

IN MEMORIUM

HANS BARTELS (1906 1997)

by
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Hans Bartels, an eminent ornithologist, died on 6 February 1997 at the age of 90 years at Bilthoven, The Netherlands. With his death Indonesian ornithology has lost one of its pioneers, and because of his knowledge and friendly character he will be missed by many Indonesian and European ornithologists. He was always willing to answer questions and to share his knowledge. Personally, I remember him as a good friend and esteemed companion on many excursions.

The course of Hans' life cannot be seen without reference to his brothers and the family circumstances. Born on 6 July 1906 at the tea estate 'Pangerango' (better known by its locality name Pasir Datar) of the firm H.G.Th. Crone on the south western slope of Mt. Pangrango in West Java, he enjoyed great freedom in his youth. His father M.E.G. Bartels, manager of the Pangerango estate, was the founder of the famous Bartels collection of c. 15,000 skins of Java birds, now held in the Leiden Museum, Naturalis. Born as the third of three sons (Max born 1902, Ernst born 1904) he and his two brothers followed their father's footsteps. Growing up in a nearly optimal climate for bird study and interest in natural history, living on a rather isolated estate, there was no better playground for three growing up boys than the well timbered garden, the surrounding tea gardens and the virgin forest nearby. Of course the three brothers were also often found in the rooms where the collection was stored, and in the preparation room, where Sundanese workers trained by their father were preparing bird skins. The games they played, such as tree climbing, or running downstream leaping bare foot from boulder to boulder, developed a comradeship between them that was to persist throughout their lives. Their mother, Angeline Caroline Henriette Bartels Maurenbrecher (born in 1879 at Pontianak, Kalimantan) shared and stimulated their interest in nature. Although she was not trained as an artist, she skillfully painted in water colours all kinds of natural objects such as curious insects, butterflies and moths, their caterpillars and pupa, etc. Moreover, later, she painted birds in water colours for her husband's intended 'magnum opus' on Java birds named *Ornis Javanica*. She herself, being educated on the nearby estate 'Cipetir', near Cibadak, was very familiar with the Indonesian (and especially Sundanese) way of life and local traditions. She spoke the Sundanese tongue of this region fluently. As a baby, Hans was given to a local Sundanese maid for care, as was often done in planter families. This woman took him in her carrying cloth all around the house and garden, as well as in the forest, because she had the collecting of medicinal herbs (*jamu jamu*) as a part time occupation. For this reason, forest may have been an almost natural habitat for Hans from very early childhood. For the boys it was quite normal to walk bare foot like the local people, even in the forest, without regard for the roughness of the ground. At an age of 8-10 years each son was allocated a special native helper and guard (*paningggaran* in Sundanese, or hunter companion) for their safety, but also to teach (*mapagahan*) them in the secrets of the forest. At the age of nine Max had already ascended (bare footed) with his father Mt. Pangrango, the mountain behind the estate, an achievement which his brothers accomplished at about the same age. As teenagers, they gave themselves nicknames according to their special abilities or achievements. The

nickname of Hans was 'Polistes', a genus name of a small species of rather aggressive wasps (Polistinae or *usud* in Sundanese), because of his particular endurance and skill in locating bird nests.

The boys received their early primary school education (1914-1917) from their mother and only for the last two classes they were to the primary school in Sukabumi. Secondary school was attended in Bandung (1918-23), because there was no such school at that time near Sukabumi, and their mother went with them. In their teens they wrote extensive letters to their father summarizing all their excursions, bird observations and particularly nests and eggs collected. A great success was the discovery in June 1923 of a nesting site of the Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus ernesti* in the Kawah Ratu, the active crater of Mt. Tangkubanprahu (Bartels, M. 1925). All their letters concerned ornithology exclusively, and no other subject was ever mentioned! During this Bandung period a tragic event completely changed their future. On 2 January 1920 their mother died as a result of a typhus infection. This was a real shock for the boys as well as for the father, who never recovered from the blow. The children were boarded out mid-afternoon after Max had obtained his secondary school certificate in 1923, they were all sent to Haarlem in The Netherlands for further education. Hans finished his secondary schooling there in 1926 and returned (with his brother Ernst) in January 1927 to Java. There was an agreement with his father that he could get a year solely for ornithological research at Pasir Datar before starting a study or an occupation.

The period February 1927-June 1929 on the Pangerango estate was a happy and fruitful time for him. His activities were confined to the environment of the estate in order to obtain information on the nidification of birds, for which data were then unknown. For example the nest of the Black Eagle *Ictinaetus malayensis* (at that time called *Neopus malayensis*) had never been found, while the Javan Hawk eagle *Spizaetus bartelsi* (then *Spizaetus nipalensis kelartii*) was thought to be a migrant (Finsch, 1908). Hans discovered the nests of these raptors and collected the first eggs known to science. In addition he was responsible for the discovery of the nest and the only egg of the Oriental Honey buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus* known for Java. It is noteworthy that he rarely used a shotgun, because in his opinion observations were far more important than obtaining a dead bird. He was an excellent tree climber and completely free of agoraphobia, and he developed a new technique for climbing tall, isolated giants and using these as look-out posts for locating raptor nests. From this lofty perch, he had an unobstructed view over a large area of forest above the upper canopy. With a pair of Zeiss 8 x 30 binoculars at hand and some rolls of rice cooked in a banana leaf (Sundanese buras) for food, he watched the movements of raptors above the forest from dawn to sunset and recorded the observations in a minuscule notebook. Surely he was gifted with a large amount of patience. He studied their soaring flight and enjoyed their acrobatic courtship and displays. As he assured me later, these impressions belong to the happiest moment of his life. Besides work on the larger birds of prey, he also paid attention to smaller bird species for which the nidification was not yet reported. So he found the first nests and eggs of Black-thighed Falconet *Microchierax fringillarius*, Javan Owlet *Glaucidium castanopterus*, Nicobar Pigeon *Caleonas nicobarica*, Pied Imperial Pigeon *Ducula bicolor*, Spotted Crocias *Crocias albonotatus*, Crested Jay *Platylophus galericalatus*, Chestnut-fronted Shrike-babbler *Pteruthius aenobarbus*, Blue-banded Kingfisher *Alcedo euryzona*, a number of woodpeckers (Checker-throated *Picus mentalis*, Banded *P. miniacus* and Orange-backed *Reinwardtipicus validus*), and some others. He was also responsible for the first and only known egg of Indian Cuckoo *Cuculus micropterus concretus* for Java in the nest of Greater Racquet-tailed Drongo *Dicrurus paradiseus*. Near Palabuhanratu on the

southern coast of Java he located nesting holes of Wreathed Hornbill *Aceros (Rhyticeros) undulatus* (Julang) and Rhinoceros Hornbill *Buceros rhinoceros (Rangkong)*, laying already at that time the basis for the joint publication with his brother Max (Bibliography No.3), who photographed these birds in front of their nest holes.

Hans was very musical. During his school years at Haarlem he took violin lessons and during the lonely evenings at the estate (only having his father as company) he exercised this further. With this talent and his very good ear for bird vocalizations, he was able to distinguish the voice of every small bird. In this pre tape recorder age he tried to describe the vocalizations of birds both phonetically and also in musical notes. I own from his hand a paper with at least 21 different musical notations of the song of the Greater Racquet tailed Drongo, a species like many drongos that is gifted with a large vocal repertoire. Moreover, this species imitates the calls of many other birds. Typically, after hearing in these imitations the mating call of the Javan Hawkeagle, Hans immediately concluded there must be a nesting site of this raptor nearby, which proved to be true.

Hans was also a talented bird photographer. By an ingenious system of electric wires he devised an early photo capture technique. During his school vacations in The Netherlands he visited his brother Max in Switzerland and helped him to photograph the snow covered nests of Nutcrackers *Nucifraga caryocatactes*, resulting in a joint publication (Bibliography No.2 and Bartels, M., 1931). However he was far more enthusiastic and interested in the making of cinematograph films. In 1937/39 during his Sumatran period he made a Kodachrome colour cinefilm with a 16 mm Kodak movie camera of the breeding biology and complete life cycle of the Wreathed Hornbill (this film was however lost during World War II, together with all his note books). After his 'free year' at the tea estate, Hans returned in June 1928 to The Netherlands to receive a planter's training at the Secondary Agriculture School (Middelbare Landbouwschool) at Deventer. This school proved to be of great importance for his later life, because besides the normal subjects related to agriculture, sanitary and veterinary science were taught and he learnt metal forging and carpentry. These gave him the idea to design special climbing irons for ascending inaccessible trees. He completed this school in 1930 at the age of 24 and on 19 August 1930 he married Johanna Louise (Hanaie) Maurenbrecher, whom he had already known from Java, and they departed for Indonesia. In spite of the economic depression he got a job on the tea estate 'Pagar Djawa' of the HVA, near Pernatang Siantar in North Sumatra. The hard life of a novice planter gave little room for spare time and ornithology. Only in April 1932, when his brother Max visited him on passage to Java, did he get some vacation. Together they visited the Sibatuloteng forest reserve around Lake Toba where they discovered an occupied nesting hole of the Wreathed Hornbill. In June 1933 he found in the same forest the nest of the Pale headed (Short tailed Frogmouth) *Barrachostomus poliophilus*. The collected nest and egg were the first known to science and they also produced the description of the hitherto undescribed male of this species (Bartels, M., 1938).

The tea estate was in the process of development from the tropical rain forest, and he saw many striking and rare birds of the medium elevation and lowland primary forest of Sumatra. During these clearances the excessively hard and heavy tree species, which were very difficult to fell, were saved such as the Tualang trees *Koompassia excelsa* (Caesalpiniaceae). These enormous, bold, buttressed columnar trunks with smooth bark stood as giant trees of 60–80 m height in the open and were the favoured nesting trees of hornbills and many raptors. It was always a challenge for Ham to climb this tree with his self-designed climbing hooks and to make pictures of the nests. Because of World War II, Hans was called to arms in May 1940 and in March 1942 his group surrendered to the Japanese army. He was among the first group to be transported to Burma for the construction of the notorious Burma railroad from Mandalay/Moulmein to Bangkok. In spite of the distressing situation and the very poor living conditions, he found his mental strength by doing nature observations and seeing his beloved birds. He became acquainted with a fellow prisoner, an amateur herpetologist, with whom he studied snakes (they held a black cobra as a pet!). Hans was partly exempted from hard railroad work, because he could sharpen and forge axes and knives, and even more important he could prepare medical surgery instruments for operations from iron wastes such as old preserving tins, petroleum tins and oil drums, left by the Japanese. Also being a trained bush ranger he trapped all kinds of animal food from the forest for the protein supply of his fellow prisoners, such as forest rats and mice, snakes, lizards and birds, sometimes a small deer. When the prisoners' camp (Camp 108) was situated in untouched rainforest near the "Three Pagodas Pass", full of hornbills, he located the nests of four species. Whreaded *Aceros (Rhyticeros) undulatus*, Great *Buceros bicornis*, Plain-pouched *Aceros (Rhyticeros) subruficollis* and Tickell's Brown Hornbill [the Grey-brown] *Anorrhinus tickelli*. Although a conservationist, he snared four Tickell's Brown Hornbill males at one occupied nest hole for food. He already knew of 'cooperative breeding' and 'helpers at the nest' in the hornbill family in 1943–44, long before they were known had reached the ornithological literature! After the capitulation of the Japanese army in August 1945, it was not immediately possible to return to Europe and Hans moved to the Netherlands only in 1947.

In 1948 he returned to Sumatra, to the estate 'Balimbingan' near his former estate 'Pagar Djawa'. In June–July 1950 he studied there and photographed the nesting of Bat Hawk *Macheiramphus alcinus* in a 70 m tall *Koompassia* tree (the nest height was 62 m) (Bibliography No.6). In 1952 he returned definitively to the Netherlands, but during the year 1975–79 he went several times back to Sumatra, Java and Bali as a guide on nature tours. His utmost desire however to make a sound cinema production of a natural history or bird subject was never fulfilled. In 1957 he applied unsuccessfully to be film operator for the Papua expedition (Sterren mountains) of the Museum of Natural History in Leiden. In 1964 he wrote (together with Ernst) a scenario for a sound colour cine film on the breeding biology of the Rhinoceros Hornbill and allied species in Malaysia. Despite the support of the University of Malaysia (Kuala Lumpur) and several scientists, the funds were not forthcoming. In 1965, again in cooperation with his brother Ernst, he prepared a project for a sound colour movie film on the breeding biology of the endemic Philippine (so-called Monkey-eating) Eagle *Pithecopoga jefferyi*. This proposal was later extended to the study of the endemic Great Philippine (Rufous) Hornbill *Buceros hydrocorax*. However, again all his effort for the expedition failed through lack of funds, although the idea for the Philippine Eagle was later pursued and executed by others. Hans was a member of the ICBP Hornbill Specialist Group established by Alan Kemp (Transvaal Museum) and he

contributed also to the latter's book on hornbills (Kemp 1995). In addition he contributed to the B.O.U Checklist No. 10 on the birds of Sumatra (Van Marle & Voous 1988). Hans is survived by his wife Hannie, two daughters Willy (in Zimbabwe) and Ilse (in Canada), and a son Hans (in Australia).

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A photograph of a nest hole of Asian Pied Hornbill *Anthracoceros albirostris* in a tall Tualang tree *Koompassia excelsa* shows Hans Bartels climbing up with his climbing books along the huge trunk of this giant tree. The photo was taken in July 1932 by his brother Max at Pematang Siantar, North Sumatra. *Nederlandsche Commissie voor Internationale Natuurbescherming, Mededeelingen* No. 11 (1937): opp. p.57.

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