



The Sarawak Museum Journal

Vol. XXIX No. 50

December 1981



ISSN: 0375-3050

E-ISSN: 3036-0188

Citation: G. S. de Silva. (1981). Some Birds of the Kabili-Sepilok Forest Reserve. The Sarawak Museum Journal, XXIX (50): 151-166

SOME BIRDS OF THE KABILI-SEPILOK FOREST RESERVE

G. S. de Silva

(Turtle Islands National Park, Sabah)

INTRODUCTION

The principal purpose of this paper is to provide a check list of birds found within the Kabili-Sepilok Forest Reserve, which covers an area of some 10,674 acres, as a quick reference for the research worker, who has hitherto been handicapped by the lack of a check list for the reserve. It is also meant to stimulate the enthusiasm of interested persons, who could help fill gaps in the knowledge by reporting casual observations. With help, contributions, and time, it is hoped to compile a complete avifaunal record of the area. Recently, information has been made available by Fox (1973) and Barbara Smith (1975, unpublished) on avifaunal and mammalian species found within the reserve and the writer has drawn freely from these sources. Although rivers are an important habitat, no work has been done in the areas drained by several of the rivers in the reserve. Nesting records are scanty, if not absent, and every endeavour must be made in the future to fill this important gap. Readers are requested to communicate with the author or the Chief Game Warden, Sabah if they are aware of the availability of other material or collections made in the Kabili-Sepilok Forest Reserve.

This paper includes species of birds observed by the author who has been a regular visitor to the reserve since 1964, the late Christopher Chong who worked at the Orang utan Rehabilitation Center, intermittently, since 1971 and Barbara J. Smith who did a primate and avifaunal survey in the reserve during 1974–75.

SOME BIRDS OF THE KABILI-SEPILOK FOREST RESERVE

by

G.S. de Silva

(Turtle Islands National Park, Sabah)

Introduction:

The principal purpose of this paper is to provide a check list of birds found within the Kabili-Sepilok Forest Reserve, which covers an area of some 10,674 acres, as a quick reference for the research worker, who has hitherto been handicapped by the lack of a check list for the reserve. It is also meant to stimulate the enthusiasm of interested persons, who could help fill gaps in the knowledge by reporting casual observations. With help, contributions, and time, it is hoped to compile a complete avifaunal record of the area. Recently, information has been made available by Fox (1973) and Barbara Smith (1975, unpublished) on avifaunal and mammalian species found within the reserve and the writer has drawn freely from these sources. Although rivers are an important habitat, no work has been done in the areas drained by several of the rivers in the reserve. Nesting records are scanty, if not absent, and every endeavour must be made in the future to fill this important gap. Readers are requested to communicate with the author or the Chief Game Warden, Sabah if they are aware of the availability of other material or collections made in the Kabili-Sepilok Forest Reserve.

This paper includes species of birds observed by the author who has been a regular visitor to the reserve since 1964, the late Christopher Chong who worked at the Orang utan Rehabilitation Center, intermittently, since 1971 and Barbara J. Smith who did a primate and avifaunal survey in the reserve during 1974-75.

It has been found that avifaunal observation in the reserve is not too difficult, except when the birds, especially the smaller species are concealed either in thick foliage or are in open areas. Admittedly, the dense vegetation of a tropical rainforest affords the birds ample opportunity for concealment but, at the same time, it provides the observer with cover to conceal himself and the birds are not easily disturbed or frightened.

It has been noted from birds caught in mist nets, that some regularly travel along roughly the same route. Others are localised and have to be searched for in likely places such as rivers or their vicinity, fallen logs, clearings etc. Trees in fruit, attract many birds and provide good observation points. It has been found that the best observation times are in the early morning, late afternoon and after rain.

In describing the birds, Smythies (1960) has been followed for English and scientific names. It is appreciated that other writers may disagree with Smythies in minor details of his systematics, but his book "The Birds of Borneo" remains the only easily accessible reference to the avifauna of the area and to avoid confusion, it has been followed.

The Kabili-Sepilok Forest Reserve

The Kabili-Sepilok Forest Reserve, which derives its name from two rivers draining into Sandakan Bay, was first gazetted in 1931 and covered an area of 5,767 acres. In 1938, 4,630 acres were added on the east side and in 1965 a further 653 acres were added to the north and south-east while in 1965, there was also a small excision in the north-east. The Game branch maintains a station in the north of the reserve for the rehabilitation of orang-utan, and in various areas research activities are conducted by the Forest Department. According to Fox (1973), during the Chartered Company regime, Pryer, owned a coffee plantation on the lower Kabili River, in the south-east of the reserve. It was abandoned in 1910 following an outbreak of disease among labourers and a slump in the coffee trade. A graveyard is said to exist on the lower left bank of the Kabili River.

Some areas in the reserve were logged 60–70 years ago on a highly selective basis and, other areas, in more recent times. In the north-east, about 400 acres were illegally felled in 1967. Some men were found poaching within the reserve in early 1972 and were dealt with. Since then the reserve has not been violated as far as is known and will it is hoped remain sacrosanct for generations to come.

Topography and climate

Most of the Reserve has been mapped as Sandakan Formation by the Geological Survey (Lee, 1967). Sandstones comprise about forty per cent of the Formation and form prominent escarpments and ridges in Sepilok, the most noticeable of which lies near the south-eastern boundary. A cliff in the headwaters of the Sepilok River appears to be due to a fault trending north-west, more or less parallel with two escarpments on Berhala Island, one of which is, apparently, due to faulting. The sandstone ridges give Sepilok its dominant characteristic and, in some cases, they rise rapidly not far from the mangroves to 250 feet in the center of the reserve and to 350 feet near the south-eastern boundary. The hills are concentrated mainly near the east boundary where the land rises to 550 feet at the Sepilok Trig Point. Gently undulating country is found in the south-west of the reserve and does not exceed 100 feet. To the south, the reserve is drained by the rivers Kabili, Pakis, Sepilok Kechil, Sepilok Besar and Arang which flow into Sandakan Bay with mangrove forest along their flatter lower reaches. To the north-west drainage is to the Gum Gum River, and to the north-east to the Sibuga River (Fox, 1973) both of which flow into Labuk Bay.

Rainfall, temperature, humidity, wind and sunshine

The Reserve has an equatorial climate and is subject to two monsoons. The North East Monsoon brings heavy rain into the area during December and January, and the South West Monsoon brings some rain in July. April is, on average the driest month, but dry spells before or after are not uncommon.

Generally the mean daily average temperature is about 80° F. However, April, being the driest month, has a slightly higher mean daily temperature. The mean monthly relative humidity is usually over 80 and the minimum daily mean is rarely lower than the low 70's.

Heavy rain storms are often preceded by strong winds which abate with rainfall. Average daily sunshine is about 6–7 hours (Fox, 1973).