SCHNEIDER'S PITTA REDISCOVERED IN SUMATRA

by Phil Hurrell
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INTRODUCTION

Schneider's Pitta *Pitta schneideri* is endemic to the montane rain forest of Sumatra and may be confined to isolated peaks of the Barisan Range in West Sumatra. There have been no records for over 70 years. Thig paper reports the discovery of a pair of Schneider's Pitta in Kerinci-Sebtat National Park and suggests that further study of their range, status and biology is urgently needed.

BACKGROUND

Schneider's Pitta was first collected at Mount Sibayak, Berastagi, North Sumatra, by the Swiss taxidermist Gustav Schneider between 1897 and 1899 (van Marle and Voous 1988), and described by Hartert (1909). Robinson and Kloss collected 14 specimens (7 mate, 4 female and 3 imm) from March to May 1914 in the Kerinci Valley, Jambi Province, and on Mount Kerinci, Barat Province, between 900m and 2,200m, with eight of the specimens at or below 1,400m (Robinson and Kloss 1918). Jacobson, collecting between 1913 and 1917, obtained eight specimens (5 male, 1 female, 2 imm.) from Kerinci (1), Mount Kaba, Bengkulu (5) and Mount Dempo, Selatan (2), with all specimens at or below 1,400m (Robinson and Kloss, 1924).

Despite the activities of several field workers on Mount Sibayak and Mount Kerinci in the last decade, there have been no subsequent records. However, on 27 December 1986, during a visit to Mount Kerinci, Frank Lambert and John Howes recorded what was believed to be this species calling just after dawn at c. 2,250 - 2,400m. Unfortunately a group of Siamang *Hylobates syndactylus* dominate the recording and Lambert and Howes were unable to locate the calling bird. (J. Howes pers. comm.). The author commenced his search on Mount Kerinci in August 1988.

LOCATION

The volcano Mount Kerinci lies in the northern part of the Kerinci-Seblat National Park, at 1° 42'S, 101° 16' E. At 3,805m, it is the highest peak in Sumatra. The present lower limit of the forest on the side visited is c. 1.800m. Extensive cultivation ties below this for the first hundred metres the forest shows signs of disturbance with small stands of bananas and some tree cutting. In addition, the forest edge is under constant assault, being cleared and burnt to make way for cultivation. Above this disturbed zone at about 1,900m, the vegetation is undisturbed lower montane rain forest, with a transition to upper

montane forest at c.2,500m (Whitten *et al*.1984). A small steep unmarked trail leads to the summit from near Kerisek Tua. There are very few side trails and no apparent evidence of hunting or trapping.

OBSERVATION

On 23 August 1988, at 16.38 hours a male Schneider's Pitta was flushed from the path at 2,375m. (measured with a pocket barometric altimeter). It perched on a fallen tree for almost two minutes, giving excellent views. It was carrying what appeared to be a large grey millipede *Myriapoda* sp. It was seen again briefly on the path a few minutes later. At dawn the next morning a female Schneider's Pitta was found foraging in the same area, and was joined shortly afterwards by the mate. The male called for a period of approximately 15 minutes after dawn and a recording was made. The birds were followed for just over one hour as they worked their way along the path, vigorously turning aside leaves with their bills. They were rarely more than a few metres from the path or from each other and on several occasions were observed bounding along side by side. They were quite confiding and stopped to preen occasionally in full view.

DESCRIPTION

The first impression was of a large, stocky pitta, similar in size to Rusty-naped Pitta *Pitta oatesi* with a very noticeable big-headed appearance.
Male: bright blue back, wing coverts and tail with blackish-brown flight feathers. The bright pale orange of the forehead, crown and nape extends to the upper back forming a collar which reaches the sides of the upper breast. The collar is separated from the back and sides by a narrow black line. The sides of the head and the upper breast are buffy with a black line extending back from the eye and flaring on the ear coverts. The throat is whitish. The breast and belly are buffy orange. There is a narrow broken black line across the upper breast. The bill is dark brown, the eye red-brown and the legs are pinkish-grey.

In flight : broad, rounded wings, blue upperparts with dark flight feathers and prominent orange head and large bill.

Female : lacks the bright orange and black collar of the male, and has brown back and wings with the flight feathers slightly darker and only the tail and upper tail coverts blue. The head is paler orange than in the male. There is a strong black line extending back from the eye which does not flare on the ear coverts. The throat is whitish. The upper breast is buffy and the breast and belly are slighty more rufous. The black line separating them is continuous and broader than in the male. The bin is slightly paler than the mate's, the eye is red-brown and the legs are pinkish-grey.

Plate VI from Robinson and Kloss (1918) was found to be generally

accurate but the following differences were noted: in the male the collar was found to be less rufous than depicted and the legs of both sexes were greyer. The call was a low, rather soft, double whistle, quite drawn out, rising on the first note, falling on the second with a slight pause between. At close range' the call was distinctly tremulous. It was repeated every 5-6 seconds in sequences of up to 11 - calls and was only heard for a short period immediately after dawn. The recording has been compared with Lambert and Howes" tape and is considered to be of the same species.

CONCLUSION

This is the first documented record of Schneider's Pitta in over 70 years. The altitude of 2,400m, was above that expected from the collecting records. Robinson and Kloss (1918) stated: "this handsome Pitta, was very common in the *honnchi* country from the valley floor up to about 7,000 feet (2,100m.), above which it did not occur." Analysis of the collecting records shows that 66% of the specimens were collected at or below 1,400m. Throughout the species' known range much of the forest up to this altitude has been destroyed or is under threat. In 1984 WWF/IUCN cited Kennci-Seblat National Park as one of the ten most threatened protected areas of the Indomalayan realm, the threat coming largely from illegal encroachment to increase agricultural land (Thorsell, 1985).

It is now imperative to assess the species' range and status throughout Sumatra and to study its ecology and habitat requirements. Clearly, increased protection should be given to the Kerinci-Seblat National Park.

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A RECENT SIGHTING OF SALVADORI'S PHEASANT

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Salvadori's Pheasant *Lophura inornata* has been listed as one of the 126 species of threatened bird that occur in Indonesia (Collar & Andrew 1988). The species is a Sumatran endemic, confined to the Barisan Mountain range and isolated mountain tops from the Ophir districts (00°04'N, 99°59' E) of Sumatra Barat, south to Mount Dempu (04°02'S, 103°09'E) in Sumatra Selatan. The bird has been. reported to inhabit the floor of lower montane forest at 1000-2200m (Van Marle & Voous 1988). Very little is known about Salvadori's Pheasant, and its taxonomic affinities with the closely related Hoogerwerf's Pheasant *L. hoogerwerfi* are unclear. Nevertheless, although *L. hoogerwerfi* has been incorporated into *L. inornata* in the past, differences are thought to be sufficient to treat these two as separate species (Van Marle & Voous 1988).

Prior to the record documented below, Salvadori's Pheasant had not been recorded in the wild since the period 1913-1917, when a series of 34 specimens was collected by Robinson & Kloss (1918) and E. Jacobson (Robinson & Kloss Robinson & Kloss (1918) and E. Jacobson (Robinson & Kloss 1924) at various sites. Nevertheless, four live specimens were imported into France in 1939, and several pairs (perhaps a mixture including both Salvadori's and Hoogerwerf's Pheasants) are reported to have reached Europe and North America in 1975 and 1976 (Delacour 1977).

On 26 December 1986, the authors observed a pair of Salvador's Pheasants at an altitude of c.2200m on the summit trail of Mount Kerinci, Sumatra Barat (01°42'S, lOI'^e'E), above the village of