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First observation of an advertisement display flight of 'Steere's Honey-buzzard' *Pernis (celebensis) steerei* on Panay, Philippines

G. GEWERS, E. CURIO and S. H. HEMBRA

On the basis of DNA analysis, Gamauf and Haring (2004) proposed that Barred Honey-buzzard *Pernis celebensis* be split into *P. celebensis* of Sulawesi, *P. steerei steerei* of Mindanao and adjacent islands and *P. s. winkleri* of Luzon and Polillo islands in the Philippines. Ferguson-Lees and Christie (2005) proposed the name Steere's Honey-buzzard for *P. steerei*, and this nomenclature is followed here. Compared to Barred Honey-buzzard, Steere's Honey-buzzard has a longer crest, lighter brown upperparts, thinner streaks on a paler neck, and weaker chestnut barring on the underparts. Seen from below, the underwing-coverts and remiges are much paler and less sharply barred, and the tail is less boldly banded. Some juvenile males have distinctively plain white or cream-coloured underparts (Ferguson-Lees and Christie 2005).

On 11 April 2004, while hiking from Research Station Sibaliw, Municipality of Buruanga, Aklan Province, to Mt Banderahan (also called Mt Tinayunga, 917 m), the highest elevation in the north-west Panay peninsula, we observed a Steere's Honey-buzzard. We watched it at a distance of 120 m for c.6 mins at 13h00 as it flew over the canopy of primary forest at c.750 m (11°49′30″N 121°59′30″E). The bird was distinguished from the similar Philippine Hawk Eagle *Spizaetus pinskeri* (formerly *S. philippensis*: see Gamauf *et al.* 2005) on the basis of its display flight (see below), which has not previously been described (see Ferguson-Lees and Christie 2001). This represents the first record on Panay, although the species is known from all other larger Philippine islands (Kennedy *et al.* 2000, Curio *et al.* 2001).

OBSERVATIONS

The bird soared in level flight a few metres above the canopy and then flew powerfully upwards in steps to gain c.30 m in height, followed by an unbroken downward swoop with the wings almost closed. This was repeated three times (Figs. 1–2). At the peak of its flight path the bird quivered its fully extended wings rapidly above its back, with their uppersides touching each other and then spreading to an angle of up to c.40 degrees (Fig. 3), and this was done five, six, and eight times at the three peaks. This quivering action was apparently powerful enough to arrest the bird in mid-air. After three cycles of ascent and descent, the bird resumed its level flight close above the canopy and disappeared from view.

This flight pattern recalls that of European Honey-buzzard *P. apivorus* (see Ferguson-Lees and Christie 2001), yet differs characteristically from it. This latter species displays the wing-quiver at the end of each upward swoop and at the summit of its trajectory. It plunges down with partly closed wings interspersed with upward swoops ending with wing-quivering, or alternatively descends with spread wings in one go. Hence it shows many more episodes of wing-quivering than in the display by Steere's Honey-buzzard we observed. However, female and first-year male European Honey-buzzards may perform more subdued versions of the display than adult males, and there is individual variation too (Ferguson-Lees and Christie 2001), so the display of Steere's Honey-buzzard that we observed may also have been a low-intensity version.

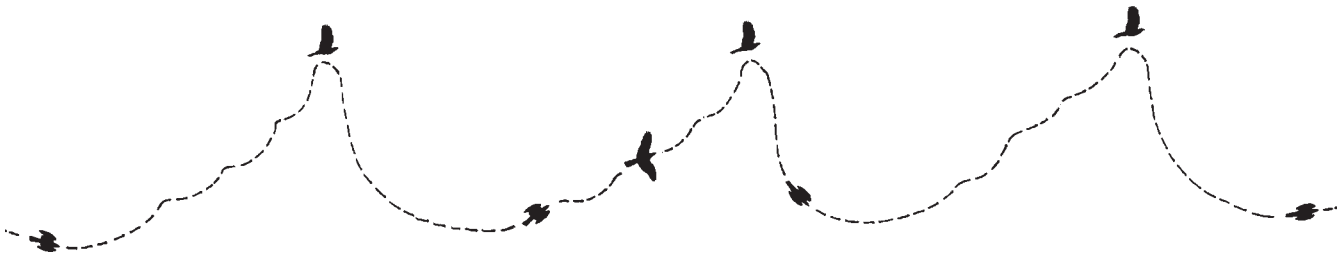

Figure 1. Diagram showing pattern of three undulations during the display flight of Steere's Honey-buzzard.

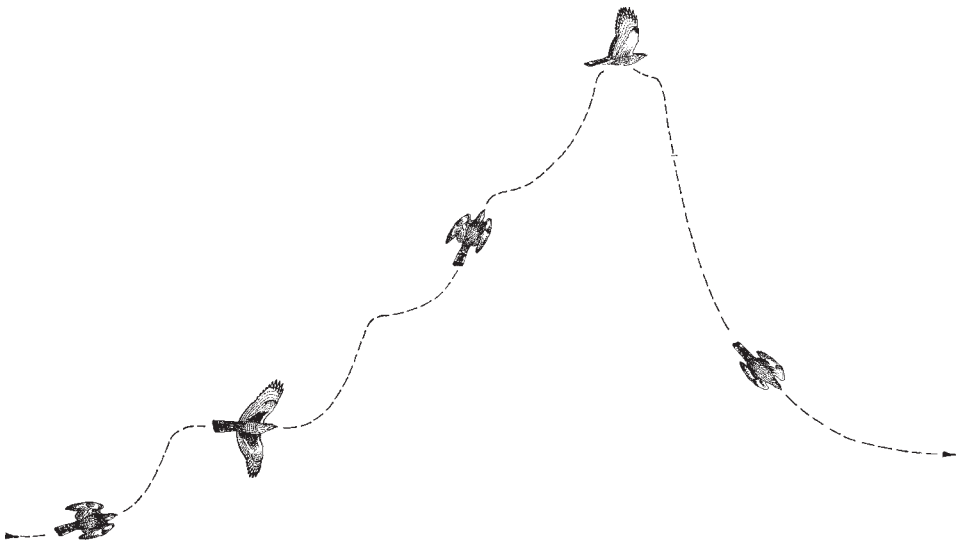

Figure 2. Diagram showing detailed pattern of one undulation during the display flight of Steere's Honey-buzzard. Note the distinct upward swoops at the summit of which the bird quivered its fully extended wings.

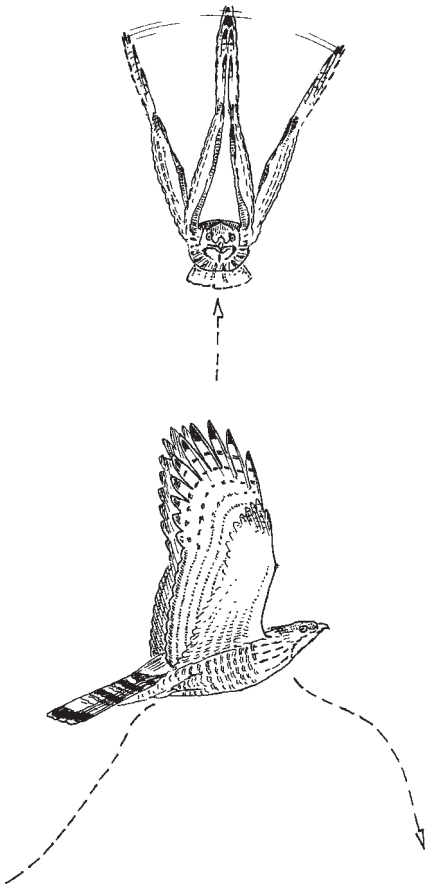

Figure 3. Diagram showing the wing-quivering as seen from the front during the display flight of Steere's Honey-buzzard.

Wing-quivering during the display flight is typical only of the genus *Pernis* among the Accipitriformes (Ferguson-Lees and Christie 2001), and thus distinguishes the bird we observed from the similar-looking Philippine Hawk Eagle that has recently shown to occur on Panay as well (Curio *et al*. 2001).

The breeding season of Steere's Honey-buzzard on Panay is not known, but breeding in February has been noted on other Philippine islands (Kennedy *et al*. 2000), and Oriental Honey-buzzard *P. ptilorhyncus* has been found to have enlarged gonads in April in the Philippines (Kennedy *et al*. 2000). The date of the present observation therefore seems compatible with the possibility that the described display flight serves some nuptial or territorial function as it does in European Honey-buzzard.

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Observations of Wetar Ground Dove *Gallicolumba hoedtii* from Timor-Leste (East Timor)

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The genus *Gallicolumba* contains 20 species of largely terrestrial pigeons that are distributed through the western Pacific (Gibbs *et al.* 2001). Most of these are very poorly known owing to their retiring, elusive nature. Wetar Ground Dove *Gallicolumba hoedtii* is no exception and has long been considered as one of the most enigmatic of the 75 birds currently recognised as endemic to the Lesser Sunda islands of Indonesia (Coates and Bishop 1997, Dickinson *et al.* 2001, Olsen *et al.* 2002, Gershaug *et al.* 2004), where it is known only from Timor and Wetar. It is one of 24 bird species that are entirely restricted to the 'Timor and Wetar Endemic Bird Area' (Stattersfield *et al.* 1998, Dickinson *et al.* 2001). Paucity of data from the 17 specimens collected more than 100 years ago from unspecified localities on Wetar and one from west Timor (at Camplong or 'Tjamplong' in 1932: Mayr 1944), and from another three more recent (1972, 1993, 1999) brief and poorly substantiated sightings from Timor (Fig. 1) mean that its status, habitat requirements and ecology have only been speculated upon (e.g. Coates and Bishop 1997). A summary of all that was known of the species up until 2001 was provided by BirdLife International (2001), who considered the species to be Endangered.

In September 2004, the Ministry of Environment and Development of Timor-Leste (East Timor) confiscated a male Wetar Ground Dove from a bird trapper apprehended in Dili. The trapper apparently fled with the other birds, except one Slaty Cuckoo Dove *Turacoena modesta*, but which evidently included four more Wetar Ground Doves and one Slaty Cuckoo Dove. CT was able to confirm the identification of the male Wetar Ground Dove retained by the Ministry of Environment and Development, and photographed it before it was released locally (Plate 1). The bird trapper had claimed to have caught the birds on the south coast of Timor-Leste, in the Natarbora region (Manututo district). Based on the assumption that the bird had indeed come from somewhere in the south of the country, we decided to conduct a brief search for the species along the south coast of Timor-Leste, where little previous bird survey work had been undertaken.

Plate 1. Male Wetar Ground Dove retained by the Ministry of Environment and Development and photographed before it was released locally, 7 September 2004 (photograph: C. Trainor).