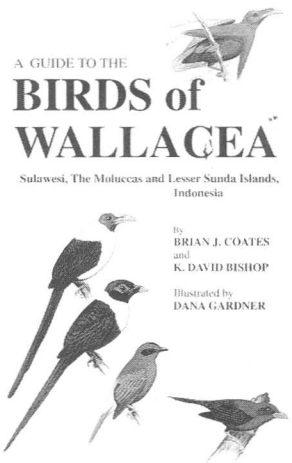
THE RAFFLES BULLETIN OF ZOOLOGY 1997 **45**(1): 477-482

BOOK REVIEWS



A guide to the Birds of Wallacea. B. J. Coates & K. D. Bishop, 1997. 535 pp. ISBN 0-95-90257-3-1. Dover Publications Pty. Ltd.

This book is the first ornithological field guide to the region situated between the Oriental and Australasian regions and known as Wallacea (after renowned naturalist A. F. Wallace). This region has an interesting mix of bird fauna from both the Oriental and Australasian regions and contains about 250 endemic bird species. This book intends to serve both as field guide and reference book for the region. This book starts with authoritative accounts of geology and vegetation of the region. It also gives an account of climate of Wallacea (written by D. A. Holmes). Following which, characteristic bird communities of each habitat type (e.g. montane forest and alpine grassland) are described. The biogeography of the avifauna of Wallacea is also discussed in details. For researchers interested in exploring the region, the key bird watching areas are listed.

After a brief introduction to each of the bird family of Wallacea, each of the over 690 bird species are described (e.g. range, status and habitat, and habits). This is supplemented by excellent drawings by D. Gardner. Appendices include the lists of endemic species of various areas within the region. The book ends with a comprehensive bibliography.

I think that this book has succeeded in its objectives and will be essential to everybody working on or interested in birds of Wallacea and surrounding regions.

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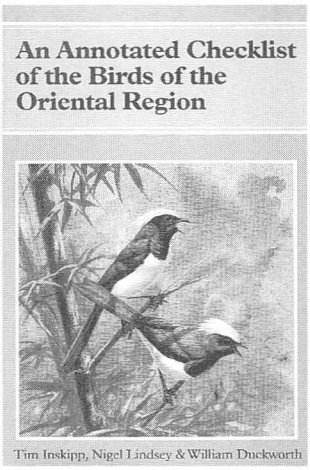

An annotated checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region. T. Inskipp, N. Lindsey & W. Duckworth, 1996. 294 pp. ISBN 0-9529545-0-8. Oriental Bird Club.

The Oriental region is considered as a bird 'mega-diversity' regions. It contains over 2500 bird species of which many species and groups are endemic to the region. About 29% of the species globally threatened of extinction occur in the Oriental region. The unprecedented habitat destruction undoubtedly be detrimental to many endemic and non-endemic bird species in the region (e.g. Brooks et al. 1997). Considering this scenario, it is important to document all the species occurring in the region, which this book aims. This inventory can then be further used to determine the status of the species of conservation concern.

This book uses the classification system proposed by Sibley & Monroe (1990, 1993). Although this system of classification has been criticized by some researchers (Davison 1997), it is now heavily used. All the species are grouped in respective Orders. However, no attempt has been made to give any description (e.g. range, migratory status) for the species. The indication of species of conservation concern is very helpful. The exhaustive reference section will also be helpful to the researchers.

This book will be useful to anybody working on birds in the region. However, I hope that it will stimulate more bird research in the region.

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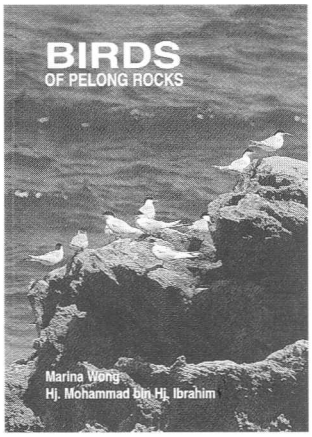

Birds of Pelong Rocks. M. Wong & Hj. M. bin Hj. Ibrahim, 1996. 70 pp. Brunei Museum, Brunei Darussalam.

This book is the first in the series on the Natural History of Brunei Darussalam and reports some natural history observations made by authors on Pelong Rocks. Pelong Rocks are a group of small rocky islands in South China sea. The book aims to give a brief introduction to some of the birds recorded on the island and is primarily aimed at non-scientific readers. It starts with a brief introduction to the geology, habitat types, and vegetation of the rocks. Then it gives natural history notes on resident (the Reef Egret, *Egretta sacra*; terns, *Sterna* spp. and *Chlidonias* spp.; and the Pied Imperial Pigeon, *Ducula bicolor*) and migratory bird species (the White-bellied Sea Eagle, *Haliaeetus leucogaster*; White-collared Kingfisher, *Todirhamphus chloris*; and Blue Rock Thrush, *Monticola solitarius*). The book ends with brief notes on how, why, and where to study birds (applicable both to Pelong Rocks and Brunei Darussalam).

Considering that the natural history data are lacking for most of Southeast Asian bird species, this book could be useful both to scientists and non-scientists. I hope that similar books would be published from other areas of Southeast Asia so that notes made by people studying natural history are properly documented.

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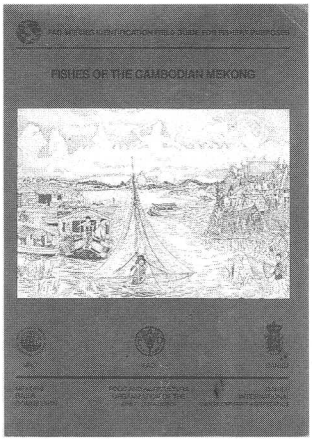

FAO Species Identification Field Guide for Fishery Purposes. Fishes of the Cambodian Mekong. W. J. Rainboth. 1996. 265 pp, XXVII pls. ISBN 92-5-103743-4. Food and Agricultutre Organisation of the United Nations, Rome.

Considering the fact that the Mekong basin is the largest river drainage in Southeast Asia, its freshwater ichthyofauna has been relatively poorly-studied. Although detailed studies on the freshwater fishes of parts of the drainage exist (e.g. Smith, 1945), only Taki's (1974, 1978) studies of the Lao Mekong have treated the freshwater fishes of this drainage with any detail. FAO is to be commended in alleviating the paucity of publications in this field by producing a field guide to the fishes of the Cambodian Mekong. Although the title suggests otherwise, this field guide reports almost every species known from the Mekong basin (about 500 species in 65 families).

The layout of the field guide makes it easily usable, and figures, most of which are of excellent quality, are provided for almost every species. Apart from this, colour plates have been provided for the more commonly-encountered species. This is a great help to users who are not familiar with the fishes of the area.

Some recent taxonomic changes should be considered though, when the book is used:

1. *Rasbora urophthalmoides* should be *Boraras urophthalmoides* (as treated by Kottelat & Vidthayanon, 1993).
2. *Dangila* is not a valid genus name, the correct name being *Labiobarbus*, with both *D. kuhli* and *D. lineata* synonymised under *L. leptocheilus*, and *D. spilopleura* under *L. siamensis* (see Roberts, 1993).
3. The *Botia* sp. described in page 134 and illustrated in plate XVI, figures 126 and 127 is now *Botia caudipunctata* Taki & Doi, 1995.
4. The genus *Heterobagrus* (page 140) is now regarded as a synonym of *Mystus* (see Mo, 1991; Roberts, 1994a).
5. The following species of *Mystus* should be transferred to *Hemibagrus*: *M. filamentus*, *M. nemurus*, *M. wyckii* and *M. wyckioides* (fide Mo, 1991).
6. All species of *Silurus* known from Indochina have been transferred to the genus *Pterocryptis* (after Bornbusch, 1991).
7. The genus *Acrochordonichthys* is not known from Indochina. The illustrations indicate that *Acrochordonichthys* sp. cf. *rugosus* is in fact an *Akysis* species. The basis for differentiating *Acrochordonichthys* from *Akysis* as given in the book is that the former genus has a truncate caudal fin while the latter has a forked caudal fin. In fact, *Akysis* species with truncate caudal fins exist (e.g. *Akysis heterurus*, Ng, 1996).
8. There is a third species of *Parambassis* known from the Mekong basin - *P. siamensis* (Fowler, 1937) according to Roberts (1994b). This was placed as a synonym of *Pseudambassis notatus* (as *Chanda siamensis*) on page 182.
9. *Coius* should replace *Datnioides* following revisionary work by Roberts & Kottelat (1994). The genus should also be placed within its own family, Coiidae. Three species are known

from the Mekong (not two as stated on page 183): *C. microlepis*, *C. quadrifasciatus* and *C. undecimradiatus* Roberts & Kottelat, 1994.

10. *Polynemus multifilis* is now referred to the genus *Polistonemus* (see Kottelat et al., 1993).
11. *Nandus nandus* is not known from the Mekong basin. The species reported by Taki (1974) as *Nandus nandus* is in fact *N. oxyrhynchus* Ng, Vidthayanon & Ng, 1996.
12. *Pristolepis* should be placed within its own family, Pristolepididae (see Roberts, 1989).
13. The picture of *Helostoma temmincki* on page 215 is actually that of *Belontia hasselti*.
14. For the genus *Betta*, there are currently three species known from the area of concern. They are *B. splendens*, *B. smaragdina*, and *B. prima* Kottelat, 1994. *Betta prima* was previously identified as *B. pugnax* (Kottelat, 1984, 1994).
15. A third species of the genus *Trichopsis* is found in the Mekong basin - *T. schalleri* (see Kottelat, 1989).

These minor points aside, this is still an important work for ichthyologists working on freshwater fishes of Southeast Asia, particularly for fisheries officers working in the region. The challenge ahead now would be to produce similar field guides to the fishes of the other rivers in the region!

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