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Records of Javan Pond-Heron *Ardeola speciosa* and Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus* in peninsular Malaysia in March 1986

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During a four-month stay in peninsular Malaysia from December 1985 to March 1986 I recorded two species of bird whose occurrence in the country was previously uncertain – Javan Pond-Heron *Ardeola speciosa* – or poorly documented – Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus*. It therefore seemed worthwhile to report these observations in some detail.

Javan Pond-Heron

On 21 March 1986 I was observing kingfisher foraging behaviour during low tide at a lagoon within mangroves, about 2–3 km west-north-west of Kuala Gula, Perak, peninsular Malaysia. Around 09h00 I noticed two small, short-legged herons, obviously of the genus *Ardeola*, on the mud about 10–20 m from the edge of the mangroves. I observed them in full sunlight with a 30× telescope. Both were in full breeding plumage and I immediately identified them as Javan Pond-Herons *A. speciosa*, a species I was familiar with from Thailand and whose identification in Malaysia was previously unconfirmed. Several Chinese Pond-Herons *A. bacchus*, two of them also in breeding plumage, were present nearby and provided convenient comparison.

I made the following description. Unstreaked pale beige head and neck blending into a deep rusty breast, which in turn was sharply delimited against a white belly and undertail-coverts. Back dark slaty grey, almost black, with long plumes extending over folded wings and tail. In flight, when the white wings and tail were visible, the birds gave a striking four-coloured impression. Bill light grey basally, pale yellow in the middle and with a black tip. Legs yellow.

Four days later, on 25 March 1986, two or possibly three Javan Pond-Herons were observed and photographed at the same place by Richard Lansdown and Andrew Hawkins, who confirmed the identification.

Pond-herons identified as *A. bacchus* regularly winter south to Singapore, but are common only in the northern peninsular Malaysian states from October to April (Medway and Wells 1976), when they are generally in basic plumage. According to present knowledge *bacchus* and *speciosa* cannot safely be separated in the field in this plumage (Hancock and Kushlan 1984). Usually they acquire breeding plumage after or shortly before leaving Malaysia, although in central Thailand I observed some individuals of *speciosa* in full breeding plumage as early as mid-February. Owing to this

problem *speciosa* has probably been overlooked among *bacchus* in peninsular Malaysia, although it has been suspected to occur (Wells 1984) and may even winter regularly in small numbers given the relative proximity of its Thai and Javan breeding grounds. Careful field observations in late March and April, when pond-herons moult into nuptial plumage, should clarify the true status of this species in peninsular Malaysia.

Dusky Warbler

On 18 March 1986 around 18h00 I observed a brownish *Phylloscopus* in degraded mangroves about 2–3 km west-north-west of Kuala Gula, Perak, peninsular Malaysia (only some 200 m from where I was subsequently to see the Javan Pond-Herons). Its habit of hopping on or very near the ground and its call, a hard 'chak', immediately suggested *P. fuscatus*, a species I had observed on many occasions only a few weeks before in Thailand. I viewed the bird for several minutes with 10×50 binoculars down to a distance of 8 m. Plumage characteristics and bill structure confirmed the initial identification.

The next day I caught a Dusky Warbler, possibly the same individual, in a mist-net about 100 m from the first place of observation and also within degraded mangrove. Several colour photographs (see Plate) and the following description were taken. Typical *Phylloscopus*, the size of a Chiffchaff *P. collybita*, with uniform olive-brown upperparts and tail and with a rusty tinge on the rump and uppertail-coverts. No wing-bars; remiges

Plate. *Phylloscopus fuscatus* caught at Kuala Gula, Perak, on 19 March 1986. (Photo: A. J. Helbig)



and wing coverts brown with olive-brown edges. Underparts whitish with a brownish tinge, especially on the breast, and lightest on the lower belly. Buff undertail-coverts. Supercilium uniform brownish-white, bordered below by a blackish eye-line. Bill thin and pointed, lower mandible completely yellow, upper mandible dark horn with thin yellow cutting edges. Feet dark brownish-flesh, soles yellow. Molt: sixth secondary growing (30% of final length); two outermost pairs of rectrices growing (90%), next two pairs towards centre of tail freshly grown with bases still in sheaths; uppertail-coverts moulting.

The Dusky Warbler normally winters south to the northern parts of the Malay Peninsula (Lekagul and Cronin 1974) and was not dealt with by Medway and Wells (1976). Up to 1984 there were only three reports of this species in peninsular Malaysia, all from mangroves of the Selangor coast: two mist-netted and photographed (but photographs not definitive – D. R. Wells pers. comm.) near Kuala Selangor on 2 April 1977, one observed near Klang, 20 February 1979 (Wells 1986), and two seen at Kuala Selangor on 27 November 1984 (*Bull. Oriental Bird Club* 1: 27). Thus the observations described above establish the fourth record of *Phylloscopus fuscatus* in Malaysia and apparently the first to be well documented photographically. The fact that they all occurred in mangroves seems to indicate a distinct preference for this habitat at the southern extremity of the species's winter range. Further north, it frequents a wide variety of wooded habitats (but including mangroves).

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