

LETTER TO THE EDITOR

THE STATUS OF THE LAZULI KINGFISHER

The Lazuli Kingfisher *Halcyon lazuli* is endemic to Seram and its satellite islands of Amboia, Saparua and Haruku, in Maluku. On Seram the species was described by Stresemann in 1914 as occurring in mangroves and lowland swampy woodland (*vide* White & Bruce 1986), but information concerning the past and present abundance is lacking.

During the 1987 Operation Raleigh expedition to Seram, I led, together with John Taylor, an ornithological exploration of the Manusela National Park and adjoining areas of north-central Seram, concentrating on examining the status of endemic and near-endemic specie*. Our first impression was that the Lazuli Kingfisher was common, as we located three pairs in degraded forest/garden habitat almost immediately upon arrival in the area between Wahai and the boundary of the park to the east. This included one pair visiting a hollowed-out arboreal termite nest. However, following two months of survey work in the region, from 20 July to 25 September, we located just two more pairs, in similar habitats close to the village of Solea (Bowler & Taylor 1989). It is encouraging that this species can utilize such modified habitats, but the apparent absence of this rather noisy and conspicuous bird elsewhere is strange and a potential cause for concern. The Collared Kingfisher *Halcyon chloris* appears to replace this species in the mangroves.

Bishop (1992) describes the species as notably common in the vicinity of Wahai on 11 June 1990. However, his records refer to three pairs in the same areas as the 1987 sighting. Taylor (1992) located just two pairs in the same area in August 1990 and again failed to locate the species elsewhere in north-central Seram during two months of fieldwork.

Visitors to Seram and its satellite islands should be encouraged to search for the Lazuli Kingfisher, particularly in areas away from the Wahai/Solea area, and to report all observations to *Kukila*. The species may prove to be widespread in coastal areas where village gardens mix with degraded forest. However, until more is known about its distribution and habitat requirements, the species should be treated as rare and potentially threatened.

References

- Bishop, K.D. 1992. New and interesting records of birds in Wallacea. *Kukila* 6 (1): 8-34.
Bowler, J, & J. Taylor. 1989. An annotated checklist of the birds of the Manusela National Park, Seram. Birds recorded on the Operation Raleigh expedition. *Kukila* 4 (1-2): 3-29.
Taylor, J. 1992. *A status survey of Seram's Moluccas endemic avifauna*. Private ms. White, C.M.N. & M. D. Bruce. 1986. *The birds of Wallacea*. Brit. Orn. U, Checklist No. 7. London.

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