

A new southernmost record of White-faced Plover *Charadrius dealbatus*

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Recent literature has discussed the occurrence of “mystery pale *Charadrius* plovers” observed and photographed in Singapore in winter 1993/1994, and in Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam from winter 2006/2007 onwards (Bakewell & Kennerley 2008, Kennerley *et al.* 2008). The conclusion is that these are the birds described by Robert Swinhoe in 1870, which he named *Aegialites* [= *Charadrius*] *dealbatus*, as a species distinct from Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus*. Subsequent confusion has resulted in the name *dealbatus* being applied as the subspecific name of the form of Kentish Plover that occurs in abundance in E and SE Asia (with an estimated population of 100,000 (Wetlands International 2006)), while the taxon described by Swinhoe *Charadrius dealbatus* has been overlooked by almost all subsequent taxonomists, and mistakenly described and illustrated as Kentish Plover. An investigation to establish the phylogenetic relationship between *Ch. dealbatus* and other small *Charadrius* plovers is currently in progress. If *dealbatus* proves to be distinct at the species level, it has been recommended that it be given the name *Charadrius dealbatus*, with the English name “White-faced Plover” (Kennerley *et al.* 2008).

The White-faced Plover specimens that have been examined are from China and are dated from April to July, which would encompass the likely breeding season. Outside the breeding season, it is generally believed that *dealbatus* ranges widely throughout coastal E and SE Asia (Kennerley *et al.* 2008). The northernmost specimen records come from Amoy

(Xiamen, Fujian province, China), and the southernmost record is from Sumatra, where a male was trapped at Cemara (Jambi province) in Feb 2008 (Bakewell & Kennerley 2007, Kennerley *et al.* 2008).

On 16 Nov 2009, a number of plovers were observed on a sandy beach at Pulau Betet in the Sembilang National Park, Banyuasin 3 sub-district, Banyuasin District, South Sumatra



Fig. 2. Four presumed juvenile White-faced Plovers *Charadrius dealbatus* with a Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus* in the foreground. (Photo: Heri Mulyono.)

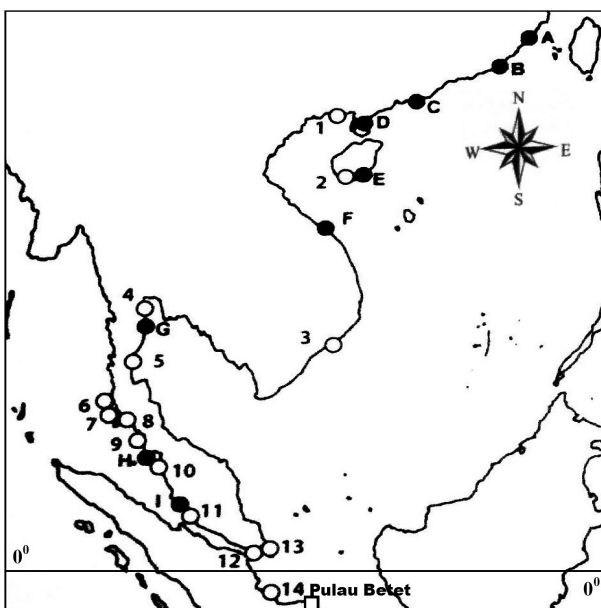


Fig. 1. Records of White-faced Plover *Charadrius dealbatus* (map reproduced from Kennerley *et al.* 2008). Solid circles show specimen record and open circles documented sightings. The open circle numbered 14 is Pantai Cemara and the square symbol shows Pulau Betet.



Fig. 3. A presumed juvenile White-faced Plover *Charadrius dealbatus* (foreground) clearly paler than five Terek Sandpipers *Xenus cinereus* (behind and left) and a Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus* (extreme right). (Photo: Heri Mulyono.)



Fig. 4. Presumed female non-breeding White-faced Plover *Charadrius dealbatus* (left) with two Kentish Plovers *Charadrius alexandrinus* (right). (Photo: Heri Mulyono.)



Fig. 5. A presumed juvenile White-faced Plover *Charadrius dealbatus* between a Kentish Plover *Charadrius alexandrinus* on the left and a Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus* on the right (the bird at the back is a godwit *Limosa*). (Photo: Heri Mulyono.)

province, Indonesia (Fig. 1, 1°47'33"S, 104°32'80"E). Among them were at least six pale birds that showed the characteristics of the White-faced Plover based on criteria described by Bakewell & Kennerley (2008). Briefly these are: short breast patches, very pale ear-coverts and more extensive white on the forehead supercilium than Kentish (Figs 2–5). White-faced Plovers can appear slightly larger than Kentish Plovers though there is considerable overlap (Figs 2–5, Bakewell & Kennerley 2008). The birds appeared to be smaller than Terek Sandpipers *Xenus cinereus* (see Figs 3 & 5). Five of the pale plovers were presumed to be juveniles, based on conspicuous pale fringes to the mantle and scapulars, giving the upperparts a slightly scaled appearance (Fig. 2, 3 & 5). One bird was presumed to be a non-breeding female by the pale forehead and supercilium, but the upperparts look darker than the other birds (Fig. 4).

Before the records of 16 Nov 2009, a typical White-faced Plover was recorded in the same area on 13 Dec 2008. Presumed White-faced Plovers have also been seen by MI at two other locations in Sumatra. One was on a sandy beach at the NE tip of Pulau Rupert (Riau province, 2°06'N, 101°41'E) on 18 Feb 2005; the other was on the Banyuasin Peninsular (South Sumatra province, 02°04'S, 104°57'E) on 31 Oct 2008. However, no photographs were taken to support these observations. The White-faced Plovers at Pulau Betet are the southernmost records for this species and provide confirmation that the taxon extends into the southern hemisphere. Previously, the southernmost record was from Cemara beach, Jambi province, Sumatra (1°22'S compared with Pulau Betet which is 01°47'), 50–60 km from Pulau Betet (Fig. 1).

Clarification of the taxonomic status of White-faced Plover

will facilitate assessment of conservation needs. Although doubtless overlooked in the past, it seems unlikely that the population is large, and its preference for sandy coastal habitat almost certainly means that it faces threats from habitat conversion, degradation and human disturbance (Bakewell & Kennerley 2008). There is a clear need for ornithologists to pay more attention to White-faced Plovers in future, especially in Sumatra which seems to be at the southernmost limit of the non-breeding range. Ideally there should be a systematic coordinated survey of the entire range; only this will provide the information needed to assess the White-faced Plover's population size and trend and conservation needs.

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