

AN EARLY ARRIVAL OF THE MALAYAN NIGHT-HERON *GORSACHIUS MELANOLOPHUS* IN JAVA?

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Background.

A member of Indonesia's avifauna that is rarely encountered is the Malayan Night-Heron *Gorsachius melanolophus*. It is described by Dammerman (1929), Kuroda (1936) and Hoogerwerf (1948, 1969) as a migrant from the Asian mainland, and a regular visitor throughout Java. Also a migrant to peninsular Malaysia, Medway & Wells (1976) provide extreme passage dates of 20 October and 30 April for Fraser's Hill, and November and 5 April in the wintering habitat. Detailed information on confirmed dates is not available for Java, but ten specimens housed at the Bogor Zoology Museum provide extreme dates of 18 November and 25 March, while Kuroda (1936) records an earlier occurrence on 8 November. Thus previously published records and museum specimens tend to agree on the period when the migrant is to be found within its wintering range. A recent sighting of an individual outside this period poses an interesting possibility.

Observations.

During a photographic expedition in early August 1982 to the Cihandeuleum swamp (Figure 1) in the Ujung Kulon National Park, on the south-western tip of Java, A.C. encountered an immature Malayan Night-Heron. The bird was standing in an open area of the seasonally dry swamp between the Cihandeuleum and Cigenter rivers. Although the bird immediately became aware of the presence of the observer, it initially made no effort to flee. This permitted a series of photographs (on file with A.C.) to be taken with an 80 200 mm zoom lens from different angles and distances of less than ten metres.

An examination of 22 photographs confirms its identity and status as an immature Malayan Night-Heron. A description of the bird's distinguishing features noted from the photographs follows: a blackish-grey nuchal crest with a white bar near the tips of the feathers; facial feathers blackish-grey with white giving a vermiculated appearance; pale yellow iris; a short stout bill with a greenish wash; black primaries with buff tips grading to white ends; black secondaries;

greater primary coverts cinnamon with narrow white tips; greater secondary coverts and remaining wing coverts grey mottled, and concolorous with back; neck and underparts buffy streaked with black; and greenish legs. The flight feathers appeared well formed and complete, indicating the bird was fully fledged.

When first observed, the bird was in the typical posture of foraging night herons and bitterns. When the bird saw A.C. it adopted a threat posture. This involved elevating the body, stretching the neck, erecting the crest, fluffing the facial and neck feathers, and dropping the wings. Approaching within six metres, the bird exhibited increased nervousness and disappeared by walking into the undergrowth. This behaviour initially caused us to believe that the bird was not yet fully fledged. However, the photo analysis and a report by Hoogerwerf (1969) that this species will often run into the undergrowth and only fly if approached too closely and presumably unexpectedly, convinced us of its fledged status.

Distribution.

The breeding distribution and movements of this species are poorly known. Hancock & Kushlan (1984) suggest that the migrants to Java originate from the breeding populations of north-east India and south-east Asia (Thailand and Indo-China). The breeding area may extend north to Hainan

(Hancock & Kushlan, op. cit.), but does not reach south to peninsular Malaysia (Medway & Wells 1976). As stated above, passage and wintering times in peninsular Malaysia and Java are late October through March/April, while a high percentage of the migrants encountered in Malaysia are immatures (D.R. Wells, *pers.comm.*).

The sighting in Ujung Kulon in early August extends the period the Malayan Night-Heron is known to occur in its accepted non-breeding or wintering range by at least two months. A more intriguing possibility is that this immature bird represents a successful breeding effort somewhere within the boundaries of the national park. A possible location is for a pair to have nested in association with the small colony of egrets and herons in the Niur swamp region approximately 12 km north-north-west of the sighting (Figure 1). If substantiated, this would represent both a new breeding species for Indonesia and a southern hemisphere breeding population.

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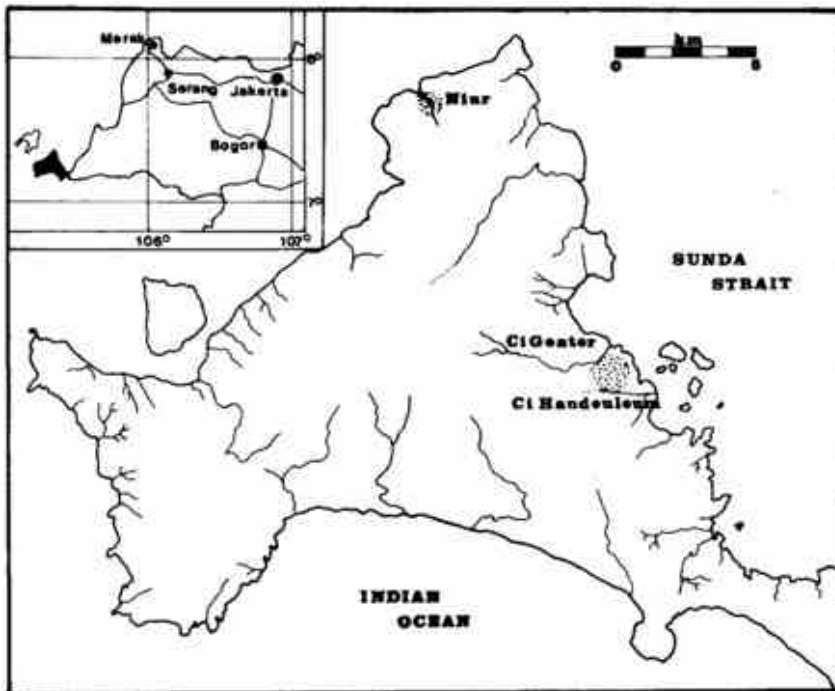


Figure 1. Map showing location of Ujung Kulon National Park and sighting of the Malayan Night-Heron *Gorsachius melanolophus*. Map adapted from Hoogerwerf (1970).

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NOTES ON SOME BIRDS OF TIMOR

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The standard works on the birds of Timor were published by Hellmayr (1914, 1916) and Mayr (1944). Both authors described the resident avifauna carefully but dealt as cursorily with migrants as had the collectors who provided the specimens. Consequently, after three short field trips made in 1973 to what is now the province of East Timor, McKean *et al.* (1975) added over 25 species to the Timor list (cf. Mees 1976). In 1985 the author made two trips to south-west Timor, the first from 27 February 30 March and the second from 28 August 3 October. . A number of species which were previously either unknown or little known in Timor or the Lesser Sundas were recorded, often as quite common, and notes on 15 of them are presented here. A number of records were corroborated by Tom M. Gullick and these are followed by his initials (T.M.G.) All the records were made in 1985 and refer either to an area of mudflats at the head of the Bay of Kupang, West Timor (10° 2'S, 123° 6'E), or to the Bina Plain beside the Mina river near the south coast of West Timor (10° 8'S, 124° 7'E).

Seven species of Palearctic waders are listed, all previously overlooked on Timor and not mentioned by Mayr (1944), McKean *et al.* (1975) or Mees (1976). All records refer to the mudflats at the head of the Bay of Kupang.

Pelecanus conspicillatus Australian Pelican

At least 48 birds, all adult, were present throughout September in the Bay of Kupang and a further 37 were regularly seen on ponds on the Bina Plain in the same month. Local residents at Tambak Oebelo, a complex of fishponds on the mudflats at the head of the bay, insist that the species is resident. They also claim to have killed a thousand pelicans in a few days, insist that exhausted birds were plucked from the sea or run down on the mudflats, but are not clear as to the year in