

Bill

Compared to Richard's Pipit, Blyth's Pipit has a shorter and more pointed bill; Bradshaw (1994) described it as 'conical shaped'. This was a distinctive feature of the Khao Yai bird.

Voice

The bird gave both typical calls – a soft and quiet *chup*, and a slightly rasping and longer *psheeu*, slightly descending towards the end. The calls were sometimes given together or repeated. Cramp *et al.* (1988) describe another alarm call, a dry *dzeep* with an anxious tone, recalling Yellow Wagtail *Motacilla flava*. Richard's Pipit gives a distinctive call that is often described as explosive and Sparrow-like *chip*, *tchut* or *schreep*, and rarely another soft *chip* call, recalling that of Blyth's Pipit, but always together with the typical explosive call. Paddyfield Pipit gives an explosive but relatively subdued *chip*, *chup* or *chwist* call (Robson 2000).

This constitutes the first record for Thailand. Blyth's Pipit breeds from Southern Transbaikalia and Eastern Manchuria south to Tibet; it winters mainly in the Indian subcontinent, and is an uncommon winter visitor to

Myanmar. It is a rare vagrant to Europe and the Middle East (Cramp *et al.* 1988, Robson 2000). It was predicted by Boonsong Lekagul and Round (1991) as a potential visitor to Thailand.

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Notes on the Talaud Rail *Gymnocrex talaudensis* from Karakelang island, North Sulawesi, Indonesia

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The Talaud Rail *Gymnocrex talaudensis* is a little-known species presently recorded only from the island of Karakelang in the Talaud Islands, North Sulawesi, Indonesia. The species was described from the single type specimen collected in 1996 (Lambert 1998). This specimen had lost its tail and was in heavy wing moult, retaining only a few fully grown flight feathers. In addition to the holotype, *G. talaudensis* is known only from two brief sightings made in 1996 by F. Lambert and F. Verbelen (Lambert 1998). Consequently, biometric data and plumage descriptions for Talaud Rail are incomplete and the species's status is little-known.

On 22 May 2000, I discovered a recently captured *G. talaudensis* being kept in a house in the village of Rae (04°19'N 126°45'E), Beo sub-district, Karakelang. The rail had reportedly been caught in a snare in marshy grassland some 2-3 km inland from the coastal village. The bird, which was in good condition with complete rectrices and remiges, was purchased from the owner for a small sum and then measured, described and photographed before being released back to the wild. The wing and tail measurements of this individual represent the first such measurements for this species.

During fieldwork on the islands in early 1999, many Karakelang villagers were found to be familiar with *G. talaudensis* and a number of anecdotal reports shed some light on the distribution and status of the species on the Talaud islands.

DESCRIPTION

The individual of *G. talaudensis* obtained in the village of Rae on 22 May 2000 was considered to be an adult, based on plumage and bare part colouration, although it was not sexed. The bird was reported to have been in captivity for less than 24 hours and was in a good condition, with complete plumage. The following description was taken under natural light:

Basal two-thirds of the bill yellow, brightest at the base of the upper mandible and with dark markings around the nares. Distal third of the bill a dirty horn, the bill tip off-white. Legs dull pink with the front and back of the tarsii a dull yellow. Iris scarlet red, surrounded by a fleshy cerise pink eye-ring. A large bare skin patch extended behind the eye and was pink with two

iridescent silvery flakes of skin, one above the back of the eye and one covering the rear half of the bare skin patch.

Head, neck and breast rich chestnut brown, being richest on the crown, hindneck and sides of neck and a shade darker on the breast. Chin, area around gape and base of the lower mandible dark grey. Mantle feathers relatively long and a glossy military green. Back olive-green, with a small number of irregularly distributed large black spots across the lower back, formed by separate black feathers. Rump and uppertail coverts mid-brown. Upper belly an unpatterned mixture of black and pale brown feathers in almost equal proportions. Lower belly, vent and undertail coverts black, the white feather shafts being visible only on close inspection. Flanks uniform pale olive green.

Tail black, with white feather shafts only on the underside. Upper surface of primaries warm brown, with orangy brown feather shafts and the outer webs a slightly warmer shade than the inner webs. Upper surface of secondaries and tertiaries olive-green with dark brown feather shafts. Alula grey-brown. Secondary coverts olive-green. Greater primary coverts warm brown, contrasting with other upperwing-coverts. Median and lesser primary coverts olive-green. Underside of all flight feathers grey-brown. All underwing-coverts black with regular broad white tips, forming a striking 'polka-dot' pattern.

Measurements (mm): Wing (minimum chord) 167, wing (maximum chord) 169, longest primary – p5 (counting inwards from the outermost primary), tail 38, tarsus 76, bill length (gape to tip) 55, nares to bill tip 30.

COMPARISON WITH THE HOLOTYPE

The plumage description of the Rae individual agrees closely with that of the *G. talaudensis* holotype, as described and illustrated in Lambert (1998). The only notable plumage difference is the Rae bird's mixture of black and pale brown feathers on the belly; the holotype being a blackish colour from the belly to the undertail coverts. The bill, iris and the head's bare skin patch of both birds appear very similar. The most noticeable difference is in leg colouration, the holotype having yellow legs, becoming pinkish on the feet, whilst the Rae bird's legs and feet were flesh pink with a dull yellow tinge down the length of the front and back of the tarsi. It is possible that *G. talaudensis* displays either seasonal variation in leg colour related to breeding condition or a level of sexual dimorphism in this feature.

DISTRIBUTION AND STATUS

Gymnocrex talaudensis is presently only known from the island of Karakelang, Talaud, where field observations have been made in the vicinity of Beo (4°14'N 126°47'E) and birds captured near Rainis (4°14'N 126°51'E) and Rae. Calls consisting of a deep note, repeated approximately twice a second, best transcribed as a 'oom .. oom .. oom .. oom ..' have been heard at two primary

forest and one wet grassland locality during visits to Karakelang in 1999 and 2000, and are reported by local guides to be made by *G. talaudensis*. However, the forest rail observed on Karakelang in 1996 (Lambert 1998), and believed to be Red-necked Crake *Rallina tricolor* could have made these calls as *R. tricolor* is reported to make similar vocalizations whilst feeding (Coates and Bishop 1997). As no birds were seen in connection with these vocalizations, they cannot safely be ascribed to *G. talaudensis*.

During five months of field work with the *Action Sampiri* conservation project on Karakelang during early 1999, I talked to local people about the island's birds in over 30 villages in all four of Karakelang's sub-districts. In all villages a number of people immediately recognised illustrations of *G. talaudensis*, known locally as *Tu'a*, claiming it to be present in damp, overgrown agricultural land in the vicinity of the village. This information, together with field records, strongly suggests that *G. talaudensis* is widespread in suitable habitats on Karakelang. Two villagers claimed to have caught this species in riverside forest, but the presence of *G. talaudensis* in the island's extensive primary forest could not be confirmed with certainty.

Interestingly, a number of Karakelang villagers claimed that *G. talaudensis* is absent from the other two large islands in the Talaud group – Salibabu and Kabaruan. Local people interviewed on Salibabu island on brief visits in May and November 1999 either had no knowledge of the rail, or recognised it as a species from Karakelang. This knowledge is woven into a traditional story about the creation of the Talaud islands. At the time of the creation, each of the three larger Talaud islands received its own unique animal – Karakelang the rail, Salibabu a cuscus and Kabaruan a cicada. Surveys carried out by the *Action Sampiri* project team on the Talaud islands in 1997 and 1999 have shown that the Sangihe-Talaud endemic *melanotis* subspecies of the Bear Cuscus *Ailurops ursinus*, long known from Salibabu island (Corbett and Hill 1992), does indeed appear to be absent on Karakelang. Although the absence of *G. talaudensis* on other islands in the Talaud group would be very difficult to confirm, it seems likely that local reports reflect the truth and that this species is restricted to Karakelang.

Most villagers who recognised illustrations of the species added that *G. talaudensis* is regularly hunted by local people with both dogs and snare traps. Such hunting appears to take place only to supplement family diets. There is no evidence of local trade in this, or indeed any other ground-dwelling bird species on Karakelang. It has not been possible to ascertain the level of threat such hunting activities represent to Karakelang's *G. talaudensis* population, but it is possible that, if the species does not utilize the island's primary forest, then the threat is significant. It is perhaps noteworthy that during four months of intensive fieldwork on Karakelang in early 1999, the *Action Sampiri* project's team of four researchers failed to record the species in the field or in trappers' catches (J. Riley, pers. comm.), which suggests that the Talaud Rail may be scarce on Karakelang.

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Cinnabar Hawk Owl *Ninox ios* at Lore Lindu National Park, Central Sulawesi, Indonesia, in December 1998

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On 18 December 1998, at about 10h00, Raf Drijvers stumbled across what he originally reported to be a typical adult Ochre-bellied Hawk Owl *Ninox ochracea*, roosting at eye-height above a narrow newly cut indistinct rotan collectors' trail, leading away from the main Palu–Napu road bisecting the Lore Lindu National Park in Central Sulawesi towards nearby Danau (=Lake) Tambing at a chilly 1,700 m above sea level (with altimeter). By the time he had fetched me and we got back to the site, which took about an hour, this bird sadly was no longer present. However, in crashing through the undergrowth in the vicinity I almost immediately flushed a strikingly rufous hawk owl from dense rattan-thickets about half a metre up from the forest floor and less than 15 m away from the original spot. With some effort—having flushed it several times when all it did was fly low through the understorey to hide in dense cover again without the necessary clarifying views, and nearly having lost it for good—this bird quite unexpectedly perched in full view on several occasions, allowing close examination over several minutes down to point-blank range in excellent light conditions.

RD immediately commented that this apparently new bird looked clearly different from the individual he had spotted earlier. Plumage-wise, this second bird was entirely bright rufous, almost reddish, lacking any facial markings. The only obvious features were its relatively small, rounded and earless head, yellowish legs and entirely pale greyish bill, bright yellow irides and pinkish orbital skin, some small and relatively sharply demarcated whitish triangular markings restricted to the scapulars, and the very fluffy appearance of the underparts. Given this last very obvious character we assumed our bird had to be a fully grown juvenile Ochre-bellied Hawk Owl, although we both realised that it differed strikingly from the illustration in Coates and Bishop (1997). Unaware that a third undescribed species of hawk owl occurred on Sulawesi, and both of us having no relevant field experience with *N. ochracea*, this identification was deemed plausible, and hence it was written up as such in a preliminary report (Mauro 1999) received by BirdLife International and other relevant

conservation bodies in early January 2000.

Features not noted by us in the field were the finely barred tail, which in our bird appeared uniform, and the whitish shafts on the underparts. Also we did not find this bird particularly slim or attenuated and long-tailed, probably owing to the fact that it was puffing up its feathers under stress.

It was not until 8 January 2000, when F. G. Rozendaal showed me his slides of the holotype of *N. ios* when it was still alive, that I remembered our sighting at Lore Lindu and I immediately realised that the bird we had seen matched them completely. Confused by the fact that, according to RD, two clearly different-looking birds were present in such close proximity, I admittedly at first was very sceptical about the validity of Cinnabar Hawk-owl. On 3 February the frontispiece accompanying Rasmussen (1999) was forwarded to me and I received the whole article about a week later. I immediately pointed out that if what we had seen indeed was *N. ios*, the plate did not do it entirely justice, particularly by lacking the fluffy quality of the underparts. Furthermore, as clearly illustrated by several photographs subsequently examined, I discovered that Ochre-bellied Hawk Owl can exhibit a pinkish orbital skin as in *N. ios* (*contra* Rasmussen 1999). On 9 February 2000 RD and I compared the unique type of Cinnabar Hawk Owl with several adult *Ninox ochracea* at the National Museum of Natural History (NNM/Naturalis), Leiden, The Netherlands. Again we could not find any features in which the type differed from the bird we observed in the field. Also at this point RD for the first time admitted not really having looked properly at the first bird in his haste to alert me to its presence. Only from 23 February 2000 onwards, when Pamela C. Rasmussen kindly mailed digital images showing a fully grown juvenile Ochre-bellied Hawk Owl, we were 100% confident that at least the second bird we observed so well together, beyond any doubt was a Cinnabar Hawk Owl.

Our sighting represents the first ever field observation of the species *avant la lettre*, also more than 600 km away from the type locality. A further locality, Gunung