

- 31/10/1989: 1 bird (Paga-Sikka, hills covered in cultivation and scrub, ± 100 m).

**NOTE ON THE OCCURRENCE OF THE
WHITE-WINGED WOOD DUCK
Cairina scutulata ON THE WEST
COAST OF NORTH SUMATRA**

By

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Summary

Details are provided of records of *Cairina scutulata* from North-western Sumatra. These are the first reports of this endangered species from outside the South-eastern corner of Sumatra since 1909, and they greatly expand the range in which remnant populations may still occur.

Ringkasan

Secara rinci ditunjukkan catatan tentang *Cairina scutulata* dari barat laut Sumatera. Catatan tersebut merupakan yang pertama untuk daerah diluar Sumatera bagian tenggara sejak tahun 1909, dan daerah dimana kemungkinan ditemukannya populasi yang tersisa, lebih besar dari yang diperkirakan.

On 9 August 1990, a pair of White-winged Wood Duck *Cairina scutulata* was seen at 08.30 hours flying across the Rianiate Transmigration Settlement near Lumut, North Sumatra (98°55'E 01°25'N). Although I had been optimistic of finding the birds here, they were not calling, and were therefore found purely by chance. The site is propitious for the species, with very swampy, frequently flooded ricefields along either side of a former course of the Batang Toro river, adjacent to peat swamp forest.

Further north, north of Barus, I failed to encounter the species but circumstances were less opportune. The swamps here are very acid, consisting of an extensive, peat-filled coastal lagoon, drained by the S. Tapus. Swampy ricefield birds which had been common at Rianiate were either rather scarce here (Chestnut Bittern *Ixobrychus cinnamomeus*. Whistling Teal *Dendrocygna javanica* and White-breasted Waterhen *Amauromis phoenicurus*) or not encountered (Painted Snipe *Rostratula benghalensis*). Nevertheless I am sure that the Wood Duck occurs in the Tapus swamp forests, and this was confirmed by a very positive response to questions at a small, permanent timber camp on the Tapus

at 98°11'E 02°10'N on 11 August ("a large duck, white wings, generally solitary and not in groups", for which was volunteered, without my prompting, the name *Serati*, the name I had learnt previously in Lampung).

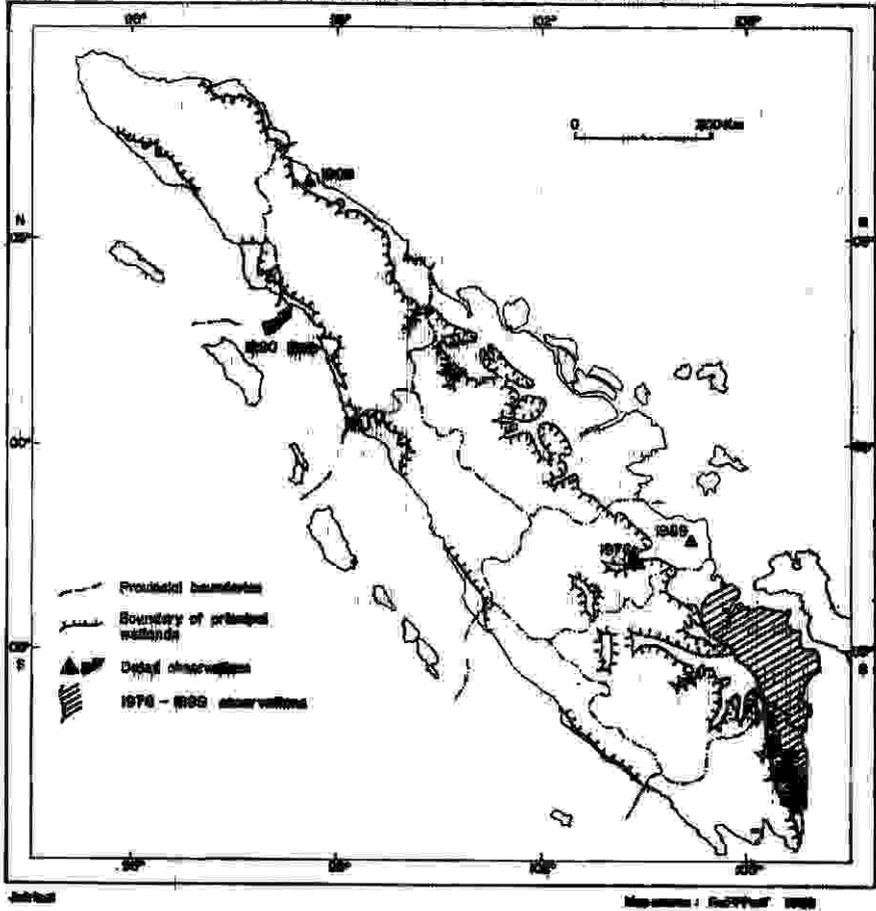
These records have considerable significance. All recent records since the Wood Duck's rediscovery in Jambi in 1976 (Holmes 1976) have, perhaps coincidentally, been from the eastern plains of Jambi, South Sumatra and Lampung (Holmes 1977, Nash & Nash 1985, Silvius 1986, Lambert 1988, Silvius & de longh 1989). Van Marle & Voous (1988) list only one other site, at Deli (the Medan region) in eastern North Sumatra in 1909 (see Fig. 1). I failed to encounter calling birds on the lower Rokan, Siak and Indrapura rivers in Riau in May and July 1978 and 1980, or from the Rantau Prapat region of North Sumatra in 1970, but experience from Rianiate, and from other observers, shows that the birds are encountered only by accident if not calling in flight (in contrast, in Jambi in January, and in Lampung in June and September-January, the birds seemed to have been invariably calling, readily establishing their presence from some distance).

These new records greatly expand the range in which the Wood Duck may be expected to still occur. Lambert (1988) considered that the permanently flooded, non-acid freshwater swamps of the Klaru land system (RePPProT 1988), when close to forest, form the ideal habitat. While this land system has its greatest extent in the south-east, riverine and coastal swamps are widespread on the east coast, with local swamps of the Klaru land system, and on the west coast, pockets of quite wide and often deep swamps occur from central Aceh south to Bengkulu (see Fig. 1). Few of these areas have been surveyed, and hopefully the Sumatran Wetland Project newly initiated by the D.G. Forest Protection and Nature Conservation with the Asian Wetland Bureau (Indonesia) will obtain further data on the Wood Duck's distribution.

It is possible that, in Sumatra, clearance of swamp forest for agriculture may be beneficial to the species initially, until such time as human population grows and the forests continue to be cleared. It is not known whether the bird is still extant in the open-country locations of my observations in Lampung in 1976-77, but probably the relict patches of forest in which the bird could survive have now been cleared, as South-east Sumatra lies on the forefront of population growth out of Java. I believe that forest type might not be critical provided that there are suitable roosting and breeding trees tolerably free from disturbance; I have records of birds flying into both mangrove forest and dryland secondary forest, even smallholder rubber, in Lampung and Jambi, and Nash & Nash (1985) reported it in peat swamp forest. Presumably the birds at Rianiate and the Tapus are using peat swamp forest for roosting and breeding.

Future observers should look for the Wood Duck anywhere in Sumatra, in the coastal and inland riverine swamps, by either listening for calling birds at dusk or dawn, or traversing open swampland preferably early in the day. The swamps favoured for feeding are often very difficult to drain, especially the deeper swamps of the west coast, and the protection of adequate areas of forest nearby is probably the key to the future conservation of the White-winged Wood Duck. Although these forests, and the land they cover, have limited value for development, they will become increasingly disturbed,

FIGURE 1. PRINCIPAL WETLANDS IN SUMATRA WITH LOCATIONS OF WHITE-WINGED WOOD DUCK OBSERVATIONS



and experience in Lampung shows that they are not safe from destruction when population pressure becomes intense. Additional data on distribution are therefore urgently required in order to design conservation programmes.

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