

**NOTE ON THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE KINABALU SERPENT EAGLE
WITH A FIRST RECORD FOR KALIMANTAN**

by
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During a general bird survey in November-December 1997 to the Tubu river upland (Bulungan district in the north of East Kalimantan), the forest above the abandoned village of Long Kipah was visited (3°06'N, 116°10'E). On 25 November at ca. 09.49 hrs, at 950 m a.s.l. on its mountain ridge, my attention was drawn to a distant long drawn plaintive call which at first reminded me of the call of the Giant Pitta *Pitta caerulea* that I had heard on tapes. Within a few minutes the producer of the call came closer. The call appeared to be from a raptor, but rather complex and unlike any raptor call I had heard before. A sound recording was made using a Sony MZ R30 Minidisk recorder and Sony ECM PBIC Microphone. On 26 November, at 08.25 hrs, a robust, stocky, very dark eagle was seen at the same locality as the day before, flying into the canopy of trees down the slope. At 09.27 hrs on the same morning another recording was made at ca 850 m.

After comparison with sound recordings of local raptors

it was apparent immediately that the raptor had been the Kinabalu (or Mountain) Serpent eagle *Pitohoris kinabaluensis*, an eagle hitherto known only from the mountains of northern Borneo.

The following description was made:

Vocalization: 1. Single plaintive long drawn "hiiiiiiii", not unlike the call of the Giant Pitta. 2. Complex call composed of three brief, rather soft notes "quick quick quick" immediately followed by a "kele" (with first syllable slightly lower in pitch than the other notes) and a long drawn "lifflllliiii".

The Serpent eagle's call has been described as "a series of very brief notes, running up to a final emphatic and more sustained note" (Davison et al. 1992). My recordings were compared with one made by A. Lewis on Mount Kinabalu; no differences were discernible.

Behaviour: On the two consecutive days the bird(s) were observed flying back and forth low over the ridge crest while calling continuously. Similar behaviour was reported by Bennett et al. (1987) for this species in Brunei.

Morphology:

Though this species may be difficult to distinguish from the Crested Serpent eagle *S. cheela*, the bird seen on 26 November was believed to be darker and stockier than the latter species, which I have observed so many times.

Habitat:

The forest over which the bird(s) were heard and seen was submontane evergreen forest between *ca* 700 and 1000 m a.s.l. The area downslope had been inhabited three or four decades previously but the people had been resettled downstream.

The Kinabalu Serpent eagle was described as rare in Del Hoyo *et al.* (1992), and listed as threatened by Collar & Andrew (1988), but this was revised to data deficient by Collar *et al.* (1994). The eagle was first described as a race of the Crested Serpent eagle from Mount Kinabalu, Sabah, in 1919 by W. L. Sclater, but has since been assigned full species status (Smythies 1981). Apart from Mount Kinabalu, where it is found between 1,400 and 2,900 m (Thiollay 1983), the eagle is known from Mts. Murud and Mulu, Sarawak (Smythies 1981). More recently it has been found at Ulu Temburong in Brunei, in a narrow strip of submontane forest on the *ca* 1,200 m high Bukit Tudal (Bennett *et al.* 1987). Collar & Andrew (1988) and Collar *et al.* (1994) mention Trus Madi (Sabah) as reported by Smythies (1981), but no reference is found in the latter work.

Not only do the above observations constitute the first record for Indonesian Borneo, it also identifies a major south east extension of the known range of the Kinabalu Serpent eagle, and a considerable extension of its known altitude range. With the recent observations of four other former "Kinabalu endemics" (van Balen 1997), this leaves only four other Bornean endemics yet to be discovered in Kalimantan: *Microhierax latifrons*, *Garrulax calvus*, *Bradypterus accentor* and *Oriolus hosii*

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