

EDITORIAL

Over the past two or three decades the amount of ornithological research or survey work undertaken in Indonesia has been rather limited, and in 1980 the Earl of Cranbrook, writing on the state of ornithology in eastern Asia in the hundredth volume of the *Bulletin of the British Ornithologists' Club*, was able to say that "despite the sporadic efforts of enthusiastic individuals, the level of ornithological activity in Java at present is very low and elsewhere in the Republic is negligible". Any authors generally had to look outside the country in order to publish their work. For example, Hoogerwerf's summary of the ornithology of Ujung Kulon (the national park lying at the western tip of Java), made from field work over the period 1937 to 1958, was published by the *Natural History Bulletin of the Siam Society* in 1969-1971.

Recently, however, we are pleased to find that increasing numbers of ornithologists have been at work again in Indonesia, and they have collected a wealth of records. Some of these eventually appeared in print, though often in journals that were only readily available to the determined professional, but the less significant records generally remained as entries in some field worker's notebook. This at once raises the question: who decides what is significant?

Indonesia is the largest nation of the SE Asian region, stretching some 5800 km from Sabang (off the northern tip of Sumatra) to Merauke (a town on the south coast of Irian Jaya near the border with Papua New Guinea). Sabang has a sub-equatorial climate in the northern hemisphere, Merauke a strongly monsoonal climate in the southern. Between them lies the greatest expanse of equatorial rain forest in the continent of Asia. In the middle of this lies "Wallace's Line", originally named as a distinct faunal break but now recognized as a wide zone of insular and inter-faunal transition, between Sundaland (the southeast extremity of the Asian landmass, represented by Sumatra, Java and Kalimantan) and the Sahul zone (the Australasian remnant of Gondwanaland, represented by Irian Jaya). In addition to this dichotomy, we claim some 13,000 islands, with a high degree of endemism. It is not surprising that we have a notably large avifauna with at least 1500 species. Some of these are known from a few museum specimens only.

We also have a very large human population, over 160 million at the last count, and it is inevitable that natural habitats are being altered at an increasingly alarming rate. The result can only be detrimental to the avifauna and under such circumstances, it might be said that every bird record is significant. Your record of *Malacopteron magnum*, the Greater Red-headed or Rufous-crowned Babbler, from forest behind Sukamandang village on the Seruyan River in Central Kalimantan, may seem insignificant. However, probably it is the first record for the district, and if you are a land use planner, your very presence may signify that it will be the last. But did you notice that it might have had a slightly different song from those you have watched elsewhere in the region? Perhaps by the next century no-one will ever know.

This leads us to our first objective, which is to reach out to professional and amateur ornithologists and to publish their records. There are few international journals, with their world-wide readership, who would be interested in your record of a common babbler in the middle of Borneo. We will be publishing annotated checklists for specific localities, to set on record distributional data in more detail than previously available, and to monitor changes in this distribution. Some checklists will be comprehensive, the result of intensive professional study both in the field and in the literature or museums. Others will be more sketchy, but the records of reliable amateurs are extremely important. Very often it is only the amateur ornithologist who, as teacher, geologist or land use planner, has the facility to reach remote places. Inevitably our first issues will carry papers that concentrate on the better known and more accessible reserves and parks, but we hope that increasingly we will be publishing records from the more remote regions.

An annual bird report has been proposed, but it was soon realized that this would be an impossible task for such a huge area, much of it poorly known ornithologically. For the time being, it is more appropriate that we build up the data base steadily. Once up-to-date checklists have been published, at either a local level in *Kukila* or a regional level (checklists for Wallacea, Sumatra and Java now in preparation for publication by the *British Ornithologists' Union*), we will then have a

basis from which to select records for inclusion in annual bird reports. After this issue, for example, any new records from Cibodas - Gunung Gede (or the Gede Pangrango National Park) will need to be published. In the meantime, we are pleased to publish notes on any especially important new records, similar to those appearing in this issue.

In summary, we wish to appeal to all readers who have worked in Indonesia in the last two or even three decades, whether as professional ornithologists or as amateur bird-watchers, to send us their records. We need not only the "significant" records, but also lists of species from particular localities (identified as accurately as possible, preferably with a grid reference) in order to supplement our knowledge on distribution. We would also be glad to receive contributions for *Kukila* on any subject relating to the avifauna of Indonesia and adjacent seas.

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