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## NOTES ON SOME BIRDS OF TIMOR

by Paul Andrew

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The standard works on the birds of Timor were published by Hellmayr (1914, 1916) and Mayr (1944). Both authors described the resident avifauna carefully but dealt as cursorily with migrants as had the collectors who provided the specimens. Consequently, after three short field trips made in 1973 to what is now the province of East Timor, McKean *et al.* (1975) added over 25 species to the Timor list (cf. Mees 1976). In 1985 the author made two trips to south-west Timor, the first from 27 February 30 March and the second from 28 August 3 October. . A number of species which were previously either unknown or little known in Timor or the Lesser Sundas were recorded, often as quite common, and notes on 15 of them are presented here. A number of records were corroborated by Tom M. Gullick and these are followed by his initials (T.M.G.) All the records were made in 1985 and refer either to an area of mudflats at the head of the Bay of Kupang, West Timor (10° 2'S, 123° 6'E), or to the Bina Plain beside the Mina river near the south coast of West Timor (10° 8'S, 124° 7'E).

Seven species of Palearctic waders are listed, all previously overlooked on Timor and not mentioned by Mayr (1944), McKean *et al.* (1975) or Mees (1976). All records refer to the mudflats at the head of the Bay of Kupang.

*Pelecanus conspicillatus* Australian Pelican

At least 48 birds, all adult, were present throughout September in the Bay of Kupang and a further 37 were regularly seen on ponds on the Bina Plain in the same month. Local residents at Tambak Oebelo, a complex of fishponds on the mudflats at the head of the bay, insist that the species is resident. They also claim to have killed a thousand pelicans in a few days, insist that exhausted birds were plucked from the sea or run down on the mudflats, but are not clear as to the year in

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which this event took place. It was probably 1978 when there was an irruption of pelicans into Indonesian (Somadikarta & Holmes 1979). In mid-October 1981 approximately 150 pelicans were photographed on Lake Oendui, Roti, an island just west of Timor (Beudels 1981). Most of these records may be of birds remaining from the 1978 invasion as the only previous records from the Lesser Sundas are of one bird in Flores, in about September 1960 (Voous 1962) and of two birds in Timor in October 1973 (McKean *et al* 1975).

*Fregata ariel* Lesser Frigatebird

At dusk on 5 September 114 frigatebirds were seen gathering over coastal mangroves near the mouth of the river Olio in the Bay of Kupang, but no birds were specifically identified (TMG). At least 89 gathered in the same area on 30 September. Although the birds did not land until dark, amongst the 46 birds that had arrived by 17:05 (sunset is at approximately 17:45) there were 18 adult male *F. minor* and two adult male *F. ariel*. Hellmayr (1914) noted a record of *F. minor* from Semau, one of the satellite islands of Timor, but surprisingly there appear to be no previous records of *F. ariel*.

*Egretta picata* Pled Egret

Present on the Kupang flats throughout September, although the peak of 18 occurred on 31 August (TMG). There appear to be no other records from the Lesser Sundas and this species is probably only a casual visitor from Australia.

*Plegadis falcinellus* Glossy Ibis

Parties on two occasions, both on the mudflats at the head of the Bay of Kupang; 26 birds on 31 August (TMG) and 21 on 2 October. The absence of records between these dates suggests that two different parties were involved. Presumably these are parties of nomadic Australian birds but the same subspecies *peregrinus* is also known to occur commonly on Java (Kuroda 1936) and Sulawesi (Kuroda 1936 and Watling 1983).

*Calidris canutus* Red Knot

Present throughout September, most birds early in the month still extensively red on the underparts; at least 18 feeding with *C. tenuirostris* on 5 September.

*Calidris alba* Sanderling One on a sand promontory near the western edge of the mudflats on 24 September.

*Calidris subminuta* Long-toed Stint A party of three birds on paddy fringing the mudflats on 19 March.

*Calidris ferruginea* Curlew Sandpiper

First noted in March and present in large numbers throughout September. At least 180 counted on one section of mudflat on 30 September when an estimated 450 were present in the area.

*Limnodromus semipalmatus* Asian Dowitcher

Four at a high tide roost with *L. limosa* on 30 September but single birds had been seen feeding on the mudflats from 7 September.

*Limosa limosa* Black-tailed Godwit Present throughout September; 188 at one roost on 30 September.

*Numenius arquata* Curlew One at a roost of *N. madagascariensis* on 5 September and two at the same roost on 1 October.

*Gelochelidon nilotica* Gull-billed Tern

Present throughout September in the Bay of Kupang. Counts at high tide roosts suggested that birds were coming into breeding plumage; on 5 September 34 out of a total of 74 (TMG). and on 1 October 64 out of 82 had acquired complete or almost complete black caps. All individuals were adult and most were presumably visitors from Australia. The only previous record from the Lesser Sundas is that of two at Secal, East Timor, on 28 October 1973 (McKean *et al.*, 1975).

The east Asian race *addenda* winters south to the Greater Sundas (Harrison 1983) and presumably the small numbers reported by Escott & Holmes (1980) between October and April in Sulawesi were this subspecies. If, as seems most likely, all Timor records are of Australian *macrotarsus* then two races of *nilotica* visit Wallacea, *addenda* in the northern winter and *macrotarsus* in the southern winter.

#### *Chlidonias hybridus* Whiskered Tern

The taxonomic position and migratory patterns of this species were described by Mees (1977). The species occurs commonly on Timor but does not appear to have been formally recorded. On 5 September, 69 *C. hybridus*, 5 with almost completely dark underparts, joined a high tide roost of *Gelochelidon nilotica* near the mouth of the Olio river. Kupang Bay, West Timor (TMG). There can be little doubt that these birds represented the Australian breeding form *javanicus*.

#### *Chrysococcyx basalis* Horsfield's Bronze Cuckoo

One on 30 March at the edge of the mudflats, Bay of Kupang, and one on, 3 September on the Bina Plain (TMG). Both birds were in coastal scrub and exhibited the bright rufous base to the near outer tail feathers which is diagnostic of the species (Pizzey 1980).

#### *Apus pacificus* Fork-tailed Swift

Several thousand birds were seen over the Bina Plain on the afternoon of 12 March. They remained high above the plain until dark and only 6 were still present the next day. Single birds were also noted in the same area and in the Bay of Kupang in September. White (1976) mentions records from the Sangir Islands. Halmahera (cf. Mees 1982) and Flores. Also reported from Sulawesi by Escott & Holmes (1980) but, considering the nominate Palaearctic form presumably crosses Wallacea to winter in Australia, records are surprisingly few.

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## SHORT NOTE

### BARN OWL *TYTO ALBA* IN BALL

On 26 October 1985, I observed two adult Barn Owls *Tyto alba* briefly flying in the swimming pool lights of the Hotel Bakungsari Cottages, Kuta, Ball. at 23.00 hours. They flew off immediately on my approach. This appears to be the first documented record of this owl on the island of Ball.

It is interesting to report further that a week later, on November 2, I saw another Barn Owl in the spotlights of an out-door ballet performance at 20.00 hours at Pandaan, East Java.

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## ANNOUNCEMENT

The British Ornithologist's Union will publish its long awaited Checklist No. 7, *THE BIRDS OF WALLACEA* by the late C. M. N. White and Murray D. Bruce, in February 1986. This will be an important systematic review of the birds of Sulawesi, the Moluccas and the Lesser Sundas, covering 676 species in great detail, with a strong emphasis on taxonomy. The Bibliography covers some 1600 entries. This work is expected to form a vital and extensive source of reference for South East Asia and Australia as well as for Wallacea itself for several decades.

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