

## EDITORIAL

Recently an attractive guide has been added to the growing list of tourist guides to Indonesia, this one specifically for birdwatchers – a review of *Birding Indonesia* appears in this issue. As a directory of the best birding sites in the country, and the practicalities of getting to and around them, it cannot be faulted, and nothing stated here is intended to detract from the book's value. It does, however, have the effect of bringing Indonesia into the global trend of 'packaging' these sites, in preparation for the coming day when queues of 'birders' will twitch their way around the parks and reserves, and smart local entrepreneurs will have smoothed out some of the hassles that presently face the more intrepid. An *ojek* (motorbike taxi) ride in at dusk to catch the frogmouths and then back to the *losmen* (small hotel) for a hygienic supper of noodles and sardines, and write up the bird log especially kept for the guests. The clever *losmen* owner might even have a copy of Gould's Frogmouth *Batrachostomus stellatus* calls on tape, just in case the tourist does not already have a published one, to ease the burden of getting that extra 'tick' – if the bird in question has managed to survive the endless succession of mechanized intruders into its diminishing territory.

This is of course a cynical and negative viewpoint. On the positive side, we should be grateful to the modernizing trends that make the wonders of the natural world accessible to the many, rather than just the pioneering or very rich few. As pointed out by Collar (1997), "birdwatchers, alongside conservationists, are in the vanguard of the new explorers", and have a tremendous contribution to make in the compilation of inventories of important locations. Of course the tourist with time and budget constraints, and a lack of the local language, will seek to maximize his list in the most expedient way, and indeed the more visitors who come to these protected areas, the greater is the chance of initiatives for their preservation. Luckily the urge for adventure in visitors from more amenable environments will readily be satisfied by the equatorial forest, with its risks of leech bites, the sudden drenching downpour, the no mean chance of a bout of malaria; maybe the *losmen* food was not so hygienic after all, which would be singularly inconvenient on the 10 hour bus ride to the next packaged venue.

There is the risk, however, that this same global trend will lull the authorities into believing that conservation of biodiversity need go no further than managing the existing protected area network. Yet, as the reviewer hints in this issue, the sheer lack of birds in so much of the developed terrain in the western regions of the country serves as a stark and depressing reminder of the negative aspects of development. The joys of birdsong, which even the urban inhabitant from the temperate zone may take for granted, is something alien to the majority here (except of course from a cage, which is indeed one aspect of the problem).

Of course, the Indonesian Ornithological Society (IOS) will continue to encourage ornithologists to visit the best known birding sites of this 'mega diverse' country, and to submit their records (which few do) in order to build up the data base for these same sites. *Kukila* has already published annotated checklists for at least six of the two dozen or so main localities described in *Birding Indonesia*, and more are in the pipeline. Perhaps we should be devoting more attention to the compilation of the avifaunal data base for all protected areas, but manpower is in short supply.

As always, visitors are encouraged to submit their records, preferably listed by site, but at least by provincial or island unit, whichever is the smaller. The records may not be used immediately, but significant records will eventually appear in island bird reports or protected area lists. For ease of

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reference to regional compilers, a simple format of records is recommended, even down to a spread sheet format, identifying location, date, altitude (please always bring an altimeter), habitat, numbers etc.

But we shall be giving even more encouragement to those who have the means to become the real pioneers, which requires time, budget, bodily fitness, a working knowledge of the language, and the ability to withstand discomfort. Even within the 'package' sites, there are areas where few tourists venture and which are urgently in need of survey. In Sumatra, examples are the lowland Kluet extension of Gunung Leuser national park, or the mountains at the southern end of Kerinci Seblat. Again using Sumatra as an example, outside the three main sites listed in the guide, there are innumerable sites that desperately await an expert's pair of binoculars, in many cases sites that are destined for early development. The article on Bukit Tigapuluh in *Kukila* 7(2) is illustrative of the value of surveys in hitherto unexplored locations. As of 1995, there was for example still a substantial block of (logged) lowland forest, both swampy and dryland, lying on the North Sumatra Riau borders west of the eastern branch of the Trans Sumatran highway. In South Aceh (Aceh Selatan, on the west coast), there are three major areas of wetland forest, including the aforementioned Kluet extension, that have so far received either only cursory survey or none at all. Kluet is known to have White winged Duck *Cairina scutulata* and there are reports of Masked Finfoot *Heliopais personata*, but what of the Singkil region further south, or the peat swamp forests on the West Aceh South Aceh borders? Still in Aceh, much of the submontane zone is forested, and potentially supremely important for the Sumatran forest fauna (e.g. galliformes, possibly including Chestnut necklaced Partridge *Tropicoperdix charltonii* in East and North Aceh?). At the other end of the island, the Bukit Barisan Selatan national park awaits comprehensive coverage (but see under "Reviews" in this issue). But the practical problems of working in, or even reaching, such areas must never be underestimated.

Time is short. Unfortunately two of the three wetland forest areas identified above are also destined for agricultural development, notwithstanding the technical problems associated with such terrain. Likewise the Lunang swamp forests in the coastal zone of southern West Sumatra, now known to be another site of the White winged Duck, are threatened by very rapid development

The IOS is committed to the study and protection of birds throughout the country We have given full support to the activities of the BirdLife International Indonesia Programme, which has concentrated its area specific activities in the especially important and sensitive Maluku and Nusatenggara regions, and we give due credit to the importance of the identification of Endemic Bird Areas (EBAs). BirdLife Indonesia has associated itself with the publication of this extremely useful guide to the nation's best birding locations. The IOS would now like to emphasize the urgency of another identification and mapping programme being conducted by BirdLife, that of the Important Bird Areas (DBA). This applies especially to the EBAs that lie outside the tourist venues so well described in *Birding Indonesia*. Time is short, and on an island such as Sumatra, it is probably true to say that any remaining lowland forest of significant size would now constitute an DBA.

DAH

Reference:

Collar, N.J. 1997. Taxonomy and conservation: chicken and egg. *Bull. Brit. Orn. Cl.* 117:122-136.