

EASTERN MARSH HARRIER IN KALIMANTAN

by

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On 26 March 1996, while bird watching on the outskirts of Tanjung Selor, a small town on the Kayan River, East Kalimantan, (1°17'27"E, 2°50'N), a raptor was seen flying over the local airport. The bird was immediately recognized as a harrier from its slender wings, held in a shallow 'V'. Detailed notes were made of the bird as it flew about 20–25 m overhead, once back and forth along the tarmac strip.

Harriers, in particular females and immatures, pose serious problems in identification and the relevant literature is often misleading, as was pointed out by Bakcwell *et al.* (1987). However, their guidelines to the identification of harriers assisted with the present bird.

The following description was taken in the field: *Head* mottled pale buff. *Body* breast uniform dark chocolate brown. *Wings* rather broad; above: uniform dark grey brown with some dark shading; below: primaries whitish with broad dark tips, secondaries brownish, wing lining chocolate brown and the same colour as the breast, with whitish to buff lesser wing coverts. *Tail* uniform dull grey brown

below, slightly darker terminal bar; upper tail vaguely barred, especially towards the rump. *Rump* with a small, ellipse shaped, conspicuously white patch. *Legs* yellow.

The combination of the following features is diagnostic of a juvenile or female Eastern Marsh harrier *Circus spilonotus* (see Porter *et al.* 1981, Bakewell *et al.* 1987) and excludes confusion with any other harrier occurring in the region i.e. a) Hen Harrier *C. cyaneus*, b) Pied Harrier *C. melanoleucos* and c) Western Marsh harrier *C. aeruginosus*:

- 1) relatively broad wings (excludes a & b);
- 2) faintly barred (or plain) tail (excludes a & b which females have clearly barred tails);
- 3) unbarred underwings (excludes a & b);
- 4) chocolate brown body and wing lining (excludes a & b);
- 5) whitish to buff lesser wing coverts (excludes a & b); and
- 6) white rump (excludes c).

Morioka *et al.* (1995) show a photograph of a harrier that resembles our bird, but which was identified tentatively as a Pied Harrier. However, the annotation was made by the authors that the head was too pale and the wings too broad for a Pied Harrier.

The Eastern Marsh harrier is a regular to locally abundant passage migrant and winter visitor to North Borneo and Sarawak (Smythies 1981). The species has not been recorded previously in Kalimantan, where only the Pied Harrier *C. melanoleucos* was known hitherto (Andrew 1992).

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