

NOTES ON THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE MASKED FINFOOT
HELIOPAIS PERSONATA
IN INDONESIA

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Introduction

The distribution of the Masked Finfoot *Heliopais personata* has been described by Ali & Ripley (1980), Baker (1929), and Medway & Wells (1976) as ranging throughout north-eastern India, Burma, Thailand, peninsular Malaysia, and Sumatra. Throughout most of this range its status has been well documented: resident and rare for north-eastern India and Bangladesh (Ali & Ripley 1980); resident, rare, but widely distributed in the flooded forest areas and swamps of Burma (Smythies 1953); and a nonbreeding but frequent visitor to the forested rivers of peninsular Malaysia, extending from the coast to the hinterland (Medway & Wells 1976).

A detailed record has been prepared by Medway & Wells (1976) and Wells (1983, 1982) of finfoot sightings, locations, and dates of occurrence in Malaysia. However its status and distribution in Indonesia is unclear, and is usually covered by statements similar to "occurring as far south as Malacca (Malaysia) and Sumatra" (King *et al.* 1975). This information is inadequate for an area (Sumatra) that extends over 1965 km from north to south.

Historical Records — prior to 1940

Early records of this species in Sumatra have been confined to the northern half of the island. Schneider collected an adult (sex unknown) in nonbreeding plumage (housed at the

American Museum of Natural History, No: AMNH 5470) at Tanjung Bringin (original name), northwest of Medan, on 3 Dec. 1898. Although the exact location was not recorded, it could have been the swampy region of Lower Langkat where Schneider collected most of his orang-utan (*Pongo pygmaeus*) between November 1897 and March 1898 (Schneider 1905). Lying between the towns of Pura and Binjai, this area is now covered with oil palm plantations. An earlier specimen (adult, sex unknown) was reported by Parrot (1907) to have been collected in 1895 but the exact date and locality were not identified.

A female, housed at the Bogor Zoology Museum, (No: 13149), was taken at Muara Tapoes Baroes (near Barus, West Sumatra) by G. de Haan on 24 April 1939. Further records include a female (no date) collected during the Vanderbilt Sumatran Expedition (1936–1939) near Medan. From the description in the article, the bird was probably collected on the Laboean River, halfway between Medan and the coastal town of Belawan (Schauensee and Ripley 1936/1939). Robinson and Kloss (1923) report a bird collected by Jacobson in the Mt. Ophir district of Padang (West Sumatra) and one by de Beaufort and de Bussy in the Medan district. Unfortunately, the dates and exact locations were not reported. There have been many additional studies of Sumatran birds at different locations prior to the 1940's; these are too numerous to list here but it is noted that none recorded the presence of the Masked Finfoot. Its secretive habitats and behaviour is surely one reason for the lack of records.

Recent Sightings – since 1940.

There is a paucity of information from these early sightings up to the present. In Hoogerwerf's (1953) valuable compilation of references related to Java (primarily) and Indonesian ornithology, this species is not cited. Nor has this species been cited in recent Zoological Abstracts (1970 to present) with reference to Indonesian avifauna.

The most recent records have been of birds on the Wai (River) Kanan flowing through the Wai Kambas Nature Reserve (Lampung Province). An adult female was seen on two occasions, 16 April 1983 (P. Andrew, *pers. comm.*) and 22 April 1984 (P. Andrew, D. Bradford, H Buck, *pers. comm.*) swimming a short distance downstream from the Forestry Dept. (PHPA) post on the Wai Kanan. More recently, a reserve guard (Darmanta *pers. comm.*) accurately described an adult male occurring in the same location on 3 June 1985. These sightings extend the period of known occurrence in Indonesia (early December to early June) to approximately the same as for Malaysia. Moreover they dramatically extends the finfoots' known distribution from the northern to the southern half of Sumatra.

By contrast to Sumatra, coastal and riverine forests of Java have been intensively studied by mainly Dutch ornithologists, but no reference to finfoots has been found in the literature. Consequently, the sighting by the author of an adult male on 7 March 1984 is believed to be the first record for Java. The bird was skulking at the edge of the *Rhizophora* swamp in the nature reserve Pulau Rambut (5°58'S, 106°42'E) in Jakarta Bay.

Status

Until additional information becomes available, the coastal and forested riverine habitat of Sumatra should be considered as this migrant's usual habitat in Indonesia. However the scarcity of records suggests that it occurs only in small numbers and has always been uncommon. The Javan record is considered to be a vagrant beyond the normal limit of its range.

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