

## NEW REPORT ON THE DIET OF THE BLUE WHISTLING-THRUSH (*Myophonus caeruleus*) IN KAKEK BODO WATERFALL, STATE-OWNED FOREST IN PRIGEN, PASURUAN (EAST JAVA)

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### ABSTRACT

The Blue Whistling-Thrush (*Myophonus caeruleus*) is a member of Turdidae family which is comprised of six races distributed from Turkestan up to India and China, Southeast Asia, Malay Peninsula, Sumatera, and Java. This bird can be found around large rivers or between ridges in the forests. On 13 December 2012, we conducted an observation around the Kakek Bodo Waterfall's camping ground and tourism site, Prigen, Pasuruan. The observation resulted in the sightings of five endemic bird species (the Olive-backed Tailorbird, Crescent-chested Babbler, Yellow-throated Hanging-parrot, Javan Banded-pitta, Lesser Forktail), and a bird with minimal record bird in Java, the Thick-billed Flowerpecker. Another result of the observation is a new data on the diet of the Blue Whistling-thrush. This species is known to prey on snails, beetles, maggots, worms, and water bugs; however, that one bird we observed was preying on a snake (from the genus *Dendrelaphis*). This species had also been reported to scavenge for leftovers thrown away by food vendors in the tourism site, so that its behavior has gradually changed.

Key words: Blue Whistling-thrush, *Dendrelaphis* snake, diet, Kakek Bodo waterfall.

### INTRODUCTION

The Blue Whistling-Thrush (*Myophonus caeruleus*) is a member of Turdidae family which is comprised of six races distributed from Turkestan up to India and China, Southeast Asia, Malay Peninsula, Sumatera, and Java. The subspecies found in Java is *flavirostris* Horsfield, 1821. Its distribution is limited only in lowland forests and medium-elevation hills (MacKinnon *et al.*, 2000) up to 1650 meters above sea level like in Cangar (Foto Biodiversitas Indonesia, 2012). This paper will discuss the report on the sighting of Blue Whistling-thrush in the state-owned forest, Prigen, Pasuruan where an individual was spotted while preying on a *Dendrelaphis* snake.

### MATERIALS AND METHODS

Observation was conducted on 13 December 2012, around the camping ground and tourism site of kakek Bodo waterfall, Prigen, Pasuruan. The area is under the management of Perhutani (state-owned forest) which is dominated by Pine and *Swietenia macrophylla* trees production. Only the area surrounding the waterfall is still covered by variation of plants and inhabited by several bird species. As a matter of fact, the condition has changed due to deforestation and minor natural disasters (blizzards, hard rains, etc.) for these past few years. Species identification follows the field-guide book of MacKinnon *et al.* (2000).

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

During the observation in the production forest, we encountered these bird species:

Sooty-headed Bulbul (*Pycnonotus aurigaster*), Olive-backed Sunbird (*Nectarinia jugularis*), Yellow-vented bulbul (*Pycnonotus goiavier*), Small minivet (*Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*), Scarlet minivet (*Pericrocotus flammeus*), Olive-backed Tailorbird (*Orthotomus sepium*), Horsfield Babbler (*Malacocinla sepiarium*), Crescent-chested Babbler (*Stachrys melanothorax*), Javan Banded-pitta (*Pitta guajana*), Great Tit (*Parus major*), Velvent-fronted Nuthatch (*Sitta frontalis*), Chesnut-bellied Malkoha (*Rhampococcyx curvirostris*), Black-winged Flycatcher (*Hemipus hirundinaceus*), Fulvous-breasted Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos macei*), Grey-cheeked Green-pigeon (*Treron griseicauda*), Cave Swiflet (*Collocalia linchi*), Crested Serpent-eagle (*Spilornis cheela*), Yellow-throated Hanging-parrot (*Loriculus pusillus*), Blue-eared Barbet (*Megalaima australis*), Rusty-breasted Cuckoo (*Cacomantis sepulcralis*), and Red Jungle-fowl (*Gallus varius*),

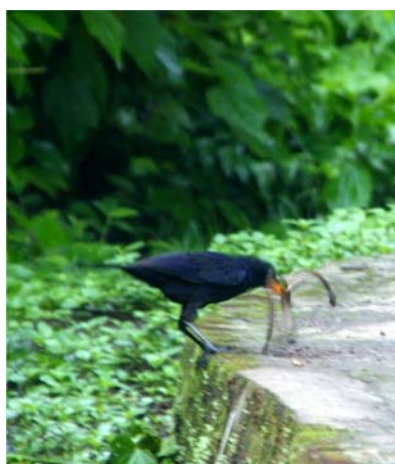


Figure 1. A Blue Whistling-thrush whipping down a snake before eating it. Prigen, 13 December 2012. Photo by Heru Cahyono

When we enter the area around the river heading to the waterfall, we found several species similar to what we found in the production forest such as the Lesser Shortwing (*Brachypteryx leucophrys*), Lesser Forktail (*Enicurus velatus*), White-crowned Forktail (*Enicurus leschenaultii*), Indigo Flycatcher (*Eumyias indigo*), and Blue-whistling Thrush (*Myophobus caeruleus*).

The last mentioned species was an adult, who was struggling to prey on a snake. This information is gripping because the diet of this species is known to consist of snails, beetles, maggots, worms, and waterbugs (MacKinnon, 1990 & 2000). On being observed, the bird was whipping down the snake upon a rock until it fainted, then flew away with the prey to eat it in a more proper place. The process of whipping down the snake was well-documented. After studying and discussing it with several fellow researchers, we concluded that the snake belongs to the genus *Dendrelaphis*. *Dendrelaphis* is a member of Colubridae family which is not poisonous, slim, large-eyed, and ventral and subcauda scales are formed by cartilages and are connected into a chain of hard bulges stretching throughout its body length. The males are generally smaller than the females, and tend to have more vibrant color (Mackay, 2006). The genus of *Dendrelaphis* consists of five species distributed in Java, one of which is endemic in Java (van Rooijen & Vogel, 2008).



Figure 2. The Blue Whistling-thrush before flying away with the beaten-to-death snake. Photo by Heru Cahyono

The discussed Blue Whistling-thrush was found at 1100 meters above sea level by the outlet stream of Kakek Bodo waterfall (7°41'59.10"S 112°37'29.00"E). The blue Whistling-thrushes in this place do not seem to be disturbed by the human activities. It is not unusual to see this bird frisking about the stones in the river, not far from the tourists. This Least Concern (BirdLife, 2001) species has also been reported to scavenge for leftovers of foods thrown away by vendors nearby, so that their natural behavior has been gradually altered.

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