

# RECENT RECORDS OF LITTLE CORMORANT *MICROCARBO NIGER* IN SUMATRA, INDONESIA

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## ABSTRACT

SETIAWAN, A., IQBAL, M., PORMANSYAH, YUSTIAN, I. & ZULKIFLI, H. 2020. Recent records of Little Cormorant *Microcarbo niger* in Sumatra, Indonesia. *Marine Ornithology* 48: 161–162.

We summarize observations of the Little Cormorant *Microcarbo niger* in Sumatra from 2016 to 2019. Based on these observations, we suggest that Little Cormorant has become widespread in Sumatra.

**Keywords:** status update, Little Cormorant, Sumatra

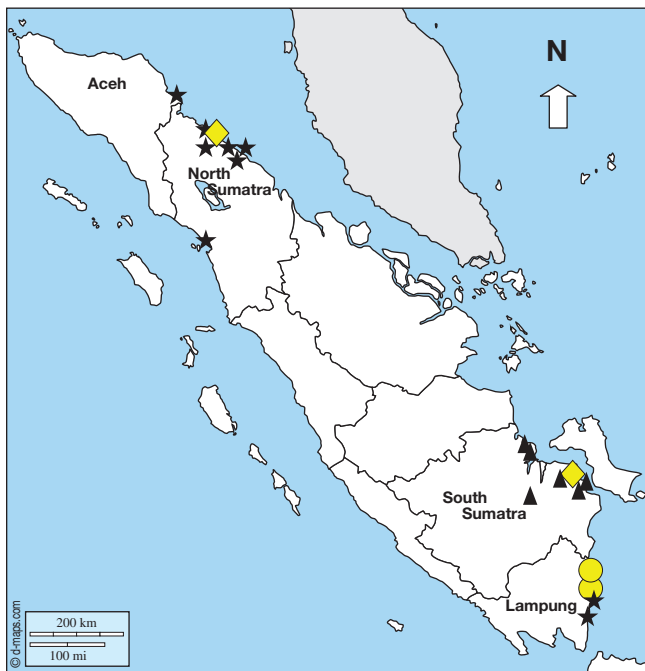
## INTRODUCTION

Little Cormorant *Microcarbo niger* is one of four cormorant species that occurs in the Indonesian archipelago (Greater Sundas and Wallacea; Eaton *et al.* 2016). This species is widely distributed throughout the Indian subcontinent, China, and Southeast Asia (Orta 1992, Johnsgard 1993); within the Indonesian archipelago,

it has been recorded in Sumatra, Java, and Borneo (Iqbal *et al.* 2013, Eaton *et al.* 2016). Three black-coloured cormorants (Little Cormorant, Little Black Cormorant *Phalacrocorax sulcirostris*, and Great Cormorant *P. carbo*) have been recorded within the Indonesian archipelago. A fourth species, Little Pied Cormorant *M. melanoleucos*, is not considered here due to its striking black-and-white plumage (see Harrison 1983, Johnsgard 1993, Sonobe & Usui 1993, Robson 2011, Eaton *et al.* 2016).

Little Cormorant was previously considered to be a non-breeding species in Sumatra (MacKinnon & Phillipps 1993, Eaton *et al.* 2016), but breeding has been observed recently (Iqbal *et al.* 2013). In addition to Iqbal's observations, we provide six more sighting records, which indicates the spread of the species in recent years (Fig. 1). First, on 28–29 November 2016, 10 birds were observed by the first (AS) and second authors (MI) in Sungai Batang village, Air Sugihan subdistrict, Ogan Komering Ilir district; at one point, eight birds roosted in a dead tree (Fig. 2A). Second, on 11 August 2018, three of us (AS, MI, P) saw a single bird roosting in a dead tree in Indrapura village, Muara Sugihan subdistrict, Banyuasin district (Fig. 2B). Third, on 02 September 2018, AS visited Jeruju River, Tulung Selapan subdistrict, Ogan Komering Ilir district, and encountered a Little Cormorant caught in the fishing gear of a local fisherman (Fig. 2C). Fourth, on 24–26 August 2018, a Little Cormorant was regularly observed by P and MI in Bungin River, Banyuasin Dua subdistrict, Musi Banyuasin district. Fifth, on 26 August 2018, a group of 10 Little Cormorants was observed by P in Barong River, Banyuasin Dua subdistrict, Musi Banyuasin district. Sixth, on 29 October 2019, up to 50 Little Cormorants were reported in Kuro Bangsal floodplain, Pampangan subdistrict. All six locations where we sighted Little Cormorants were on the east coast of South Sumatra province (Fig. 1). Our observations add to the seven sightings recorded in northern Sumatra between 2017 and 2020 and two in Lampung province (eBird 2020).

Due to the similarity of Little and Black cormorants by size and morphological characteristics, we were cautious in citing reports of



**Fig. 1.** Locations of Little Cormorant observations. Previous Sumatran records are in yellow, as summarized in Iqbal *et al.* (2013); circles are observation records, diamonds are breeding records. Recent records are in black (triangles are observations reported here, stars are from eBird (2020)).

Little Cormorant pending confirmations (van Marle & Voous 1988, Holmes 1996). Little Cormorant is a basically sedentary species but may move as a result of monsoon rainfall patterns and changing water levels (Johnsgard 1993). This species probably occupies freshwater lowlands, including ponds, rivers, lakes, swamps, and rice fields (Orta 1992). However, most confirmed records in Sumatra have been in estuarine habitats, except a very recent record from the Kuro Bangsal flood plain in October 2019.

Little Cormorant may have been overlooked in the past or it may have expanded its range to Sumatra, particularly from Java or maybe from the Thai-Malay Peninsula, where there are many observations and breeding records. Recent records from Java are listed in eBird (2020). In Malay Peninsula, Little Cormorant is a very rare non-breeding visitor to a few locations at low elevation, from Thailand south to Malaka. For instance, sightings were made in 2007 and 2009 at Sungai Cenang and Pantai Cenang, Pulau Langkawi, Kedah, and a single bird was seen at Bidor (Perak) on 25 January 2007 (Jeyarajasingam & Pearson 2012). However, a rise in Little Cormorant sightings between 2016 and 2020 suggests the possibility of a recent expansion south from Thailand to the Malay Peninsula (eBird 2020). The species has been observed breeding in Tanjung Tualang, Kinta district, Perak, in late 2016 and early 2017 (Yeap Chin Aik, Chan Kai Soon, and Sein Chiong Chiu pers. comm.).

A growing population of birdwatchers and researchers in Sumatra, as well as easier access to birdwatching equipment and field guides, has led to increased communication related to rare and vagrant birds in this region during the last decade (Iqbal *et al.* 2009, Iqbal *et al.* 2010, Imansyah & Iqbal 2015, Putra *et al.* 2018). Our report, at least in part, is a testament to this change. Additional sightings are needed to better

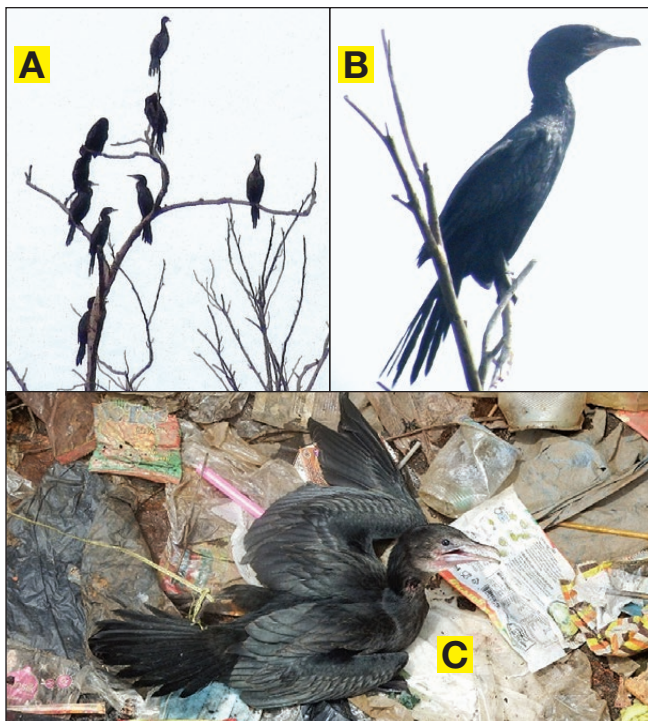
establish the status of this species and other waterbirds in Sumatra, to detect population trends and the condition of wetland habitats, and to establish conservation efforts for these species.

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**Fig. 2.** Little Cormorants in South Sumatra, Indonesia. (A) 29 November 2016 in Batang village; (B) 11 August 2018 in Indrapura village; and (C) an individual caught on 02 September 2018 in Jeruju River. Photos by Muhammad Iqbal [A & B] and Arum Setiawan [C].