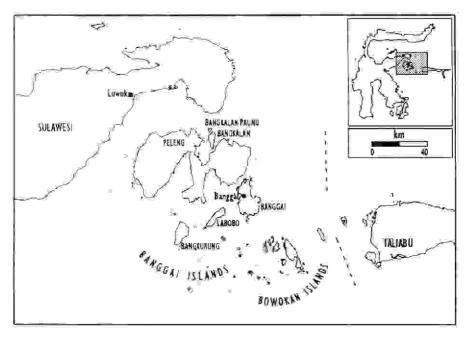
RECENT BIRD OBSERVATIONS FROM THE BANGGAI ISLANDS

By

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Together with the neighbouring Sula Islands, the Banggai Island group is considered by BirdLife International as an important endemic bird area (ICBP 1992; Sujatnika et al. 1996), because it holds as many as nine restricted range species. Though the two island groups have been assigned a critical conservation priority (ICBP 1992), their fauna remains little known (White & Bruce 1986; Bishop 1992). Intensive coverage for the Sula Islands was completed only in 1991 (Davidson et al. 1994). During a contemporary expedition to study the status of Sula Scrubfowl Megapodius bemsteinii from 9 October to 9 December 1991 in the Banggai Islands, we recorded incidental observations on other species. This report aims to contribute to the present knowledge of distribution and biology of the birds of the Banggai Islands with emphasis on restricted range and little known species and the provision of new island records Where pertinent, observations from Sidangori Batui in eastern Sulawesi, made by MID'r two days in September 1991, are referred to in the species accounts. Observations during an additional excursion to the Banggai Islands on 31 August 1996 (MID) are also incorporated.



Areas surveyed in the Banggai Island group (IW^IS'S, 122°44' 124°08'E) featured a mosaic of limestone forest, at various stages of logging, and cultivated areas, mostly in the lowlands (Indrawan *et at.* 1993) and we also made observations at some wetland localities (summarised in Indrawan *et at.* 1994). Islands visited in the Banggai archipelago included Peleng, Bangkalan and Bangkalan Kecil (satellite islands of Peleng), Banggai, Labobo, and Bowokan (a group of small islands adjacent to Taliabu in the Sula Islands).

Nomenclature follows Andrew (1992). Species that are endemic to Wallacea or which have restricted ranges are marked with *. A species represented by endemic subspecies (White & Bruce 1986), either on the Banggai Islands or in the Banggai" Sula group, are indicated by the subspecific name being given at the beginning of the species account. Additional species observed are listed in Appendix 1.

SPECIES ACCOUNTS

Brahminy Kite *Haliasfur Indus*. Moderately common in coastal localities. In the eastern part of Peleng two adults with dusky shaft streaks to white fore part of the body and one adult with an unstreaked breast were observed. This appears to conform with the assertion in White & Bruce (1986) that streaked, unstreaked and intermediate birds often occur sympatrically.

Sulawesi Serpent eagle *Spilomis rufipectus**. Represented on both Banggai and Sula Islands by an endemic subspecies: *sulaensis*. Similar to its status in the Sula Islands (Davidson *et al.* 1994), this raptor is relatively common in degraded lowland forest and cultivation, particularly on eastern Peleng and Labobo. The bird is rather tame and conspicuous. The "kilii kli" calls resemble those of Crested Serpent eagle *S. cheela*. On Labobo, during mid November, YM noted birds flying in pairs with different, more melodious calls.

Black Eagle *Ictinaetus malayensis*. One was seen circling very slowly and close to the ground, in a forest edge in Lalong (Peleng), 31 August 1996. This observation confirmed one "probable" observation of the Black Eagle for the island group, by D. Bishop in Peleng (W&B 1986)

[Rufous bellied Eagle *Hieraaetus kienerii]*. A single bird circling above the forest at Lalong (Peleng) on 31 August 1996 was probably this species. It was a dark eagle with helmet like head markings (crown, cheek and nape all dark), with a contrasting white throat and chest, and rufous abdomen. The underside of the wings was two toned, darker brown rufous on the underwing coverts. The species has not been previously recorded from the island group (White & Bruce 1986).

Sulawesi Hawk eagle *Spizaetus lanceolatus**. Positive identification from sight was for immature birds only. One observed on 31 October at the forest edge at Kelapa Lima (Banggai), calling a harsh repeated "keek" incessantly during the afternoon and throughout the night. This call was confirmed

later from a recording by van den Berg and Bosnian 1986 (courtesy of Bas van Balen). On Labobo, vocal immature birds were seen and heard at two localities at Lalong during November. These observations constitute new records for Banggai and Labobo, though it has been recorded previously on Peleng (White & Brace 1986).

Sula Scrubfowl *Megapodius bernsteinil**. Relatively common in forest localities on Peleng, Banggai and Labobo. Widespread, up to about 450 m a.s.l. Nests with two eggs and a chick were recorded in December. The status and conservation of this species is described in detail in Indrawan *et al.* (1994).

[Red Junglefowl *Gallus gallus]*. YM, who is familiar with this feral species in North Sulawesi, reported a sighting of a pair foraging in the scrub on Bangkalan Kecil. On Banggai, it was probably overlooked by the observers, because local people over a wide area from Banggai to Pasir Putih reported its occurrence (local name "Lambuyun") and claim to hunt it. Female decoys of this bird and caged birds were seen occasionally. This is the first record of the Junglefowl for the Banggai Islands (it is possibly an introduced species on Sulawesi, see White & Bruce 1986). Due to the paucity of actual sightings, it is best treated as unconfirmed.

Barred Rail *Gallirallus torquatus**. Represented in the Banggai and Sula Islands by an endemic subspecies: *sulciroslris* (White & Brace 1986). Known locally as "Tikak". Common in a dry scrubby area at Lalong (Labobo), but difficult to see. However, drumming, combined with "kek kak kek kak" vocalisations, were probably diagnostic (YM). It calls occasionally at night. Heard and seen briefly in mangroves at Luksagu (eastern Peleng), near dusk. The observations at Labobo constitute a new island locality for this rail (see White & Bruce 1986).

White breasted Waterhen Amauromis phoenicurus. Two adult birds with white forehead were noted in mangroves at Pasir Putih (Banggai) and once at Tendetung (Peleng). A captive black fronted bird was seen on Peleng, said to have been caught on the island, and another with black forehead at Gori Gori, mainland Sulawesi (MID, pers.obs.). These observations serve as new records for the island group; they also support the idea that the Wallacean population of this rail shows unstable colouration (see White & Brace 1986, and Davidson et al. 1994 for the Sula islands).

White Imperial Pigeon *Ducula luctuosa**. On Peleng, groups of up to eleven were seen in logged lowland forest at Monggias, and nine birds were seen to roost together in tall mangroves at Luksagu; those already at perch called with a deep booming voice.

White faced Cuckoo dove *Turcoena manadensis**. lowland forest at Monggias (Peleng). Single birds were seen occasionally in degraded

Nicobar Pigeon Caloenas nicobarica. Village people described the bird vividly, as Junai Mas (Golden Pigeon), especially at Lalong (Peleng) and Lalong (Labobo). On 9 October YM saw one foraging on the ground, close to a single Sula Scrubfowl, in logged forest at Lalong (Peleng). A caged bird was seen at Batang Babasal (Peleng), reported to be one snared from nearby logged forest. These observations consitute new records for the Banggai Islands (White & Bruce 1986).

Ornate Lorikeet *Trichoglossus ornatus**. On Peleng this seemed to be common in secondary forests and coconut plantations, but less conspicous than the Blue backed Parrot (see below). On 16 October at least seven birds were seen foraging in a fruiting fig tree near the coast, at *ca.* 200 metres a.s.l. Kept as probably the most popular pet in villages.

[Yellow breasted Racquet tan *Prioniturus flavicans**]. Foraging in small flocks of up to ten birds in degraded forest at Lalong (Labobo), noted by LP who is familiar with both racquet tails in N. Sulawesi. The males had a distinctive blue crown with red central patch but other markings were not noted in detail, however adults of both sexes differed from Golden mantled Racquet tail (see below). Interviews with the local people at Lalong indicated that the Yellow breasted Racquet tail was seen only seasonally. The Racquet tails were collectively known locally as "Tulip". Because of limitations of our field notes, this record, new to the island of Labobo (W & B 1986), needs farther confirmation.

Golden mantled Racquet tail *Prioniturus plauturus**. Recorded thrice at a lowland forest in Lalong (eastern Peleng), up to 8 birds in a group. On close views, distinguishing characters for males of this Racquet tail included a dull elongated (but not extensive) red patch on top of the crown, bordered by a pink hind neck patch. The mantle, unlike the proceeding species, had a greyish wash. Racquet tails which were heard and seen flying in lowland forest at Kelapa Lima (Banggai) were thought to be this species. Two of this bird were once seen to forage in the same tree as Blue backed Parrot.

Blue backed Parrot *Tanygnathus sumatramis*. Flocks of up to ten were seen frequently in cultivated areas in mainland E. Sulawesi and the Banggai Islands. At Sidangori on mainland Sulawesi it is frequently considered a pest to crops, trapped, and occasionally kept as pet (MID pers obs.). Partly nocturnal and easily detected by their repeated "kea" calls in flight. Observation of two captive birds in Peleng suggested colour of iris more yellow rather than grey or grey brown *(contra Eck 1976 in White & Bruce 1986)*.

Moluccan King Parrot *Alisterus amboinensis**. This Moluccan species is represented on Peleng Island by an endemic subspecies: *versicolor*. The bird is mostly silent and was observed only occasionally, in partly logged forest. Birds have been seen to feed singly or in twos during the day. On 22 October, however, a flock of four was seen flying out of the forest at dusk, across open cultivation, which raises speculation that the species may be partly nocturnal.

Moluccan Hanging parrot *Loriculus amabilis**. Represented in the Banggai Islands by an endemic subspecies: *ruber*. Seen in a variety of habitats including cultivation, coconut plantations and mangroves (on Peleng, Banggai, Labobo and the smaller islands of Bowokan), also as pets. Once seen at *ca.* 600 m a S.I. in the western mountains of Peleng (by LP). Birds seen were foraging singly or in small numbers but maybe up to six loose individuals. Their local name *"Tintis"* is onomatopoeic and reflects the calls in flight. Labobo is a new locality for this species (White & Bruce 1986).

Moluccan Scopsowl *Otus magicus*. White & Bruce (1986) places *mendeni* of Peleng tentatively in *magicus* following Marshall (1978) rather than in *manadensis*, pending confirmation of the voice. The former has a "raven like territorial croak" or rasping voice and the latter a "clear whistle of rising inflection" (Marshall op *cit.*). At a degraded lowland forest habitat on Kelapa Lima (Banggai), the calls of two birds were harsh, syllabilized as "korrooou....". By contrast, at a coconut grove with secondary forest at Lalong (Labobo), the voice of three birds was described as "koaa..." in one case, uttered regularly at 6 10 second intervals. This latter voice recalled the "poa..." (in one case at regular 7 10 second intervals) of three birds (presumed *manadensis*) at Sidangori on eastern mainland Sulawesi (MID pers.obs). Thus field observations on the voice of Banggai birds has so far failed to resolve the taxonomy, with the possiblity that *magicus* occurs on Banggai Island and *manadensis* on Labobo Island, The need for farther studies is indicated.

Great Eared Nightjar *Eurostopodus macrotis*. Observed at several localities on Peleng, mostly at the forest edge Two birds were seen in aerial display, before crashing down to the canopy in what appeared to be" a copulation attempt (YM pers. obs.). A fledgling immature was seen in early October.

Black billed Kingfisher *Pelargopsis melanorhynca**. Represented in the Banggai Islands by an endemic subspecies: *dychrorhyncha* (White & Bruce 1986). Common on the coasts of Peleng, Banggai and Labobo. On sandy shores of the small island ofBangkalan, four were seen on a one kilometre stretch of sandy coast. Other sites include mangroves and once a village plantation. Bills of the islands' population have variable combinations of red and black. Some of the individuals had the base of the culmen and basal half of the mandible red, the rest of the bill black (which conform to the description of White & Bruce), sometimes with the red patch extending to the chin. However, the red on the mandible sometimes extended to the tip, and on occasions there were even individuals with all red bills (three observations) and all black bills (two observations). This raises doubts about the validity of the *dichorhyncha* and *eutreptorhyncha* subspecies described for the Banggai and Sula Islands respectively (White & Bruce 1986), which would leave their larger size as the main criterion.

Red bellied Pitta *Pitta erythrogaster.* On the Banggai and Sula Islands represented by an endemic subspecies: *dohertyi* that is now treated as a fall species: Sula Pitta (Sibley & Monroe 1990, Lambert & Woodcock 1996). Three sightings by YM in Monggias (ca. 100 m. a.s.l., north eastern Peleng) in the

more open parts of a logged forest, once a pair. On 26 October, as many as four were flushed on a 2 km path through an abandoned plantation (ca. 200 m. a.s.l.) at the edge of secondary forest at Batang Babasal (eastern Peleng).

Elegant Pitta Pitta elegans*. At Monggias (Peleng) this species was sometimes observed in the same habitat as Red bellied Pitta, foraging in degraded, logged lowland forest. On Labobo single birds were seen or heard frequently in scrub and plantations bordering forest edges. The call is a double whistle syllabilized as "perriew...priw", at various times of day but especially at dawn and dusk. At dusk on 10 November as many as five calling birds were recorded from a radius of about fifty metres from the observer While making observations from a blind, a single pitta, possibly the same individual, regularly fed on invertebrates close to three megapode mounds, but in only one of nine occasions was it seen to actually ascend the mound to forage. The bird jumps to catch insects in the air An unidentified lepidopteran was observed among its food, which it broke against a log. It settled on a perch at one metre height to call. At the sound of approaching human feet the bird did not flush immediately, but instead freezed and listened intently. These observations on Peleng and Labobo constitute the first for the Banggai Island group (W & B 1986).

Slaty Cuckoo shrike *Coracina schistasea**. The original notes for this species have been mislaid. Differentiated from the similar looking Black faced Cuckoo shrike *Coracina novaehollandiae* mostly by the extensive black on the head. In Peleng eight sightings were made, of birds singly, in pairs or small groups, all in moderately to lightly disturbed forests and altitudes of up to 200 m a.s.l. (YM).

Golden Bulbul *Hypsipetes affinis**. Represented on Banggai by an endemic subspecies: *harteti* (White & Bruce 1986). Groups of three to four birds were commonly seen in degraded forests at Monggias (Peleng).

Henna tailed Rhinomyias *Rhinomyias colonus**. Identified positively once only, by YM in secondary forest on the coast of Lalong (Labobo). Its call was checked against a recording made by Dennis Yong from the Sula Islands, The UEA Expedition to Taliabu found this species as locally common but describe it as "fairly unobstrusive" (Davidson 1994).

Black naped Monarch *Hypothymis azurea*. Represented in the Banggai and Sula Islands by an endemic subspecies: *blasii*. Commonly observed in all localities. Breeding, a nest with two nestlings in scrub growth at Ba Panga (northeastern Peleng), was noted on 26 October. The nest, suspended at two metres in a shrub, was cone shaped and *ca*. 15 centimetres in height. It is made of dry wood fibers from bamboo and palms, and the outer side was bound with spider egg sacs.

Chestnut Munia *Lonchura malacca*. A flock often birds was observed in grass and shrubs on the bank of a creek at Tendetung (Peleng) on 6 December. They had black heads, chesnut bodies and wings, and whitish or greyish bills. Black faced Munias *L. molucca* were observed nearby and were more common. This constitues the first record for the Banggai Islands (see White & Bruce 1986).

Tree Sparrow *Passer montanus*. Three at the harbour of Banggai on 13 November constitute the first record for the Banggai Islands.

Helmeted Myna *Basilomis galeatus**. Encountered at Monggias (Peleng), and Pasir Putih and Pai Sepundung (Banggai), mainly in secondary forests at altitudes of up to 200 m a.s. I Small groups of up to four were seen gleaning bark for insects and foraging for fruits and berries, including those of a forest pandan (possibly *Pandanus celebicum*). The bird foraged at rather low levels of the forest edges and occasionally in village gardens, but we never saw the bird forage on the ground. No birds were observed in captivity.

Finch billed Myna *Scissirostrum dubium**. Foraging flocks of between 50 and 150 birds were seen in secondary vegetation and forest edges on Peleng.

Hair crested Drongo *Dicrurus hottentotus*. Commonly found on all islands, birds with white iris being predominant (see White & Bruce 1986). However sightings were also made of individuals with brown irises, twice on Banggai and once on Labobo, all below 300 m a.s.l. [The brown irised individuals might be this species, but they could not be positively told apart from Spangled Drongo *D. hracteatus*,

previously unrecorded from the island group].

Ivory backed Wood swallow *Artamus monachus**. Recorded at Salakan, Monggias, Tendetung (Peleng) and Pai Sepundung (Banggai). Observed in more forested habitats than the White breasted Wood swallow *A. leucorhyncus* and at altitudinal range of 100 to 200 m a.s.l. At Tendetung both species foraged over forest edges, with the Ivory backed being 100 metres higher. On 31 October at Pai Sepundung, a pair was seen flying high in circles, while calling a melodious "chwink chwink", after which one bird mounted the back of the other whom slowed its flight, in a probable copulation attempt (YM).

Crow sp. *Corvus sp.* Unidentified crows were observed at six localities on Peleng, Banggai, Labobo and Tumbak Kecil (Bowokan) Islands. Birds were breeding in October and November at Tendetung (Peleng), Pasir Putih (Banggai) and Tumbak Kecil. One discovered nest was made of dry branches on a tall tree *ca* 20 m high, occupied by a pair.

The only crow supposedly occuring on the Banggai Islands is the Banggai Crow *C. unicolor*, which is an endemic with only two known specimens; compared to the Slender billed Crow *C. enca*, it is "very small, black" (White & Bruce 1986). The bird is unknown in the wild and the exact island from which it was collected is not known (White & Bruce 1986; Bishop 1992). Bishop (1992) believed that he may have been observing the Slender billed Crow on Peleng.

The birds we saw were not markedly smaller than the few Slender billed observed on mainland Sulawesi (MID). In good light a green olive sheen was observed on the breast and, as with the mainland bird, the call often ends with a falsetto. An unsuccessful search was made for adult crows with smaller body size on west Peleng at *ca.* 300 m a.s.l., but a single crow of smaller size and dull brownish sheen was observed in mossy forest at 660 a.s.l., which remains unidentified (YM & LP).

DISCUSSION

The present observations report the occurrence of restricted range terrestrial birds in the Banggai Islands, including species whose conservation status is a cause for concern (Collar & Andrew 1988, Shannaz *et al.* 1995): Sula Scrubfowl, Red bellied Pitta, Elegant Pitta, Slaty Cuckoo shrike, Henna tailed Rhinomyias and Helmeted Myna. One widespread but near threatened species, the Nicobar Pigeon, was added to the island group's list. Due to the opportunistic nature of this compilation, many species (e.g. the more difficult swifts and swiftlets), were overlooked. Three "near threatened" species were either not observed (Blue faced Rail *Gymnocrex rosenbergii* and Red backed Thrush *Zoothera erythnota*) or not identified with confidence (Banggai Crow). We believe the Banggai Crow, if extant, is localised, and further survey should include visiting the higher altitudes for this bird.

Some unexpected variations on the individual species were observed (cf. White & Bruce 1986), for example:

- * White breasted Waterhen Amauromis phoenicurus (forms with either black or white forehead);
- * Moluccan Scopsowl *Otus magicus* (two kinds of calls, i.e. clear pleasing whistle and harsh unpleasant notes);
- * Black billed Kingfisher *Pelargopsis melanorhynca* (individuals with strikingly variable extent of black/red on the bills).

We cannot assume that for these species the observed variations in the Banggai Islands might reflect status of geographical races as implied by White & Bruce 1986. The implications are thus quite intriguing: could the variations be attributed to individual, age, sex or a combination of secondary invasions and hybridisations?

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Appendix 1. Other terrestrial birds noted during the 1991 survey

| | Peleng | Banggai | Labobo | Bowokan |
|-------------------------------------|--------|---------|--------|---------|
| Pandion haliaetus | + | | + | |
| Haliaeetus leucogaster | + | | | |
| Accipiter sp (rhodogaster or namis) | + | | | |
| Falco moluccensis | + | | | |
| Ptilinopus melanopsila | + | | | |
| Ducula aenea | + | | | + |
| Macropygia amboinensis | + | | | |
| Chalcophaps indica | | | + | |
| Alcedo atthis | + | | | |
| Alcedo meninting | + | | | |
| Halcyon coromanda | + | + | | |
| Halcyon sancta | + | | | |
| Centropus bengalensis | + | | | |
| Eudynamis metanorhynca | + | | | |
| Eurystomus orientalis | + | | | |
| Coracina novaehollandiae | + | | | |
| Coracina tenutrostris | | + | | |
| Culicapa helianthea | | + | | |
| Motacilla cinerea | | + | | |
| Motacillaflava | | | + | |
| Pachycephala pecloralis | | + | | |
| Dicaeum celebicum | + | + | | |
| Cisticola exilis | + | | | |
| Anthreptes malaccensis | | | + | |
| Nectarinia aspasia | + | + | | |
| Zosterops atrtfrons | + | + | | |
| Lonchura molucca | + | | | |
| Oriolus chinensis | + | + | + | + |