

**MAX E. G. BARTELS AND THE JAVAN LAPWING *VANELLUS MACROPTERUS***

by

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The Javan Lapwing *Vanellus macropterus* was (and just possibly still is) a bird species endemic to Java, although there is debatable nineteenth century evidence of its occurrence on Sumatra. It has not been seen since 1940, and indeed almost nothing has ever been published on the species (the scant details are assembled in BirdLife International's *Threatened birds of Asia*, in prep.).

However, the Swiss German plantation owner Max E. G. Bartels (1871-1936; see Stresemann 1937, Rozendaal 1981) kept extensive manuscript and typescript notes on Javan birds, which he clearly intended to publish at one stage. These are held at the National Museum of Natural History Naturalis, Leiden, Netherlands. The notes contain an invaluable summary of Bartels's experience of the Javan Lapwing. This material has been selected, condensed and reworked into the entry on the species in *Threatened birds of Asia*, but because it is a unique record (and because there are items of information which do not concern conservation and were therefore not used in BirdLife's account), we felt it would be worthwhile reproducing the entries in its entirety in the interests of science and posterity. The translation, from German, is ours.

Bartels's notes are in the form of a typescript which is extensively modified and extended in manuscript; there is also mention of the Javan Lapwing in his manuscript diary entry for 12th May 1925. We have taken the liberty of inserting paragraph breaks where they appear appropriate, but have not otherwise altered the format of the notes; to give clarity to his meaning, we have occasionally introduced modern punctuation and appropriate bridging language but hope that nothing has been misrepresented in the process. The citation of the work as given in *Threatened birds of Asia* is: "Bartels, M. E. G. 1915-1931. Diaries and notebooks on Javan birds. Unpublished typescripts and manuscripts held at NMNH, Leiden, Netherlands." Everything that follows hereafter, except in square brackets, is by Bartels and any use of the information should be attributed to him (involving the citation above) and not to us as the publishers of this note.

**Typescript notes*****Xiphidiopterus euculidus*, Temm.**

The area of distribution of this Spurred Lapwing in Java is very restricted, because I found it, until now, only in the extensive steppe like swamps of the Sedari estuary and its tributaries, as well as here and there in the lowlands of the Tjitaroem delta and at Rawah Tangerang. Although I have not yet seen the "Beberak", as the Malays onomatopoeically call it, in larger numbers, and although the individual pairs often inhabit a relatively large area, even so at the above named localities it is an everyday sight, impossible to miss. As soon as an intruder enters a territory the birds are up and circling him, giving their characteristic persistent calls, and only calming down when he has left the territory.

In December 1923, after a very dry year which had left many swamps still dry, I found only very few Spurred Lapwings in the Tjitaroem delta. In contrast to their normal behaviour, they did not fly around me, but took off and flew away immediately. As they are clever and very cautious they never

dive bomb people but instead they generally "create a stink" at an appropriate distance, often climbing to tremendous heights while doing so. If the intrusion goes on too long, they will sometimes slink off to a different swamp, but usually corm back fairly quickly.

During the cast monsoon, when most of the swampland is dry, they tend to mill around with a preference for walking about in the growing (but still partly dried out) Teki grasses (as called by the Malays), but they undoubtedly prefer the patches where these grasses stay moist the longest, i.e. where they do not dry out even in moderately severe droughts.

During the rainy season the birds keep to areas in the swamps which are relatively little flooded, since despite their long legs they prefer not to walk in open water like stilts. In the Tjitaroem delta they often busy themselves in wet cattle pasture at the borders of their normal foraging areas, which are densely overgrown swamps with rush/sedge and other shorter water plants; indeed, near Rawah Tangerang I have only ever seen them on a partly wet buffalo pasture.

In the swamps they prefer to keep to area which allow them a wide view, and they frequently fly to any nearby hillocks, e.g. a rounded knoll or a clump of rush/sedge, to get a better view of the area.

Even though they know perfectly well how to use their legs, I have never yet seen them walking long distances, only flying. Their flight is not acrobatic like their European cousins; I usually see them in fast direct flight.

Their food consists mainly of water or swamp living insect larvae, water bugs, beetles, snails (the shells we broken up by the birds' strong digestive muscles) and seeds of aquatic plants, which are, however, only used as a supplement. In captivity the species eats small fish, as I found out with one bird which was brought to me by a local person in November 1927 and which had become so tame after about seven weeks that he would come within grabbing distance of my gardener while he was busy catching fish for him from a little pond in the bird house. After two months he was already so tame that he took the proffered food out of the gardener's hand. Whenever the gardener came up to the bird house, the lapwing would utter his characteristic call, which he used all the time because I also heard it frequently long after sunset and even at night. While he was walking about in the aviary, he presented a very fine image, showing exactly the same coquettish manner as a pretty young girl.

When he was first put in the bird house; a *Spilornis baha* [= *cheela*] was living there which he at first carefully avoided; but he changed his behaviour when he quickly discovered that the serpent eagle was not interested in him. On 31 July 1929 a young *Spizaetus limnaetus cirrhatus* was introduced to the aviary and he took no notice of this bird either, but sadly it killed him on 2 October 1929. The hawk eagle probably did this because he had shortly before been fed with gallinule and mammal meat after having previously had a diet of small goldfish; he ate the lapwing the following day. Apart from fish and aquatic larvae in rice fields ....[The notebook entry breaks off here.]

#### **From the manuscript diary (Tjitarum delta, 1925)**

12 May 1925 ... On the buffalo pasture not far from the entrance to Rawah Tangerang, where yesterday we saw *Xiphidiopterus cucullatus*, my men found a nest of this lapwing. The nest was found by chance, since the bird had not revealed its whereabouts, being extremely shy. The birds kept flying

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back and forth to the pasture, and one of the birds settled immediately onto the eggs as soon as we had retreated to a good distance. It ran to it, making many short pauses, looked around, and sat so low on the eggs that it was very hard to see from fairly far away. The four eggs lay with the pointed ends inwards. The nest was situated on a slight knoll whose grassy edge formed the edge of the nest. The scrape was rather deep. The nest had a diameter of half a foot and lay in an earth hole. It consisted of rather loosely arranged dry grass.

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### References

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