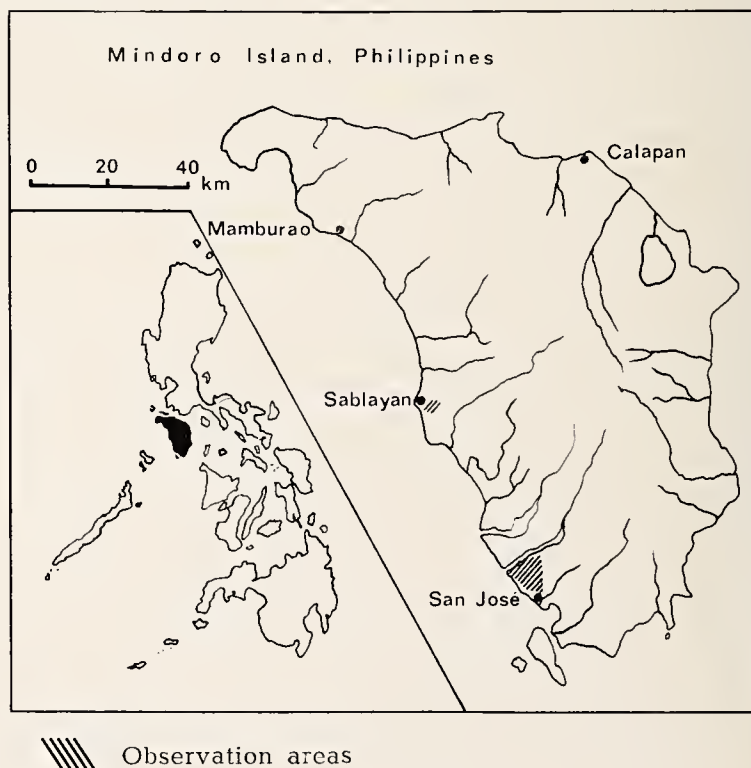


New Records of Philippine Birds on the Island of Mindoro

By

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That a great number of migratory birds, particularly shorebirds and waders have not been recorded for the island of Mindoro is due partly to the lack of attention these species have received from ornithologists. Likewise, observations on frequency and fluctuation of these birds throughout the year have not yet been made. The relative neglect from the biological viewpoint is illustrated by the example of *Tringa glareola*, a common migratory species on Mindoro, which is easily observed in rice paddies, fish ponds, salt lakes and along river beds. Its occurrence on Mindoro was reported in 1954 only (Ripley and Rabor, 1958), despite a history of more than seventy years of periodic ornithological expeditions in some parts of this island. The collecting that has been done centered mainly in the mountains during the dry season.



Mindoro, a medium size island, lying directly south of Luzon (latitude ranges around 13°), was probably at one time connected with Borneo by a land bridge across Palawan. Unlike several of the other larger to medium-sized islands in the Philippines, Mindoro does not yet have a large human population. Although there is much hunting and netting, birds are not greatly disturbed and many areas of protected habitat exist.

During my stay in the province of Mindoro Occidental from September 25, 1970 until March 29, 1972, I observed birds in the vicinity of San José, particularly in the area of the NIDC Rice Production Farm, at the village of Central, 15 km north of San José. This area was widely planted with rice and provided good habitat for migratory birds, especially during the period of land preparation. Many waders were also observed along the Bugsanga river, which bordered the northern edge of the area. Adjacent salt evaporation lakes, covering an area of about 555 ha, provided additional areas for wintering birds such as herons, ducks, rails, and various shorebirds.

Species Accounts

In all, I personally observed 169 species from 48 families during my stay on Mindoro. Among others, the following birds are new records for the island (names used follow Dupont, 1971).

Black-Crowned Night Heron — *Nycticorax nycticorax*

Although Delacour and Mayr (1946) mentioned this species as common on Luzon and Mindanao, and Dupont (1971) added the island of Calayan, this Asian visitor was not previously reported from Mindoro. I obtained a live male on September 29, 1971 from a Filipino, who had netted the bird the previous night in a ricefield between Central and San José.

The measurements in mm were: wing, 297; bill, 71; tail, 107; tarsus, 77. Weight 522 g. The skin is in my collection.

Sooty Rail — *Porzana tabuensis*

This small rail was previously known in the Philippines from the island of Luzon only (Delacour and Mayr, 1946), but they suggested that the species was probably more common than the few records would indicate. From 1965 through 1970, biologists of the Philippine National Museum banded a total of 369 specimens at Dalton Pass, Nueva Vizcaya Province, Luzon (McClure and Leelavit, 1972). My records of sooty rails on Mindoro confirm that this species is not really rare, but is merely secretive in its habits; no natural sightings were made during my stay.

The first specimen was caught in an abandoned, weedy rice paddy (part of the NIDC Rice Production Project, about 10 km north of San José) on September 22, 1971. The land preparation in this field was combined with a drive (locally called „blanketing“) in order to reduce the dense rat population. The tractor operator started harrowing the rice paddy from the periphery towards the center. The weedy portion finally left in the center contained a great number of rats which were then captured or killed by the farmers. The rail was caught along with the rats, because its wing was still in molt.

On September 29, 1971 five more sooty rails were obtained by the same means in a nearby area. Four of them were in different stages of wing molt. The fifth was a nearly full-grown immature bird with a wing length of 76 mm. The fact that this group included an immature bird and had molting wings leads me to speculate that the species may be resident on Mindoro.

The comparison of two skins from Mindoro with the specimen from Luzon in the collection of the Philippine National Museum in Manila indicates that the birds from Mindoro probably belong to the same race: *P. tabuensis tabuensis*.

Black Coot — *Fulica atra*

Black coots have been previously reported only from Luzon. Whether they are winter visitors or form a breeding population has not been determined. Mindoro is now the second Philippine island where black coots have been seen. One specimen was observed on December 8, 1970 swimming on a salt evaporation pond near the town of San José.

A second coot seen on March 14, 1972, on a freshwater lake, not far from the town of Sablayan, may have belonged to a small local population. It swam in loose company with a number of gallinules (*Gallinula chloropus lozanoi*) and purple swamphens (*Porphyrio porphyrio pulverulentus*).

Short-eared Owl — *Asio flammeus*

Another bird so far only recorded from Luzon is the short-eared owl. Dupont (1971) considers this species a straggler from Asia.

On Mindoro on January 6, 1972, one specimen was flushed at dusk near the mouth of the Bugsanga river, near the village of San Agustin. The bird rested in a clump of *talahib* (*Saccharum spontaneum*), a tall grass which was common in the sandy flats and grassland along the banks of the river.

Another owl, perhaps the same one, was flushed on January 22, 1972, from the same area. In the tall grass clump from where it had flown, I found one regurgitated pellet. It contained the skull of a shrew, *Suncus luzoniensis*, and the lower jaw of a young rat, *Rattus argentiventer*.

Red-throated Pipit — *Anthus cervinus*

The red-throated pipit has been considered as an uncommon winter visitor (McGregor, 1909; Delacour and Mayr, 1946) to the Philippines. Dupont (1971) says that *A. cervinus* winters in the Philippines from Asia, but no details are available about the distribution or frequency of observation in the country.

On Mindoro, I was able to observe *Anthus cervinus* on numerous occasions; it appeared as a rather common winter visitor to this island. In the same manner as (Wildash, 1958) described in South Vietnam, the red-throated pipit on Mindoro travels in flocks and frequents post-harvest rice paddies. I observed birds during January and February, 1971, and from January through March, 1972, in the ricefields of the NIDC area, where they appeared to prefer abandoned threshing sites in the fields. The common practice of partial burning of the straw piles on those sites did not seem to affect the continued activity of the birds.

During the months of January and February, 1972, I observed red-throated pipits along lower reaches of the Bugsanga river. In the late afternoon between 16.30 and 17.30 hrs small flocks of 2 to 8 birds were following the river channel toward the ocean. The birds in the area may have had a common roost, which I was unable to locate, near the mouth of the river.

One bird was collected from a flock of about 10 in a dry paddy field on March 12, 1972. The measurements in mm were: wing, 79; bill, 12; tarsus, 21; tail, 58. The sex could not be determined because of damage.

Japanese Yellow Bunting — *Emberiza sulphurata*

McGregor (1909) termed the Japanese yellow bunting a „somewhat abundant, but inconspicuous migrant in the Philippines“. Delacour and Mayr (1946) made a similar comment and added that this bird was found in fields and grasslands. Published records (Dupont, 1971) report occurrences only on the most northern islands of the Philippines, Calayan and Luzon. Biologists from the Philippine National Museum have some banding records from Dalton Pass in the province of Nueva Vizcaya and from Calatagan in the province of Batangas in the years 1966, 1967 and 1969 (McClure and Leelavit, 1972). Both localities are on Luzon.

Between February 13 and March 12, 1972, I made almost daily observations of *Emberiza sulphurata* near the mouth of the Bugsanga river. Most observations were made on a large, sandy riverbank, overgrown with *talahib*. Although large portions of this area had been incompletely burned, it was still an attractive feeding and lounging site for this bunting. On several occasions, I counted up to 20 individuals feeding on yellowish

seeds which had dropped after the burning of the tall grass. About 8 km upstream, I found a very similar grassland adjacent to the river and observed a group of about 10 of these buntings.

On February 15, two specimens were shot but were so heavily damaged that the sex could not be determined. The measurement of one bird in mm was: wing, 68; bill, 10; tarsus, 19. Weight 16 g.

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Summary

The paper reports observations of six species of birds which have not been previously recorded on the island of Mindoro, north-central Philippines. These birds are the Black-crowned night heron (*Nycticorax nycticorax*), Sooty rail (*Porzana tabuensis*), Black coot (*Fulica atra*), Short-eared owl (*Asio flammeus*), Red-throated pipit (*Anthus cervinus*), and Japanese yellow bunting (*Emberiza sulphurata*). Biological observations on the frequency, abundance, feeding, and habitat are also reported.

Zusammenfassung

In der Zeit vom 25. September 1970 bis zum 29. März 1972 hatte ich Gelegenheit, ornithologische Beobachtungen auf der philippinischen Insel Mindoro durchzuführen. Dabei wurden zahlreiche Arten festgestellt, die bisher noch nicht auf Mindoro beobachtet worden waren. In der vorliegenden Arbeit wird über die sechs Arten *Nycticorax nycticorax*, *Porzana tabuensis*, *Fulica atra*, *Asio flammeus*, *Anthus cervinus* und *Emberiza sulphurata* berichtet. Einige Bemerkungen über den Überwinterungsbiotop, Häufigkeit des Auftretens, Nahrung und Verhalten sind hinzu gefügt worden.

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