

Status of black-headed gull *Larus ridibundus* in Indonesian Borneo

By Arum Setiawan

STATUS OF BLACK-HEADED GULL *LARUS RIDIBUNDUS* IN INDONESIAN BORNEO

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ABSTRACT

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Here, we report the second record of the Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus* in Indonesian Borneo. Although larids are uncommon in these waters, observations of these birds are increasing. Whether this is due to greater observer coverage remains to be determined.

Key words: Black-headed Gull, Borneo, changing status

The Black-headed Gull *Larus ridibundus* is a small (length 34–43 cm), elegant gull that breeds in Iceland, Faeroes, Britain, and throughout most of Europe and Asia, including on the shores of the Black and Caspian seas, east to the Sea of Okhotsk and the Kamchatka Peninsula, and across Eurasia (Harrison 1985). Northern populations are migratory, whereas lower latitude birds tend to be resident or dispersive; Asian birds winter in India and are vagrant in Malaysia and Philippines (Burger & Gochfeld 1996). The Black-headed Gull is also vagrant to Mexico, Hawaii, Socotra, Maldives, New Guinea, Wallacea, North Australia, Chad, Gabon, Mozambique, and South Africa (Olsen & Larsson 2003). In Indonesia, the Black-headed Gull has been reported in Sumatra, Sulawesi, Moluccas, and West Papua (MacKinnon & Phillipps 1993, Sukmantoro *et al.* 2007, Eaton *et al.* 2016, Gregory 2017).

Although it has been recorded in Borneo, the Black-headed Gull is absent in Indonesian Borneo and Kalimantan (Smythies 1999, Mann 2008, Myers 2016, Phillipps & Phillipps 2016). In this paper, we report the presence of the Black-headed Gull in Indonesian Borneo.

On 20 December 2018, a small white gull was observed and photographed by the first author on Semayap Beach, South Kalimantan, Indonesia. Based on observations and photographs, the bird was identified as a Black-headed Gull. The bird's body was whitish overall, with pale grey upperparts; a long, slender, dark red bill with black tip; and a white head with dark ear spot and pale grey around eyes. These characteristics indicate an adult non-breeding Black-headed Gull. The bird in question differed from other gulls in Southeast Asian and Indonesian waters, and the combination of a dark red bill and legs confirmed its identity.

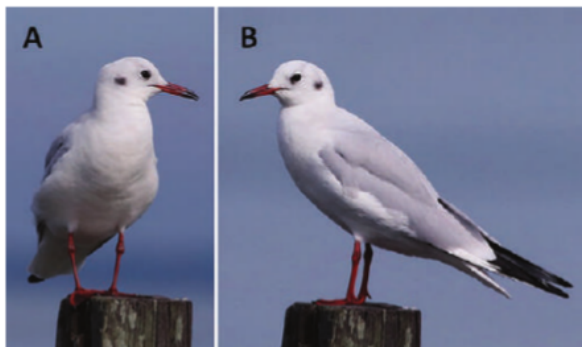


Fig. 1. First Black-headed Gull recorded in Indonesian Borneo, Semayap Beach, Kotabaru, South Kalimantan, 20 December 2018. (A) View showing combination of dark red bill and legs, white head with dark ear spot, and pale grey around eyes; (B) View showing whitish overall body with pale grey above, and the absence of a dark pattern in the tertials and covert markings (all photos: Ahyadi Hasyim).

Many of the gulls that have been recorded in Southeast Asian and Indonesian waters have a yellow bill and legs, or black bill and legs. These include the Heuglin's Gull *Larus heuglini*, Black-tailed Gull *Larus crassirostris*, Laughing Gull *Larus atricilla*, Mew Gull *Larus canus*, Mongolian Gull *Larus mongolicus*, Lesser Black-backed Gull *Larus fuscus*, Pallas Gull *Larus ichthyæetus*, Saunder's Gull *Larus saundersii*, and Little Gull *Larus minutus* (Robson 2011, Pratt & Beehler 2015, Eaton *et al.* 2016, Gregory 2017). The dark red bill and legs of the bird observed on 20 December 2018 was similar to that of the Relict Gull *Larus relictus*, Brown-headed Gull *Larus brunnecephala*, Slender-billed Gull *Larus genei*, and Bonaparte's Gull *Chroicocephalus philadelphia*; however, the pale eyelids and pale eyes contrasted the dark eyes of a Slender-billed Gull. Based on these features, we identified this bird as a non-breeding Black-headed Gull. Following Olsen & Larsson (2003), adult non-breeding Black-headed Gulls found in South Kalimantan are in winter plumage. Adult winter and second winter Black-headed Gulls are mostly indistinguishable at this stage, but a small minority of second

winter individuals show traces of immature plumage such as dark-patterned tertials and covert markings (especially on the upper primary coverts). Individuals seen in South Kalimantan have been pale grey overall in the tertials, having covert markings without a dark-pattern, indicating an adult in winter plumage.

On the island of Borneo, the Black-headed Gull has been reported in the East Malaysian states of Sarawak, Sabah, and Brunei Darussalam (Smythies 1999, Mann 2008, Myers 2016, Phillipps & Phillipps 2016). In the past, this species has been a very scarce winter visitor to the coast of northern Borneo, with one inland record of its presence (Mann 2008); however, more recently, observation of this species has become increasingly regular, especially in winter around ports such as Sandakan and Kota Kinabalu in north Borneo (Phillipps & Phillipps 2016). The current record of a Black-headed Gull in South Kalimantan is the second for this species in Indonesian Borneo. The Black-headed Gull was reported for the first time in Indonesian Borneo with an observation of three birds perched on wooden pillars in the port area of Nyamuk on the Sungai Kakap in the northern Sungai Nyamuk Delta, West Kalimantan, on 15 January 2011; two birds were still present on 23 January 2011 (van Balen *et al.* 2013). Eaton *et al.* (2016) show a distribution map for the Black-headed Gull in West Kalimantan, indicating that this species occurs there; however, their mention of Black-headed Gulls in northern Borneo is limited to the distribution of this species. Phillipps & Phillipps (2016) state that the Black-headed Gull is the only gull recorded in Borneo, but they do not indicate whether its range extends into Indonesian Borneo. Another Black-tailed Gull was observed in Sabah and is supported by a photographic record from Kota Kinabalu; however, the source of this record is unclear (Eaton *et al.* 2016; J. Eaton pers. comm.). Myers (2016) listed the Black-headed Gull and Black-tailed Gull as recorded in Borneo, but neither species has been recorded in Indonesian Borneo.

Phillipps & Phillipps (2016) present three theories as to why larids and other seabirds are rare in Borneo: first, the shallow seas around Borneo do not encourage the upwelling of nutrients, which are the food source of the fish upon which seabirds feed; second, Borneo's warm, relatively calm seas are not as rich in fish as the colder waters to the north and south; third, there are very few secure nesting sites for seabirds around the coast of Borneo. In addition, other than the record in January 2013 of the first Heuglin's Gull in West Kalimantan, Indonesian Borneo (Eaton *et al.* 2016), we surmise that the lack of information on gulls and other seabirds may be the result of a lack of observer effort.

In the last decade, a rapidly increasing interest amongst local Indonesian researchers and birdwatchers in Kalimantan, as well as easier access to binoculars and cameras, has led to an increase in observations of vagrant and migratory birds in Indonesia (Iqbal *et al.* 2009, Iqbal *et al.* 2010, Imansyah & Iqbal 2015, Iqbal & Albayquni 2016, Putra *et al.* 2018). In the future, further monitoring is needed to establish the status of Black-headed Gulls and other seabirds in Indonesian Borneo.

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