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Cover: Pseudo-flying animals and wind-dependent seed & spore dispersers – made with digital painting in Krita. © Melito Prinson Pinto



NOTE

Status of the Sumatran Striped Rabbit *Nesolagus netscheri* in Isau-Isau Wildlife Reserve, South Sumatra Province, Indonesia

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Classified as Data Deficient on the IUCN Red List, the Sumatran Striped Rabbit *Nesolagus netscheri* is endemic to Sumatra Island of Indonesia and is apparently the rarest lagomorph in the world (Flux 1990; McCarthy et al. 2019). *N. netscheri* normally inhabits montane forest, but was also recorded in lowland forest, at 544–1900 m elevation (McCarthy et al. 2012; Schai-braun & Hacklander 2016). This species has been documented along forests of the Bukit Barisan Mountains, from Gunung Leuser National Park in northern Sumatra to Bukit Barisan National Park in southern Sumatra (McCarthy et al. 2012, 2018). The remaining forests of Bukit Barisan Mountains in South Sumatra Province have been recently reported as important habitat for *N. netscheri* (Setiawan et al. 2018, 2019). Established in 2014 with a total of 16,742 ha, Isau-Isau Wildlife Reserve (formerly known as Isau-Isau Pasemah Wildlife Reserve) is one protected area in South Sumatra Province located in the Bukit Barisan Mountains (Mahanani et al. 2017; Whitten et al. 2000). The Isau-Isau Wildlife Reserve is home for many endangered species of wildlife,

particularly *N. netscheri* (Susilowati 2022). In this paper, we report the occurrence and review status of *N. netscheri* in Isau-Isau Wildlife Reserve. Due to its rarity and endemism, the coordinates of specific locations are not shown here.

Our study of *N. netscheri* was conducted in the Wildlife Reserve during various visits from 2018 to 2021. We set camera traps in the potential habitats to detect its occurrence. To complement our data, we interviewed as many as possible of the local people to explore their knowledge of *N. netscheri*. There are 24 villages around Isau-Isau Wildlife Reserve (Anonymous 2022), but our study focussed on two villages: Lawang Agung Village (Mulak Ulu Subdistrict, Lahat District) and Tanah Abang Village (Semende Subdistrict, Muara Enim District). Records of *N. netscheri* in Isau-Isau Wildlife Reserve are summarized below:

– A local person c. 70 years old from Lawang Agung Village reported seen *N. netscheri* in 1995 at 23:00 h. He saw an adult *N. netscheri* in the forest when he was hunting a Greater Mouse-deer *Tragulus napu* for food.

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Image 1. Landscape of Isau-Isau Wildlife Reserve, South Sumatra Province, Indonesia, 18 July 2021. A typical of preference habitat of *Nesolagus netscheri*. © Muhammad Iqbal.

Unfortunately, he forgot the exact date and month of this observation.

– In 2005, a local from Lawang Agung Village reported that he had shot an adult *N. netscheri* in the forest of Isau-Isau Wildlife Reserve. Again, this settler forgot the exact date and month. The habitat is a mix of coffee plantation and durian trees, bordered with forests. Some herbs are found, and based on interviews with local people, two of them are eaten by *N. Netscheri*: *Elatostema* sp., and *Godonoboea platypus*.

– On 28 December 2018, an adult *N. netscheri* was finally documented in the forest of Isau-Isau Wildlife Reserve at a day-night camera trap set up by the Nature Conservation Agency of South Sumatra Province (Balai Konservasi Sumber Daya Alam Provinsi Sumatera Alam). These photos from a camera trap confirmed the occurrence of *N. netscheri* in this conservation area.

– In early January 2020, a local person from Lawang Agung saw an adult *N. netscheri* near his hut. At that time, he was staying in his hut waiting for Durian fruits *Durio zibethinus*, January being a peak season of Durian fruits here.

– On 23 March 2020 at 1119 h, an adult *N. netscheri* was photographed at a camera trap set by the Nature Conservation Agency of South Sumatra Province in the same location where local people reported this species earlier, in January 2020.

– In mid May 2021, a local person from Lawang Agung reported seeing an adult of *N. netscheri* around his garden, located in a coffee plantation bordering with forest. He saw this adult *N. netscheri* in his small chilli farm *Capsicum annum* at night. It is likely that this rabbit was feeding on leaves of *C. annum*.

– On 17 September 2021 at 0138 h, an adult *N. netscheri* was documented by a camera of the Department of Biology of Sriwijaya University and Nature Conservation Agency of South Sumatra Province. The location of the camera trap is very close to the location where local people reported this species earlier in January 2020.

– On 9 February 2019, a ranger of Nature Conservation Agency of South Sumatra Province saw one adult with two young *N. netscheri* by day-light where *N. netscheri* had been reported earlier, in January 2020.

Thus, there are eight records of *N. netscheri* documented from Isau-Isau Wildlife Reserve between 1995 and 2022, three from camera traps and five from interviews with local people. It is clear that *N. netscheri* is very rarely encountered here. All records of *N. netscheri* in Isau-Isau Wildlife Reserve are from habitat within good canopy cover, or at least near a forest canopy area. Based on the interviews and observations of habitats, *N. netscheri* probably feeds on *Elatostema* sp, *Godonoboea platypus*, and young leaves of Chilli *C. annum*. The diets of *N. netscheri* have been summarized (Flux 1990; Setiawan et al. 2022), but further information about its diet is still required. In contrast to our previous study on the *N. netscheri* in Gunung Raya Wildlife Reserve (Setiawan et al. 2018), our interviews with more than 50 local people who frequent the forests suggest that many of them have never seen this rabbit, and almost none of them are intentionally hunted.

Information from settlers shows that *N. netscheri* is rarely encountered, but camera trap documentations help to confirm its occurrence.

The Sumatran Striped Rabbit *N. netscheri* is a protected mammal by Indonesian law (Ministry of Environment and Forestry 2018). Isau-Isau Wildlife Reserve has been justified by its conservation status in protecting *N. netscheri*. Our records of *N. netscheri* in Isau-Isau Wildlife Reserve give strong evidence that this conservation area is important habitat for this species in Sumatra. McCarthy et al. (2019) propose a study to define the distribution of the species on the island, and to develop an estimate of density so that population trends of this rare species may be monitored. To facilitate this conservation action, we recommend that regular patrol undertaken by rangers of the Nature Conservation Agency of South Sumatra Province staff in Isau-Isau Wildlife Reserve should also focus on *N. netscheri*, recording incidental sightings, and collecting information from local people and from camera traps installed in certain areas. This could provide essential information for conserving populations of *N. netscheri* in Sumatra.



Image 2. An adult *Nesolagus netscheri* documented on 17 September 2021: a—Position heading to camera | b—Lateral position move away from camera. © Department of Biology, Sriwijaya University.

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