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Notable bird observations from Brunei, Borneo

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Some of the more interesting distributional records of birds for Brunei in the last few years are provided, including the first record for Borneo of the Great Bittern *Botaurus stellaris* and of the Brown-chested Flycatcher *Rhinomyias brunneata*. A record of breeding by the Oriental Pratincole *Glareola maldivarum* on Borneo is also included.

This paper records some of the more interesting new distributional records, and one breeding record, for Brunei, Borneo, in the past few years. In the last decade or so there have been a number of persons interested in birds, spending periods of varying length in the country, and in some cases publishing their observations. However, much of Brunei is still unexplored, or underexplored, ornithologically. In an attempt to collate all available knowledge on bird distribution in the country, I recently wrote an annotated checklist of the birds of Brunei (Mann in press), with the cut-off date July 1986. Some observations in this paper also appear there in less detail.

It will be noted that the Wasan Rice Scheme features prominently in this paper. With much of Brunei being covered by one form of forest or another in the past, open country species are comparatively few. However, swamps, lakes and paddyfields are important for birds associated with water, both migrant and sedentary. With increasing affluence, there has been a tendency to abandon rice growing, and the fields rapidly revert to grassland and scrub, which is not attractive to a great variety of species. However, government rice-growing schemes have been developed, of which Wasan (4°45′N, 114°50′E), situated approximately 17 km south-west of Bandar Seri Begawan, is the most important ornithologically, being of sufficient size and diversity of habitat to attract a variety of migrant herons, waders, rallids (e.g. Baillon's Crake *Porzana pusilla*, Watercock *Gallicrex cinerea* and Common Moorhen *Gallinula chloropus*) and warblers, and a few ducks and raptors (e.g. Marsh Harrier *Circus aeruginosus*, Peregrine Falcon *Falco peregrinus* and Eurasian Kestrel *F. tinnunculus*).

The total area of the scheme is approximately 400 ha, and development began in the late 1970s. There is a large central reservoir, formed by a dam across a stream, which has typical swamp vegetation. The rest of the area consists of rice at various stages of development, bare mud awaiting planting, ploughed land, and areas left fallow which have reverted to grassland and scrub. In early 1987 a number of fields were planted with melons. The proportions of the different habitats vary through the year, and from one year to another. Numerous irrigation ditches form a grid across the whole area.

In this paper, observers referred to by their initials are: Patricia Cox (PC), Simon Cox (SC), J. Elkin (JE), D. Harvey (DH), M. Harvey (MH), John

McKean (JM), Clive F. Mann (CFM), A. Conrad Ozog (ACO) and Kathleen Shurcliffe (KS).

SYSTEMATIC LIST

GREAT BITTERN *Botaurus stellaris* Wasan Rice Scheme: one on 17 January 1987 (ACO, JM and KS). It was seen again on about 2 March 1987 (P. Waggitt). There is one record for Singapore, autumn 1908, and one for Malacca, West Malaysia, 3 March 1909 (Medway and Wells 1976), i.e. in a single winter; one for Luzon (Philippines) on 12 March 1905 and one of five birds on Palawan (Philippines) on 14 February 1979 (Kennedy *et al.* 1986). This species normally winters south to Viet Nam, Cambodia and Hong Kong (King *et al.* 1975). The bird seen was clearly not an American Bittern *B. lentiginosus* because it lacked black primaries, and it was considered not to be the Australasian Bittern *B. poiciloptilus* by JM who knows this latter species well. Characters noted included the distribution of black on the head, and the ochraceous area on the wing.

LESSER TREEDUCK *Dendrocygna javanica* Kilanas (4°45′N 114°51′E): one found in a moribund condition at the Government Rice Scheme on 22 November 1986 is now in the collection of the Brunei Museum. In Borneo this species was hitherto only known from Bandjarmasin ('very common'), Bangkau Lake (flock of several hundred) and off Bako National Park (90–100, 20 July 1958) (Smythies 1981). The first two localities are in Kalimantan, and the last in Sarawak.

NORTHERN SHOVELER *Anas clypeata* Wasan Rice Scheme: an eclipse male on 17 January 1987 (JM, ACO and KS). The previous Borneo records are from Sarawak, i.e. Kuching on 24 December 1894, two at Trusan on 25 November 1902, Sundar on 26 November 1935, Sibu undated (Smythies 1957); and Sabah, i.e. seven at Tampassak Plains on 8 March 1982 (F. H. Sheldon pers. comm.) and one from Padas Damit on 8 December 1984 (Parish and Wells 1984).

TUFTED DUCK *Aythya fuligula* Wasan Rice Scheme: two females on 7 December 1986 (JE, DH, MH, CFM and ACO). The previous records for Borneo are from Sabah and Sarawak: Labuan in October (?1890) (Smythies 1957), Kota Belud on 2 January 1968 (Smythies 1981), Sandakan, one for about three weeks in November 1982 (F. H. Sheldon pers. comm.), Kuching in December 1899, and Sibu in 1939 (Smythies 1981).

COMMON COOT *Fulica atra* Wasan Rice Scheme: an immature on 7 December 1986 (JE, DH, MH, CFM and ACO). The only previous records for Borneo are both from Sabah: eight at Kota Belud in January 1959 (Smythies 1981) and a specimen in the Sabah Museum collected on 5 February 1968 on the Kampang River, Penampang (F. H. Sheldon pers. comm.).

ORIENTAL PRATINCOLE *Glareola maldivarum* Wasan Rice Scheme: probably four pairs attempted to breed on the naked baked earth that resulted from ploughing during a prolonged drought in early 1987. Territorial behaviour was noted in March, and on 25 and 29 May one juvenile was seen with eight adults (CFM). I have recently been informed (D. Parish *in litt.* 1987) that this species breeds regularly at Kota Belud, Sabah. Other than this, however, the nearest confirmed breeding site is in Perlis, with possible breeding in Kedah, Kelantan and northern Tregganu, all in peninsular Malaysia (Medway and Wells 1976).

LONG-BILLED PLOVER *Charadius placidus* Muara Spit (5°02′N 115°07′E): adult with Malaysian Plover *C. peronii* on 14 January 1983 (CFM). There are two previous Bornean records, both from Brunei, in January and December 1982 (Vowles and Vowles 1985).

[RINGED PLOVER/SEMI-PALMATED PLOVER *Charadrius hiaticula/semi-palmatus* Wasan Rice Scheme: one seen on four dates between 6 November 1986 and 29 January 1987, but views were insufficient to distinguish the species, although the former is more likely (CFM, JM, ACO and KS). There are two previous records of Ringed Plover from Brunei, undated 1971–1972 and September 1980 (Vowles and Vowles 1985), but there is no mention that the Semi-palmated Plover was eliminated when establishing the identity of the birds. There is a more recent record of *C. hiaticula* from Miri, Sarawak (Ollington in prep.)]

NORTHERN LAPWING *Vanellus vanellus* Sungai Bera, near Seria (4°38′N 114°21′E): one on 6 December 1986. Good views were obtained, and a field description submitted showing important features (José Diederix). There is one previous record from Borneo, also in Brunei (Smith 1976).

HORSFIELD'S BRONZE CUCKOO *Chrysococcyx basalis* Jerudong (4°56′N 114°50′E): present from 1 June to 19 July 1985. Initially three, rising to at least five, all immatures, stayed in an area of low scrub, occasionally feeding on the ground. The birds were identified by the following features: whitish supercilium, with dark ear-coverts; dark brown upperparts (crown concolorous), with variable but initially small amounts of bronze-green, becoming more obvious later; greyish-white underparts with some dark freckling on throat and breast, and a very small amount of dark barring (becoming more obvious later) on the flanks. The only records accepted by Smythies (1957) were of a specimen from southern Borneo (in the Leiden Museum) and one from North Natuna Islands (in the Raffles – now National – Museum, Singapore). He rejected other records because of nomenclatural confusion. More recently there is a sight record of one at Seria, Brunei, in August 1981 (Cameron 1983). This species breeds in Australia and visits South-East Asia, rarely as far as the Malay Peninsula, in the austral winter.

HOOPOE *Upupa epops* Near Panaga, Seria (4°36′N 114°17′E): one on 7

September 1986. Photographs were submitted which, with a field description, were adequate to identify the species (Mr and Mrs N. Song). Pantai Mentiri Golf Course, near Muara (4°58′N 115°01′E): one on 24 March 1987 (J. Woods, who knows this species well from Africa). There are three previous records for Borneo: Labuan in the 1870s, Kuching in January–February 1964, and Lumut (Brunei) in September 1977 (Smythies 1981).

[BLACK-NAPED ORIOLE *Oriolus chinensis* Jerudong: one, seen briefly, but believed to be this species, 18 December 1983 (CFM, PC and SC). Known previously in Borneo only from southern Kalimantan and south-west Sarawak (Smythies 1981). It is advisable to treat this record as unconfirmed at the moment.]

STONECHAT *Saxicola torquata* Berakas, near Bandar Seri Begawan (4°59′N 114°57′E): one on 10 December 1983 (PC, SC and CFM). Previous Bornean records are: Sarawak: Kuching on 31 January 1898 (Smythies 1957) and 24 March 1963 (Smythies 1981), Satang Island on 2 December 1955 and Kuala Niah on 23 February 1958 (Smythies 1957); Sabah: Kampung Nukohan, Kuala Penyu, on 26 March 1975 (Wells 1976); Brunei: Muara on 27 December 1966 (Harrisson 1967). This species is a resident or migrant to much of mainland South-East Asia.

[CLAMOROUS REED WARBLER *Acrocephalus stentoreus* Jerudong: one or more seen and heard between 24 June and 5 July 1984. The identity could not be confirmed by catching the birds. Attempts at netting the following January yielded only Oriental Reed Warbler *A. (arundinaceus) orientalis* (CFM). The dates of the Jerudong birds would appear to be much too late for wintering *A. orientalis*. Two specimens of *stentoreus* were taken at Rantau, Kalimantan, in 1916 (Mees 1971). More recently it has been recorded from Polder Alabio and Muara Kaman, Kalimantan (Holmes and Burton 1987), the birds apparently being identified by song in November at the first locality, and in April at the second.]

[ASIAN BROWN FLYCATCHER *Muscicapa latirostris* Lamunin Forest (4°41′N 114°45′E): individuals seen in forest clearings at two localities, about 8km apart, in May 1987, may have been *M. l. umbrosa*, recently described by Wells (1982) from Tawau, Sabah. Other specimens have recently been taken on the Bole River west of Lahad Datu, and Sepilok forest reserve (Wells and Francis 1984). These localities are also in Sabah. Firm identification must await capture of the bird.]

BROWN-CHESTED FLYCATCHER *Rhinomyias brunneata* Bandar Seri Begawan: immature trapped on 23 and 24 October 1982. Numerous photographs were taken, but the film was destroyed in processing. Skins were later examined in the British Museum (Natural History) to confirm the identification (CFM). Among the features noted on this bird were the pale lower mandible, darkening distally, and the dark edges to the throat feathers giving a scaling effect. This is a migrant from eastern China, and is

widespread in West Malaysia during the northern winter, possibly reaching Sumatra (Medway and Wells 1976). There is one record from Thailand (Nabhitabhata and Nadee 1985). The Brunei bird had a wing-length of 91mm. This could indicate a previously unknown population since hundreds of handlings in peninsular Malaysia have never yielded a wing-length greater than 86mm (D. R. Wells pers. comm.). This is the first occurrence on Borneo.

CRESTED MYNA *Acridotheres cristatellus* Bandar Seri Begawan: two or three present from January 1983 to February 1986 (CFM). The only other record in Borneo is of a party living in Kota Kinabalu, Sabah, from 1978 to 1979 (Smythies 1981). Darus and Stuebbing (1986) record that these birds are still present.

YELLOW-BREASTED BUNTING *Emberiza aureola* Wasan: A male coming into breeding plumage on 27 March 1987 (CFM and ACO). The only previous Bornean record is of one at Kuching on 18 November 1964 (Smythies 1981). This species winters south to peninsular Malaysia and Singapore.

[BLACK-HEADED BUNTING *Emberiza melanocephala* Bandar Seri Begawan: what was believed to be an immature of this species was seen on 30 November 1985 (CFM and R. F. Ollington). However, the view was fairly brief, and it is preferable to treat it as unconfirmed. This species is a winter visitor to India, with one record of a vagrant in peninsular Thailand (King *et al.* 1975) and three records from Japan, two from Hachijo Island (in the Izus), November 1928 and November 1930 (OSJ 1974), and one from Okinawa, autumn 1985 (Okinawa Yacho Kenkyukai 1986).]

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Records of Javan Pond-Heron *Ardeola speciosa* and Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus* in peninsular Malaysia in March 1986

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During a four-month stay in peninsular Malaysia from December 1985 to March 1986 I recorded two species of bird whose occurrence in the country was previously uncertain – Javan Pond-Heron *Ardeola speciosa* – or poorly documented – Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus*. It therefore seemed worthwhile to report these observations in some detail.

Javan Pond-Heron

On 21 March 1986 I was observing kingfisher foraging behaviour during low tide at a lagoon within mangroves, about 2–3 km west-north-west of Kuala Gula, Perak, peninsular Malaysia. Around 09h00 I noticed two small, short-legged herons, obviously of the genus *Ardeola*, on the mud about 10–20 m from the edge of the mangroves. I observed them in full sunlight with a 30× telescope. Both were in full breeding plumage and I immediately identified them as Javan Pond-Herons *A. speciosa*, a species I was familiar with from Thailand and whose identification in Malaysia was previously unconfirmed. Several Chinese Pond-Herons *A. bacchus*, two of them also in breeding plumage, were present nearby and provided convenient comparison.

I made the following description. Unstreaked pale beige head and neck blending into a deep rusty breast, which in turn was sharply delimited against a white belly and undertail-coverts. Back dark slaty grey, almost black, with long plumes extending over folded wings and tail. In flight, when the white wings and tail were visible, the birds gave a striking four-coloured impression. Bill light grey basally, pale yellow in the middle and with a black tip. Legs yellow.

Four days later, on 25 March 1986, two or possibly three Javan Pond-Herons were observed and photographed at the same place by Richard Lansdown and Andrew Hawkins, who confirmed the identification.

Pond-herons identified as *A. bacchus* regularly winter south to Singapore, but are common only in the northern peninsular Malaysian states from October to April (Medway and Wells 1976), when they are generally in basic plumage. According to present knowledge *bacchus* and *speciosa* cannot safely be separated in the field in this plumage (Hancock and Kushlan 1984). Usually they acquire breeding plumage after or shortly before leaving Malaysia, although in central Thailand I observed some individuals of *speciosa* in full breeding plumage as early as mid-February. Owing to this