Direct observation of a Hoogerwerf’s Pheasant on a nest in North Sumatra

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The Hoogerwerf’s Pheasant *Lophura hoogerwerfi*, endemic to the island of Sumatra, was first collected in 1937 by A. Hoogerwerf in the Gayo Highlands, Aceh at 1,400 m altitude (Chasen 1939, Chasen & Hoogerwerf 1941) and later in 1939 by D. Ripley close to the Gayo Highlands at 650 m (Meyer de Schauensee & Ripley 1940). The Gayo Highlands are located within the Gunung Leuser National Park (GLNP), Aceh. Direct sightings have been reported from within the GLNP in the 1970s (van Marle & Voous 1988, Sözer et al. 2006) and in 1998 a female was seen just north of Leuser Mountain (BirdLife International 2012). Currently, the Hoogerwerf’s Pheasant is listed as ‘Vulnerable’ in the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species (BirdLife International 2012).

During regular bird market surveys in Medan, Shepherd (2006) found between 1996 – 2004 the Hoogerwerf’s Pheasant on five occasions (in total: 1998, 3 females and 3 males; 1999, 4 females, 2 males and five pairs). Another 3 birds were encountered in 2000 by TRAFFIC (the wildlife trade monitoring-network of WWF and IUCN) at the Medan bird market (Shepherd 2006). All these individuals were, according to the dealers, trapped within the boundaries of the GLNP (Shepherd 2006, Sözer et al. 2006). Due to the direct sightings and the information collected from the dealers, the Hoogerwerf’s Pheasant is regarded endemic to GLNP, Aceh, and often referred to as the Aceh Pheasant.

Here we report a direct observation of a breeding Hoogerwerf’s Pheasant female in the Batang Toru forest, North Sumatra (N01.692745°, E098.976613°), south of Lake Toba, in an area allocated as protection forest (*Hutan Lindung*). On the 2nd of October 2008 at 13:54 hours at an altitude of 1021m we encountered the female pheasant, sitting quietly in the corner of tree buttresses (Plate 1).

Plate 1. A female Hoogerwerf’s Pheasant *Lophura hoogerwerfi* sitting on eggs in the corner of tree buttresses.
We suspected that she was sitting on eggs, since she did not move when we passed. She began to behave in a restless manner, and hence we only made a few pictures and moved on so as not to further disturb her. That she was sitting on eggs was confirmed five days later, on the 7th of October 2008, when we passed the same spot again. The female was no longer present, however two eggs were still in the nest of which one gave the impression of being hatched (Plate 2). The habitat in which we observed the female was in a primary mixed Dipterocarp forest, with little undergrowth.

There is only one previous report of a nest found that was considered to be of the Hoogerwerf’s Pheasant from February 1979 (van Marle & Voous 1988). This nest was found in the Mamas Valley of Gunung Leuser National Park, Aceh at 1,800 m on relatively dry mountain slopes.

Plate 2: Two eggs still in the nest of which one which appears to have hatched.

There is ongoing discussion on the taxonomy of the Hoogerwerf’s Pheasant, as to whether it is conspecific with Salvadori’s Pheasant \textit{Lophura inornata} (Delacour 1977, del Hoyo \textit{et al}. 1996, Johnsgard 1999). Even Hoogerwerf himself wondered whether the pheasant he collected was an ‘undescribed subadult form of Salvadori’s Pheasant (Chasen & Hoogerwerf 1941). Sightings of the Salvadori’s Pheasant have been restricted to the in the central and southern Barisan mountain ranges (Fuller & Garson 2000). The appearance and descriptions of male \textit{hoogerwerfi} and the \textit{inornata} imply that they are very similar indeed (Marle & Voous 1988, Sözer 1999, Sözer \textit{et al}. 2006). For the females, it seems that there are clearer differences in the plumage between the two forms (Chasen & Hoogerwerf 1941, BirdLife International 2001, Sözer \textit{et al}. 2006). But in summary, it is clear that more research is needed to clarify taxonomic relationship between the two species.

For now, this direct sighting of the Hoogerwerf’s Pheasant south of Lake Toba expands the distribution of the species considerably. This could imply that the total population of the Hoogerwerf’s Pheasant may be larger than has been estimated thus far. The areas of GLNP and Batang Toru are approximately 280 km apart. However, in both areas hunting and habitat loss are significant threats. Further research is needed not only establish the taxonomy of the species but also current distribution and ecological needs, in order to ensure successful conservation of this species.
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