

Further Records of Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus (h.) himantopus* in North Sumatra

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Ringkasan: Kami melaporkan tiga catatan baru Gagang-bayam barat dari Provinsi Sumatera Utara. Ini termasuk 11 ekor di Padang Durian pada tanggal 13 Oktober 2010, 19 ekor di Pantai Datuk Alam pada tanggal 11 September 2012, dan 17 ekor di Pantai Jono / Perjuangan pada tanggal 29 November 2012. Observasi ini telah menambah bukti lebih lanjut adanya kemungkinan bahwa jenis tersebut mulai menjajah Sumatera Utara (di Aceh). Kami menganjurkan para pemerhati burung untuk memeriksa setiap gagang-bayam yang mereka lihat di Sumatera utara untuk bukti perkembangbiakan mereka.

Introduction

Two species of stilts occur in Indonesia: White-headed Stilt *Himantopus leucocephalus* and Black-winged Stilt *H. himantopus*, formerly treated as a race of the former species (Sukmantoro et al. 2007; Iqbal et al. 2010). The Black-winged Stilt is found through much of Europe, Africa and Asia (Pierce 1996). In South-East Asia it is largely a migrant, although small breeding populations exist in Thailand, Myanmar, Cambodia and Laos (Robson 2000). It also breeds in Peninsular Malaysia, where it was first recorded breeding in Perak in 1998 (Jeyarajasingam & Pearson 1998) and subsequently on Pulau Pinang (D. Bakewell pers. com.).

The first validated Indonesian record of this species was in Kalimantan in 2004, with subsequent first sightings in Sumatra and Java in 2007 and 2010, respectively (Iqbal et al. 2010; Jamaksari & Iqbal 2011). There have been a small number of subsequent records from Sumatra, and breeding was confirmed in May-June 2010 at Sei Tuan, Deli-Serdang District, North Sumatra Province (Iqbal et al. 2010; Iqbal & Giyanto 2011; Abdillah et al. 2012). Here we report on three further sightings of Black-winged Stilts at new locations in North Sumatra during 2010 and 2012, and provide circumstantial evidence that further breeding may have taken place.

Methods and observations

During September to October 2010 and August to December 2012 we surveyed waders along the east coast of North Sumatra, concentrating on the central coastline between Bagan Serdang (3°42'N, 98°50'E) in the north and the mouth of the Asahan River (3°01'N, 99°52'E) in the south (Crossland & Sitorus in prep.), see Fig. 1. All sites were surveyed on foot and birds were counted with 10x42 or 10x50 binoculars and with a 25x60 spotting scope.

At Padang Durian (3°36'N, 99°03'E) we observed a mixed assemblage of c. 400 waders and terns, comprising mainly Common Redshank *Tringa totanus*, Wood Sandpiper *Tringa glareola* and Marsh Sandpiper *Tringa stagnatillis* in rice fields on 13 October 2010. Also present was a flock of eleven stilts, identified as *H. himantopus*

and distinguished from *H. leucocephalus* primarily on the basis of head and neck markings as described by Robson (2000) and Message & Taylor (2005). The party comprised 4 adult males in breeding plumage, 2 adult females in breeding plumage, 4 adults in non-breeding plumage and 1 juvenile (Plate 1). These stilts were observed for 60 minutes foraging in shallow water and wet mud within uncultivated rice fields. Several spent time roosting on a low bund separating two rice fields. They stayed together as a loose group but mixed freely with other waders, particularly Common Redshank and Marsh Sandpiper. When disturbed, all 11 birds took flight together, circled as a flock, then landed on another rice field, 150 m distant.

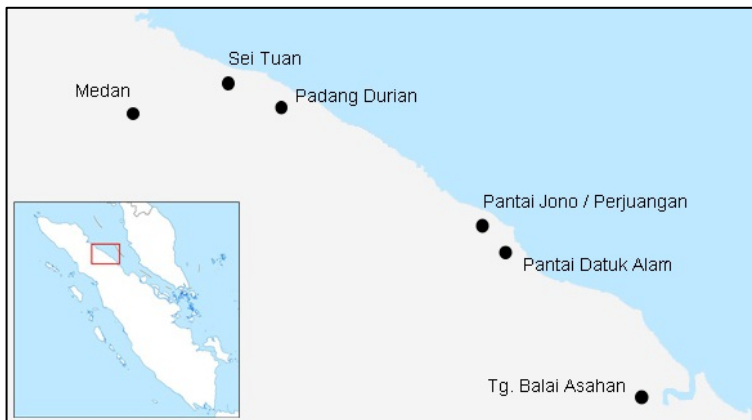


Fig 1. Locations where Black-winged Stilts were observed 2010 and 2012.

On 11 September 2012, we saw 19 Black-winged Stilts at Pantai Datuk Alam ($3^{\circ}20'N$, $99^{\circ}28'E$), as they arrived from the direction of brackish wetlands less than 1 km inland. They immediately commenced feeding among other waders but as these birds were wary and did not allow close approach, we were unable to accurately identify plumage stages. Finally, on 29 November 2012 we observed a flock of 17 Black-winged Stilts at Pantai Jono/Perjuangan ($3^{\circ}22'N$, $99^{\circ}24'E$), 8 km from Pantai Datuk Alam. The birds flew in to feed on inter-tidal mudflats at low tide, arriving from the direction of inland aquaculture ponds and a large area of shallow ponding amongst partially cleared nipah swampland (Plate 2). This flock comprised eight males in breeding plumage, two females in breeding plumage, four adults in non-breeding plumage and three juveniles.

Having had 30 years of experience with White-headed Stilts in New Zealand and Australia, ACC noted two other subtle but consistent differences between that species and the birds seen in North Sumatra. The first was that the legs of the Sumatran birds appeared slightly orangey, rather than bright pink as in the White-headed Stilt. This feature is not commonly mentioned (perhaps due to the lumping by many authors of both forms into one species), but the legs of the Black-winged Stilt are described as carmine pink by Rosair & Cottridge (1995) and are shown as slightly orangey on illustrations in a number of recent field guides including Robson (2000), Myers (2009) and Phillipps & Phillipps (2014). The species also differ in their calls. The Sumatran birds sounded slightly higher pitched and less nasal than White-headed Stilt. These differences in call have been noted by Hayman *et al.* (1986) and Sonobe & Usui (1993).



A. C. CROSSLAND

Plate 1. Part of a flock of 17 Black-winged Stilts observed at Pantai Jono/Perjuangan on 29 November 2012.



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Plate 2. Black-winged Stilts at Padang Durian, North Sumatra, 13 October 2010.

Discussion

Our sighting of Black-winged Stilts at Padang Durian, North Sumatra Province, in October 2010, represents the eighth record for Indonesia, all but one emanating from Sumatra. The stilts we observed were apparently not new arrivals because local people adamantly stated that the birds had been present since at least June or July and probably earlier. This would place them in residence during much of the reported breeding season as observed in southern Thailand (Wells 1999, 2007) and over

approximately the same months that Abdillah *et al.* (2012) monitored active nests at Sei Tuan in North Sumatra. Local people also reported that the Stilts engaged in dive-bombing and broken-wing displays, behaviours typical of nesting and chick-rearing stilts - and not typical of non-breeding stilts. This information and the confirmed presence of at least one juvenile suggest that breeding may have occurred at Padang Durian prior to our visit, *i.e.* between June and October 2010.

Our observations of Black-winged Stilts at Pantai Jono/Perjuangan and Pantai Datuk Alam involved mixed flocks of adults and juveniles feeding on open inter-tidal mudflats, but we found no evidence of any breeding behaviour. Both sightings involved birds consolidated into flocks and no breaking up into obvious family groups was noted. Given the relative close proximity of the two sites (8 km apart) and the similar number of individuals (17 and 19), there is a possibility that the two observations involved the same group of birds, and that the flock was locally mobile. Whether the origin of these birds was the breeding population at Songkla Lake in Southern Thailand (470 km away) (Pierce *et al.* 1993), or the Sei Tuan and Padang Durian areas (60-80 km away), or hitherto undiscovered breeding grounds remains unknown.

The possible breeding at Bagan Serdang in 2009 (Iqbal *et al.* 2010), breeding at Sei Tuan (Abdillah *et al.* 2012) and possibly Padang Durian (our observations) in 2010, and our observations at other sites in 2012, suggest that the species has established colonies in northern Sumatra. We agree with Iqbal & Giyanto (2011) that more work is needed to confirm the true status of stilts in Sumatra and to monitor the convergence in range between Black-winged Stilt and White-headed Stilt in western Indonesia. Thus we encourage Indonesian and visiting ornithologists to be alert to any stilts (whether Black-winged or White-headed) they might encounter in northern Sumatra. Observations of aerial “dive-bombing” or ground-based distraction behaviours should be followed up with a careful search for nests or chicks. With extensive areas of rice-field, many natural marshes and temporary open wetland caused by conversion of mangrove or nipah swamp to agricultural land, northern Sumatra has an abundance of apparently ideal nesting habitat for stilts.

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