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THE BIRDS OF GUNUNG GADING NATIONAL PARK

S. Sreedharan

ABSTRACT

A total of twenty days, between 7th April to 28th April 1997, were spent observing and trapping birds at Gunung Gading National Park (1° 42' N, 109° 48' E). Field observations were made over seven days, with daily walks through various habitats. A further thirteen days were spent using mist nets to trap sedentary and secretive jungle species.

A total of 51 species from 20 families were recorded in the Park during that period. 85 individuals of 27 species were trapped and ringed, 15 of these being juvenile and immature birds. A total of 34 birds of 22 species were in breeding state. Eight birds were undergoing full wing and tail moult, 4 breeding birds undergoing post-nuptial moult and 2 fledglings in post-juvenile moult. The low catch rates for juvenile birds and those in post-nuptial moult suggest that breeding at Gunung Gading was still in the early stages at the time of the study. The absence of many common ground-feeding jungle species suggests that its prolonged isolation from other tracts of undisturbed MDF, as well as its history of habitat disturbance and clearing, has impoverished the avifauna at Gunung Gading.

The study, intended to last for five weeks until 20th May, was aborted when mist-nets were stolen by illicit visitors inside the park on two separate occasions.

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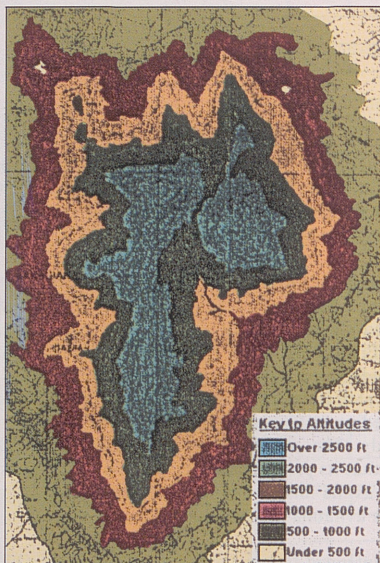
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INTRODUCTION

The rugged and mountainous Gunung Gading National Park, in the Kuching Division of Sarawak, was gazetted as a conservation zone in 1983. It was opened to visitors only in 1994 and has become a popular week-end attraction for tourists and local residents.

Located just a few miles away from Lundu, it encompasses an area of 4,106 hectares and a complex of four peaks, Gunung Sebuloh, Gunung Lundu, Gunung Perigi and the eponymous Gunung Gading, the highest peak at 2946 feet above sea level.

Recognisable landmarks in south Sarawak, these peaks, formed of igneous rocks laid down in the Mesozoic age, give rise to the Lundu River which is marked by a series of seven waterfalls as it flows through the Park. The Park is the main catchment area for the nearby town of Lundu.



Map 1: Altitudinal map of study area

THE STUDY AREA

The forested slopes of Gunung Gading National Park ($1^{\circ} 42' \text{ N}$, $109^{\circ} 48' \text{ E}$) have become virtually an island, being surrounded by old longhouses or new settlements and separated from other forests by expanses of cleared and cultivated land.

The vegetation on the lower slopes and foothills, mostly of Mixed Dipterocarp Forest, is partly degraded due to logging and clearing in the past. There are small areas of Kerangas Forests on the less fertile and sandy soils nearer the summits (Map 2).

Around the Park Office, the staff quarters and tourist accommodation areas are open grassy spaces and clearings given to garden plants and flowering trees or shrubs. Behind and adjacent to it, just outside the Park boundary, there are a few patches of disturbed vegetation surrounding small-holdings of pepper and cocoa.

Gunung Gading contains many rare plants of the families *Guttiferae*, *Leguminosae*, *Araliaceae* and *Orchidaceae*, but its greatest conservation role lies in the protection of an endemic rarity, the parasitic plant, *Rafflesia tuanmudae*.

Despite having been constituted as a National Park, illegal entries and encroachment is still prevalent. Its containment, a constant management problem, is made difficult by easy access to the Park along its long boundary.

METHODS

A total of twenty days, between 7th April to 28th April 1997, were spent observing and trapping birds at the Park.

The study was conducted by the author who was assisted for a few days by a field assistant from the National Parks & Wildlife Office, Sarawak. The first three days were spent, in a joint mist-netting session, with a team from the School of Biological Sciences at the National University of Singapore (NUS).

1. The nomenclature used in this paper follows *The Annotated Checklist of the Birds of the Oriental Region* (Inskipp *et al* 1996).
2. Systematic field observations were made with 10 x 50 binoculars over seven days, during slow daily walks through various habitats. It was supplemented by random sightings made during mist-netting sessions. Field notes, and descriptions of birds that were not readily identified, were recorded at the time of sighting.
3. Mist nets were used to trap sedentary and secretive jungle species occupying the lower- and ground-storey levels of the forest. Varying numbers of 4-shelf mist nets, each 12 or 18 metres in length, were put up in different habitat types. They were set to a maximum height of 3 metres, the bottom shelves being 0.3m above ground level.