

Status of the Northern Pintail *Anas acuta* (Anseriformes: Anatidae) in Sumatra

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Abstract

The Northern Pintail *Anas acuta* is a migratory waterfowl species that passes through Indonesia during its annual migration. This study reports on the presence of *A. acuta* in northern Sumatra, Indonesia, based on recent observations and historical records. Our results show that there are four records of *A. acuta* in Sumatra, with three records from Percut, North Sumatra. The consistency of records from this location suggests that it may provide suitable habitat for the species. The presence of *A. acuta* in Sumatra is a rare but regular visitor.

Keywords: *Anas acuta*, East Asian-Australasian Flyway, migration, Northern Pintail, waterfowl.

Introduction

Indonesia is a critical component of the East Asian-Australasian Flyway, a migratory bird route that spans from East Asia to Australia (Yong *et al.* 2018; Taufiqurrahman *et al.* 2022). Every year, millions of migratory birds from various species, including ducks, geese, and shorebirds, embark on this long journey to find food, breed, and escape the winter (Iqbal *et al.* 2021a, b). Indonesian wetland area is a vital stopover point along this flyway due to its strategic location and rich habitats (Abdillah *et al.* 2022; Iqbal *et al.* 2022; Rozirwan *et al.* 2022).

Indonesia's wetlands are diverse and include a range of habitats, from mangrove forests to freshwater lakes and rivers (Wibowo & Suyatno 1998). These habitats provide important breeding, feeding, and roosting sites for both migratory and resident waterfowl (Iqbal 2005, 2016). Many species of waterfowl can be found in Indonesia's wetlands, including the goose, whistling-duck, pygmy-goose, shelduck, wigeon, mallard, teal, garganey, shoveler, and hardhead (Eaton *et al.* 2021).

The Northern Pintail *Anas acuta* is one migratory waterfowl species that passes through South and Southeast Asia during its annual migration between its breeding grounds in the northern hemisphere and its wintering grounds in the southern hemisphere (Birdlife International 2019). In Indonesia, this species has been recorded as a rare visitor in Sumatra, Borneo, Java, and Sulawesi (Bashari & Martin 2018; Eaton *et al.* 2021). In Sumatra, this species was only recorded once from northern Sumatra (Eaton *et al.* 2021; Taufiqurrahman *et al.* 2022). In this paper, we discuss the status of *A. acuta* in Sumatra based on recent observations from the field.

Methods

In 2012, a survey of migratory waterbirds was conducted in the east coastal zone of North Sumatra Province, Indonesia. Bird observations were conducted at two periods, January and March 2012, to coincide with the peak migration periods of waterbirds species in Indonesia. During these observations, a team of experienced birders conducted systematic counts of waterfowl species, including the Northern Pintail, at selected sites. The sites are east coastal zone of Percut or Bagan Percut (3°43'34.0"N, 98°47'30.2"E; Fig. 1). Percut Village is situated in Percut Sei Tuan subregion, Deli Serdang region, North Sumatra Province. This area is one important site for East Asian-Australasian migratory wader populations, particularly for Green Sandpiper *Tringa ochropus*, Common Redshank *T. totanus*, Terek Sandpiper *Xenus cinereus*, Lesser Sand Plover *Charadrius mongolus*, Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata*, Eastern Curlew *N. madagascariensis*, Black-tailed Godwit *Limosa limosa*, Bar-tailed Godwit

L. lapponica and Asian Dowitcher *Limnodromus semipalmatus* (Iqbal *et al.* 2010).



Figure 1. Map of Sumatra, and location of records of *Anas acuta* in northern Sumatra (triangles). The black triangle is the record from 2012, and the yellow circle is the record from 2020.

The observations were conducted using binoculars and spotting scopes, and the birds were documented (Figs. 2 and 3). The January observation focused on the mid-wintering period, whereas the March observation coincided with the spring migration period, enabling a comparison of species composition and abundance between these two critical periods. Photographs were taken for documentation and identification purposes. To further assess the status of *A. acuta*, our observations were combined with other records of this species from citizen science platforms, specifically eBird and iNaturalist (eBird 2025; iNaturalist 2025).

Results and Discussion

There are four records of *A. acuta* in Sumatra (Table 1). Three of four records are from Percut, North Sumatra. The consistency of records from this location over the years suggests that it may provide

suitable habitat for the species.

Table 1. The historical records of *Anas acuta* in Sumatra, Indonesia. Note: NA (Not Available).

No	Date	Number	Location	Sources
1	1992, undated	NA	Unspecified	Eaton <i>et al.</i> 2021; Taufiqurrahman <i>et al.</i> 2022
2	14 January 2012	2	Percut, North Sumatra	Personal Observation
3	10 March 2012	2	Percut, North Sumatra	Personal Observation
4	14 January 2020	3	Percut, North Sumatra	eBird 2025, iNaturalist 2025

The waterfowl observed in Percut in 2012 were identified as *A. acuta* based on the unmistakable characteristics of the male. The morphological features observed were as follows: slender and long-necked, dark chocolate-brown head and upper neck, a white line extending from the side of the head down to the neck and whitish lower foreneck and upper breast, a relatively long slender grey bill with a blackish median stripe, and distinctive elongated central tail-feathers (Fig. 2 and 3). These features are consistent with the morphological characters of *A. acuta*, as described in relevant field guides (Madge & Burn 1988; Carboneras 1992; Sonobe & Usui 1993; Robson 2011).

The results of this study show that there are several records of the presence of *A. acuta* in Percut, North Sumatra. These data were obtained from various sources, including direct observation and reports from online platforms such as eBird and iNaturalist. From the collected data, it can be seen that there are four records of the presence of this species in Percut, North Sumatra. The first record comes from 1992, but there is no information about the number of birds observed. The second and third records come from 2012, with the number of individuals observed being two birds. These two records were obtained from direct observation in the field. The fourth record comes from 2020, with the number of individuals observed being three birds. This record was obtained from the online platforms eBird and iNaturalist (eBird 2025; iNaturalist 2025).



Figure 2. Two Northern Pintail *Anas acuta* on 14 January 2012 in Percut, North Sumatra (© Hasri Abdillah).



Figure 3. Two Northern Pintail *Anas acuta* on 10 March 2012 in Percut, North Sumatra (© Hasri Abdillah).

The *A. acuta* is widespread across almost the whole of northern North America, Europe and Asia (Madge & Burn 1988; Carboneras 1992). The bird breeds widely in North Asia, moves to South Asia, the northern part of Southeast Asia, south and central parts of East Asia in the non-breeding period (Sonobe & Usui 1993). In Southeast Asia, this species is uncommon to locally common winter visitor to Myanmar, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos; and vagrant to Peninsular Malaysia and Singapore (Robson 2011). The bird is a rare visitor in Indonesia (Bashari & Martin 2018; Eaton *et al.* 2021).

The consistency of records of *A. acuta* from Percut, North Sumatra, over the years suggests that it may provide suitable habitat for the species. There are few new and noteworthy bird records from northern Sumatra in east coastal zone of Sumatra, particularly the presence of Eurasian Oystercatcher *Haematopus ostralegus* and Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Calidris pygmaea* in Indonesia (Abdillah *et al.* 2025; Iqbal *et al.* 2025). The presence of *A. acuta* in Sumatra is a rare but regular visitor to Sumatra, Indonesia. The small number of records may indicate that *A. acuta* is not a common species in Sumatra, or it may reflect a lack of survey effort in the region.

The record of *A. acuta* in northern Sumatra adds to the expanding list of vagrant migrant waterbirds in Sumatra. This trend is likely driven by the increasing interest in waterbirds among local researchers and enthusiasts on the island over the past decade, facilitated by improved access to camera equipment with telephoto lenses for documentation (Abdillah & Iqbal 2012; Abdillah *et al.* 2025; Iqbal *et al.* 2025). Further research is needed to determine the abundance and distribution of the species in Sumatra. Overall, the results highlight the importance of continued monitoring and research on *A. acuta* in Sumatra, Indonesia, to better understand its ecology and conservation status in the region.

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