flushed by P. Tipler, S. Taylor and myself from relatively dry ground close to some wet field edge. From my experience with Swinhoe's Snipe *Gallinago megala* during several visits to its breeding grounds in Siberia I was fairly confident about the identity of the bird as soon as it got up. At this point a number of snipe, chiefly Common, but with at least two Pintail, rose and the unusual bird joined the party which circled over us at a height of some 10m or more. The flock did a couple of circuits of the immediate vicinity, affording us relatively brief, but quite adequate comparative views of the three species in the air at the same time, and my initial identification of the unusual bird was confirmed. The flock then moved over a small river and dropped into a more extensive area of wet fields, but we were unable to follow them up as a crossing point could not be found.

By comparing the birds in the air together, although only Common Snipe was actually alongside the Swinhoe's, it was apparent from all angles, i.e. in profile when going around, when directly overhead and when tail-on going away, that the Swinhoe's was distinctly larger and bulkier than the Common in both body-depth and width of the wing. The bill was roughly the same length as that of the Common Snipe and was held almost horizontal, but the plumage, i.e. wing-pattern above and below, was like that of a Pintail Snipe. All the Pintail Snipe that we had flushed looked distinctly smaller and shorter-billed than the Common Snipe, although Taylor (1984) found bill-length to be not particularly helpful when separating these two species. The body appeared rather long, although depth of breast and belly gave it a chunky appearance. Only the very tips of the toes, at most, projected a little beyond the tip of the tail, a feature that I have observed with Swinhoe's in Siberia. Plumage details were admittedly sparse. It had a typical snipe head-pattern, the belly was unmarked whitish, similar in extent to that of Common Snipe, the breast was dull light brownish, but the underwing was densely and uniformly barred throughout on the coverts, with no paler central areas visible as on Common Snipe. Neither the underwing nor the upperwing had the white trailing edge to the secondaries, which was visible on the Common Snipe in the air with it. The upperwing, seen as the bird was rising, was dull light brown, rather uniform and not as contrastingly marked as in Common Snipe, with flight feathers not obviously darker; in short it looked less striped on the upperparts than does Common Snipe but very much like Pintail Snipe in pattern and coloration both from above and below.

To summarize its features, the bird had the upper- and underwing pattern of a Pintail Snipe but it was obviously larger and longer-billed, it was a little larger and bulkier than Common Snipe, with a rather longer and deeper body and broader and slightly blunter primaries, but the bill was roughly the same length as that of Common Snipe. It was not as bulky as a Great Snipe *G. media*, which I have seen on two occasions previously, and was considered definitely not to have been large enough for a Solitary Snipe *G. solitaria*, although this is a species that I have never seen. The toes projected only very slightly beyond the tip of the tail, but no more so than in Common Snipe and

not as extensively as is considered to be diagnostic of Pintail (Taylor 1984). Compared to Pintail Snipe flushed at the same site it was noticeably larger and relatively longer-billed and with a heavier and slower flight action. Pintail Snipe appear distinctly smaller and a little shorter-billed when seen in flight with Common Snipe, and show a fairly prominent projection of the toes beyond the tip of the tail if this is looked for. The latter feature would have been visible in the good profile views obtained as the bird circled us, especially as we were looking for it. The remote possibility of the bird being the very similar Latham's Snipe *G. hardwickii* was discounted, partly on range (it has never been recorded from the Indian subcontinent) and from subsequent experience of it in Australia, where I felt that Latham's was substantially larger and bulkier than Swinhoe's and invariably called when flushed.

Although this is the first record for Nepal, it is not unexpected as this species has been recorded from various parts of eastern India in winter (Ali and Ripley 1984).

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Letter: *Setornis criniger, Malacopteron albogulare* and conservation in Indonesia

In his paper on habitat preferences of the Hook-billed Bulbul *Setornis criniger* and the White-throated Babbler *Malacopteron albogulare*, Sheldon (1987) notes that a common denominator in their habitats is 'poor-soil' forest. In lowland forests, this term encompasses peat-swamp forest, heath forest (*kerangas*) on podzols, forests on ultrabasic soils, and also those transitional forests between *kerangas* and the typical rich lowland Mixed Dipterocarp Forest (MDF). While pedologically very different from each other, the soils have common factors of high acidity and severe nutrient deficiency or toxicity, resulting in poor quality forests with low species diversity.

More recent data from Borneo support these observations on habitat

preference. Thus Nash and Nash (1988) recorded both species in Tanjong Puting National Park on the south coast, an area comprising mainly peat-swamp and heath forest. In Similajau National Park in Sarawak, W. Duckworth (pers. comm.) reports *S. criniger* to be virtually confined to poor-soil forest, though the few records of *M. albogulare* were from adjacent MDF. D. R. Wells (pers. comm.) notes that in the Malay Peninsula *M. albogulare* successfully occupies peat-swamp forest though it is also found in MDF.

Information from Sumatra is very sparse, and all known records of both species are listed in van Marle and Voous (1988). All the localities for *S. criniger* would suggest peat-swamp forest, except perhaps that from Bangka where heath forest is common. However, as in other areas of its range, *M. albogulare* is perhaps less so confined. The first record by D.A.H. from Jambi was in poor-soil forest (acid, sandy, upland soils) but two subsequent records were from MDF in rolling terrain. Sheldon (1987) acknowledges that the relative increase in records of *M. albogulare* reflects recent netting activities. We suggest also that this babbler is rather easily overlooked, being perhaps an infrequent songster, and not associating with congeners in mixed flocks. S. V. Nash and A. D. Nash (pers. comm.) never heard the song in Tanjong Puting. This song is very distinctive, but rather repetitive and approaching that of Horsfield's Babbler *Trichastoma sepiarium* in monotony.

Sheldon expresses concern over the threats to the habitats of the two species, and while this may be appropriate in Sabah, the threats are rather lower on the list of conservation concerns in Indonesia. Recent resource studies have shown that Kalimantan has some 44,000 km^2 of peat-swamp forest and 17,000 km^2 of lowland heath forest. While there is logging in some peat swamps, principally in areas of *Ramin* wood, the poor-soil forests are generally those least under threat. The conservation of the richer lowland forests and wetlands remain of far greater urgency. It is not difficult to envisage a future scenario in which Indonesian forests will be confined to the mountains, gazetted and managed reserves, and the poorest soil areas such as those apparently frequented by *S. criniger* and *M. albogulare*.

The habitat area measurements above are derived from a five-year-long national inventory of land resources currently being executed by the Land Resources Department of the Overseas Development Natural Resources Institute of the U.K. government. By 1989, this survey expects to have completed the entire country (two million km^2), mapping land systems (ecosystems identified by their landform using mainly remote-sensing imagery), also current land-use and forest cover, and existing or proposed development projects and reserves. The survey provides baseline data for agricultural and forest planning, and will be of great assistance in revisions to the national conservation plan drawn up by FAO prior to the availability of such comprehensive regional data.

To prevent the worst scenario from becoming reality, ecological surveys of remaining forest areas, the establishment of gazetted reserves of sufficient size, and their management, must be considered an international priority.

Without international support, the Indonesian government does not yet have the skilled manpower and capacity to resolve the complex multi-disciplinary issues involved in developing the sustainable management of its environment.

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