
NOTE ON A SIGHTING OF STRIATED GRASSBIRD IN KALIMANTAN

by
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On return from a two month bird inventory in the hinterland of the Sesayap river (East Kalimantan) during September October 1998, the environs of the small town of Malinau (116°37' E; 3°31'N) were briefly surveyed. On 30 October, the local air strip (used by the airline companies M.A.P. and D.A.S.) was visited by the author accompanied by S. Hedges from 07.30 to 09.05 hrs. Our attention was drawn to a rather large warbler like bird flushed from the ground. The bird remained low, hidden amongst some dense bushes, and did not allow us to approach within 30-40m. Therefore no close views were obtained. The long, tapered, somewhat 'hanging' tail, and pale brown boldly streaked upperparts suggested Striated Grassbird (or Warbler) *Megalurus palustris*, which was soon confirmed by its immediately recognized loud song, repeated four or five times: "*chi chiuwu, krik krik(krik)*". This song is very familiar to ornithologists in Java.

The first sighting of the the Striated Grassbird on Borneo was in 1982 at Lahad Datu, and in 1984 near Kota Belud (Francis 1985), in Sabah, East Malaysia. It is now found all along the west coast of Sabah from Kudat to Kota Belud, Kota Kinabalu, the Klias peninsula and Beaufort (F. Lambert, G. Davison, pers. comm. 1999). More recently, in December 1995, the species was found at Mukah in Sibiu District, Sarawak (Gregory Smith 1996), which implies that the bird has spread all the way along

the coast through Brunei, Miri and Bintulu without being observed (G. Davison, pers. comm. 1999).

The arrival of Striated Grassbird in Malinau may have been very recent. However, the species could have been overlooked during visits by the author to the same area in November 1997, and to the air strip of Tanjung Selor 80 km to the southeast in March 1996. Lahad Datu and Kota Belud in Sabah are respectively 250 kni and 320 kni (in a direct line) from Malinau.

Subspecific Status

Measurements and soft part colours of a bird captured at Lahad Datu were closest to *Orbesi* of the Philippines in all respects (Francis 1985). Rabor (1977) describes the song as "tor tor riok", repeated over and over, which sounds closer to the Javan birds (*cf* Hoogerwerf 1950: "chuk chukkrrrooiik", "chok chok cheret", chit chit cheret"). There is however more variation in the song of birds in Java and Bali than these transcriptions suggest; for instance, on Bali a song was heard and tape recorded by the present author in April 1981 (van Balen, unpubl. data), transcribed as "chichiwchi i irrw chuk chuk chuk chuk", very similar to the bird seen at Malinau.

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