

First Record of Lesser Shortwing *Brachypteryx leucophrys* on Sumba Island, Lesser Sundas

PHILIPPE VERBELEN AND VEERLE DOSSCHE

Krijgsgasthuisstraat 89, 9000 Ghent. Belgium, Email: Filip_Verbelen@yahoo.fr

Ringkasan. Pada 31 Juli 2014, satu individu Cingcoang Coklat *Brachypteryx leucophrys* terdengar bernyanyi di hutan primer montana pada puncak Gunung Wanggameti (1.225 m), titik tertinggi di Sumba. Burung ini teridentifikasi dari suara nyanyian khas-nya, juga didapatkan rekaman-rekaman suaranya. Spesies ini ditemukan agak umum diatas 1.000 m dpl, namun demikian hanya 37,5 km² (0,33%) dari pulau Sumba berada pada ketinggian diatas 1.000 m. Cingcoang Coklat nampaknya satu-satunya spesies burung di Sumba yang keberadaanya terbatas di hutan montana. Keberadaanya di pulau itu memberikan informasi baru biogeografi burung pulau Sumba.

Introduction

The Lesser Shortwing *Brachypteryx leucophrys* is widely distributed from the Himalayas to South China and throughout Southeast Asia, and five subspecies are currently recognised (Collar 2005). In Indonesia the species is known from Sumatra, Java, Bali, Lombok, Sumbawa, Alor, Wetar and Timor (Coates & Bishop 1997; Trainor *et al.* 2007, 2009, 2012). All of the Indonesian island populations are currently considered as one single subspecies *leucophrys* but further study of the taxonomic relationships of these populations is recommended (Trainor 2005). The presence of Lesser Shortwings on Alor and Wetar was confirmed relatively recently (Trainor 2005; Trainor *et al.* 2009, 2012). Some distribution maps in the literature are erroneous: those in both the *Handbook of the Birds of the World* (Collar 2005) and Birdlife International (2014) imply that the species occurs on Flores and Sumba, yet there are no confirmed records from these islands (Collar 2005; Birdlife International 2014).

On Flores the Lesser Shortwing appears to be replaced by an isolated subspecies of the White-browed Shortwing *Brachypteryx montana floris*, which like the former species, occurs in montane forest, at altitudes of 610-1900 m, but mainly above 1,200 m (Collar 2005). The Floresian White-browed Shortwing is highly distinctive in both plumage and vocalisations and is a good candidate to be formally recognised as distinct (Collar 2005).

Observations

On 31 July 2014 the authors were birding along a trail through primary forest that leads to the summit of Mount Wanggameti (1,225 m asl) inside Laiwangi Wanggameti National Park, Sumba (Fig. 1; Plate 1). Around 09:00 hrs, PV heard a loud and rather high pitched warbling song that he immediately recognised as the song of the Lesser Shortwing because of the typical short but loud whistles at the start of the song, followed by jumbled rising and falling notes. The song came from the dense undergrowth of a gully in an area of primary montane forest at approximately 1,038 m asl (10°05'59.1" S, 120°14'57.5" E). Singing activity was initially low. In order to provoke more song activity, PV used playback of a Lesser Shortwing recording from Bali which provoked instant reaction. The bird came closer and frequently sang less than 10 m from us. Once good sound recordings of its song were obtained, we switched to playback of its own song to lure the bird into view.

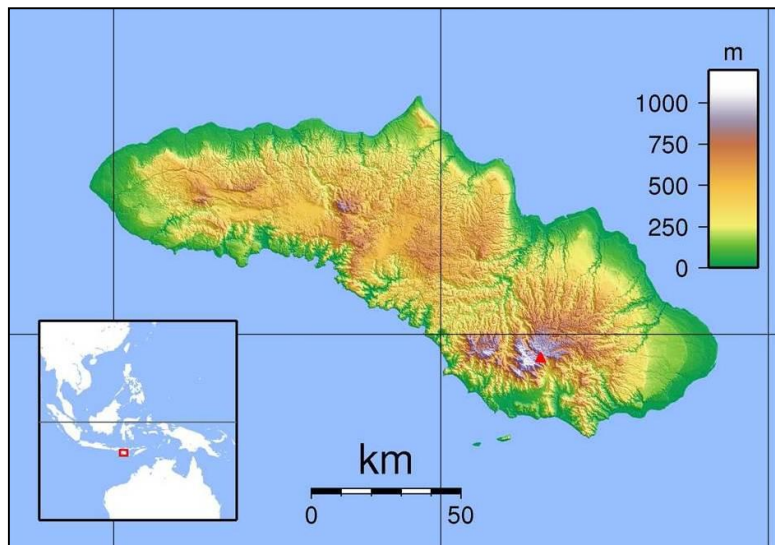


Figure 1. Map of Sumba showing elevation classes and the location of Mount Wanggameti (indicated by triangle).

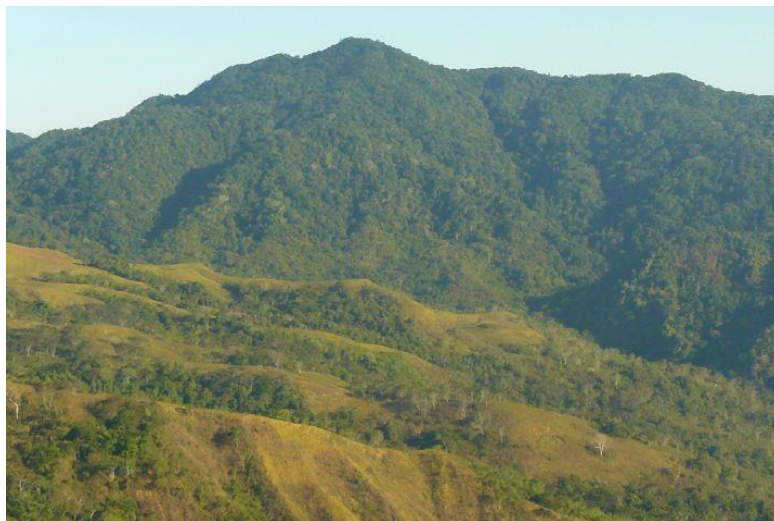


Plate 1. The summit of Mount Wanggameti, Sumba.

On a few occasions, the Lesser Shortwing approached us to within less than 5 m in response to playback of its own song. The bird stopped singing and made two types of distinct alarm calls instead: a series of harsh notes sounding like “tuck”, interspersed with a rather monotonal high-pitched whistle (“psee”). PV was already familiar with these two call-types from observations of Lesser Shortwings on Sumatra, Java, Bali, Lombok and Alor. These two call types are also described in the literature (Robson 2000; Rasmussen & Anderton 2012). While the bird circled around us, it stayed in dense cover and remained largely hidden. It was briefly observed a few times, albeit without binoculars, as it hopped on the forest floor and over fallen logs. Its size, erect posture and skulking behaviour in the dense forest undergrowth corroborated our identification of the species based on its diagnostic song.

On the next day, up to three Lesser Shortwings could be heard singing simultaneously from different gullies beside the trail. On 2 August 2014 additional sound recordings were obtained along the trail as far as the summit of the mountain (Fig. 2 and 3). Our recordings of the vocalisations have been uploaded on the Xeno-Canto website (Verbelen 2015a,b,c,d). That day, at least 10 birds were heard singing at regular intervals along this trail, indicating that the species is common in the area. However, considering the small extent (37.5 km²) of montane forest above 1,000 m on the island, the population of Lesser Shortwings must be very small.

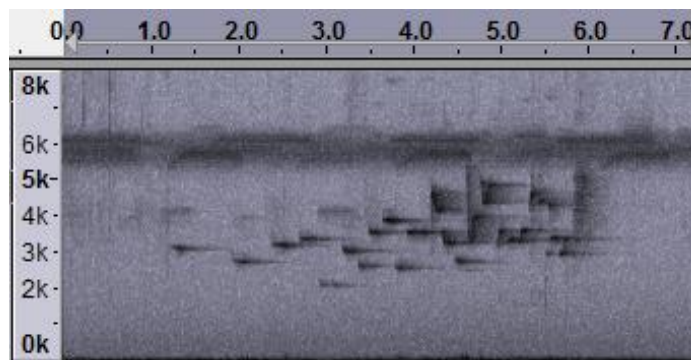


Figure 2. Typical song strophe of Lesser Shortwing on Mt Wanggameti – Sumba, 2 August 2014 (XC 278707 by Philippe Verbelen)

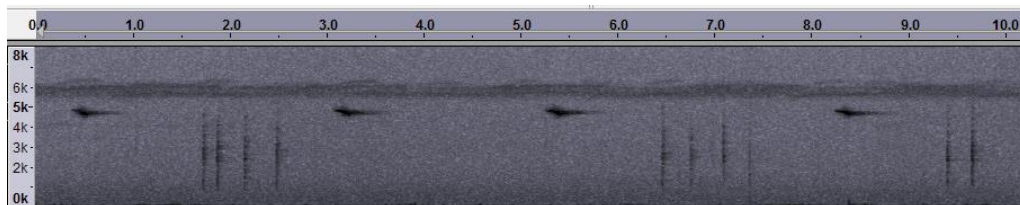


Figure 3. Alarm calls of the Lesser Shortwing on Mt Wanggameti, Sumba: a rather monotone, whistled “psee” is visible as the horizontal lines on the sonogram and the “tak”, “tak” notes are visible as the vertical lines on the sonogram – (XC 278708 by Philippe Verbelen on 2 August 2014)

The presence of the Lesser Shortwing on Sumba has previously gone unnoticed probably due to the combination of a low number of birdwatchers that has so far visited Mount Wanggameti and the skulking behaviour of the species. It was not recorded during six days of exploration of Mount Wanggameti from 18 to 23 September 1992 (Jones *et al.* 1995; Linsley *et al.* 1998). To our knowledge, it has not been observed by other birdwatchers that have visited Sumba since our visit. We believe that detection of the species requires familiarity with its song.

Acknowledgements

We thank Simon Ongo for providing information about Laiwangi Wanggameti National Park, Colin Trainor for comments on the draft manuscript, an anonymous reviewer for useful feedback, Soerya Purnoma for providing a map, and Rohan Fisher (Charles Darwin University, Australia) for providing data on the extent of land above 1,000 m on Sumba. Adam Supriatna kindly translated the summary into Indonesian language.

References

- Birdlife International. 2014. Species factsheet - Lesser Shortwing *Brachypteryx leucophrys*. (accessed on 28 October 2014 from <http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/speciesfactsheet.php?id=6450>)
- Coates, B.J. & K.D. Bishop. 1997. *A Field Guide to the Birds of Wallacea*. Dove Publications, Alderley, Queensland.
- Collar, N.J. 2005. Family Turdidae (Thrushes). Pp 514-807 in J. del Hoyo, A. Elliot & D.A. Christie (eds.). *Handbook of the Birds of the World. Vol. 10: Cuckoo-shrikes to Thrushes*. Lynx editions, Barcelona.
- Jones, M.J., M.D. Linsley & S.J. Marsden. 1995. Population sizes, status and habitat associations of the restricted-range bird species of Sumba, Indonesia. *Bird Conservation International* 5: 21-52.
- Linsley, M.D., M.J. Jones & S.J. Marsden. 1998. A review of the Sumba avifauna. *Kukila* 10: 60-90.
- Rasmussen, P.C. & J.C. Anderton. 2012. *Birds of South Asia. The Ripley Guide*. Vols.1 and 2. Second edition. National Museum of Natural History – Smithsonian Institution, Michigan State University and Lynx Edicions, Washington, D.C., Michigan and Barcelona.
- Robson, C. 2000. *A Field Guide to the Birds of South-east Asia*. New Holland Publishers, U.K.
- Trainor, C.R. 2005. Species richness, habitat use and conservation of birds of Alor island, Lesser Sundas, Indonesia. *Emu* 105: 127-135.
- Trainor, C.R., B.J. Coates & K.D. Bishop. 2007. *The Birds of Timor-Leste*. Birdlife International Publication No. 53. Birdlife International and Dove Publications.
- Trainor, C.R., Imanuddin, F. Aldy, P. Verbelen & J.S. Walker. 2009. The birds of Wetar, Banda Sea: one of Indonesia's forgotten islands. *BirdingASIA* 10: 78-93.
- Trainor, C.R., P. Verbelen & R.E. Johnstone. 2012. The avifauna of Alor and Pantar, Lesser Sundas, Indonesia. *Forktail* 28: 77-92.
- Verbelen, P. 2015a. Song of Lesser Shortwing on Sumba. <http://www.xeno-canto.org/278706>
- Verbelen, P. 2015b. Call of Lesser Shortwing on Sumba. <http://www.xeno-canto.org/278707>
- Verbelen, P. 2015c. Song of Lesser Shortwing on Sumba. <http://www.xeno-canto.org/278708>
- Verbelen, P. 2015d. Call of Lesser Shortwing on Sumba. <http://www.xeno-canto.org/278709>