

# Threatened Birds of Asia:

## The BirdLife International Red Data Book

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## JAVANESE LAPWING

*Vanellus macropterus*



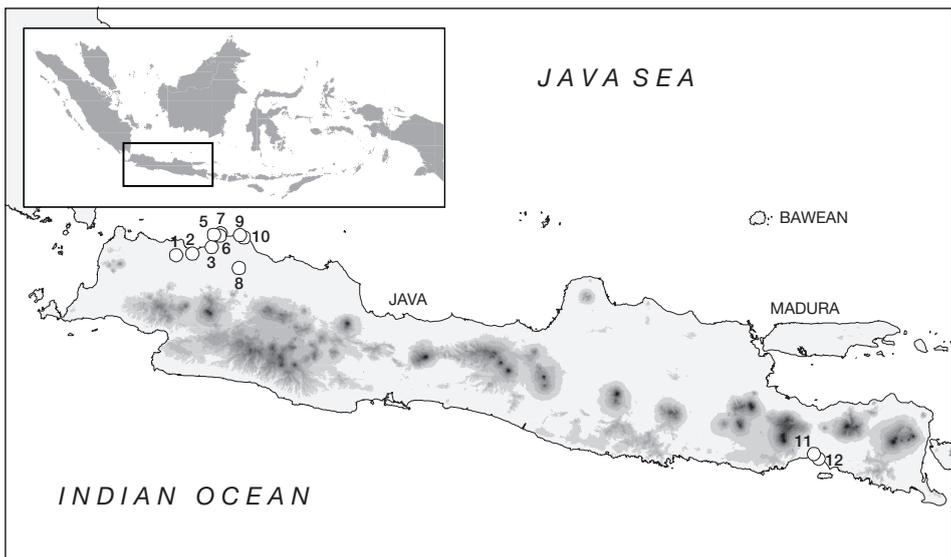
**Critical** ■ D1

Endangered  —

Vulnerable  —

*Having not been recorded since 1940, this wader may already be Extinct. However, it is here classified as Critical, firstly because not all localities where it could possibly survive have been surveyed, and secondly because, in the event of its continued survival, fewer than 50 individuals are likely to be involved.*

**DISTRIBUTION** The Javan Lapwing is known with certainty only from the island of Java, Indonesia, where it has not been seen since 1940 (see Remarks 1) and appears likely to be extinct; there are unconfirmed records from Sumatra and Timor (see below). In the first 30 years or so of this century it was possible to record that the range of the species on Java was highly restricted, owing to the limited quantity of appropriate habitat (see below); Bartels (1915–1931; see Remarks 2) reported it there in the region of the Sedari estuary and its tributaries, the Citarum delta and at Rawah Tangerang. Kooiman (1940) stated that the species “occurs all the year round in several pairs in the meadows bordering the swamps on the south coast” of East Java, and he marked it as a breeding species there, with a note that by south coast he meant “the belt of swamps and dunes south of Lumajang” (see the habitat photograph taken by Kooiman and reproduced in Whitten *et al.* 1996). Thus it is that all records come from two discrete areas on Java, one in the west on the north coast, and one in the east on the south coast:



**The distribution of Javanese Lapwing *Vanellus macropterus*:** (1) Tangerang; (2) Jakarta; (3) Kali Tempayan; (4) Muara Bungin; (5) Citarum Delta; (6) Cabangbungin; (7) Kali Bungin; (8) Karawang; (9) Kali Cilesung; (10) Kali Pisangan; (11) Lumajang [South of]; (12) Meleman.

○ Historical (pre-1950)

**INDONESIA** *Java* ■ *West Java* near **Tangerang** (“Rawah Tangerang” or “Tangerang swamp”), May 1925 (male and four eggs in RMNH; also Hellebrekers and Hoogerwerf 1967); **Jakarta** (Batavia), 1872 (Vorderman 1882–1885, Koningsberger 1901–1909, Hoogerwerf 1948a), before 1896 (three specimens in RMNH), April 1909 (female in AMNH), January 1927 (female in ZMA); **Kali Tempayan** at Telar Cabang, August 1907 (seven specimens in RMNH); at or near **Muara Bungin**, September 1914, May 1916, April 1917, May 1922 (six specimens in RMNH), including at Rawah, November 1921, October 1922 and August 1923 (five specimens in RMNH); **Citarum delta** (near Jakarta), May 1916 (female in RMNH) and June 1940 (two eggs representing a clutch in RMNH; also Hellebrekers and Hoogerwerf 1967), including at Singkil, June of an unspecified year (Vorderman 1882–1885), July 1909 (female in RMNH), and April 1917 (female in RMNH); at or near **Cabangbungin**, June 1919, June 1920 and June 1921 (five eggs apparently representing four clutches in RMNH; also Hellebrekers and Hoogerwerf 1967); near **Kali Bungin**, December 1923 (male in RMNH); **Karawang**, undated (Koningsberger 1901–1909); **Kali Cileung**, August 1908, May 1920 (male and female in RMNH), including Telar Cileung, June 1915 (female in RMNH); **Kali Pisangan**, May 1920 (male and female in RMNH); ■ *East Java* south of **Lumajang**, apparently in the 1930s (Kooiman 1940); **Meleman**, November 1938 and April 1939 (two females in RMNH),

A possible record from Sumatra concerns an alleged specimen and egg collected in the mid-nineteenth century (van Marle and Voous 1988). Certainly it seems rather improbable that a wading bird clearly capable of strong flight (see Remarks 3) would be restricted to one Sundaic island, and the evidence is a little stronger than van Marle and Voous (1988) credited: the specimen is known to be female (Schlegel 1862–1873), and there were in fact two eggs, dated 1834 and collected by S. Müller (RMNH catalogue data), who was certainly present in Sumatra in that year (see, e.g., his description of the nest of Graceful Pitta *Pitta venusta*, dated May 1834, under the relevant account).

There is also a claim that the species was recorded on Timor (adult male in RMNH: Schlegel 1862–1873), but this has been questioned (*Emu* 76:151); nevertheless, at least three specimens were involved (Bruce 1978; also Fisher 1981).

**POPULATION** The species is said not to have been reported since 1939 (Hayman *et al.* 1986), although in fact there is a clutch of eggs from 1940 (see Distribution and Remarks 1). It may survive in some remote area (Hayman *et al.* 1986; see Measures Proposed). It was not found during a two-month survey of the Citarum delta in 1949, and “when last seen in the 1920s and again in 1940, it was rated as local and by no means common (Kooiman 1940, Bock 1958, G. F. Mees pers. comm. 1976)” (King 1978–1979). It was apparently never encountered in flocks, only in scattered pairs (Bartels 1915–1931), and if present its distinctive call (from which its native name “beberäk” derived) was always to be heard, so that it was impossible to overlook it at a known site (Bartels 1915–1931); this very strongly suggests that it must have vanished from all sites studied in recent decades by ornithologists.

**ECOLOGY** *Habitat* Habitat of this species has been described as “open areas near freshwater ponds, perhaps also on agricultural land” (Hayman *et al.* 1986), this being taken from Vorderman (1882–1885) with the agricultural speculation by King (1978–1979). In fact the species was found in “wide steppe-like marshes” in river deltas; in the rainy season it would keep to areas which were only slightly flooded, since despite its long legs it was not given to wading (Bartels 1915–1931). In the Citarum delta it also often occupied damp pastures bordering marshes thickly covered in sedges (see Remarks 4) and other low aquatic vegetation, while at Rawah Tangerang it was found chiefly only on an (occasionally rather wet) buffalo meadow (Bartels 1915–1931). The species would select areas in the marshes where a long view could be maintained, and would even ascend any elevated ground such as a hummock or a clump of sedge in order to obtain a better view (Bartels 1915–1931). A photograph of

habitat in which the last record of the species was made, in East Java, is in Whitten *et al.* (1996).

**Food** The species took water- or marsh-dwelling insect larvae, waterbeetles, beetles, snails (ground shells found in stomachs) as well as seeds of aquatic plants which, however, were only occasionally consumed (Bartels 1915–1931). In captivity it was noted also to take small fish very readily, the bird in question (having been brought in as an adult by a local) becoming sufficiently tame within two months to take food from the hand (Bartels 1915–1931). Stomach contents of a bird from Singkil were “little freshwater snails, green threads of thin freshwater weed, small insect legs, and a few rock-hard seeds of waterplants” (Vorderman 1882–1885).

**Breeding** In noting that the species would persistently fly round a human intruder on its territory, calling all the while, until the latter had departed, Bartels (1915–1931) recorded that in December 1923 there was such a severe drought in the Citarum delta that very few Javan Lapwings were present, and that those which remained made no attempt at protest but simply flew away; this tends to suggest that he had previously thought the species to be territorial all year round. This point might be elucidated by information from some of its closest relatives. In any case, the majority of eggs for which the month was given were collected in June (eight, apparently comprising five clutches); there is one record from May (four eggs, apparently comprising one clutch) (all material in RMNH; also Hoogerwerf 1949). A nest on a buffalo meadow in May 1925 contained four eggs, the pointed ends all facing inwards, and was situated on a slight hump whose grassy edge formed the edge of the nest; the scrape was a rather deep earth hollow with a diameter of “half a foot” and it was lined with (actually “it consisted of”) thick grass rather loosely arranged (Bartels 1915–1931).

**Migration** Hayman *et al.* (1986) mentioned but were sceptical of “reports suggesting that this species once migrated between Timor and Sumatra”, but noted that several birds were “said to have perched on a ship’s railing off the Javanese north coast”. It has already been noted that Timor cannot be confirmed as part of this bird’s range; moreover, examination of the months in which it was recorded on Java shows that only February and March are missing, which tends to argue against migration in this species (an idea which was floated by Temminck in 1838: King 1978–1979). However, the report about perching on a ship’s rail is important: Vorderman (1882–1885) reported that “When I made a voyage in 1872 from Pamanukan [on the north coast of West Java] to Batavia [Jakarta] on the steamer *Coquette*, several of these birds landed on the railing of the forward deck during the evening above Tjamara [see Remarks 5]; this happened while we could see the north coast of Java” (translation: SvB). Such an incident is perhaps most consistent with species that show *some* movement between areas and therefore *some* capacity to disperse quite widely, particularly given the size of the wings (see Remarks 3); one might imagine a small group dispersing along the north coast of Java and being caught by a squall.

**THREATS** The only explanation offered by King (1978–1979) concerning this bird’s rarity was that trapping and hunting continues “mercilessly”. However, it seems more likely that disturbance and conversion of its wet-grass savanna habitat, which can never have been extensive, was the principal agent of its disappearance. It occurred in isolated pairs often in rather large areas (Bartels 1915–1931), suggesting that it must have been a naturally low-density species and hence particularly susceptible to extinction in the face of large-scale habitat loss within a restricted range.

The Javan Lapwing is one of two threatened bird species in the “Java Coastal Zone Endemic Bird Area”, threats and conservation measures in which are profiled by Sujatnika *et al.* (1995) and Stattersfield *et al.* (1998).

**MEASURES TAKEN** This species has been protected under Indonesian law since 1978 (Inskipp 1986), rather too late to be of much benefit to it. Searches for the species appear to

have been very few, but an important initiative dating from 1984 and mentioned in Allport and Wilson (1986) is documented in Remarks 6. In mid-2000, a preliminary search of the south-east coast south of Lumajang was undertaken and although much habitat had been converted, an area worthy of further investigation was identified (R. Saryanthi *in litt.* 2000).

**MEASURES PROPOSED** The chances of this species surviving are very small indeed. One area which deserves investigation is the savanna at Cimanuk, near Indramayu (G. F. Mees verbally 1995). However, it appears that the area south of Lumajang on the south-facing coast of East Java is a large system of marshes and sand-dunes, some of which still survive, yet which has remained virtually unvisited by ornithologists since Kooiman's time: clearly therefore a concerted attempt at finding the species in the area, using interviews and direct observation, is urgently needed.

It seems likely that at one stage the Javan Lapwing had a much larger range. If its habitat was wet-grass (coastal) savanna, it would be worthwhile determining whether any unexplored tracts of such habitat exist in the adjacent islands of Sumatra, Bangka, Belitung and southern Borneo (to parts of which the Citarum delta is closer than it is to the two known sites in East Java), and investigating accordingly.

**REMARKS** (1) There is a very small possibility that documentary evidence may exist for the species surviving into the 1950s. At the start of Hellebrekers and Hoogerwerf (1967), A. Hoogerwerf, writing in the third person, stated that he was dealing with 1,020 eggs in his own collection, almost all from West Java, "obtained after the appearance in 1949 of a paper in which he published colour descriptions of 5680 Javanese eggs..." and later in the paper gave the weight of one of two Javan Lapwing eggs which, from context, ought therefore to have been collected *after* 1949. However, inquiries at RMNH, ZMA and MZB have failed to trace any such eggs. (2) A complete transcription of the entry on the Javan Lapwing in Bartels (1915–1931) is in Collar *et al.* (in press). (3) Bartels (1915–1931) noted that the species tended to fly rather than use its long legs to move any great distance. Schlegel (1862–1873) noted that it has "very long wings" (as evidently did Wagler when applying the name *macropterus*). (4) In the original notes, Bartels (1915–1931) had typed "Kolbenschildf" (presumably bulrush) but substituted "Binsen" in manuscript. Binsen means sedges or rushes, but the subsequent word "low" suggests he did not intend the latter. (5) There is a Cemara in Losarang district, Indramayu, but this is c.40 km east of the route Pamanukan–Jakarta (SvB). (6) The text in this section was contributed by G. A. Allport (*in litt.* 2000). In July–October 1984 a wetland bird survey team visited various sites within Java, including the coastal areas of Muara Gembong and Sungai Bekasi to the north-east of Jakarta Bay, and the coastal areas around the village of Karang Mulya, south of Muara Cikiong 20 km to the east of Muara Gembong. The main objective of the survey team was to locate Milky Storks *Mycteria cinerea* (see relevant account; also Allport and Wilson 1986). However, open freshwater marshland "rawah" habitats potentially suitable for Javan Lapwing were searched for in these localities but with little success. An area of rawah was found inland of the coastal strip of prawn ponds at Karang Mulya; this was only a few hectares in extent but did hold a group of 30 Black-winged Stilt *Himantopus himantopus*, a bird seen only once elsewhere on the Javan coastal plain by the survey team. No lapwings were seen and no local bird trappers at Karang Mulya recognised the species from illustrations. It was felt that the overwhelming majority of rawah habitat had been converted to other uses, particularly prawn ponds, in the north-western Javan coastal plain, and that the only means of locating any suitable habitat that might by chance remain would be by aerial survey or analyses of satellite imagery.