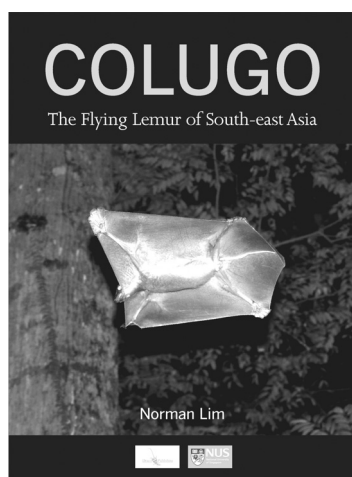




Colugo: the Flying Lemur of South-east Asia

Norman Lim. Draco Publishing & Distribution Pte Ltd and the National University of Singapore, Singapore. 78 pp. ISBN 981-05-6454-6

Ten years ago, while writing a review of frugivory and seed dispersal, I did a comprehensive search of the literature for

information on the diet of the Sunda Colugo (*Galeopterus variegatus*). Bill Wischusen's PhD study of the Philippine colugo (*Cynocephalus volans*) had shown that this species was largely folivorous, but almost nothing seemed to be known about the ecology of the Sunda species. This was a surprise since colugos are neither rare nor difficult to see, and every field naturalist in the region has a favourite colugo story. Mine is seeing one gliding between street trees while eating dinner at a roadside restaurant in Penang. A partial excuse for this ignorance is the apparent impossibility of keeping them alive in captivity, but I suspect the primary reason is that they cannot be studied by any of the standard techniques developed for primates, bats or ground-dwelling mammals.

Now Norman Lim has now provided the science of Dermopterology – the study of colugos – with its first book. Almost everything known about colugos up to 2005 is in here, from distribution and morphology to diet, behaviour and reproduction. The highly readable text is illustrated on almost every page by stunning photographs, as well as maps, diagrams and tables. Of particular value, is the way that the author has brought together observations from many other naturalists to flesh out his own studies in Singapore. Much of the information on the Sunda Colugo is previously

unpublished, so this book will be the primary source for mammalogists interested in this species. The final chapter makes a plea for conservation – perhaps unnecessary for this relatively resilient species? – and also makes some sensible suggestions for studies that are needed to fill in gaps in our knowledge. The need for further taxonomic studies is particularly urgent, for while colugos are still common in the region as a whole, it is possible that unrecognized cryptic species are under threat, on islands or in continental Southeast Asia. Diet, social organization and life history are other obvious gaps.

The 2005 cut-off in the literature sources was rather unlucky, since several relevant papers have been published since. These include new fossil evidence from Thailand, Myanmar and Pakistan, which shows both the great antiquity of the colugos in Asia and that their present distribution is a relict from a more widespread past (Marivaux et al., 2006). The fossil, molecular and morphological evidence now all agree in grouping the colugos with the tree-shrews in the aptly named Sundatheria (“Sunda animals”), which is, in turn, the sister group of the primates. We can only hope that this new understanding of colugo relationships will inspire more researchers to work on this interesting group. There is no better place to start than with this beautifully produced book.

LITERATURE CITED

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