

## The status of Oriental Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus* in Wallacea, with a description of the first record for Ternate

JOHN C. MITTERMEIER<sup>1,2</sup>, IRFAN ROSYADI<sup>3</sup> AND K. DAVID BISHOP<sup>4</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Museum of Natural Science and Department of Biological Sciences, 119 Foster Hall, Louisiana State University, Baton Rouge, LA, 70803, USA; <sup>2</sup>School of Geography and the Environment, University of Oxford, South Parks Road, Oxford, OX1 3QY, UK. Email:

[john.mittermeier@gmail.com](mailto:john.mittermeier@gmail.com); <sup>3</sup>Burung Indonesia, Jl. Dadali No. 32, Bogor 16161, Indonesia;

<sup>4</sup>P.O. Box 1234, Armidale, NSW 2350, Australia.

**Ringkasan.** Sikep-madu asia *Pernis ptilorhynchus orientalis* diketahui sebagai pengunjung musim dingin di seluruh sunda besar, Nusa Tenggara dan Sulawesi, tetapi belum pernah tercatat ditemukan di kepulauan Maluku. Pada tanggal 22 September 2013, kami mengamati dan memotret seekor Sikep-madu asia yang teridentifikasi sebagai subjenis *P. p. orientalis* sedang hinggap di pohon di pinggir Danau Tolire, Pulau Ternate, Maluku Utara. Dalam tulisan ini juga dibahas mengenai status dan catatan kehadirannya di pulau-pulau lain.

### Introduction

The Oriental Honey Buzzard *Pernis ptilorhynchus*, also known as Crested Honey Buzzard, is a widespread polytypic species with six subspecies including five largely sedentary subspecies occurring in the Philippines (*philippensis*, *palawanensis*), Java (*ptilorhynchus*), Sumatra, Borneo, and the Malay Peninsula (*torquatus*), and mainland Asia (*ruficollis*), and one migratory subspecies (*orientalis*) which is a common winter visitor to the Philippines and Indonesia, where large numbers occur annually on Java and Bali (e.g. Ash 1993; Nijman 2004, Germe 2005; Germe & Waluyo 2006). In Wallacea, the species was originally considered to be only an occasional visitor. White & Bruce (1986), for example, list only two records, both specimens from the late nineteenth century. Additional documentation of Oriental Honey Buzzard in Wallacea remains limited with published records consisting primarily of a handful of sight records from islands in the Lesser Sundas (Gibbs 1996; Coates & Bishop 1997).

Recent fieldwork and increased coverage by birdwatchers, however, has revealed numerous observations of Oriental Honey Buzzard in the Lesser Sundas (J. Hornbuckle, J. Eaton pers. comm.), proving that the species is a regular visitor to this part of Wallacea, with substantial numbers occurring annually. Germe (2005) and Germe & Waluyo (2006) documented large numbers of honey buzzards traveling eastwards across the Lombok Strait into the Lesser Sundas in autumn, including nearly 8,000 individuals in September–November 2005. However, there are still only a handful of records of the species from the Moluccas.

### Observations

While observing birds on Ternate island, Maluku Utara, IR discovered a medium-sized raptor along the edge of Tolire Lake (0° 50' 17" N, 127° 18' 18" E; 93 m asl) at 12:15 hrs on 22 September 2013. The bird was observed for several minutes and photographed (Plate 1) while perched in a tree *Paraserianthes falcataria* along the cliffs surrounding the lake. The following day, 23 September, IR observed the bird again in the same area, but it was not found during the following week. While several medium-sized raptors occur in the Moluccas, the combination of a relatively small, pigeon-like head, long barred tail

with broad black subterminal band, pale underparts with dark streaks and white throat bordered with black streaks identified this as an Oriental Honey Buzzard.



**Plate 1:** Oriental Honey Buzzard, Tolire Lake, Ternate, 22 September 2013

## Discussion

There are only two records of Oriental Honey Buzzard from the Sulawesi region: a specimen from Selayar, south of Sulawesi (White & Bruce 1986), and a single observation from Sangihe, north-east of Sulawesi, in October 1995 (Riley 1997). The contrast with the Lesser Sundas likely represents real distributional patterns (Germi *et al.* 2009), as well as a degree of survey bias. Even though there are no published observations of the species from Sulawesi, recent studies by the Hachikuma Project at Japan's Keio University have used satellite tracking data to document migratory individuals visiting the island. In autumn 2012, for example, two out of the four individuals tagged in Japan visited Sulawesi, one travelling directly east from Borneo across the Makassar Strait and the second going north from Flores (Keio Research Institute 2014). The lack of observer records from Sulawesi almost certainly results from this species being overlooked due to confusion with the resident Barred Honey Buzzard *Pernis celebensis*, and future visitors to the island should carefully check honey buzzards, particularly during the boreal winter.

In the Moluccas, by contrast, there is no evidence of satellite tagged Oriental Honey Buzzards and, apart from the Ternate bird described above, we know of only three records

of the species from the Moluccan biogeographic region. The first is of a single bird observed by M. Poulsen on Kai Dulah, near Kai Kecil, South Moluccas, on 8 February 1997 (Johnstone & van Balen 2013). The second is an unpublished record by KDB from Weda Bay, Halmahera, North Moluccas, on 25 November 2012 (photos available), and the third is a recent observation from Seram, South Moluccas, by A. Geilvoet on 4 January 2015. While this scarcity of records may be partly due to the limited ornithological survey work in the region, it is probable that migratory Oriental Honey Buzzards only reach the Moluccas as occasional vagrants. Honey buzzards breeding in Japan follow a detoured migration in which they travel west to mainland Asia and then go overland along the Malay Peninsula before curving east to reach wintering grounds in the Sundas and Philippines (Higuchi *et al.* 2005; Yamaguchi *et al.* 2008, Keio Research Institute 2014). This migration path likely contributes to their rare occurrence in northern Wallacea and the Moluccas, particularly relative to other raptors such as Chinese Sparrowhawk *Accipiter soloensis* and Japanese Sparrowhawk *A. gularis* for which a portion of the population reach Wallacea by traveling directly south via the Oceanic Flyway (Germi *et al.* 2009).

While it has been suggested that a resident population of Oriental Honey Buzzards may occur on some islands of the Lesser Sundas (Verhoeve & King 1990), the records we reviewed that included subspecies identification in Wallacea were all migratory *orientalis* of which small numbers, particularly first year individuals, likely remain in the region year round (Coates & Bishop 1997; C. Trainor pers. comm.). Measurements of the three specimens from Wallacea confirm this (Mees 2006). Our observation also supports this pattern with several plumage features indicating that the Ternate bird is probably *orientalis*, specifically: long primaries, a short crest, and overall pale coloration with streaked underparts lacking the rich colors and barring of resident subspecies. Late September is early for migratory honey buzzards, but not exceptionally so; early dates for southbound migrants on the Thai-Malay Peninsula are 10 September (Wells 1999), late September for central Java (Nijman 2004), and 11 September for eastern Bali (Germi & Waluyo 2006).

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