

First record of Black Kite *Milvus migrans* for Flores, Lesser Sundas

MARK SCHELLEKENS

Besterdring 27-07, 5014 HG, Tilburg, The Netherlands, Email: ljm.schellekens@yahoo.com.
Alternative address: Woloara-Ende-Wolowaru, Flores, N.T.T., 86372, Indonesia

The Black Kite *Milvus migrans* is a medium sized raptor that is widely distributed in Europe, Africa, South-east Asia and Australia (Thiollay 1994). Surprisingly, the species is a rare visitor to the Greater Sundas but it was recently confirmed for Java (Sukmantoro *et al.* 2009), and there are a few, albeit poorly documented, records for Bali (Mason 2011). In the Lesser Sundas Black Kites have been recorded from Lombok, Sumbawa, Sumba and Timor, and these birds have been assumed to be visitors from Australia (*M. m. affinis*) rather than resident populations (White & Bruce 1986). Black Kite has never been recorded from Ashmore Reef (140 km south of Roti; M. Carter *in litt.* 2013) – a regular stopover site for migrants between Australia and Wallacea – which suggests that few, if any, birds visit from Australia. On Lombok, there have been no records since the 1930s (Myers & Bishop 2005). On Sumbawa the first record was of three birds at the edge of Lake Taliwang in May 1988 (Johnstone *et al.* 1996). On Sumba it may be resident as records are scattered throughout the year, but are mostly from the austral winter and summer (February, June, July, August, September and December), with up to 25 birds counted (Linsley *et al.* 1998; Olsen & Trost 2007). On Timor it is considered locally common (Coates & Bishop 1997), and observations of groups of up to 30 birds after flooding events at Lake Iralalero suggests that some may be visitors, or that a resident population congregates at the lake when prey is abundant (C.R. Trainor *in litt.* 2013). Surprisingly there are no published records of Black Kite for Flores (White & Bruce 1986; Verhoeve & King 1990; Coates & Bishop 1997; Verhoeve & Holmes 1998; Pilgrim *et al.* 2000; Trainor & Lesmana 2000; Mees 2006).

On 29 June 2012, while on my way to the Mount Egon volcano in east-central Flores by motorcycle, I observed a large bird circling over a plot of dry vegetable and fruit gardens. The bird was immediately identified as a Black Kite, a species with which I am familiar from Europe, Japan and Australia. The shallow forked tail, colour and “jizz” excluded all other raptor species occurring in the area. A series of photographs were taken from a distance of about 500m, and whilst of low resolution, clearly show the salient characteristics of the Black Kite (Plate 1). The bird was observed circling for about 2 minutes before it flew off in an easterly direction and was not seen again despite a short chase, which was hindered by gardens. The site of the observation was c. 15 km east of Maumere on the road to Larantuka (8°36'S; 122°26'E; estimated from Google Earth).



Plate 1. Black Kite, 15 km east of Maumere, Flores.

The surprising absence of records of the Black Kite from Flores was highlighted by Mees (2006). Parenthetically, about a decade prior to this sighting, on 15 September 2002 and July 2003, at a nearby site (Tambak Koliaduk; 8°36'S, 122°12'E), I had brief, unsatisfactory views of single birds that were tentatively identified as this species. The 2012 record suggests that the Black Kite may be an occasional visitor (from Australia, Timor or Sumba) because a resident population of such a large and distinctive bird is unlikely to have been overlooked on Flores. It has not been observed migrating from Bali towards the Lesser Sundas, or entering Wallacea from the East Asian Oceanic Flyway (Germi 2005, 2006; Germi *et al.* 2007) though migrating raptors remain little-studied in the region and much remains to be learnt about them.

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