

- Helbig, A. J., Knox, A. G., Parkin, D. T., Sangster, G. and Collinson, M. (2002) Guidelines for assigning species rank. *Ibis* 144: 518–525.
- Moulton, J. C. (1914) Hand-list of the birds of Borneo. *J. Straits Branch, Roy. Asiat. Soc.* 67: 125–191.
- Ogilvie-Grant, W. R. (1895) [*Rhizothera dulitensis*]. *Bull. Brit. Orn. Club*, 4: 27.
- Peters, J. L. (1934). *Check-list of birds of the world*. Vol. II. Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press.
- Sheldon, F., Moyle, R. and Kinnaird, J. (2001) Ornithology of Sabah: history, gazetteer, annotated checklist, and bibliography. *Orn. Monogr.* 52: 1–285.
- Showler, D. A. (1993) Long-billed Partridge *Rhizothera longirostris*: a new species for Sabah. *Forktail* 8: 156.
- Smythies, B. E. (1957) An annotated checklist of the birds of Borneo. *Sarawak Mus. J.* 9(24): 523–818.
- Smythies, B. E. (1960) *The birds of Borneo*. Edinburgh and London: Oliver & Boyd.
- Smythies, B. E. (1981) *The birds of Borneo*. Third edition. Kota Kinabalu and Kuala Lumpur: Sabah Society and Malayan Nature Society.
- Smythies, B. E. (1999) *The birds of Borneo*. Fourth edition, revised by G. W. H. Davison. Kota Kinabalu: Natural History Publications (Borneo).

G. W. H. Davison, National Parks Board, Singapore Botanic Gardens, 1 Cluny Road, Singapore 259569. Email: Geoffrey\_Davison@nparks.gov.sg

## A re-evaluation of the status of Tawny Eagle *Aquila rapax* in South-East Asia

J. W. DUCKWORTH, T. P. INSKIPP, E. PASQUET, P. C. RASMUSSEN, N. H. RICE,  
C. R. ROBSON and D. G. D. RUSSELL

Tawny Eagle *Aquila rapax* is usually listed as occurring widely, if rarely, in South-East Asia, primarily the northern parts. Robson (2005) considered the species (as *A. r. vindhiana*) to be a vagrant to North, Central and South Myanmar, North-West Thailand and West and East Tonkin. Interpretation of past records of '*A. rapax*' is hindered by the wide former treatment of Steppe Eagle *A. nipalensis* as a subspecies of *A. rapax* (e.g. Vaurie 1965). Moreover, review of the status of Bonelli's Eagle *Hieraetus fasciatus* in South-East Asia (Duckworth *et al.* in press, where the relevant specimens are depicted) found that the two published historical specimens purportedly of *A. r. vindhiana* from South-East Asia east of Myanmar were both Bonelli's Eagles. This accords with the statement of Rasmussen and Anderton (2005) that Tawny Eagle has been 'reported as vagrant SE Asia (but non-migratory, so confirmation needed; some specimens misidentified)'. This note, therefore, reviews the status of Tawny Eagle in South-East Asia.

Occurrence in Thailand is based solely on the specimen of Meyer de Schauensee (1930), collected at Chiang Mai (18°47'N 98°59'E; at an elevation of 900 feet [c.300 m]) on 20 December 1928, and housed at the Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia (ANSP 87531). This is a juvenile (first-plumage) Bonelli's Eagle. Presence in West Tonkin is based on the specimen reported by Delacour (1930a, 1930b), a male collected at Sa Pa (= Chapa, 22°20'N 103°50'E) on 14 December 1929, housed at the Muséum National d'Histoire Naturelle, Paris (MNHN CG1931-151). This is also a Bonelli's Eagle, in its first winter. Various secondary sources citing occurrence of the species in West Tonkin are not explicitly based on this record (e.g. Delacour and Jabouille 1940, Dang Huy Huynh and Hoang Minh Khien 1995), but we have traced no other original record from West Tonkin.

Occurrence in East Tonkin was based upon a sight record of H. Stevens (in Kinnear 1929: 121–122) that 'a magnificent eagle observed in heavy forest at Bao-Ha could only have been *Aquila nipalensis*', about which Delacour and Jabouille (1931: 78) opined, without giving reasons, that 'we think rather that it was an *A. r. vindhiana*' [original in French]. This cannot now be accepted as any species. There has never been any claim of occurrence in Laos or Cambodia, although '*A. rapax*' is sometimes listed predictively (e.g. McNeely 1975).

The Central Myanmar record is based upon Macdonald (1906), who wrote that the species was 'rare. The eggs were brought to me in December'. The lack of explicit mention of a specimen of the bird itself urges caution over this record and indeed Smythies (1940) wrote that '*Aquila rapax vindhiana*...is the commonest eagle of India, but there is no proof that it occurs in Burma, apart from one record based on eggs alone. For the present therefore it is not admitted to the Burma List'. He later removed his caveat over Macdonald's information, giving no explanation, but probably because after his first edition he added that 'there is one record from near Thayetmo' (Smythies 1953, 1986, 2001). This latter, the source of listings for South Myanmar, is based on Blanford (1895) who stated that it 'occurr[ed] in Upper Burma near Thayet Myo [19°19'N 95°11'E], as there are specimens collected by Oates in the British Museum'. One such specimen, BMNH 1882.1.9.16 (December 1871), is still there, but has been re-identified as a Steppe Eagle, as have two other Oates specimens once labelled as '*A. vindhiana*', from around Pegu (= Bago; 17°20'N 96°29'E), BMNH 1882.1.9.17–18 (27 February 1877 and 20 November 1876); these latter presumably caused Blanford's mention of multiple specimens from Thayetmyo through Oates. Apparently the only other published historical mention

of the species in Myanmar, Harington (1909), merely stated that Tawny Eagle is 'locally resident in Upper Burma', no doubt based on Blanford (1895) and Macdonald (1906). There is also a purported Myanmar specimen in MNHN, mount CG1879-534, which was registered in the museum's holdings in 1879 and is labelled only as 'Birmanie [= Myanmar], lac Sambbhur, Gerrard', Gerrard referring to the large taxidermy firm of Edward Gerrard & Sons, London (see Morris 2004). The consignment of birds acquired with this eagle (as shown by the MNHN catalogue) originates from localities ranging from India to Indonesia. We have traced no lake of such name in Myanmar, but there is a productive bird locality in India called Lake Sambhar (27°00'N 75°08'E), spelt as 'Sambhur' by, e.g., Adam (1874). It is, therefore, at least possible that the eagle originated from India: it cannot be accepted as the sole specimen record for Myanmar (and South-East Asia).

We have traced only one recent published record from South-East Asia, from Myanmar: a single bird on 13 and 14 January 2000 at Indawgyi Lake (25°08'N 96°20'E), stated to give 'a very clear sighting' (Van der Ven 2000, Robson 2001). However, no confirmatory details were given. A single was also recorded on 31 October 2005 near the village of Warazup (25°48'N 96°39'E; c.250 m), in the south of the proposed Hukaung Tiger Reserve, Kachin State, Myanmar (Tordoff *et al.* in press., A. W. Tordoff *in litt.* 2007), but in the light of the significance of this record, A. W. Tordoff (*in litt.* 2007) now considers it provisional. Following the sentiments of Rasmussen and Anderton (2005), and given the history of misidentification with this species in the region, until/unless a diagnostic description is published for at least one record, the species's occurrence in South-East Asia should be considered hypothetical.

In sum, we can trace no acceptable record of Tawny Eagle from Indochina or Thailand: of the three records, two were certainly misidentified and the other is now unidentifiable. Occurrence in these countries is not even particularly likely: *A. r. vindhiana* is the only Asian race of the species, with a world distribution given by Dickinson (2003) as 'Pakistan, India and northern Burma [= Myanmar]'. South-East Asia is bounded to the north by the vast area of China: no Chinese Tawny Eagle records (as distinct from those of Steppe Eagle) were traced by Cheng (1987), and it has never been recorded in Hong Kong (Carey *et al.* 2001). Although it is sometimes listed for Korea, all known records refer to Steppe Eagle (N. Moores *in litt.* 2007). Occurrence in Myanmar, which lies closer to India, seems somewhat more likely, but even so Tawny Eagle has never certainly been recorded in intervening Bangladesh (P. M. Thompson in Rasmussen and Anderton 2005), despite listing for the country by some sources. Rasmussen and Anderton (2005) accepted records a long way east in India; specifically, in the Natural History Museum, Tring, U.K., there are four specimens from Darjeeling (27°02'N 88°16'E) and one from Behar (BMNH 45.5.19.2; presumably, the modern state of Bihar). Although Tawny Eagle in India is 'resident...mostly sedentary, with some local movement after nesting is over' (Naoroji 2006), the propensity of large raptors to disperse long distances at least occasionally, particularly as young, means that the occasional occurrence of Tawny Eagle in South-East Asia must be a possibility.

In conclusion, therefore, observers should be aware that any record of Tawny Eagle from South-East Asia merits publication with supporting detail. The same applies to any such specimen which may already be held in a museum and not traced by us. Just as several records historically referred to Tawny Eagle were in fact other species, there may be South-East Asia specimens of genuine Tawny Eagles masquerading under other names. The challenges of identifying the species should not be underestimated.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We thank several correspondents for confirming that they know of no records from several countries or areas: Philip Round (Thailand), Tom Evans and Fred Goes (Cambodia), Geoff Carey (Hong Kong) and Nial Moores (Korea); Jonathan Eames, John Howes and A. W. 'Jack' Tordoff for further information relevant to recent sightings; various museums for reporting, through requests on the AVECOL and eBEAC lists, that they hold no South-East Asian specimens: Paul Sweet (American Museum of Natural History, New York, U.S.A.), Kees Roselaar (Zoologisch Museum, Universiteit van Amsterdam, Netherlands), Ingvar Byrkjedal (Bergen Museum, University of Bergen, Norway), Sylke Frahnert (Museum für Naturkunde, Humboldt Universität zu Berlin, Germany), Marcel Guentert (Natural History Museum Bern, Switzerland), Jean L. Woods (Delaware Museum of Natural History, Delaware, U.S.A.), Hein Van Grouw (National Museum of Natural History, Leiden, Netherlands), Robert C. Faucett (University of Washington Burke Museum, Seattle, U.S.A.), Iris Heynen (Staatliches Museum für Naturkunde, Stuttgart, Germany), Jürgen Plass (Upper Austrian Museum), Anita Gamauf (Museum of Natural History in Vienna, Austria) and René Corado (Western Foundation of Vertebrate Zoology, Camarillo, California, U.S.A.); and Ben King, Aasheesh Pittie, Praveen J., Robert Prys-Jones, R. J. 'Ted' Tizard and two anonymous reviewers for advice.

## REFERENCES

- Adam, R. M. (1874) Additional note on the birds of the Sambhur Lake and its vicinity. *Stray Feathers* II (4&5): 337-341.
- Blanford, W. T. (1895) *Fauna of British India, birds*. Vol. 3. London: Taylor and Francis.
- Carey, G. J., Chalmers, M. L., Diskin, D. A., Kennerley, P. R., Leader, P. J., Leven, M. R., Lewthwaite, R. W., Melville, D. S., Turnbull, M. and Young, L. (2001) *The avifauna of Hong Kong*. Hong Kong: Hong Kong Bird Watching Society.
- Cheng Tso-Hsin (1987) *A synopsis of the avifauna of China*. Beijing: Science Press, and Hamburg, Germany: Parey.
- Dang Huy Huynh and Hoang Minh Khien (1995) [Zoological resources in Sa Pa.] Pp. 342-347 in Dang Huy Huynh (ed. in chief), [*Selected collection of scientific reports on ecology and biological resources.*] Hanoi: Publishing House 'Science and Technics'. (In Vietnamese.)
- Delacour, J. (1930a) On the birds collected during the fifth expedition to French Indo-china. *Ibis* (12)6: 564-599.
- Delacour, J. (1930b) Note sur quelques oiseaux rares ou nouveaux obtenus au cours de la cinquième expédition en Indochine. *L'Oiseau* 11: 457-468.
- Delacour, J. and Jabouille, P. (1931) *Les oiseaux de l'Indochine française*. Vol. II. Paris: Exposition Coloniale Internationale.
- Delacour, J. and Jabouille, P. (1940) Liste des oiseaux de l'Indo-chine française, complétée et mise à jour. *L'Oiseau et la Revue Française d'Ornithologie* 10: 89-220.
- Dickinson, E. C. (2003) *The Howard and Moore complete checklist of the birds of the world*, third edition. London: Christopher Helm.

- Duckworth, J. W., Round, P. D., Russell, D. G. D., Kasornrorkbua, C. and Robson, C. R. (in press) Bonelli's Eagle *Hieraaetus fasciatus* in South-east Asia. In Hernandez, V. J. (Ed.) *The Bonelli's Eagle. Ecology, behaviour and conservation*. Madrid: Tundra Ediciones.
- Harington, H. H. (1909) *The birds of Burma*. Rangoon: Rangoon Gazette.
- Kinnear, N. B. (1929) On the birds collected by Mr. H. Stevens in northern Tonkin in 1923–24 (with notes by the collector.). *Ibis* (12)5: 107–150, 292–344.
- Macdonald, K. C. (1906) A list of birds found in the Myingyan district of Burma. *J. Bombay Nat. Hist. Soc.* 17: 184–194, 492–504.
- McNeely, J. A. (1975) *Draft report on wildlife and national parks in the lower Mekong basin*. Unpublished.
- Meyer de Schauensee, R. (1930) A further collection of birds from Siam. *Proc. Acad. Nat. Sci. Philadelphia* 81: 523–588.
- Morris, P. (2005) *Edward Gerrard & Sons – a taxidermy memoir*. Ascot, Berkshire, U.K.: MPM Publishing.
- Naoroji, R. (2006) *Birds of prey of the Indian subcontinent*. London: Christopher Helm / A & C Black.
- Rasmussen, P. C. and Anderton, J. C. (2005) *Birds of South Asia. The Ripley guide*. Washington D.C. and Barcelona: Smithsonian Institution and Lynx Edicions.
- Robson, C. R. (2001) From the field. *Oriental Bird Club Bull.* 33: 68–78.
- Robson, C. (2005) *New Holland field guide to the birds of South-East Asia*. London: New Holland.
- Smythies, B. E. (1940) *Birds of Burma*, first edition. Rangoon: American Baptist Mission Press.
- Smythies, B. E. (1953) *The birds of Burma*, second edition. Edinburgh, U.K.: Oliver and Boyd.
- Smythies, B. E. (1986) *The birds of Burma*, third edition. Liss, U.K.: Nimrod.
- Smythies, B. E. (2001) *The birds of Burma*, fourth edition. Kota Kinabalu, Malaysia: Natural History Publications (Borneo).
- Tordoff, A. W., Appleton, T., Eames, J. C., Eberhardt, K., Htin Hla, Khin Ma Ma Thwin, Sao Myo Zaw, Saw Moses and Sein Myo Aung (in press) Avifaunal surveys in the lowlands of Kachin state, Myanmar, 2003–2005. *Nat. Hist. Bull. Siam Soc.*
- Van der Ven, J. (2000) *Myanmar expedition 1999–2000. Report, visit January 2000*. Unpublished.
- Vaurie, C. (1965) *The birds of the Palearctic fauna, a systematic reference. Non-Passeriformes*. London: H. F. and G. Witherby.

- J. W. Duckworth, Wildlife Conservation Society Asia Programme, 2300 Southern Blvd, New York, NY 10460, U.S.A.; current address: PO Box 5573, Vientiane, Lao P.D.R. Email: willduckworthdprk@yahoo.com
- T. P. Inskipp, 1 Herneside, Welney, Wisbech, Cambridgeshire PE14 9SB, U.K. Email: inskipp@btinternet.com
- Eric Pasquet, Departement Systematique & Evolution, Museum National d'Histoire Naturelle, CP 51, 57 rue Cuvier, F 75005 Paris Cedex, France. Email: eric.pasquet@mnhn.fr
- P. C. Rasmussen, Department of Zoology and Michigan State University Museum, West Circle Drive, East Lansing, MI 48824-1045 U.S.A. Email: rasmus39@msu.edu
- N. H. Rice, Academy of Natural Sciences of Philadelphia Ornithology Department, 1900 Benjamin Franklin Parkway, Philadelphia, PA 19103, U.S.A. Email: rice@ansp.org
- C. R. Robson, 63 Stafford Street, Norwich, NR2 3BD, U.K. Email: craiger@ntlworld.com
- D. G. D. Russell, Curator, Bird Group, Department of Zoology, The Natural History Museum, Akeman Street, Tring, Hertfordshire, HP23 6AP, U.K. Email: d.russell@nhm.ac.uk

## First confirmed record of Alström's Warbler *Seicercus soror* in Laos, with comments on its status in South-East Asia

NICK DYMOND

On 29 January 2005, I was birding in central Laos near the village of Ban Naphong on highway 8, some 14 km east of the main north-south highway 13, at an altitude of c.200 m (at c.17°56'N 104°27'E). The area is dominated by outcrops and spectacular ridges of limestone karst which is the prime habitat of the restricted-range Sooty Babbler *Stachyris herberti*. Near the village, I located a trail leading into a narrow valley between two karst ridges. There was closed canopy forest in the valley floor, but more patchy, rather stunted forest with a broken canopy on the karst slopes. At around 09h30 I ventured with some difficulty some 20 m up the karst slope and soon had the good fortune to come on a foraging party of five Sooty Babblers. However, the knife-edge karst formations, some of which were loose, and the deep crevices made stalking the babblers extremely dangerous, so I retreated

a little and found a safe, but very uncomfortable, spot to sit and wait.

Fortunately the babblers remained in the area and were intermittently in view for more than 20 minutes. During this period I heard sharp, high-pitched calls coming from the valley-floor understorey just below me. I recognised the calls as being those of Alström's Warbler, formerly called Plain-tailed Warbler *Seicercus soror*, and using a Sennheiser microphone and Sony Walkman cassette player I made a 50-second recording which includes an irregular sequence of nine monosyllabic call-notes and six disyllabic call-notes (Fig. 1). From my precarious position I had several brief views of the single calling bird in shaded light at ranges down to c.25 m, although it was within earshot for at least ten minutes. It had yellowish-green upperparts, greyish-green head with