

Recent bird observations from Kisar Island, Lesser Sundas

COLIN R. TRAINOR

BirdLife International-Indonesia Programme, PO Box 310 Boo, Bogor 16003, Indonesia.
Current address: School of Science, Northern Territory University, Darwin, Northern Territory
0909, Australia. Email: colin.trainor@ntu.edu.au

Summary In September 2001 avifaunistic data were collected during a brief visit to the largely deforested island of Kisar (eastern Lesser Sundas). A total of 19 bird species were recorded including two new island records: Australian Pelican *Pelecanus conspicillatus* and Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*. Other interesting observations included the first sightings of the Little Friarbird *Philemon citreogularis* race *kisserensis* in almost 100 years. Study is needed to clarify the taxonomic distinctiveness of this taxon. The Rainbow Lorikeet *Trichoglossus haematodus* and Olive-headed Lorikeet *T. euteles*, known from nineteenth century records, were not recorded and may now be extinct. The 'South-west' islands were little studied in the twentieth century. Ornithological surveys of still forested islands such as Wetar, Romang and Babar are a priority.

Pengamatan Burung Terbaru dari Pulau Kisar, Sunda Kecil, Indonesia

Ringkasan Disajikan pertelaan mengenai spesies-spesies burung yang tercatat selama kunjungan singkat ke Pulau Kisar (kepulauan Sunda Kecil timur) pada bulan September 2001. Ditemukan 19 spesies burung, dua di antaranya spesies baru: Undan australia *Pelecanus conspicillatus* dan Layang-layang api *Hirundo rustica*. Juga dipertelakan catatan mengenai anak-jenis endemik Cikukua lantang *Philemon citreogularis kisserensis* di pulau-pulau Kisar, Moa dan Leti. Perlu studi untuk menjeleaskan status taksonomik spesies ini. Dua jenis nuri yaitu Perkici pelangi *Trichoglossus haematodus* dan Perkici Timor *T. euteles*, terakhir diketahui dari catatan abad ke-19, tidak tercatat dan mungkin sudah punah di pulau Kisar. Pulau-pulau di bagian Barat Daya, yang sedikit diteliti pada abad ke-20, merupakan prioritas tinggi untk survei ornithologi, terutama Wetar, Romang and Babar yang mempunyai hutan tropik yang luas.

Kisar (8°04'S, 127°13'E, 0-240 m asl, c. 100 km²) is a remote, rarely visited and consequently poorly known island in the eastern Lesser Sundas of Wallacea, Indonesia. Whilst its geographical affinities lie with the Lesser Sundas it is administratively part of Maluku (Moluccas) within the Tanimbar district or *kabupaten*. The local regional sub-district centre (*kecamatan*) of Wonreli is also responsible for Romang and Damar islands and consequently the island is an important regional transportation hub with direct links to Kupang, Saumlaki (Tanimbar Islands), Ambon and Surabaya (East Java).

The island forms part of the non-volcanic Outer Banda Arc of islands (Monk *et al.* 1997) together with nearby Timor (East Timor is just 25 km to the south). Geologically the island is characterized by uplifted limestone and melange. The coast is ringed entirely by moderately steep slopes and cliffs to 50-100 m above sea level covered in shrubland (3-5 m high) with scattered Lontar Palms *Borassus flabellifer*. Inland, the landscape comprises rolling hills and gullies reaching a maximum elevation of only 240 m asl. Habitat diversity is low, and includes grassy hills covered in Lontar Palm and scattered *Schleichera oleosa*, shrublands dominated by *Acacia* sp and small remnant patches of closed canopy tropical forest (to 14 m). Presumably the island was once entirely covered in tropical dry forest and semi-evergreen (closed) forest types, but these have been almost entirely destroyed, with perhaps less than about 1 km² (<1%) of the island's original natural habitats remaining (*pers. obs.*). Several springs and topographically protected rocky gullies are lined with a riparian tall closed forest (perhaps semi-evergreen) with patches typically occupying less than 1 ha.

Kisar is the driest island in south Maluku: Wonreli has a mean annual rainfall of 1,044 mm, with 80% of the rain falling between December and May, but no 'wet months' (> 200 mm/ month) (RePPProT 1989). The current human population does not appear to have changed greatly since 1874 when estimated at c. 10,000 persons (Monk *et al.* 1997). Kisar forms part of the far-flung conservation unit, the Banda Sea Endemic Bird Area (EBA 165: Stattersfield *et al.* 1998).

From 13-17 September 2001 I made limited (8 h) ornithological observations on Kisar however, these appear to be the first since those of Hartert (1904) which were based on a collection by Heinrich Kuhn. Following a trip to Damar Island, I transited on Kisar observing birds in the north of the island and around the town of Wonreli. I confirmed the presence of 19 species including two new species for the island (Appendix 1). In addition I note observations of the poorly known taxon *Philemon citreogularis kisserensis*.

Although Kisar supports no endemic species, a total of 52 species (43 resident, seven migrant and two vagrant) have been reported. At least historically, Kisar has supported five Restricted Range species: Pink-headed Imperial Pigeon *Ducula rosacea*, Barred-necked Cuckoo-dove *Macropygia magna*, Olive-headed Lorikeet *Trichoglossus euteles*, Rufous-sided Fairy Warbler *Gerygone dorsalis* and Green-cheeked Bronze Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx rufomerus* (Hartert 1904; White & Bruce 1986; Coates & Bishop 1997; Trainor *pers. Obs.*).

The following notes comprise observations of new * or interesting species on Kisar:

*** Australian Pelican *Pelecanus conspicillatus***

Two attempted to land near the shore in Wonreli Harbour at 1530 h, but were disturbed by passengers awaiting a ship. The pelicans continued to soar at c. 300 m over the harbour area for about 1 h.

Pink-headed Imperial Pigeon *Ducula rosacea*

Occasionally observed in mixed woodland with two pairs observed leaving a fruiting fig tree, 4 km NE of Wonreli.

Olive-headed Lorikeet *T. euteles* & Rainbow Lorikeet *T. haematodus rubritorquis*

Kuhn collected a total of 20 Olive-headed Lorikeets and two Rainbow Lorikeets on Kisar during April and May 1901 (Hartert 1904), which suggests that the former was common at that time. The Olive-headed Lorikeet is endemic to the central Lesser Sundas including Timor, Wetar, Alor and more than ten small islands, while the Rainbow Lorikeet is widespread in south Wallacea, Australia, New Guinea and Melanesia. Hartert (1904) collected two Rainbow Lorikeets in May 1901 and commented that "it is in my opinion not possibly a regular inhabitant of Kisar, but probably brought there by men or else reached the island as an exceptional visitor".

I recorded neither species of lorikeet during my survey. A local resident stated that he had not seen parrots for about 20 years on Kisar, and that he considered that they were extinct on the island (he held a Rainbow Lorikeet captured on Wetar Island). This was supported by Ois Lololuan, head of the local Telkom office, who had not seen parrots during his five years on the island.

*** Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica***

Flocks of 3-5 observed over the beach at Wonreli Harbour.

Little Friarbird *Philemon citreogularis*

The Little Friarbird is known from Australia and southern New Guinea (Coates & Bishop

1997) where it is resident and relatively common. However, the little known and highly localized Wallacean taxon *kisserensis* is restricted to the islands of Kisar, Moa and Leti. Sibley & Monroe (1990) and Collar *et al.* (1994) treat this taxon as a full species but without any supporting arguments.

On Kisar, *P. citreogularis* was common and widespread throughout all habitats visited. It frequently perched in the canopy of village trees, such as Lontar Palm and a deciduous red-flowering tree (perhaps *Erythrina*), where highly active. In Wonreli it was common in trees amongst village houses, even though persecuted by people and frequently shot with air rifles for food (or 'fun'). The voice of this taxon is typical of a friarbird: a range of hoarse calls including a two-syllable "we-ahh we-ah we-ah we-ah we-ah" (about 1 s interval), and raucous, more rapidly repeated "kick-oo kick-oo", which is similar to the description of the larger Moluccan Friarbird *Philemon moluccensis* given by Coates & Bishop (1997) and heard by the author on Yamdena in August 2001. A brief phrase of its call was tape-recorded and is held by the author.

Discussion

Kisar Islands resident bird species composition is closely associated with nearby islands including Romang, Sermata, Leti and Moa as would be expected. These islands, as well as Wetar and nearby East Timor, including Jaco Island (10 km²) would comprise the source of most its resident avifauna. The Green-cheeked Bronze Cuckoo *Chrysococcyx rufomerus* and Rufous-sided Gerygone *Gerygone dorsalis* are examples of local "Banda Sea" endemics, but species such as the Pink-headed Imperial Pigeon *Ducula rosacea*, Barred-necked Cuckoo-dove *Macropygia magna*, Olive-headed Lorikeet *Trichoglossus euteles* show a broader, "Timorian" influence.

The presence of an Australian race of the Rainbow Lorikeet on Kisar is difficult to explain unless it was introduced to the island. Evaluation of these specimens by genetic analysis may be of value. Given the broad habitat requirements of both Olive-headed and Rainbow Lorikeets on small islands in the Lesser Sundas (Trainor *pers. obs.*), the small size of the island and the ease with which both species are able to be observed in the wild elsewhere, I consider the lack of observations by local residents over the last 20 years to be strong evidence that they are now extinct on Kisar. If the Rainbow Lorikeet was indeed originally introduced to Kisar from Australia (possibly by collectors of sea cucumber from Ujung Pandang [Makassar]) it may not have established a viable population. Capture for the cage bird trade, and the loss of forest and especially of mature hollow-bearing trees are suggested as a general, and more likely, cause of their extirpation. Presumably, Olive-headed Lorikeet could reach Kisar from East Timor, Wetar (c. 40 km west) and Romang (60 km to the northeast).

Although field survey effort has been variable in the south-west islands there is a strong relationship between island area and the number of resident species (Fig. 1). Kisar, with 43 resident species, is near the regression line (not shown) for the expected number of species, while Luang and Sermata are well below the expected number probably reflecting the limited survey effort. Additional avifaunal surveys of these islands might significantly increase the number of residents known for these islands.

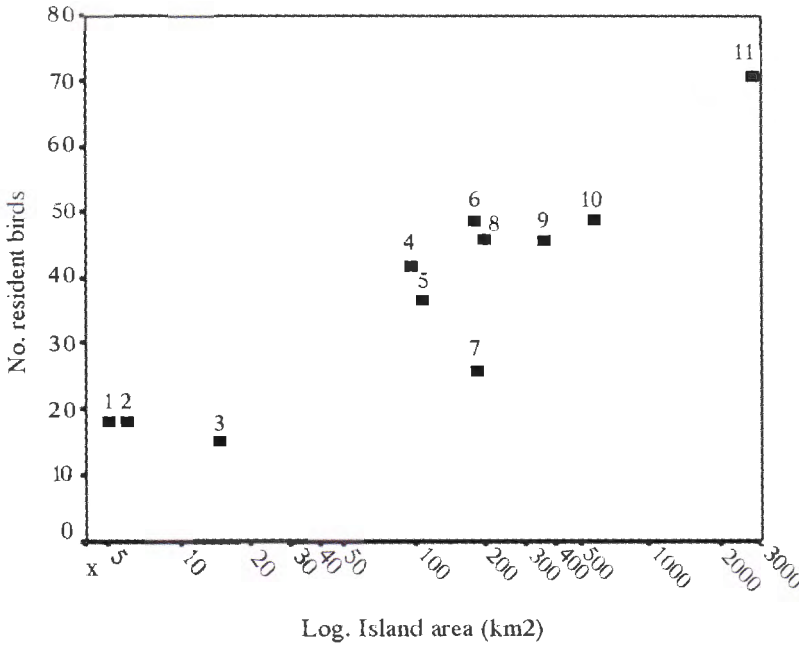


Figure 1. Relationship between island area (km²) and number of resident bird species on the “south-west” islands of the Lesser Sundas. Islands: 1= Terbang Utara (Damar), 2= Terbang Selatan (Damar), 3= Luang, 4= Kisar, 5= Leti, 6= Romang, 7= Sermata, 8= Damar, 9= Moa, 10= Babar, 11= Wetar. Data from White & Bruce (1996), Coates & Bishop (1997) and authors (unpubl. Data).

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Appendix I. List of birds recorded on Kisar. Sources: Hartert (1904), White & Bruce (1986), current study: "2001". Status: AM= Austral winter migrant, PM= Palearctic winter migrant, V= vagrant, R= resident, nt= globally Near Threatened; 2001 survey: X, recorded by author; Forest bird: F= Forest bird based on subjective assessment of habitat use.

Latin name	English name	Status	2001 Survey	Forest bird
<i>Pelecanus conspicillatus</i>	Australian Pelican	V	X	
<i>Egretta sacra</i>	Reef Egret	R		
<i>Nycticorax caledonicus</i>	Rufous Night-heron	V		
<i>Pernis ptilorhynchus</i>	Oriental Honey-buzzard	PM		
<i>Haliastur indus</i>	Brahminy Kite	R		
<i>Haliaeetus leucogaster</i>	White-bellied Sea-eagle	R	X	
<i>Hieraetus kienerii</i>	Rufous-bellied Eagle	R	F	
<i>Falco moluccensis</i>	Spotted Kestrel	R	X	
<i>Coturnix ypsilophora</i>	Brown Quail	R		
<i>Turnix maculosa</i>	Red-backed Button-quail	R		
<i>Gallirallus philippensis</i>	Buff-banded Rail	R		
<i>Rallina fasciata</i>	Red-legged Crake	R		
<i>Charadrius leschenaultii</i>	Greater Sand-plover	PM	X	
<i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	Common Sandpiper	PM		
<i>Esacus neglectus</i>	Beach Thick-knee	R, nt		
<i>Ptilinopus regina</i>	Rose-crowned Fruit-dove	R	X	F
<i>Ducula rosacea</i>	Pink-headed Imperial Pigeon	R, nt	XF	
<i>Macropygia magna</i>	Barred-necked Cuckoo-dove	R	F	
<i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>	Spotted Dove	R	X	
<i>Geopelia maugei</i>	Barred Dove	R	X	
<i>Chalcophaps indica</i>	Emerald Dove	R		F
<i>Trichoglossus haematodus</i>	Rainbow Lorikeet	R		F
<i>Trichoglossus euteles</i>	Olive-headed Lorikeet	R		F
<i>Cacomantis variolosus</i>	Brush Cuckoo	AM		
<i>Chrysococcyx rufomerus</i>	Green-cheeked Bronze Cuckoo	R		
<i>Centropus bengalensis</i>	Lesser Coucal	R		
<i>Tyto alba</i>	Barn Owl	R		
<i>Caprimulgus affinis</i>	Savanna Nightjar	R		
<i>Collocalia esculenta</i>	Glossy Swiftlet	R	X	
<i>Halcyon sancta</i>	Sacred Kingfisher	AM	X	
<i>Halcyon chloris</i>	Collared Kingfisher	R	X	
<i>Merops ornatus</i>	Rainbow Bee-eater	AM		
<i>Eurystomus orientalis</i>	Common Dollarbird	R		
<i>Pitta elegans</i>	Elegant Pitta	R		F
<i>Hirundo rustica</i>	Barn Swallow	PM	X	
<i>Hirundo tahitica</i>	Pacific Swallow	R		
<i>Anthus novaeseelandiae</i>	Richard's Pipit	R	X	
<i>Coracina novaehollandiae</i>	Black-faced Cuckoo-shrike	R		
<i>Coracina papuensis</i>	White-bellied Cuckoo-shrike	R		F
<i>Lalage sueurii</i>	White-shouldered Triller	R	X	
<i>Lanius schach</i>	Long-tailed Shrike	R		
<i>Saxicola caprata</i>	Pied Bush-chat	R	X	
<i>Cisticola juncidis</i>	Zitting Cisticola	R		
<i>Gerygone dorsalis</i>	Rufous-sided Gerygone	R		F
<i>Monarcha cinerascens</i>	Island Monarch	R		F
<i>Monarcha trivirgatus</i>	Spectacled Monarch	R		F
<i>Zosterops citrinellus</i>	Ashy-bellied White-eye	R	X	
<i>Philemon citreogularis</i>	Little Friarbird	R	X	
<i>Taeniopygia guttata</i>	Zebra Finch	R	X	
<i>Lonchura punctulata</i>	Scaly-breasted Munia	R		
<i>Lonchura pallida</i>	Pale-headed Munia	R		
<i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>	Large-billed Crow	R	X	
TOTAL		52	19	12