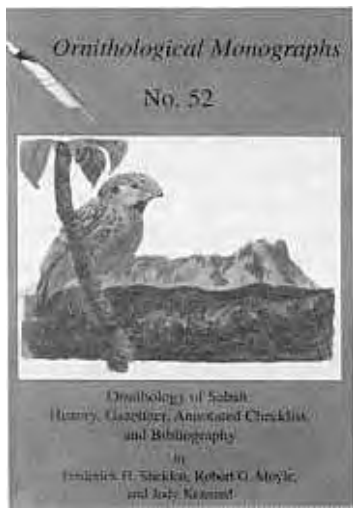


BOOK REVIEW



**Ornithology of Sabah: History, Gazetteer, Annotated Checklist and Bibliography.** Sheldon, F. H., R. G. Moyle & J. Kennard, 2001. Ornithological Monographs 52, American Ornithologists' Union, Washington, D.C. vi + 285 pp. USD 25.00. Without ISBN number.

Occupying the north part of the island of Borneo is Malaysian state of

Sabah. Due to its unique geographic location, Borneo is one of the nerve centres of biodiversity. However, sadly, biodiversity of Sabah, as of Southeast Asia, is poorly studied. This sad reality remains despite the fact that habitat destruction in Southeast Asia has been unprecedented in recent times. Sound biological knowledge, in my mind, is needed for effective conservation. Any monograph on the birds of Sabah should therefore be good news. However, when I received a copy of this monographs, two thoughts came to my mind. First, I thought - not another book on birds of Southeast Asia! There are numerous books (field guides) on the birds of Southeast Asia – most of them are scientifically useless as they often lack adequate information on the bird biology. Second, I thought that anybody could compile the available information. As I show below, both of my thoughts were wrong.

This monograph is divided into five parts: introduction, history, gazetteer, annotated checklist and bibliography. Included in introduction are physical, geographical and habitat features of Sabah. Also included are critical analyses on evolution, ecology, behaviour and conservation. These four parts make this monograph apart from traditional field

guides that I was mentioning earlier. As mentioned, all these chapters are critically written. In addition to succinctly summarizing the current state of knowledge, they point the readers towards the areas that potential researchers can home in. Probably because of lack of information, ecology and behaviour section dwell on Bornean birds than specifically on Sabahan birds.

The authors point out the biological benefits of strategically placing agricultural plantations. Such examples show that both conservation and exploitation can be and should be effectively balanced. All survey sites in Sabah are mapped with geographic coordinates given for most of them. This I admit is a mammoth task in its own particularly because the sites have Malay names and would have been difficult to map. In my mind, the most valuable part of this book is the species descriptions. When available, data on the species' biology are presented. Such information will be particularly useful for future studies such as those comparing guild compositions among sites.

Anybody interested in Southeast Asian birds should own this monograph. With this work, the stage is set for more quantitative ornithological research in Sabah. I have a number of wishes. First, I hope that similar monographs are published for other regions such as Sarawak and Java. Second, I hope that ornithological research in Southeast Asia takes a leap from traditional survey work. Last, governments in the region provide conducive environment for scientific research – unknown biodiversity cannot be protected adequately.

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