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Observation on A New Diet and Significant Number of Silvery Pigeon *Columba argentina* on Siberut Island, Mentawai Islands, West Sumatra

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Abstract
The Silvery Pigeon *Columba argentina* is one of the Greater Sundas enigmatic Columbidae. This Critically Endangered pigeon is recorded in nearly every islands offshore of west Sumatra coastline and mostly found in small flock. Its diet is poorly known, where fruits become the only dietary item ever reported. On 19 February 2026, during our survey in Siberut Island, Mentawai Islands, West Sumatra, we observed a flock of *C. argentina* feeding on fruits of *Planchonella* tree. This observation adds more fruit item into *C. argentina* dietary list, corroborating its frugivorous feeding status. It also highlights the importance of Siberut Island in supporting a significant population of 15 *C. argentina* individuals, representing approximately 6% of the global population.

Keywords: *Columba argentina*, Critically Endangered, frugivorous, *Planchonella* sp., Siberut Island.

Introduction

The Silvery Pigeon *Columba argentina* is one of enigmatic Columbidae in Greater Sundas (BirdLife International 2001). It is a rare, patchily distributed species in Sumatra and Borneo satellite islands, covering Indonesia and Malaysia (Yong 2009; BirdLife International 2019). Recent records mostly come from almost all west Sumatran islands (except Enggano), including Tepi Island, Simeulue Island and its surrounding (Eaton & Rossouw 2011; Iqbal *et al.* 2022), Nias Island (Svensson & Yong 2016) and Mentawai Islands (Lee *et al*. 2009; Yong 2009). In the eastern Sumatran islands, records are limited to those made before 1950, highlighting the need for careful surveys to confirm the species' continued presence in this region (Yong 2009). Likewise, records from mainland Sumatra still require further verification (Yong 2009; Iqbal 2010). In Borneo, the species has been recorded from the Anambas and Karimata Islands, as well as other satellite islands off southwestern Borneo, and was rediscovered on the Natuna Islands after more than a century (Yong 2009; Phillipps & Phillipps 2016; Syah *et al.* 2025). Meanwhile, a once substantial population on Burong Island, Sarawak, is now believed to be extinct (Baptista *et al.* 2020).

In the Mentawai Islands, *C. argentina* was first documented from Sioban on Sipora Island, based on seven specimens collected by Elio Modigliani in July 1894, although they were originally identified as *C. grisea* (Salvadori 1894; Ghiraldi & Aimassi 2019). Currently, within the four principal islands of Mentawai, the species has been recorded on Siberut, Sipora, and South Pagai Islands, as well as in the waters separating Masokut and Simaimu Islands near Siberut (Lee *et al*. 2009; Yong 2009; Verbelen 2010).

On Siberut, *C. argentina* is locally referred to as "*bailuggat*," while the superficially similar

Ducula bicolor is known as "*matmat*." The two species can be differentiated by several key characteristics of *C. argentina*, including its pale grey overall coloration, reddish-brown orbital skin, greenish bill with a reddish base, broad black undertail band, narrower black markings with more extensive white on the underwing, and reddish feet (Yong 2009; Phillipps & Phillipps 2016; Eaton *et al.* 2021; Taufiqurrahman *et al.* 2024). Due to its exceptionally small population size, *C. argentina* is currently listed as Critically Endangered, with the global population estimated at only 249 individuals (BirdLife International 2019).

There is a lack information on its breeding and diet (Baptista *et al.* 2020). Some recent published reports provide a handful information on its biology. A pigeon chick collected on 3 July 2021 from a 10 m nest on coconut tree in Tepi Island close to Simeulue Island, Aceh, gives some information about its breeding biology (Iqbal *et al.* 2022). Its diet, so far, consists of fruits only that hinting its frugivorous feeding status (Syah *et al.* 2025). On Linggam and Tepi Island, Aceh, it feeds on fig's syconias locally known as "*sini-sini*" *Ficus* sp., Chinese Bayan or "*buah rambung*" *Ficus microcarpa* and Melinjo fruits *Gnetum gnemon* (Iqbal *et al.* 2022). On Natuna Island, the species was observed feeds on the ripe fruits of *Psychotria* sp. (Syah *et al.* 2025). Here we present an observation recording a new plant species that fruits consumed by the pigeon, in addition to the sigthing of significant number of flocking individuals.

Methods

Observation conducted during a morning on 19 February 2026 at a freshwater swamp forest of North Siberut of Siberut Island, Mentawai Islands, West Sumatra. During 1.5 hours of observation, species presence, activities, and documentations were recorded; the latter was to confirm the identification. Bird taxonomy and common English name followed AviList Core Team (2025).

Results and Discussion

The observation of *C. argentina* was started when an individual observed flying in and landing on a tall *Buchanania arborescens* (locally known as "*tumu*" tree) in the survey area. The tree was about 25-30 m and amerged as a prominent standing atop the freshwater swampforest. Subsequently, several individuals followed the first one and perched at the same tree (Fig. 1), made up total to nine individuals that resting and preening. Some individuals sometimes flew in and out of the flock. No *D. bicolor* or other Columbidae mixed with flock.



Figure 1. Five of nine Silvery Pigeon *Columba argentina* perched at *Buchanania arborescens* tree in Siberut Island, Mentawai Islands, West Sumatra, 19 February 2026 (Photograph: Imam Taufiqurrahman).



Figure 2. A Silvery Pigeon *Columba argentina* observed feeding on *Planchonella* sp. fruit in Siberut Island, Mentawai Islands, West Sumatra, 19 February 2026 (Photograph: Heru Fitriyadi).

The second author then decided to enter the swamp to have a closer look and better documentation. It was later revealed that six more pigeons perched on the nearby *Planchonella* sp. and fed on its fruits (Fig. 2). This tree, locals named it as "*sosoken*", was about 10 m tall and inconspicuous from outside the swamp.

The ripe fruits from this tree are rather maroon, oval-shaped, with about 30-40 mm long (Fig. 3). It is significantly bigger than other fruits previously reported as *C. argentina* diet. The syconias of *Ficus microcarpa* are around 10-12 mm width (Tan *et al.* 2010) and the syconias of *Ficus* sp. recorded in Linggam Island are slightly smaller from the former (M. Iqbal *pers. comm.*). The *Gnetum gnemon* fruits are 10-35 mm long (Orwa *et al.* 2009) and *Psychotria* sp. fruits are as big as grapes, about 20-30 mm in diameter (Ahdiani *pers. comm.*). The observation confirmed that the pigeons had no difficulties to swallow somewhat large food item. This finding adds new information on this species' diet, as not reported previously (Iqbal *et al.* 2022; Syah *et al.* 2025).

Further investigation revealed that *Planchonella* sp. was rather common in the swamp area, extendingly inhabit to the plantations bordered with surrounding secondary forest. It belongs to Sapotaceae, a plant family with 300 species members recorded across Malesian region with approximately 158 species recorded in Indonesia (Hutabarat & Wilkie 2018). Many of its members produce fruits which become food sources for mammals and birds, which at the same time serve as its dispersal agents (Hutabarat & Wilkie 2018). In Papua New Guinea, Short-tailed Paradigalla *Paradigalla brevicauda*, Blue Bird-of-Paradise *Paradisornis rudolphi*, White-bibbed Fruit Dove *Ptilinopus rivoli* and Buff-faced Scrubwren *Aethomyias perspicillatus* recorded feeding on *Planchonella* sp. fruits and flowers, emphasized its importance for birds (Hicks & Hicks 1988a, b).



Figure 3. The fruit of *Planchonella* sp. collected from the freshwater swamp forest ground, Siberut Island, Mentawai Islands, West Sumatra, 19 February 2026 (Photograph: Imam Taufiqurrahman).

It is interesting to note that *C. argentina* usually recorded to join the feeding flock of the more common and abundant *D. bicolor* (Gibbs *et al.* 2001). However, as no *D. bicolor* seen during this observation, it could hint a possible difference of diet or ecological preferences between these two sympatric species (Gibbs *et al.* 2001; Iqbal 2016).

The presence of total 15 individuals in this observation is a noteworthy information. Previous records in Mentawai Islands (Verbelen 2010; Lee *et al.* 2009; Yong 2009,) reported only a single or two individuals *C. argentina* observed. The sizable flocks in this observation may reflect a good-standing population inhabit the island and represents a significant number, given about 6% of its global population estimate. Previous significant flock of *C. argentina* were reported in March 2016 from Nias Island of about 50 individuals counted (Rheindt *et al.* 2020) and on 4 July 2021 from Simeulue Island of at least 20 birds observed (Iqbal *et al.* 2022).

This observation adds valuable information regarding the dietary composition of *C. argentina* and confirms earlier reports describing the species as frugivorous (Iqbal *et al.* 2022). It also demonstrates the important role of Siberut Island in supporting the conservation of the species in the Mentawai Islands. Additional long-term observations are required to further document its ecological and biological characteristics, particularly aspects related to feeding habits and diet.

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