

OBSERVATIONS ON A WINTERING COMMON KINGFISHER IN JAVA

by

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The Common Kingfisher *Alcedo atthis* is a winter visitor to western and northern Indonesia from the northern hemisphere, from the Malay peninsula northwards. The migrant race is *bengalensis*, whereas breeding populations of *floresiana* and *hispidoides* occur in the Lesser Sundas, Sulawesi, Moluccas and Papuan region (Fry *et al.* 1992).

The Common Kingfisher is a rare visitor to Java (McKinnon 1988), and only thirteen specimens and sightings could be traced in the collections of the Zoological Museum at Bogor, the Leiden Museum and from the literature. These mainly derive from the northern coastal areas of the island. The species has not previously been reported from the interior of the island. However, recent observations have been made not only in coastal areas but also at a considerable distance inland. Table 1 lists both the old and recent records.

Table 1. Records of *Alcedo atthis* on Java.

Locality	Coordinates	Date	Source
Ciletuh	106°28'E, 7°07'S	21.10.02	Bartels/NHML45160
Kali Cilesung	107°19'E, 5°58'S	13.03.18	Bartels/NHML
Kali Cilesung	107°19'E, 5°58'S	13.03.18	Bartels/NHML
Kali Bungin	107°07'E, 5°57'S	13.10.22	Bartels/NHML
Cihonje	105°32'E, 6°42'S	15.10.32	Hoogerwerf/MZB
Jakarta	106°48'E, 6°05'S		MZB
Muara Angke	106°44'E, 6°07'S	Oct 1987	van Balen
Bogor gardens*	106°47'S, 6°36'E	Dec 1987	Hurrell (pers. comm. 1987); van Balen
Cengkareng	106°42'E, 6°05'S	Feh 1990	Van Balen
Bogor (Tajur)*	106°49'E, 6°37'S	1990-1991	This paper
Muara Angke	106°44'E, 6°07'S	Oct 1990	Indrawan (in litt. 1992)
Bandung*	107°35'E, 6°55'S	28.12.90	J. Seymour (in litt. 1992)
Bandung* (Buahbatu)	107°39'E, 6°57'S	31.01.92	Rudyanto & H. Kohayashi. (pers. comm. 1992)

Inland records are asterisked.

NHML: Nationaal Natuurhistorisch Museum Leiden;

MZB : Museum Zoologicum Bogoriense.

One of these records refers to a bird that visited the authors' garden in the village of B&ntarpeuteuy (or Bantarpete) in the SB of Bogor almost daily from September 1990 to February 1991. The site lies cu. 55 km from the North coast. The observations are of interest because of the relative continuity of sightings, of what was presumed to be a single individual, in rather aberrant winter quarters-In mid-September 1990, the call of a kingfisher was regularly heard near the neglected fish pond behind the authors' house. The bird was not seen until 6 January 1991. Its dull greenish-blue upperparts, white neck patch and rufous ear coverts, and intensity of the blue on the rump, identified it as the Common Kingfisher, rather than the resident Blue-eared Kingfisher *Alcedo meninting*, a much more common species in the region.

Although Fry *et al* (1992) describe the Blue-eared's call as similar to the Common's, the authors believe that, the two species can be safely distinguished by call. The somewhat shriller call of the Common always lacked the more trilling quality of the Blue-eared. This may prove to be a useful character in areas such as Sulawesi and Maluku, where both species are resident and where plumages are very similar (Long *et al*, 1992). On the Sula Islands about one year later, SvB saw and heard the resident Common Kingfisher *A. atthis hispidoides* calling exactly like the bird in Bogor.

Early during the bird's residence in Bogor, it was seen only early in the day. It perched on overhanging branches or on the concrete border of the pond, from where it preyed on the numerous "guppies" (billion fishes), and perhaps also tadpoles. After some hours, the water surface would be covered by an algal film that developed under the influence of sunshine, and which turned from green in the morning to red during the course of the day. Occasional late afternoon showers altered this situation by disturbing the film and permitting the bird to feed again. With the onset of wetter weather in February, the fish became available throughout the day, as wind and cloud prevented the forming of an algal cover. The bird was seen by both authors at any time of the day during this period.

The kingfisher was seen for me last time w 25 February. In the late afternoon, it took two series of splash baths, as if preparing for a night journey (Common Kingfishers are known to migrate at night, see Medway & Wells 1976). On this day, the sun had shone brightly after a long period of rainy weather, and the suggestion is made that the change in weather conditions triggered the bird's departure.

Within a week after the departure of the Common Kingfisher, the characteristic "trreee-tee" call of the Blue-eared Kingfisher was heard around the pond. On 10 March, the bird was seen, and its deep blue upperparts, white neck patch, blue ear coverts and smaller size made clear that the vacancy left by the migrant was now occupied by the resident. Apart from some minor differences in behaviour (the Blue-eared, for instance, never sat on the concrete border and was much shier and more difficult to see), the replacement was perfect. Until the authors moved from the house in

November 1992, the bird was a regular visitor to the garden. The Common Kingfisher never appeared during the two subsequent winters.

During 1986-1992, four more inland observations were made (see Table 1), e.g., by J. Seymour (*in litt.* 1992) and during bird banding activities by HIMBIO (Rudyanto & H. Kobayashi, pers. comm. 1992) in and around Bandung, which lies at an altitude of 700 m, at least 60 km from the coast. As mentioned previously, old records pertain only to the coastal areas. This apparent change may be a result of ornithologists being more active in the region than previously. Possibly, however, the clearance of most of the forest cover on Java, and the relatively recent, large-scale disturbance of mangroves and other coastal habitats along the North coast, especially the construction of shrimp ponds, has encouraged the migrant kingfishers to utilize inland wintering grounds.

References

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