

First Records of Five Shorebird Species for Flores, Indonesia: Asian Dowitcher *Limnodromus semipalmatus*, Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*, Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*, Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata* and Broad-billed Sandpiper *Limicola facinellus*

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Summary. This paper documents the first island records of five migrant waders on Flores, Nusa Tenggara, based on 21 brief surveys in east-central and south-central Flores. On 8 October 2004, four Asian Dowitchers *Limnodromus semipalmatus* and a Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus* were seen on Pangabatang Island, a small sand islet off Maumere. At Tambak Koliaduk aquaculture ponds (Maumere), two adult Ruff *Philomachus pugnax* were recorded on 5 December 2004, and a Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata* on 19 December 2005. Finally, two Broad-billed Sandpipers *Limicola falcinellus* were observed at Ende estuary in south-central Flores on 17 October 2006. Given the relatively low survey effort in the region, it is likely that most of these species are regular visitors in small numbers to Flores and Timor.

Ringkasan. Tulisan ini mendokumentasikan laporan pertama lima spesies wader (burung merandai) migran dari Flores, Nusa Tenggara. Laporan ini berdasarkan pada 21 survei singkat di pusat Flores bagian timur dan selatan. Pada tanggal 8 Oktober 2004, empat Trinitil-lumpur Asia *Limnodromus semipalmatus* dan seekor Cerek Tilil *Charadrius alexandrinus* terlihat di pulau Pangabatang, pulau pasir kecil tidak jauh dari Maumere. Di kolam-kolam tambak Koliaduk (Maumere), dua ekor Trinitil Rumbai *Philomachus pugnax* juga dilaporkan pada tanggal 5 Desember 2004, serta seekor Gajahan Erasia *Numenius arquata* pada tanggal 19 Desember 2005. Pada tanggal 17 Oktober 2006 akhirnya dua ekor Kedidi Paruh-lebar *Limicola falcinellus* dilaporkan terlihat di muara sungai Ende, Flores. Mempertimbangkan rendahnya kegiatan survei di kawasan ini, kemungkinan besar spesies-spesies tersebut merupakan pengunjung teratur ke Flores dan Timor dalam jumlah kecil.

Introduction

About five million migrant shorebirds (or waders) travel along the East Asian Australasian Flyway from their Palearctic breeding grounds to Australia and New Zealand each year (Bamford & Watkins 2005). The islands of Wallacea are their final landfall before reaching Australia, and an important stop-over for several species (Trainor 2005), yet the status of waders in the region is still poorly known. A review of 794 specimens of 31 Palearctic waders, led to the conclusion that Wallacea was 'not a major wintering ground for waders of the eastern Palearctic' (White 1975). The lack of large significant wetlands in Wallacea has

also probably reduced the interest of visiting ornithologists. There are no Ramsar sites of international importance, but Kupang Bay (West Timor) and the Gulf of Bone (Sulawesi) are significant sites (Coates & Bishop 1997) that might meet Ramsar criteria. In addition, Ashmore Reef National Nature Reserve is a Ramsar site and lies less than 200 km south of Timor.

In his review of the birds of Flores, Mees (2006) concluded that migrants from the north have been under-recorded. This review was based almost entirely on the important specimen collections of Fathers Erwin Schmutz and Jilis Verheijen during the 1950s to the early 1980s. However, during the past two decades field observations have intensified on Flores because of visiting birdwatchers, university expeditions and conservationists (e.g. Butchart *et al.* 1996; Pilgrim *et al.* 2000; Trainor & Lesmana 2000). Although these workers focused on tropical forest habitats, they also recorded small numbers of shorebirds and waterbirds.

In a previous report (Schellekens 2006), I described the first record of Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes* for Flores. In the present report, I document the first records of five additional migratory wader species on Flores. The records were obtained between October 2004 and October 2006 during (1) four visits to Pangabatang Island (8°29'S, 122°28'E), a small island off the coast of East-Central Flores; (2) 15 visits to Tambak Koliaduk (8°37'S – 122°13'E), 2 km east of the city of Maumere in Sikka Regency, also in East-Central Flores; and (3) two opportunistic visits to Ende River estuary (8°50'S – 121°40'E) in Ende regency, Central-South Flores.

Results and Discussion

ASIAN DOWITCHER *Limnodromus semipalmatus*

On 8 October 2004, I visited Pangabatang Island, with the goal of observing the hundreds of seabirds that were noted on previous days in the Maumere Straits, as well as the wading birds on the island. Landfall was made at low tide and the sandy beaches, as well as the rocky reefs, were teeming with wading birds. Amongst a group of waders I noticed four unusual medium-sized birds feeding in the mud. The following notes were made:

Birds roughly the same size as Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*, larger than Common Redshank *T. totanus* and considerably smaller than the Bar-tailed Godwit *Limosa lapponica*, all of which were present for direct comparison. Long, straight black bill, lighter (greyish) at the base; relatively short, black or dark grey legs; dark grey upperparts, heavily mottled with white or light grey; white underparts, mottled grey; grey crown with a pale eye-stripe beginning at the base of the bill and extending to well behind the eye; black iris, surrounded by a thin white eye-ring. During flight, the dark grey upperparts contrasted sharply with the white underparts; light grey secondaries showed clearly against the remainder of the darker mottled wings; rump light grey; and tail barred grey and white; legs protruded well behind the tail-feathers.

The birds were readily identified as Asian Dowitchers, a species with which I am familiar from East Java, where I observed over 100 over-wintering birds at the Brantas Delta, north of Surabaya, during December 2003. The possibility of the birds being Long-billed Dowitchers *L. scolopaceus* can be excluded as that species possesses yellowish legs and bill, and a white rump, and is generally smaller than the Asian Dowitcher (Hayman *et al.* 1986). The combination of long, straight, black bill, dark legs and large size exclude other larger waders. On a subsequent visit to Pangabatang Island on 7 December 2004, two Asian Dowitchers were observed again, indicating that some individuals may 'over-winter' (during the breeding season) in the area.

The vast majority of the world's Asian Dowitchers spend their non-breeding season in eastern Sumatra and Java, and records from Wallacea and further east are few (Beehler *et al.* 1986; Coates & Bishop 1997; Geering *et al.* 2007). From west to east, records include: one in South Sulawesi on 27 November 1989 (Baltzer 1990); one at Waingapu, Sumba, on 18 and 19 September 2001 (Benstead in Trainor *et al.* 2006); four birds near Kupang, West Timor, during September 1985 (Andrew 1986); up to five birds at Hera, East Timor, during October 2003 (J. Keast in Trainor 2005); and two on Seram on 8 September 2006 (Rheindt & Hutchinson 2007). Combined with my records for Flores, these records indicate that the species regularly visits Nusa Tenggara in small numbers during its southward migration, but it is probably often overlooked due to lack of observers.

KENTISH PLOVER *Charadrius alexandrinus*

On 8 October 2004 a small plover was observed sitting alone on a sandy beach on the south coast of Pangabatang Island. The following notes were made:

Tiny plover (same size as a nearby pair of Malaysian Plovers *C. peronii*), very dark (blackish) legs, black breast-patches on each side of the neck and breast, and a complete white hind collar; short black bill; white forehead; black fore-crown and mask; rufous on crown, extending to the nape; light brown upperparts with bright white underparts. Upon my approach, it flew off showing black primaries and secondaries, contrasting with the light brown of the wing coverts. A faded white stripe was seen on the upper wings, and the sides of the tail feathers were also white.

After comparing illustrations of small plovers in several field guides, I concluded that the bird was a male Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus* in fading breeding plumage. The dark legs and black breast patches of this bird rule out the possibility that it was either a Ringed Plover *C. hiaticula* or Little Ringed Plover *C. dubius*, both of which have yellowish legs and a complete black breast-band. Direct comparison ruled out Malaysian Plover, which has black around the base of the hindneck, continuous with black breast patches, and light colored legs. The Red-capped Plover *C. ruficapillus* has a bright rufous crown and hind-neck, which is absent from the Kentish Plover and the bird I observed. The Javan Plover *C. javanicus* has been recorded breeding in Sumbawa (Coates & Bishop

1997) and has been recorded from Labuhan Bajo (Tim Allwood, pers. comm.). This species has light coloured legs (pers. obs.; photographed on Java), and generally more rufous upperparts compared to the light brown upperparts of the Kentish Plover. The Long-billed Plover *C. placidus*, a vagrant to North Borneo and Bali (MacKinnon & Phillipps 1993), is much larger than either Kentish or Malaysian Plovers, lacks any rufous in the crown, and has a complete dark breast-band.

The Kentish Plover is a rare visitor to Wallacea (Coates & Bishop 1997), but has been recorded by N McCrie in northern Australia and West Timor (McCrie 1995 and pers. comm.).

RUFF *Philomachus pugnax*

On 5 December 2004 I observed two adult Ruff amidst a spread-out flock of waders at the Tambak Koliaduk fish and shrimp ponds. The following notes were made:

Large wader, fractionally smaller than Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* and appearing slightly taller than Common Redshank *T. totanus*, both species nearby for direct comparison. Long neck; short, straight, thick black bill, lighter at the base; orange-red legs (less bright than in Common Redshanks); buff-brown, scaled upperparts; greyish mottled breast, neck and crown; white belly and underwings with dark wing-tips. In flight, a thin white wing-bar was observed. The tail showed white on each side of the tail, separated by a buff-brown stripe. No calls were heard.

Apart from the Common Greenshank and Common Redshank that were present for direct comparison, the only species with which the Ruff might be confused is the Spotted Redshank *T. erythropus*. The latter species has been recorded in Timor-Leste (C. Trainor, pers. comm.), and occasionally reaches Australia (Geering *et al.* 2007). This species is similar in size and has reddish legs, but has a long, thin bill; white rump, and white tail barred with black.

The Ruff is a rarely recorded bird in Wallacea, with just one record from Sulawesi mentioned in Coates & Bishop (1997). Recent records are from Komodo (Mauro 1999), West Timor (Verbelen 1996), and Timor-Leste (C. Trainor, pers. comm.).

EURASIAN CURLEW *Numenius arquata*

On the small beach on the north side of the Tambak Koliaduk fish and shrimp ponds, a single Eurasian Curlew was observed on 19 December 2005. The following notes were made:

Large wader, towering over the seven Whimbrels *Numenius phaeopus* beside it; with a long, down-curved brown bill. Brown upperparts scaled with black; dark (blue-grey) legs; dark iris with faint white eye-ring. In flight the white wedge-shaped rump and white barred tail showed clearly, and the predominantly white underside of the wings was also well observed. Voice was a loud "Coorlee" uttered upon take-off.

The only other big curlew occurring in Indonesia is the Eastern Curlew *Numenius madagascariensis*, which is a regular but uncommon visitor to Flores (pers. obs.). However, Eastern Curlews lack the white rump and tail, and the white under wing. They also have a longer bill, although this is hard to compare when only one of the species is present. Voices of both species are similar and of no use for identification. Confusion with the Whimbrel and Little Curlew *N. minutus* can be disregarded on the basis of size. Whimbrels were present for direct comparison, and this species also has a distinctive voice, as well as a white eyebrow and crown stripes. The Little Curlew is even smaller than the Whimbrel, and can therefore be excluded.

The Eurasian Curlew appears to be a rare visitor to Wallacea with three records from Sumba (two in Coates & Bishop 1997; one personal unpublished record from December 2000), two from Timor and single records from Halmahera, Lombok and Komodo (Coates & Bishop 1997). A single bird was also observed near Dili, Timor-Leste, on 4 April 2008 (C. Trainor pers. comm). The species is a regular and common migrant to the Greater Sundas (MacKinnon & Phillipps 1993), but there are no confirmed records from Australia (Geering *et al.* 2007).

BROAD-BILLED SANDPIPER *Limicola falcinellus*

On 17 October 2006, I observed two unusual small waders feeding in shallow water in the Ende estuary. The following notes were made:

Small wader with grey upperparts, dark shoulders with pale scales and strongly contrasting white underparts; thick black bill (longer than head), stout at the base and curving down near the tip; grey head from crown to just below the black eye; thick white eyebrow with a second, thinner white stripe above the eyebrow on the side of the crown extending almost to the nape; legs light grey/green; breast white with faint grey/brown streaking. In flight the birds showed white wing-bars; dark grey tip of the tail; grey rump with white edges on both sides.

Checking several reference books, the birds were readily identified as Broad-billed Sandpipers in non-breeding plumage, a bird hitherto unrecorded for Flores. The Curlew Sandpiper *Calidris ferruginea*, which is a regular visitor to Wallacea (Coates & Bishop 1997), is similar to the Broad-billed Sandpiper, but is larger, and has a more evenly down-curved bill; a white rump; black instead of light-colored legs; and a single white eyebrow. Another species with which the Broad-billed Sandpiper might be confused is the Dunlin *C. alpina*, which has been reported, albeit unconfirmed, in Wallacea, on Timor and Sulawesi (Coates & Bishop, 1997). This species lacks the two white stripes on the head featured in the Broad-billed Sandpiper, and has a heavier bill, as well as black legs, a black rump with white edges, and a brownish neck and breast.

The Broad-billed Sandpiper has been recorded in Wallacea on Sulawesi, Kai, Sumba and Timor (Coates & Bishop 1997), so this record for Flores is not surprising. Thirty-six individuals were recorded at Panite-Kuka, West Timor, on 5 January 2005, and it is a regular visitor to Timor-Leste (C. Trainor pers. comm.). Up to 40% of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway population migrate to Australia (Geering *et al.* 2007), so the occurrence of the species in Wallacea might be more regular than the few records suggest.

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