

## Editorial

As this editorial is being written, it is almost one year ago when disaster struck Indonesia and several other nations surrounding the Indian Ocean. On the morning of 26 December 2004 the massive earthquake off the west coast of Sumatra generated a series of massive waves that caused the death of nearly a quarter of a million people. Sumatra was the worst affected area, Banda Aceh being almost totally destroyed. Regrettably, the human toll might have been less if coastal habitats had been protected or managed, but much of Sumatra's coast is already degraded (e.g. Davie & Sumardja 1997; *Pacific Conservation Biology* 3: 366-378). The probable impacts of the tsunamis on birds were catalogued on the BirdLife International website [www.birdlife.org](http://www.birdlife.org), and summarised by Sykes (2005; *BirdingASIA* 3: 13-16). As terrible and unpredictable as the effects of the tsunamis were on human lives and livelihoods, their impact on wildlife was surely minor compared to the effects of deforestation, habitat fragmentation and fire in Sumatra (and Kalimantan), all caused by humans.

In the midst of ongoing habitat loss for, and illegal trade in, Indonesian birds, it is heartening to witness the emergence of Indonesia's first national ornithological organization. The Indonesian Ornithologists' Union (IdOU) was officially inaugurated in August 2004, and with its formation, a new generation of Indonesian ornithologists can take pride in their achievements.

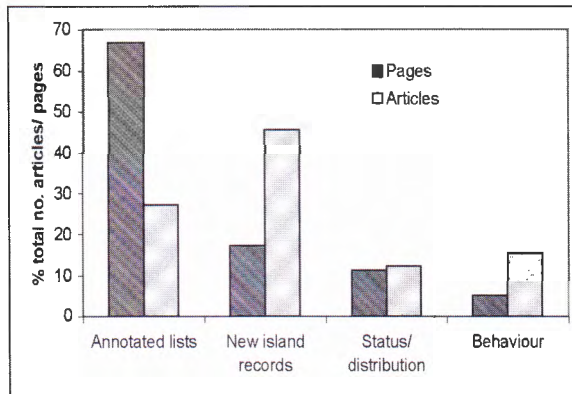
Almost 20 years after the publication of the first issue of *Kukila* volume 2 (the first volume, published a decade earlier, was primarily avicultural in content) under the auspices of the Indonesian Ornithological Society (IOS), *Kukila* has found a new home. The journal was officially handed over to IdOU on 1 May 2004, by Dr. Made Sri Prana, Chairman of the IOS.

With the passing of an era, it is fitting to pay tribute again to the founding father and long-term senior editor of *Kukila*, Derek Holmes, who died in October 2000. Derek's passion for Indonesian birds and their conservation, along with his formidable knowledge, provided the driving force for what is now an internationally respected journal. As willingly confessed in the Editorial for Volume 12, Derek's shoes have been impossible to fill. We also gratefully acknowledge the efforts of Prof Somadikarta, as co-editor of *Kukila* for many years. Birdlife International-Indonesia supported and housed *Kukila* for ten years, and we are very grateful to Richard Grimmett and Herly Lisdawati for volunteering their time so generously to maintain *Kukila* stock and financial records. The generous financial support of Joost Brouwer is also greatly appreciated.

Since assuming the role of Chief Editor in 2001, I have been driven by two goals, the first of which is to transform an essentially European-dominated journal to one that is at least equally written and read by Indonesians. As a first step in making the journal more accessible to non-English speakers, summaries (Ringkasan) in Bahasa Indonesian were introduced in Volume 12. It is hoped that this small, but significant, initiative will provide an incentive for more Indonesian ornithologists to read the journal, and to submit their own contributions to the Secretariat. Happily this process is occurring gradually already, and the present volume contains several contributions written by Indonesians.

My second goal is to shift the focus of *Kukila* to reflect a more diverse array of ornithological themes. Given the inadequate state of knowledge of the distribution of

Indonesian birds in the mid-1980s, it is small wonder that the first *Kukila* editorial (Volume 2) was essentially an impassioned plea for distributional records, particularly annotated checklists. The appeal was successful, as an analysis of past volumes shows. An overwhelming two-thirds (67%) of the page space in Volumes 2 to 10 were consumed by annotated lists, even though new island records predominated (45%) in terms of numbers of articles (Fig. 1). Clearly the average annotated list was much longer than any other type of contribution! The remaining 27% of articles (including short communications) concerned either bird behaviour or the status of threatened and poorly-known species, the latter predominating in terms of space allocation.

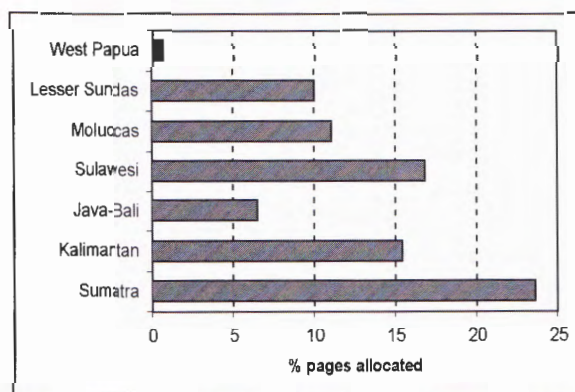


**Figure 1.** Relative contributions of broad topics to *Kukila* volumes 2-10.  $n$  (articles) = 182;  $n$  (pages) = 1273.

With the exception of West Papua, the geographical spread of these contributions was surprisingly unbiased: the space allocated to the Greater Sundas and Wallacea was roughly commensurate with their avifaunas. Within the Greater Sundas, Sumatran articles contributed slightly more than those concerning Kalimantan (Fig. 2), although there was surprisingly little on Java and Bali, given their prominence in government and tourism, respectively. Sulawesi dominated articles concerning Wallacea, but the minor imbalance has been partly redressed in the previous and present volumes. However the paucity of contributions from West Papua is a matter for serious concern.

Notwithstanding the extremely important role that distributional data have played over the last two decades in increasing our understanding of the status of rare and threatened species, and in assigning Important Birds Areas, the lack of ecological and behavioural studies in the past is lamentable. With avifaunal reviews of most major islands completed or in preparation, I believe that the time is ripe for *Kukila* and the IdOU to embrace and encourage “natural history” studies of birds. Natural history is the cornerstone of good ecology and wildlife management, and indirectly contributes to conservation. Without knowledge of the food, habitat and nesting requirements of a rare or threatened species, it is impossible to identify the reasons for its rarity or decline. Sadly, except for a handful of such species, we know almost nothing about the life history of the vast majority of even the commonest of Indonesian birds. This hiatus in our knowledge affects not only regional ornithology, but also global ecology, as it hampers discussions of tropical ecology, the literature for which is still heavily biased towards the American tropics.

Fortunately, such basic ecological studies, particularly observations of behaviour (eg. nesting, feeding, vocalisations), require minimal equipment and financial support, and can be done by one individual, without the assistance of others. They can be conducted in a paddy field, forest remnant or even in the streets of a busy city like Jakarta. They require only a pair of binoculars, a notebook, meticulousness, patience and a desire to make new discoveries. The more data collected (eg. regular visits to a habitat plot or nest), the more publishable these observations become. With the accumulation of such data we may eventually be able to answer questions like: do forest birds forage lower during rain; and does the breeding season or clutch size of birds vary across Indonesia? And if banding (ringing) is incorporated into a project, we may soon be able to answer questions like: how long do Indonesian forest birds live; how large are their territories; and do migrants return to the same habitat patch each year?



**Figure 2.** Contributions to *Kukila* volumes 2-10 according to biogeographic regions. Articles concerning seabirds and species status across Indonesia or Wallacea are excluded.

In closing, I urge readers to pick up their binoculars and start *watching*, rather than simply recording, birds. I appeal to those who already have behavioural or other ecological data on Indonesian birds - hidden in diaries or notebooks - to submit their observations to *Kukila* for consideration as articles or short communications. And for “twitchers” or birders who have lists of species for under-surveyed areas, or have found new sites for rare or poorly-known species, we have introduced a new section called Around the Archipelago.

Happy birding!  
Richard Noske  
Chief Editor