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## **LESSER YELLOWLEGS *Tringa flavipes* IN SUMATRA - NEW TO S.E. ASIA**

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Early in the afternoon of Wednesday 27 September 1983, the authors were watching waders on the shallow pools adjacent to the west boundary fence of the P.T. Arun Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) plant near Lhokseumawe on the east coast of Aceh province, northern Sumatra (5°14' N, 97°04' E).

Waders present on the pool were Marsh *Tringa stagnatilis*, Wood *T. glareola* and Common *Actitis hypoleucos* Sandpipers and another medium-sized *Tringa* species. The unidentified *Tringa* was initially seen with three Wood Sandpipers. When approached, the bird was flushed and flew inside the gas plant, out of sight. It had long, trailing, orange legs and a square, white rump and was obviously not one of the common Asian wader species.

With the cooperation of the gas plant operators, we gained access and approached the area containing the *Tringa* sp., only to see all the birds fly back to the other side of the fence. We walked over and looked through the fence at the original pools and noticed a single "shank" by itself in the corner of a pool. Through the Questar telescope, it appeared rather like a Marsh Sandpiper with a fairly straight bill, greyish upperparts with white-bordered feathers, whitish underparts and a prominent white eyering. It was flushed and again showed bright orange legs and a square white rump. It dropped back inside the fence of the gas plant, but this time it was alone. We again stalked it with the Questar, and took some rather distant photographs before recording the following notes :

The bird was taller than a Wood Sandpiper but similar in colour except for a paler head. At rest, the wings were longer than the tail. The bill

was slightly shorter and stouter than that of a Marsh Sandpiper and was estimated to be perhaps 1.2 times the head length. The dark bill had an orange/red base to the lower mandible-. The upperparts were similar in colour to those of the Marsh Sandpiper. The crown was grey-brown, streaked darker. It had a white supercilium stretching from the forehead to the eyes. The lores were dark (darkest at the bill base). It had a white eyering. The lesser and median coverts seemed to be largely brown, tipped buffy and the greater coverts a median grey, margined white and notched with black. Tertials were seen to be blackish notched with whitish. The tail was a similar colour to the upperparts but with thin black bars. The flanks and undertail were white. The breast was weakly streaked and mottled with greyish brown, with stronger markings at the sides of the breast. The throat was whitish. The underwing was not well seen, but the underwing coverts seemed to be white, barred with brown.

The bird was seen in direct company with a Wood Sandpiper and seemed noticeably larger but not noticeably paler from the side, although it seemed very pale when alone and with its back to us.

The bird was not definitely heard to call. A call of "tew" was noted on one occasion, but could have come from another bird. The bird seemed nervous but not flighty. It bobbed its tail when we were very distant from it, rather like a Common Sandpiper. At closer range, it made some exaggerated head/neck thrusts and so looked rather long in the neck like a Ruff *Philomachus pugnax*. It fed by a vigorous pecking.

The bird was seen in conjunction with Common, Marsh and Wood Sandpipers and was clearly different from any of these. Other large sandpiper species to be expected in the region are Common *Tringa totanus* and Spotted *T. erythropus* Redshanks, Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia* and Nordmann's Greenshank *Tringa guttifer*, in all of which the white patch on the rump extends well up the back. The only other sandpipers reported from the region with square, white rump patches are Green Sandpiper *T. ochropus* which is the same size as Wood Sandpiper and has dark underwings, different tail pattern, and darker upperparts, and Great Knot *Calidris tenuirostris* which has shorter, black legs. It was therefore decided that the species 'was one of the North American breeding wader species. There are three possible species. The Lesser Yellowlegs *Tringa flavipes*, Greater Yellowlegs *Tringa melanoleuca* and the Stilt Sandpiper *Micropalama himantopus*. The Stilt Sandpiper is a similar size to the Wood Sandpiper with a slightly decurved, all black bill and a long white supercilium extending well behind the eye and an unbarred tail. Thus the species observed was either a Lesser or Greater Yellow legs.

The principal difference between the two yellow legs are size and bill shape. The Lesser is 230-250 mm in length (20% larger than Wood Sandpiper) and the Greater is 290-330 mm (60% larger than Wood Sandpiper). On the basis of photographs obtained of the bird with the

Wood Sandpiper, it appeared to be similar in size to the Lesser Yellowlegs. The bill of the Greater Yellowlegs is roughly 1.5 times the distance from bill-base to nape, usually fairly uptilted, often with a greenish, greyish or yellowish basal third; on the Lesser, the bill is shorter, just longer than the head length, thinner and straighter, all-dark or with some brownish or yellowish at the extreme base (Hayman *et al* 1986). It was noted in the description that the bill was shorter than that of the Marsh Sandpiper (36-45mm). That of the Lesser is 31-38 mm while that of the Greater is 50-61 mm (Hayman *et al* 1986). Thus the bird observed was a Lesser Yellowlegs. The pale edging to feathers on the upperparts indicate that this bird was a juvenile.

The Lesser Yellowlegs has not previously been recorded in S.E Asia. It breeds in eastern Alaska and much of Canada. A few winter in Southern USA and Central America, but most in the West Indies and South America, south to Chile and Argentina (Cramp *et al* 1983). It is a regular vagrant in Europe, and has been recorded over 170 times in the British Isles alone. There have been several records from Japan (Wild Bird Society of Japan 1982). There has been one Australian record and seven from New Zealand (Lane 1987). Thus, the current sighting is the westernmost record of a bird which presumably strayed across the Pacific. The timing of the sighting coincides with the southward migration of this species in the USA.

The Lesser Yellowlegs is the first true nearctic species recorded in S.E. Asia. The Long-billed Dowitcher *Limnodromus scolopaceus* which has been recorded in Indonesia (Klapste 1982) breeds in N.Asia although it winters in South America.

The number of nearctic species recorded in S.E. Asia has been increasing recently. In Hong Kong in 1986, a Pectoral Sandpiper *Callidris melanotos* was caught in April (Melville, 1987) and a Lesser Yellowlegs was recorded in October/November (Kennedy, 1987). In 1984-88, Several nearctic or nearctic/Asian species were recorded in Singapore (Cniington in prep.). It is thus likely that American wader species are more regular throughout S.E Asia, but go unnoticed. Increased vigilance is therefore needed.

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