

Biodiversity Record: Movement of a laced woodpecker between Pulau Ubin and Pasir Ris

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Subject: Laced woodpecker, *Picus vittatus* (Aves: Piciformes: Picidae).

Subject identified by: Evan Landy.

Location, date and time: Singapore Island, Pasir Ris Park, mangrove boardwalk; 17 January 2021; 1533 hrs.

Habitat: Patch of mangrove within an urban parkland.

Observer: Evan Landy.

Observation: A female laced woodpecker photographed foraging in the mangrove was wearing a band on her right leg (Fig. 1). The image was sufficiently clear to reveal the code number N1416 on the surface of the band.

The observer sent the photograph to the coordinators of the bird banding programme managed by the National Parks Board. With ringing records provided by Jacky Soh and Lim Kim Keang, the code number was traced and it revealed that the bird had been banded on Pulau Ubin on 2 March 2007 at Jalan Mamam, near Beberok Hut, by Bari Mohamed. The site, at the northeastern part of Pulau Ubin, can be classified as a secondary forest habitat.



Fig. 1. Female laced woodpecker at Pasir Ris Park mangroves on 17 January 2021. The image on the left is a magnified version of the part of the photograph on the right showing the leg band with the code 'N1416'. (Photograph by: Evan Landy).

Remarks: The laced woodpecker is a medium-sized species that is a common resident of secondary forests, scrub, old plantations, mangroves and occasionally urban parks in Singapore (Yong et al., 2017). The movement of the featured bird is noteworthy for being a confirmed record of movement between Pulau Ubin and Singapore Island by a resident, non-migratory bird. It suggests that birds are equally likely to attempt movement between Johor, in Malaysia, and Pulau Ubin, and raises the possibility of more distant dispersal events. It is noteworthy that the original banding location is situated closer to Malaysia than Singapore Island, and would require a shorter flight distance over water of less than 1 km at the narrowest point between Pulau Ubin and Johor. Further study and re-sightings of other banded birds between Johor, Pulau Ubin and Singapore Island would be needed to understand potential conservation implications for birds such as the critically endangered straw-headed bulbul, *Pycnonotus zeylanicus*, of which 22.9–57.3% of the global population is found on Pulau Ubin and mainland Singapore (Chiok et al., 2020). This highlights the importance of holistic conservation management between Pulau Ubin and mainland Singapore.

Over the intervening 14 years, it is unknown when the woodpecker made the journey across the Johor Strait to Singapore Island, or if it had made the cross-strait flight multiple times. The distance is approximately 5.5 km from the site where it was banded to the site where it was photographed (see Fig. 2). The minimum distance covered over open water of the strait is 2 km from Pulau Ubin to Pasir Ris Park, or around 1.5 km if the bird had travelled to Changi then made its way along the north coastline to Pasir Ris. The bird would have been moving around various sites on both Pulau Ubin and Singapore Island. Further records, if available, are required to understand its movement over that period of time.

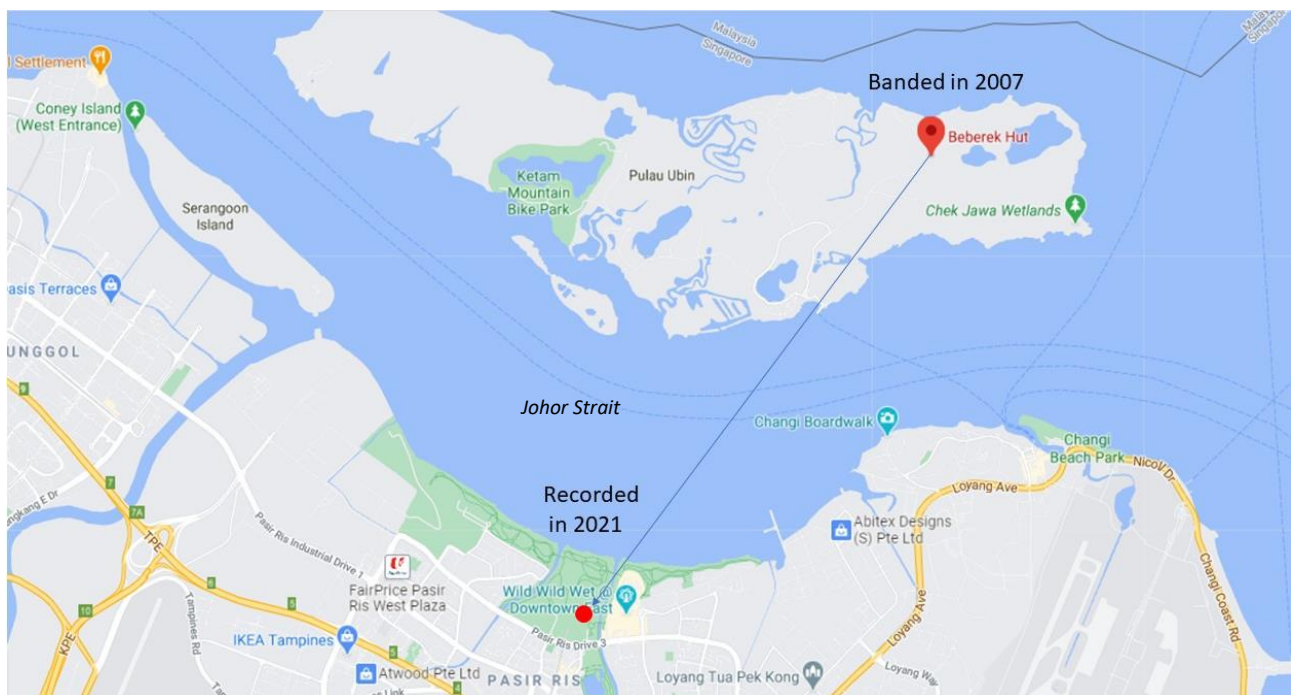


Fig. 2. Map showing the banding site and re-sighting location of the woodpecker. (Image: Google Maps).

The featured observation is proof that a laced woodpecker can live for at least 14 years in the wild. As the observed individual appeared to be in good health, it does not give any indication of the maximum age attainable by this species. However, the bird may be at the upper limits of its lifespan; another medium-sized woodpecker, the hairy woodpecker (*Leuconotopicus villosus*), has a longevity record of 15 years 10 months (Erlich et al., 1988). The generation length of the laced woodpecker is listed as 5.6 years (BirdLife International, 2016). It will be worth recording any future sightings of this bird as it will contribute to our understanding of the life expectancy of this species in the wild.

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