ball in the paw to feel this bird's weight. Expect the bird to be a couple of grams lighter. Hold that 10.1-inch WFH tablet to picture the bird's length from bill to retrices. Expect the bird to be a couple of millimetres shorter.

The Cotton Pygmy Goose is the Thumbelina of the *anatidae* family which is constituted by ducks, geese and swans. While Hans Christian Andersen's Thumbelina emerged out of a flower, the Cotton Pygmy Goose commonly glides around water lilies.

Reasonably undisturbed freshwater lakes on the outskirts of Chennai and sections of Kancheepuram and Thiruvallur are known to support small populations of this pint-sized resident bird.

Sufficiently filled, if not to the brim, waterbodies that have always enthusiastically hosted the Cotton Pygmy Goose come across as even more of a generous host.

Over the last one month, birder E Arun Kumar has found Cotton Pygmy Teals paddling around in relatively good numbers at Nayapakkam, Nemam and Chembarambakkam lakes.

"I have been seeing a good population of this bird at all these three lakes. At Nemam, on an average, 15 to 20. At Chembarambakkam, 8 to 12. At Nayapakkam, which is readily associated with Cotton Pygmy Goose sightings, it is 15 to 20," elaborates Arun Kumar.

For most other species, flocks of this size are hardly anything to chirrup about. For the Cotton Pygmy Goose, they make a significant number.

Let us recall that the State of India's Birds 2020 report has placed the Cotton Pygmy Goose under a concerning list — "Common Birds Showing Strong Long-term Declines".

Freshwater lakes and even ponds, its precincts rarely hoofed, and its expanse generously sprinkled with aquatic vegetation, particularly lilies, make a rule-of-thumb formula for assessing which habitats would suit the Cotton Pygmy Goose.

"Wherever you have suitable vegetation, particularly constant lily growth, there is a good chance of sighting the Cotton Pygmy Goose. Thenneri and Nayapakkam are among those places. Right outside SSN, there is a small lake marked by lily growth, and it has a flock of ten birds," says eBird reviewer Vikas Madhav Nagarajan. "Chembarambakkam lake is the best place to sight this species. It has a very healthy population, so does Nayapakkam"

The bird is conspicuously rare within urban Chennai, a fact underlined by the scant records of the species from habitats one would intuitively expect it to be drawn to.

It is remarkable that freshwater lakes in the outskirts that are not significantly marred by pollution fare better in drawing the Cotton Pygmy Goose. A study of the records of the bird in and around Chennai bear this out. It suggests that the bird has a lower tolerance threshold for polluted waterbodies.

“The Pygmy Cotton Goose prefers waterbodies a little cleaner than the ones found in the urban environment. That is an area that needs to be validated with more observations,” says ornithologist V Santharam.

Is this bird likely to be found in ponds?

What applies to the lakes apply to the ponds as well? At pain of repetition, ponds with suitable vegetation, particularly lilies, may appeal to the Cotton Pygmy Goose, provided they meet two other critical requirements.

“Any lily pond found in a place marked by quiet, and where the birds would not be easily disturbed can technically be a place for this species,” says Vikas. Arun Kumar weighs in: “I have not seen them in ponds around our place, only in Rajasthan and Gujarat. In Gujarat, a guide once took me to a place to show me what he called a rare bird. He led me to a small pond and showed me the Cotton Pygmy Goose. I did not want to dampen his excitement, and so played along, sounding surprised.”

(‘Home Ground’ is a weekly column about the resident birds of Chennai and surrounding areas that are not commonly seen)

Please enter a valid email address.

END

Downloaded from **crackIAS.com**

© **Zuccess App** by crackIAS.com