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New island records and new elevational records of birds from South Maluku, Indonesia

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During an expedition to the islands of Buru (3°S 126–127°E) and Seram (2–3°S 127–130°E), South Maluku, from 29 August through 20 September 2006, new island records were made for two bird species. Furthermore, we recorded a number of species at elevations higher or lower than previously reported. In the following account, we give details of these new records. Island endemic races are identified by their subspecific name.

RUFOUS-NECKED SPARROWHAWK *Accipiter erythrauchen ceramensis*

This raptor was seen once in Buru and twice in Seram, the last sighting being of an adult flying by at close distance in the vicinity of the village of Solea near Wahai, Seram, on 17 September 2006, at c.150 m. This species has previously not been recorded below 650 m on Seram (Coates and Bishop 1997), and it has been suspected to be replaced by the Variable Goshawk *Accipiter novaehollandiae* at lower elevations (Verbelen 1994). Our identification was based on the clearly visible rufous sides of the neck, which contrasted with the pale grey breast that is so typical of the subspecies *ceramensis* of South Maluku, and that readily sets this form apart from the local race of Variable Goshawk *A. novaehollandiae hiogaster* and from Chinese Sparrowhawk *A. soloensis*.

GURNEY'S EAGLE *Aquila gurneyi*

We saw this eagle on two occasions in Seram, both times significantly above the upper altitudinal limit of c.900 m given by Coates and Bishop (1997) for Maluku. The first sighting was of an adult circling overhead along higher parts of the highway from Masohi to Wahai on 7 September 2006 at c.1,200 m. The second sighting was also of an adult seen from the trail that traverses Kobipoto Ridge in Manusela National Park on 15 September 2006 at c.1,200 m. During both observations, the birds were seen well and the clear structural and plumage differences (e.g. shorter tail, dark cere, all-black plumage) that distinguish this species from the common Black Eagle *Ictinaetus malayensis* and immature White-bellied Sea Eagle *Haliaeetus leucogaster* were noted.

ASIAN DOWITCHER *Limnodromus semipalmatus*

We saw and photographed two individuals of this Near Threatened Eastern Palearctic shorebird on Seram: one was found in mangrove mudflats at Air Besar, c.3 km east of Wahai (Seram) on 8 September 2006 (Plate 1), and the second one was seen on Pulai Sawai off the northern coast of Seram on 20 September 2006 These two birds constitute the first record of this species in Maluku Province. The birds were clearly recognisable as this species and could be told apart from godwits *Limosa* spp. by plumage details (e.g. lack of wing-bar) and the distinctly-shaped all-black bill (Plate 1). In Wallacea, Asian Dowitcher has previously been recorded only once each in Sulawesi and West Timor (Coates and Bishop 1997). More recently, Trainor *et al.* (2006) recorded an individual of this species during passage in Sumba. The species winters from north-western Australia to Sumatra and is therefore probably a regular but widely overlooked passage migrant in Maluku.

GREAT CUCKOO DOVE *Reinwardtoena reinwardtii*

On 11 September 2006, we recorded and photographed an individual on Mt Binaya (Seram) at c.1,600 m (Plate 2). Subsequently, on 19 September 2006 we repeatedly saw a single individual in coconut plantations and mangrove habitat at sea level near Air Besar, c.3 km east

of Wahai (Seram). Both records fall outside the documented elevational range of 150–1,000+ m given for Seram by Coates and Bishop (1997).

SUPERB FRUIT DOVE *Ptilinopus superbus*
This species was common in the lowlands of Seram, with the highest record of a female at 1,100 m on Kobipoto Ridge in Manusela National Park in pristine montane forest on 15 September 2006. The bird was easily distinguished from females of the locally much more numerous White-bibbed Fruit Dove *P. rivoli* by its white belly and vent and by dark speckling on the wings. Coates and Bishop (1997) report the upper limit of this species as 700 m in Seram.

RED-BREASTED PYGMY PARROT *Micropsitta bruijnii pileata*
This inconspicuous canopy bird has previously been recorded at 700–900 m on Seram (Coates and Bishop 1997). On 9 September 2006, we photographed individuals of a flock of about 40–60 birds that were mostly clinging to a tree trunk and feeding off its bark in selectively logged lowland forest along the trail from the village of Roho to Kanikeh just outside the boundaries of Manusela National Park at c.400 m above sea level (Plate 3). This constitutes an extension of the previously known altitudinal range of the poorly known Seram population of this bird.

MOLUCCAN SCOPS OWL *Otus magicus magicus*
We flushed and photographed an individual at c.1,000 m around the foot of Mt Binaya near the village of Kanikeh on Seram on 10 September 2006 (Plate 4). Coates and Bishop (1997) do not give an elevational range for this species on Seram. However, our record slightly exceeds uppermost elevations given for this species on most other neighbouring islands.

Plate 1. Asian Dowitcher *Limnodromus semipalmatus* at Air Besar, Wahai, Seram, 8 September 2006. (Robert Hutchinson / Birdtour Asia.)

Plate 3. Red-breasted Pygmy Parrot *Micropsitta bruijnii pileata* at c.400 m between Roho and Kanikeh, Seram, 9 September 2006. (Robert Hutchinson / Birdtour Asia.)

Plate 2. Great Cuckoo Dove *Reinwardtoena reinwardtii* at c.1,600 m Mt Binaya, Seram, 11 September 2006. (Robert Hutchinson / Birdtour Asia.)

Plate 4. Moluccan Scops Owl *Otus magicus magicus* at c.1,000 m near Kanikeh, Seram, 10 September 2006. (Robert Hutchinson / Birdtour Asia.)

MOLUCCAN BOOBOOK *Ninox squamipila squamipila*
During the night of 14 September 2006, we tape-recorded a pair and photographed one individual near our base-camp at 2,100 m on Mt Binaya (Seram). This is far above the previously reported elevational limit for the Seram populations of this species (1,400 m; Coates and Bishop 1997).

STREAKY-BREASTED JUNGLE FLYCATCHER *Rhinomyias addita*
This Buru endemic is known to inhabit montane forest at 475–1,460 m (Coates and Bishop 1997, Poulsen and Lambert 2000). We commonly encountered this species in forest of a wide elevational range and disturbance spectrum. Our highest record was from primary montane forest at c.1,500 m along a trail above the village of Memboli in central Buru on 31 August 2006, while our lowest record was from heavily disturbed roadside scrub at only 350 m along the logging track near Waetabi Camp, and well within sight of the beach.

SNOWY-BROWED FLYCATCHER *Ficedula hyperythra negroides*
This endemic Seram race was common in temperate forest on Mt Binaya around 1,900–2,300 m on 14–16 September 2006. We did not advance any higher than 2,300 m, so the bird might occur higher yet. We rarely recorded this species below 1,900 m on Mt Binaya, though we did see it at c.1,350 m on Mt Kobipoto (on 15 September 2006). Therefore, the elevational range of this species appears to be centred above 2,000 m on Mt Binaya. As in the case of other montane birds that are commonest above 2,000 m on Mt Binaya, Coates and Bishop (1997) indicate an upper elevational limit of 2,000 m, even though this falls right within the elevational centre of the altitudinal distribution of this species.

CINNAMON-CHESTED FLYCATCHER *Ficedula buruensis ceramensis*
The Seram race seems to be restricted to bamboo vegetation in montane forest. During our visit, we recorded it sparingly at hilly mid-elevations, with the highest record in a bamboo thicket in intact montane forest on Mt Kobipoto at c.1,250 m on 14 September 2006. This is notably higher than the upper elevational limit of 900 m reported by Coates and Bishop (1997) for Seram.

OLIVE HONEYEATER *Lichmera argentauris*
This small-island specialist was seen at high densities on tiny Pulau Opin, an islet near Pulau Sawai off the northern coast of Seram. The 2-ha island was inhabited by c.30–100 individuals, some of which were observed flying away from the island towards the mainland of Seram, which can be reached by crossing c.2 km of open water. The only other record for the Seram area is an observation of this species on Lusaolate located off the north coast of Seram (Coates and Bishop 1997).

SCARLET MYZOMELA *Myzomela dibapha elisabethae*
Coates and Bishop (1997) cite the elevational range of the Seram race *elisabethae* as 600–1,400 m. However, even though we did see many individuals around 1,000–1,400 m on Mt Kobipoto (15–16 September 2006), on Mt Binaya the elevational range of this species seems to be substantially higher, and here we only saw individuals of this species above 2,000 m, with the highest sighting being of a juvenile with a distinctly reddish throat but otherwise drab plumage at 2,300 m (11 September 2006). We doubt the species occurs lower than 1,800 m on Mt. Binaya, because montane habitat features like epiphyte growth become very sparse below that elevation on this mountain complex.

RUFOUS-THROATED WHITE-EYE *Madanga ruficollis*
Little is known about this Endangered species, which had not been recorded for decades before it was rediscovered near Lake Rana in central Buru in the 1990s (Coates and Bishop 1997). On 31 August 2006, we saw and photographed two individuals at 1,750 m above the village of Memboli in central Buru (Plate 5). The birds were clinging to tree-bark and feeding in a nuthatch-like manner. Later, we observed another two individuals c.100 m further down the trail. The birds seemed to be restricted to a peculiar type of montane forest that is characterised by strong epiphytic growth and stunted tree growth. The elevation at which we saw the species was the lowest altitude of occurrence of this particular habitat. We suggest that this species is probably still common within its restricted altitudinal zone on Buru, since none of its range seems to have been affected by human encroachment yet. The lack of previous records seems to be attributable to their high-elevation distribution and the fact that few researchers have ascended to high enough elevations. Our record is the highest yet of this species. The sight record from the 1990s (C. Robson *in litt.* 2006) and subsequent records (Poulsen and Lambert 2000) were made at 1,450–1,470 m, probably in small isolated pockets of suitable 'elfin forest' habitat that are scattered further down the slope because of suitable edaphic and microclimatic conditions. However, a 1922 specimen record from Wa Fehat at 820 m is suspiciously low, and it would be worth investigating whether this could involve a case of mislabelling (e.g. missing the digit 1 in 1,820 m).

Plate 5. Rufous-throated White-eye *Madanga ruficollis* at 1,750m above Memboli, Buru, 31 August 2006. (Robert Hutchinson / Birdtour Asia.)

BLUE-FACED PARROTFINCH *Erythrura trichroa pinaiae* In central Buru, we recorded small flocks of this species three times in montane forest above the village of Memboli, at 850 m, 1,000 m and 1,750 m, respectively. These sightings establish a wide elevational range of this species, which has previously been recorded only once at 1,500 m on Buru (Coates and Bishop 1997).

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Records of Black-necked Stork *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus* breeding pairs fledging four chicks

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Black-necked Stork *Ephippiorhynchus asiaticus* is among the rarest of the stork species in India (Rahmani 1989, Sundar 2004) with very few studies on their breeding success (Sundar 2003). They nest solitarily and have clutch sizes of 3–4 eggs, with 1–3 chicks usually fledging successfully from each nest (Ishtiaq 1998, Maheswaran 1998, Sundar 2003, G. Clancy *in litt*. 2006). In this note, we report three instances of Black-necked Stork pairs fledging four chicks each from three different locations in India, and discuss possible reasons for the occurrence of this unusual phenomenon in the same year.

On 21 December 2005, AD and YB visited a farm in Jodiya village, Jamnagar district, Gujarat, and observed a Black-necked Stork nest on a 'neem' *Azadirachta indica* tree. The nest had four nearly fledged nestlings (Plate 1). One week later, the farmers informed YB that all four nestlings had fledged from the nest. Subsequently, AD and YB visited the site and observed all four fledged juveniles. This nest was likely initiated in October 2005 (calculated following Sundar 2003). Neem trees were previously unknown as a nesting tree for this species (see Sundar 2003).

On 28 January 2006, an adult Black-necked Stork was observed with four newly fledged juveniles in Hadayi Malawaan Wetland, Etah district, Uttar Pradesh by SPN. The nest site for this family could not be found and the subsequent fate of the four juveniles is not known. The nest was likely initiated in October or November 2005.

On 20 March 2005, a pair of adult Black-necked Storks with four newly fledged young was seen resting in a wheat field beside Kurra village, Mainpuri district, Uttar Pradesh by KSGS (Plate 2). The adult pair is known to be resident in the area; they raised chicks only once between 1999 and 2002 (Sundar 2003, KSGS unpublished data). The four young are likely to have fledged from a nest initiated in December 2005 or January 2006.

All three nests were clearly initiated during or immediately after the monsoon, as is consistent with earlier observations (Ishtiaq 1998, Sundar 2003), in the breeding season of 2005–2006. In 2005, rainfall in all three areas was delayed, with most of it occurring in September instead of being spread between July and October. Such concentration of rainfall may lead to the formation of temporarily larger wetlands. This may lead to temporary food abundance, and may have permitted the storks to provision more chicks than usual. The three records are geographically well spaced, hinting that breeding pairs all over the country can potentially raise four chicks if appropriate conditions are available. This species is naturally rare in the countryside in India, mostly living in areas that are not visited regularly by birdwatchers or biologists, and with most pairs and families scattered in the countryside away from the wetlands where intensive waterfowl counts are made (Rahmani 1989, Sundar 2004). More consistent observations on identified pairs will provide improved information on nesting success and on why so few nesting attempts result in the fledging of four chicks. This information may assist in captive breeding attempts and in understanding the ecology of a species that is declining rapidly in the Indian landscape.