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## ADDITIONS TO THE AVIFAUNA OF THE BANDA ISLANDS, MALUKU

by

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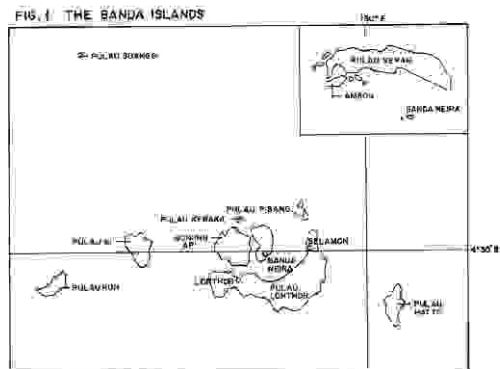
### Summary

During a number of visits to the Banda Islands, which lie south of Seram in the Moluccas, the authors describe or refer to a total of 32 bird species that have not been recorded previously from the islands. The majority of these are migrant species or seabirds, while some others may have been introduced. Very few represent significant extension of breeding range. Future visitors are invited to pay particular attention to the goshawks and sunbirds.

### Introduction

The Banda Islands lie *ca* 100 km south of the nearest land mass, the island of Seram in Central Maluku (4°31'S, 129°54'E). The three principal islands are Banda Neira, Gunung Api and Pulau Lonthor (Banda Besar). Other islands include Pulau Hatta to the east, Pulau Pisang (Pulau Syahrir) to the north, and Pulau Ai and Pulau Run to the west. The first author (LM) spent ten days on the Banda Islands in December 1993, the second author (CH) visited them on July 1-3 1994 and March 25-April 1 1995, while the third author (BvB) visited the islands on 20-21 April 1994.

White & Bruce (1986) list only 44 species for the islands. BvB notes that the seven most common species on the islands are Blue-tailed Imperial Pigeon *Diicula concinna*. Uniform Swiftlet *Aerodromus vanikorensis*. Collared Kingfisher *Halcyon chloris*. Common Dollarbird *Ewostomus vanikorensis*. Rufous Fantail *Rhipidura rufifrons*, Lemon-bellied White-eye



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*Zosterops chloris*, and Crimson Myzomela *Myzomela dibapha* (the endemic sub-species *boiei*), although CH did not record the Dollarbird at all.

The following additions were made to the avifauna during the above listed visits. Attention is also drawn to Johnstone & Sudaryanti (1995) who visited Banda Neira during 23-29 May 1992.

**Lesser Frigatebird** *Fregata oriel*. One immature on 21 Dec 1993 about 400 m offshore from Selamon, in a group of Red-footed Boobies *Sula sula*, which was following a mixed school of dolphin and tuna fish through the straits between Hatta and Lonthor (LM). Three Lesser Frigatebirds were also recorded by BvB on 21 April 1994 at Banda Neira. Although listed for nearby Suanggi by White & Bruce (1986) on the basis of de Korte (1982), there is no reference to this species on Suanggi in de Korte (1991).

**Little Black Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax svicrostris*. One flying low over the bay between Lonthor and Banda Neira, to settle in a tree on the shore of Gunung Api, 27 Mar 1995 (CH).

**Little Pied Cormorant** *Phalacrocorax melanoleucos*. One in overhead flight at Banda Neira on 21 April 1994 (BvB).

**Red-footed Booby** *Sula sula*. A group of 15 birds, 14 white phase, 1 brown phase with distinct white tail, observed on 21 Dec 1993 (see Lesser Frigatebird) (LM). Two large white seabirds with black wings flying low over the water between Lonthor and Hatta on 29 Mar 1995 were attributed to this species (CH). The nearest known breeding ground is Pulau Suanggi (de Korte 1991), which lies only 28 km NW of the Banda Islands. Previously recorded from Pulau Hatta in 1992 (Johnstone & Sudaryanti).

**Brown Booby** *Sula leucogaster*: One, 19 Dec 1993, 2 tan north of the main island group (LM). The species breeds on Suanggi but in very small numbers (de Korte 1991).

**Australian Pelican** *Pelecanus conspicillatus*. One in shallow water just off Kampong Lonthor, July 1994. It was subsequently joined by a tight flock of 12 pelicans that glided in from the northeast. Two were seen at the same location on 28 Mar 1995. Local people are familiar with the pelican, which they say commonly arrives in the "east-wind season, departing with the west-wind season" (CH). [This corresponds with the SE monsoon, at the time of the austral winter. Ed.]

**Great Egret** *Casmerodius albus*. Two feeding in close proximity on exposed tidal mudflats at Lonthor, July 1994 (CH).

**Little Egret** *Egretta garzetta*. One on the coral shoreline at Neira, 20 Dec 1993. Dark bill and legs, without yellow pads, suggest the Australian sub-species *nigripes* (LM).

**Reef Egret** *Egretta sacra*. One dark morph bird seen off Selamon on 21 Dec 1993, and one white

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morph bird, with dusky yellow bill and orange-tinted legs, seen on Neira, 28 Dec 1993 (LM) Two dark morph birds seen in July 1994, one on Pulau Pisang, one on tidal mudflats off Lonthor (CH). In March 1995, two birds (one dark, one white) on Gunung Api, and a white-phase bird near Kampong Lonthor, (CH). Previously recorded in 1992 by Johnstone & Sudaryanti (1995).

**Cattle Egret** *Bubulcus ibis*. Up to three birds seen on several occasions beside the airstrip on Neira, 19-27 Dec 1993, and one observed close to habitation at Neira town (LM). This species was also reported to BvB on 21 April 1990.

**Osprey** *Pandion hataetetus*. Single birds were seen at Selamon on 21 Dec, Lonthor on 23 Dec, and Gunung Api on 28 Dec 1993; it is not known how many individuals were involved (LM). One observed on Pulau Pisang in July 1994 (CH). In March 1995, there were two sightings, probably of separate individuals, on Gunung Api, and a pair was observed two days later for several minutes circling each other in leisurely pursuit and rising high above Banda Neira town (CH).

**White-bellied Sea-eagle** *Haliaeetus leucogaster*. One over Neira, 19 Dec, and a pair over Gunung Api, 23 Dec 1993 (LM). One over Karaka islet, between Banda Neira and Gunung Api, July 1994 (CH). In 1995, one adult was seen between Banda Neira and Gunung Api on 26 Mar and 1 Apr; an immature was seen quartering over the bay between Banda Neira and Lonthor on 27 Mar (CH).

[**Goshawk** *Accipiter* sp.] A pair of goshawks was observed from Gunung Api, over the north end of Neira, at a distance of some 2 km., 26 Dec 1993, engaged in aerobatics possibly as some form of courtship display (LM). A small accipiter about the same size (30-35cm) and jizz as the Australian Collared Sparrowhawk *A. cirrhocephalus* was seen briefly sailing low over the village and forested cliffs at Kampong Lonthor. It had broad, rounded wings and the tail was fanned. The underside was pale with a rusty fawn blush, paler on the throat. The wings were broad and rounded, with dark tips to the primaries and trailing edge of secondaries, and a paler base to primaries. A second bird was seen apparently hunting low over treetops, shoreline cliff-tops and hills near Kampong Selamon, Pulau Lonthor.

These records are included to draw attention to the occurrence of goshawks on the islands. The only species listed for the islands by White & Bruce (1986) is the Grey Goshawk *A. novaehollandiae polionotus* but the description of the birds observed by CH does not agree with this. In addition, BvB observed two, probably Grey Goshawks, at Banda Neira airport and also on Pulau Hatta, both on 21 Apr 1994, while Johnstone & Sudaryanti (1995) record Brown Goshawk *A. fasciatus cf didimus* on Banda Neira, at a nest, more data are now required.

**Spotted Kestrel** *Falco moluccensis*. One hovering over the airstrip at Banda Neira, 20 Dec, and one on Gunung Api, 26 Dec 1993 (LM). One at the airstrip 21 Apr 1994 (BvB) and again 30 Mar 1995, and subsequently a pair seen nearby (CH). First recorded for the Banda Islands in 1992 by Johnstone & Sudaryanti (1995).

**Little Curlew** *Numenius minutus*. A flock of ca. 10 feeding on tidal mudflats near Lonthor, July

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1994. Identification was confirmed by the characteristic alarm call. White & Bruce (1986) indicate that all other Wallacean records have been several months later, and this is also several months earlier than the usual arrival date in northern Australia (CH). Previously recorded on Banda Neira on 26 Sep 1992 by Johnstone & Sudaryanti (1995).

**Oriental Pratincole** *Glareola maldivarum*. A party of 13 at the airstrip on 19-21 Dec 1993 (LM). This sighting, together with another of 5 birds in Ambon on 5 Dec, indicates that the species is a winter visitor to Maluku, despite the sparse records given in White & Bruce (1986).

**Brown Noddy** *Anous stolidus*. Several between Lonthor and Hatta islands, March 1995 (CH).

**Spotted Dove** *Streptopelia chinensis*. A single bird at the harbour of Banda Neira on 20 April 1994 (BvB). It is likely that this has been introduced to the islands.

**Mollucan Red Lory** *Eos bornea*. Two birds in flight at Banda Neira on 20 April 1994 (BvB).

**Eclectus Parrot** *Eclectus roratus*. Three parrots seen crossing the strait between Gunung Api and Banda Neira on 21 April 1994 were believed to be this species. Identification was confirmed soon after with good views of a single male (BvB). This latter individual seemed very tame and may have been an escaped bird. One captive bird seen in Banda Neira in March 1995 was said by its owner to have been caught on Lonthor, where it is reputed to breed in the wild (CH). The species was first reported in 1992 (Johnstone & Sudaryanti 1995).

**Forest Kingfisher** *Halcyon rnacleayii*. A single bird seen on a prominent perch in cultivated land near the airstrip, 30 Mar 1995. On 1 Apr, three were seen at the airstrip terminal and in nearby cultivation. They repeatedly perched on the communications tower where they engaged in noisy display with nape feathers raised and wings drooped, as observed in north Australia (CH).

[Bee-eater *Merops* sp]. Two in flight over Pulau Hatta on 21 Apr 1994 were flying in a southerly direction at height (BvB), recorded as *Merops efoniatius*.

**Barn Swallow** *Hirundo rvtica*. Observed over the airstrip several times in March 1995 (CH).

[**Sunbird** *Nectarinia* sp ] A single male was seen briefly in dense vegetation on the outskirts of Banda Neira town, 25 Mar 1995. This was all black on the underside, and was either Black Sunbird *N. aapasia* or a black-bellied form of the Olive-backed probably *N. jüigularis clemenciae* (CH). [Future visitors are requested to resolve this identification - ed].

**Breeding records.** In addition to the breeding records listed in Johnstone & Sudaryanti (1995), BvB made the following observations of breeding on 21 April 1994: *Rhipidura rufifrons* (nest with one full-grown young), *Zosterops chloris* (small fledglings) and *Myzomela dihapaha* (very recently fledged young).

## Discussion

A total of 23 new species to the Banda list are described, this total including 6 that had been previously recorded in 1992 by Johnstone & Sudaryanti (1995); the latter authors had also added the following 9 new species to the Banda Islands list; Wedge-tailed Shearwater *Puffinus pacificus*, Pied Heron *Egretta picata*. Brown Goshawk *Accipiter fasciatus*, Oriental Plover *Charadrius veredus*, Sooty Tern *Sterna fuscata*, Great Crested Tern *Sterna bergii*, Yellow-crested Cockatoo *Cacatua sulphurea*. Glossy Swiftlet *Collocalia esculenta* and Pacific Swallow *Hieundo tahitica*.

Few of these additions are remarkable, the majority being migrant species or itinerant sea birds, although Oriental Pratincole and Forest Kingfisher may represent slight extensions of wintering range. It is perhaps unlikely that the Spotted Dove and the three parrot species arrived unassisted. Presumably the Osprey, Sea-eagle and Spotted Kestrel are resident, but the reported presence of apparently breeding Brown Goshawk is notable. Both the goshawks and the sunbird would warrant further study.

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