

Fruit in the Diet of the Checker-throated Woodpecker

Amar-Singh HSS

Introduction

The Checker-throated Woodpecker *Chrysophlegma mentale* has a distribution from southern Myanmar and peninsular Thailand, through peninsular Malaysia to Sumatra, Borneo and Java (Kirwan et al. 2022). BirdLife International (2024; 2025) splits the Checker-throated Woodpecker into two species and considers the one found in Peninsular Malaysia (Checker-throated Yellownappe *Chrysophlegma humii*) as Near Threatened. However, it is still observed fairly commonly in the region (Wells 1999). The eBird/Clements checklist and IOC World Bird List continues to treat it as a single polytypic species (Clements et al. 2025; Gill et al. 2026).

The diet of the Checker-throated Woodpecker is thought to be almost exclusively invertebrates with occasional berries (Winkler et al. 1995; Wells 1999; Gorman 2014; Kirwan et al. 2022). Wells (1999) does not describe any frugivory for the region.

The mention of "*occasional berries*" appears to have come from Short (1982) who quoted a letter written by Harrison (1958) to the Malayan Nature Journal where he mentions "*green berries in its diet*". This is possibly the only reference in literature to the Checker-throated Woodpecker feeding on fruit, and that has been repeated in subsequent sources.

This report is to provide an update on fruit in the diet of the Checker-throated Woodpecker.

Observations

From the year 2022 to August 2026, I have observed the Checker-throated Woodpecker feeding on fruit on four occasions at various parts of the Kledang Saiong Forest Reserve, Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia.

Macaranga gigantea, January 2022

Macaranga gigantea is a towering tree when fully grown at 15-30 metres with a spreading crown. The fruit of *Macaranga gigantea* attracts many birds and mammals. I observed a pair of Checker-throated Woodpeckers feeding extensively on *Macaranga gigantea* fruit (Amar-Singh HSS 2022) (Plate 1). Fruits are 6-8 mm wide and held on branched inflorescences. Ripe fruit were taken directly from the inflorescences or by probing deep with the tongue. In the past I have observed two other woodpecker species, the Crimson-winged Woodpecker *Picus puniceus* and the Banded Woodpecker *Chrysophlegma miniaceum*, feeding on this fruit.

Trema orientale, May 2023

I was able to document a pair of Checker-throated Woodpeckers feeding on the fruit of *Trema orientale* (sometimes called *Trema orientalis*) (Amar-Singh HSS 2023). This is a fast-growing, evergreen shrub or tree (up to 12-15 meters) with extensive branching and a spreading crown. Fruit is a small ovoid drupe measuring about 3-5 mm across, initially green, turning black or dark purple when fully ripe. It is another popular bird feeding tree. Photographic observation of Checker-throated Woodpeckers feeding was difficult as the birds sat on the bushy crown of the tree and were often obscured. Feeding was rapid with many fruits taken. One image

documentation of fruit being taken is in Plate 2. The woodpeckers also visited two fruiting *Ficus* trees (one had ripe fruit) but I was not able to observe any fruit feeding.



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Plate 1: Checker-throated Woodpecker feeding on *Macaranga gigantea* fruit. Kledang Saiong Forest Reserve, Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia, Jan 2022.

Macaranga bancana, June 2023 and June 2026

Macaranga bancana is a small to medium sized tree with characteristic, large, three-lobed leaves. The fruit is held in 4-5-lobed capsules measuring 10–11 mm across and turns pink when ripe.

In June 2023 at a fruiting *Macaranga bancana*, I observed a single adult female Checker-throated Woodpecker feeding extensively on the fruit (Plate 3). The tree attracted many other birds and I observed intermittent conflict between the Spectacled Spiderhunters *Arachnothera flavigaster* and the Checker-throated Woodpecker (Plate 3). Spectacled Spiderhunters usually chase off the smaller birds at these fruiting trees but the woodpecker was not deterred.



Plate 2: Checker-throated Woodpecker feeding on *Trema orientale* fruit. Kledang Saiong Forest Reserve, Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia, May 2023.



Plate 3: Left: Checker-throated Woodpecker feeding on *Macaranga bancana* fruit. Right: Conflict with Spectacled Spiderhunter. Kledang Saiong Forest Reserve, Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia, Jun 2023.

In June 2026 I observed a family unit of three Checker-throated Woodpeckers feeding on *Macaranga bancana* fruit (Plate 4). The adult female was collecting large volumes of the ripe

fruit to feed the fledged juvenile male. I saw two feeding episodes where the female regurgitated fruit boluses to feed the juvenile; the number of fruit (from serial images) was in the range of 15-20. Some leftover fruit during the episodes was eaten by the adult female. The adult male was also feeding on the *Macaranga bancana* fruit but I did not see it feed the juvenile (observations were made over two consecutive mornings). Ripe fruit was taken directly from the inflorescences or by probing deep with the tongue. A video recording of feeding can be seen here: <https://youtu.be/InDLXue9imA> and <https://youtu.be/ID0DdOQenu4>.



Plate 4: Left: Adult female Checker-throated Woodpecker feeding juvenile male with a bolus of *Macaranga bancana* fruit. Right: Adult male feeding on *Macaranga bancana* fruit. Kledang Saiong Forest Reserve, Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia, Jun 2026.

Sarcotheca monophylla, August 2026

In August 2026 I observed a pair of Checker-throated Woodpeckers take at least eight *Sarcotheca monophylla* fruit. The fruit was not easy to reach and the birds often had to fly out, an aerial sally like flycatchers, to snag a fruit and return to another perch to feed. It was hard to document but fortunately there was one occasion where fruit was in easy reach (Plate 5). *Sarcotheca monophylla* is a favourite fruit tree in the forest for many birds. It is a tall tree and can grow to a height of 30 meters. Fruits are bright red and oval measuring up to 13 mm in size.

Additional Supporting Data

A literature review did not identify any articles on frugivory by the Checker-throated Woodpecker.

An online image search for images using a Boolean search for "Checker-throated Woodpecker" and "fruit" did not reveal any images apart from my own.

A review of all images in the Macaulay Library (ML) (908 images as of 23 August 2026) did not identify any showing the woodpecker with fruit in the beak, apart from those posted by myself.



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Plate 5: Checker-throated Woodpecker feeding on *Sarcotheca monophylla* fruit. Kledang Saiong Forest Reserve, Ipoh, Perak, Malaysia, Aug 2026.

However, the Checker-throated Woodpecker has been documented at fruiting plants/trees in the ML images (Table 1). My personal experience has been that it is hard to document the actual fruit in the beak. It is possible that the birds are feeding on insects among the fruit, but my observations suggest that fruit is taken at times.

Table 1: Macaulay Library Images showing the Checker-throated Woodpecker at fruiting trees (excluding my observations/posts).

Fruiting Plant	Location	Date	Source
<i>Macaranga gigantea</i>	Panti Recreational Forest, Johor, Malaysia	Jul 2026	Lemon Lam (ML662504831)
	Hutan Lipur Perdik, Selangor, Malaysia	Jun 2026	Yoke Kheng (ML660772791)
	Talang-Langkap Road, Negeri Sembilan, Malaysia	Jul 2025	Lee Cheow Lim (ML639186778)
	Deramakot Forest Reserve, Sabah, Malaysia	Oct 2024	Chris Daniels (ML624925412)
	Panti Recreational Forest, Johor, Malaysia	Aug 2019	Chun Fai Lo (ML548597181)
	Hutan Lipur Sungai Sedim, Kedah, Malaysia	Aug 2018	Choy Wai Mun (ML109886871)



Fruiting Plant	Location	Date	Source
<i>Macaranga bancana</i>	Panti Recreational Forest, Johor, Malaysia	Sep 2006	Lip Kee Yap (ML378722891)
Ficus trees	Kinabalu Park, Sabah, Malaysia	Oct 2025	Kenneth YK Chong (ML643475955)
	Taman Negara National Park, Pahang, Malaysia	Jul 2025	Ayuwat Jearwattanakanok (ML640182323)
	Kinabalu Park, Sabah, Malaysia	Mar 2020	Neil Osborne (ML619800272)
Unidentified Tree (possibly a <i>Callicarpa</i> sp.)	Bukit Tinggi, Pahang, Malaysia	Aug 2023	Jodhan Fine (ML604518141)

Discussion

Although the Checker-throated Woodpecker primarily feeds on invertebrates and insects, this documentation of feeding on four different fruit types, supports that fruit is not uncommon in its diet. The large volume fruit feeding of juveniles is unusual. More work is required in this area.

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