

# First record of Nordmann's Greenshank *Tringa guttifer* in northern Sumatra, Indonesia

Hasri Abdillah<sup>1</sup> & Muhammad Iqbal<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Sumatra Rainforest Institute, Komplek Perumahan Mobil Oil, Jl. Dr. Mansyur III/16-A, Kel. P.B. Selayang-I, Kec. Medan Selayang, Medan 20131, Indonesia. [h45ri\\_hab@yahoo.com](mailto:h45ri_hab@yahoo.com)

<sup>2</sup> KPB-SOS, Jalan Tanjung api-api km 9 Komplek P & K Blok E 1, Palembang 30152, Indonesia. [kpbsos26@yahoo.com](mailto:kpbsos26@yahoo.com)

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Nordmann's Greenshank, one of the world's most threatened shorebirds, is confined to the East Asian–Australasian Flyway (Bamford *et al.* 2008, BirdLife International 2001, 2012). Its global population is estimated at 500–1,000, with an estimated 100 in Malaysia, 100–200 in Thailand, 100 in Myanmar, plus unknown but low numbers in NE India, Bangladesh and Sumatra (Wetlands International 2006). The population is suspected to be rapidly decreasing due to coastal wetland development throughout Asia for industry, infrastructure and aquaculture, and the degradation of its breeding habitat in Russia by grazing Reindeer *Rangifer tarandus* (BirdLife International 2012). On the other hand, there have been many encouraging sightings of Nordmann's Greenshanks lately, several from sites where this species has never previously been reported, such as Java and NW Australia ([nordmannsgreenshank.blogspot.com](http://nordmannsgreenshank.blogspot.com)).

Mostly Nordmann's Greenshanks have been recorded in very small numbers throughout SE Asia, and there are few places where it has been reported regularly. In Myanmar, for example, it was rediscovered after a gap of almost 129 years. The total count recorded by the Asian Waterbird Census (AWC) in 2006 for Myanmar was 28 birds with 14 being the largest number at a single locality (Naing 2007). In Thailand,

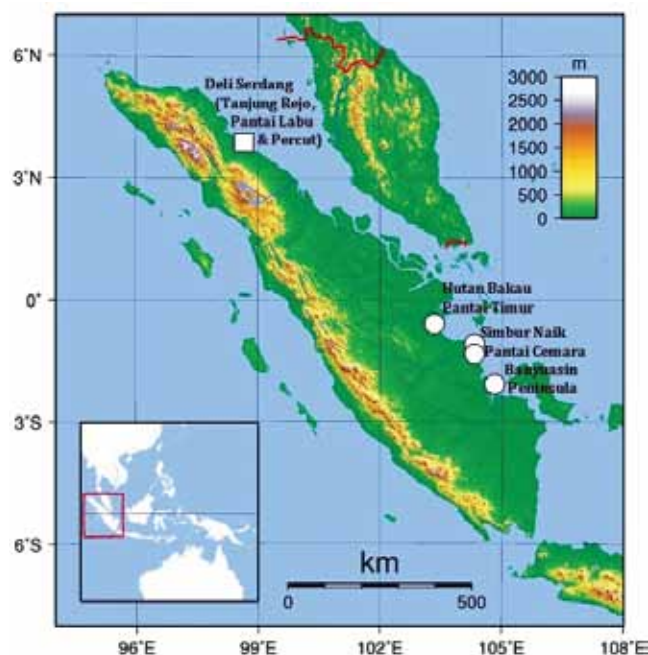
the largest single count during the AWC in 2005–2006 was 60 birds at Khok Kham on 24 Dec 2005 (Round *et al.* 2007), and the highest count ever reported was of at least 70 on 3 Feb 2007 in Selangor State on the west coast of Peninsular Malaysia (Li *et al.* 2007). Nordmann's Greenshank has been recorded as a rare visitor in N Borneo, but has never reported in Kalimantan, Indonesian Borneo (Mann 2008). It is a very rare winter visitor in Singapore, with the only recent sighting, of two birds in Nov 2008, being recorded after a 27-year gap (Cheong 2009). In Indonesia, it is a rare non-breeding visitor to Sumatra, Sulawesi and Buton Island off SE Sulawesi (BirdLife International 2001).

In 2011–2012, Nordmann's Greenshank was found three times in Sumatera Utara province, N Sumatra. First, a flock of 13 birds was recorded on 17 Nov 2011 at Tanjung Rejo village (3°44'N, 98°46'E), Percut Sei Tuan Subdistrict. The other two records both relate to birds seen just 8 km from the first site at Sei Tuan village (3°42'N, 98°50'E), Pantai Labu Subdistrict (Fig. 1), three on 15 Dec 2011, and four on 13 Jan 2012.

Although Nordmann's Greenshank is similar to Common Greenshank *Tringa nebularia*, it has some distinctive characters that allow conclusive identification when seen in good conditions. Its bill is almost straight and distinctly bicoloured, its legs are shorter and yellower than those of Common Greenshank, its neck is shorter, and it has paler lores (Hayman *et al.* 1986; Fig. 2). Common Greenshank has a slightly upturned bill and has an altogether slimmer appearance. To confirm our identification, we have taken advice from people who are familiar with Nordmann's Greenshank: Adrian Boyle who has experience of the species in China and Australia (e.g. Boyle & Slaymaker 2010), Christoph Zöckler who knows the species in Myanmar (e.g. Zöckler & Frew 2011) and David Bakewell who knows it in Peninsula Malaysia (see his photos at [www.orientalbirdimages.org](http://www.orientalbirdimages.org)).

Our three records of Nordmann's Greenshank in Deli Serdang district, Sumatera Utara province, are the first records of this rare and threatened species in N Sumatra. Previous records in Sumatra (all in S Sumatra) are: two undated observations in Hutan Bakau Pantai Timur, eight at Sungai Simbur Naik and Desa Cemara in Apr 1986, 21 on the Banyuasin peninsula in Dec 1988 (BirdLife International 2001), and regular records from Oct 2007 to 2010 of up to 21 individuals (on 9 Jan 2009) at Cemara beach, Jambi province (Noni & Londo 2008, 2010, Tirtaningtyas & Philippa 2009). Two birds have been captured at Cemara beach, a juvenile on 16 Feb 2008 and an adult on 22 Mar 2009 (Tirtaningtyas & Philippa 2009).

In Indonesia as a whole, Nordmann's Greenshank is a rare non-breeding visitor to Sumatra, Sulawesi and Buton Island off SE Sulawesi (BirdLife International 2001). There is also a first record for Java: a single bird recorded on



**Fig. 1.** Map showing the location of records of Nordmann's Greenshank in Sumatra. The square shows the location of the records from N Sumatra during Nov and Dec 2011 and Jan 2012 reported here; the circles show the localities of previous Sumatra records.



**Fig. 2.** One of three Nordmann Greenshanks *Tringa guttifer* seen near Sei Tuan village, Pantai Labu Subdistrict, N Sumatra on 15 Dec 2011.

1 Nov 2006 in the delta of the Kulon Progo River, Central Java (*nordmannsgreenshank.blogspot.com*). In Wallacea, it might occur occasionally but is probably overlooked because waders are rarely the target of bird tours in such places as Nusa Tenggara; if it does occur, it is probably quite rare (Colin Trainor, pers. comm.).

The east coast of N Sumatra includes some valuable habitat for migratory shorebirds in the East Asian–Australasian Flyway and recent surveys have shown that the importance of this area is greater than previously supposed (Bamford *et al.* 2008, Crossland *et al.* 2009, Iqbal *et al.* 2010). The occurrence of Nordmann's Greenshank in this area should have been expected in view of historical records of the species just across the Malacca Strait on the west coast of Malaysia and in Singapore.

Most Nordmann's Greenshanks recorded in N Sumatra have been seen on mudflats, a habitat that is extensive along the 2,000 km east coast of the island. Therefore it would seem quite likely that better survey coverage would show that Nordmann's Greenshanks occur more commonly on this coast than existing records suggest. If so, bearing in mind the low world population, numbers in east Sumatra might amount to a significant proportion of the species' population.

The number of birdwatchers visiting the east coast of N Sumatra is increasing and this may lead to more observations of Nordmann's Greenshank; but there can be no doubt that a priority for the species' conservation is for thorough surveys of this key coastline to determine when and where it occurs and in what numbers.

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