

**OCCURRENCE OF GREY PHASE
BLACK-HEADED BULBULS *PYCNONOTUS ATRICEPS* ESPECIALLY ON JAVA.**

by S. van Balen.

Received December 26, 1985

On 26 April 1984 a grey (melanistic) phase Black-headed Bulbul *Pycnonotus atriceps* was observed by the author during a trip across the Saguling hydro-energy project area west of Bandung, West Java. The bird was seen in a tree in roadside secondary growth. The bulbul-like appearance, the black head and grey body were diagnostic. The observation of the rare colour phase induced me to study existing publications on this phenomenon and to examine the specimens present in the Zoological Museum of Bogor. Temminck (1838) described a grey and black Bulbul collected in 1822 by Van Hasselt in the Banten region of West Java, and Vorderman (1892) described an identical bird obtained on Bawean Island. They treated the birds as belonging to a separate species *Ixos (Microtarsus) chalconcephalus*. These birds were later identified as being only varieties of *Pycnonotus (Brachypodius) atriceps* (cf. Bartels & Stresemann 1929) and were considered as being apparently rare.

The species ranges from North-east India to the Greater Sundas, including the Andaman Islands and Palawan (King et al. 1975). The grey phase has been reported from Silchar (North-east India) where both grey and normal yellow birds were observed in the same flock (Stuart Baker 1922); the Maratua Islands (East Kalimantan), where only grey birds were found (Chasen 1939); Bawean Island, where probably at least 50% of the population were in grey phase plumage (Hoogerwerf 1963); and in West Java (Bolang, Banten and Priangan region) and Central Java (Jepara), where grey birds are rare (Van Heurn 1927; Hoogerwerf 1963).

It has been suggested by Hoogerwerf (1963), after he had examined the skins of *Pycnonotus atriceps* in the Bogor Museum, that fauna on small islands inclines towards melanism. Present examination of the specimens in the Bogor Museum reveals no grey skins amongst 34 and 42 specimens respectively from mainland Sumatra and Kalimantan, and only two amongst 24 skins from mainland Java (West Java: one of 16; Central Java: one of 8). In comparison the grey skins from Bawean Islands outnumbered the normal specimens in a ratio of 2:1 (n = 24). However, no grey birds have been collected on the relatively small islands of Panaitan (10 skins), Belitung (6 skins), Mentawai (Pagai Utara and Sipora, one each), Sebuku and Sebesi in the Sunda Strait (two each).

Van Heurn (1927) supposed as a possible cause of the grey phase in *Pycnonotus atriceps* the lack of a carotenoid (yellow colouring), a colour variety which is called schizocriroism. It is interesting to note the presence of some specimens from Bawean with grey feathers that have a yellowish wash, varying in degree; a yellowgreen bird (probably from Java) with feathers having a slight greyish wash is also mentioned by Hoogerwerf (1946).

Melanism occurs in both sexes. Among the Bawean birds in the Bogor Museum, grey skins are found in the following ratios: females 1:6 (yellow : grey, n = 7), males 2:3 (yellow : grey, n 15); One grey and one yellow skin were unsexed.

In conclusion, it is still not determined what factors are responsible for the relatively high incidence of grey phase *Pycnonotus atriceps* on small islands. Additional comparative information is required on insular distribution and on the behavioral ecology of these two colour phases, in order to elucidate this question.

Acknowledgements

I wish to thank Johan Iskandar and other staff members of the Ecological Institute at Bandung, and both Randy Milton and Derek Holmes, for providing suggestions on the draft.

Kukila 1986 2(4).

References.

Bartels, M. & E. Stresemann. 1929. Systematische Uebersicht der bisher von Java nachgewiesenen Vogel. *Treubia* 11:89 146.

Chasen, F.N. 1939. *The birds of the Malay Peninsula. IV: Birds of the Low country jungle and scrub.* Witherby, London.

Heurn, F.C. van. 1927. Schizochroisme bij *Micro(arsus)*. *Jaarb. Club van Ned. Vogelk.* 17: 33 36.

Hoogerwerf, A. 1946. Zijn de op Bawean levende ondersoorten van *Brachypodius atriceps* en *Anthreptes malacensis* inderdaad verschillend van de o.a op Java voorkomende vormen? *Limosa* 18: 49 56.

Hoogerwerf, A. 1963. Notes on Indonesian birds with special reference to the avifauna of Java and the surrounding small islands (II). 8. Some further notes on *Pycnonotus atriceps* subspp. known from Java and surrounding islands. *Treubia* 26: 138 143.

King, B., E.C. Dickinson & M. Woodcock. 1975 *A fieldguide to the birds of South East Asia.* Collins, London.

Stuart Baker, E.C. 1922. *The fauna of British India, including Ceylon and Burma. Birds, Vol. 1.* Taylor & Francis, London: Thacker, Spink & Co, Calcutta and Bombay.

Temminck, C.J. 1838. *Nouveau Recueil des Planches coloriees d'Oiseaux, pour servir de suite a Buffon, plate 453)*

Vorderman, A. 1892. Bijdrage tot de kennis van de avifauna van het eiland Bawean. *Natuwk. Tijdschr. Ned. Ind.* 51: 417 - 422.

Address: c/o World Wildlife Fund, P.O. Box 133, Bogor, Indonesia.

