

## A new breeding species for the Philippines: the Pied Harrier *Circus melanoleucos*

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Two harrier species, the Eastern Marsh Harrier *Circus spilonotus* and the Pied Harrier *Circus melanoleucos*, are found in the Philippines during the winter as migrants (Dickinson *et al.* 1991). Summer records suggest breeding, but formal evidence of breeding has not been available (Dickinson 1986, Dickinson *et al.* 1991, Danielsen *et al.* 1994). It has been reported by Aetas (a local tribe living in the Sierra Madre) to be a rare breeding bird in cultivated areas in the Dinapigue Valley, Palanan, Isabela (Danielsen *et al.* 1994).

During my stay in the Philippines at Isabela State University (ISU) at Cabagan, I was told of juvenile raptors that had been taken from the nest. I visited the 'owner' at the beginning of July to see which raptor species he had taken. In a 1 m<sup>3</sup> cage was an immature harrier. The bird escaped shortly after my visit, before I could take any photographs. It appeared that it was the only survivor out of three young, and that the nest was located at the Cabagan campus of Isabela State University (ISU), Northern Luzon. The man described the plumage of one of the parents as black and white and that of the other as brownish. This description fits the Pied Harrier, but also the Eastern Marsh Harrier (MacKinnon and Phillipps 1993).

I made my first observations of the species shortly after my arrival at the Cabagan campus, on 26 June, 1992. A pair of Pied Harriers was gliding over the wet rice fields along the entrance way. There was already a record from earlier that year, made by a group of Danish ornithologists (A. Jensen unpublished). The pair remained here until at least January 1993. A pair of Pied Harriers (possibly the same) was still present when I visited the site for a second time, from 15 July to 1 November, 1994. A juvenile was seen at the end of October, together with the adult pair, but this juvenile may have been a migrant.

Pied Harriers, like harriers in general, prefer open habitats such as (grassy) marshes, reed beds, and rice fields (MacKinnon and Phillipps 1993). Open habitats like grassland and wet rice fields are the dominating habitats on the ISU campus and the surrounding areas. The nest was found in the newly established forest plantation at the east side of the campus.

Once, the Philippines were mainly covered with tropical rainforest. Now only a small fraction of the forest remains because of activities such as logging and *kaingin* (a form of slash and burn agriculture). Grasslands and rice fields are now very extensive, offering a suitable habitat. The Pied Harrier seems to have taken advantage of this change by extending its breeding range southward, enriching the fauna of the Philippines. Which species will do the same in the future?

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## Buff-throated Warbler *Phylloscopus affinis* restored to the avifauna of the Indian subcontinent

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For many years the Buff-throated Warbler *Phylloscopus subaffinis* was considered a member of the avifauna of the Indian subcontinent on the basis of specimens collected in winter in Nepal and described as a new subspecies, *P. s. arcanus* (Ripley 1950). These specimens were treated subsequently by several authors as intergrades between *subaffinis* and Tickell's Leaf-Warbler *P. affinis* (Watson *et al.* 1986, Williamson 1967). Recently, however, Alström *et al.* (1993) found these to be misidentified Aberrant Bush-Warblers *Cettia f. flavolivacea* and, as no specimens from the region were then known, this meant the removal of *P. subaffinis* from the Indian subcontinent list. In addition, Alström and Olsson (1992) presented strong evidence that *P. subaffinis* is best treated as specifically distinct from Tickell's Leaf-Warbler.

	Culmen			Wing			Tail			Wing/tail ratio		
	x	s.d.	n	x	s.d.	n	x	s.d.	n	x	s.d.	n
<i>P. affinis</i>												
males	13.0	0.55	12	58.7	1.52	12	45.1	1.72	12	1.30	0.03	12
females	13.0	0.69	5	57.1	2.26	8	44.0	1.83	7	1.30	0.04	7
UMMZ 187549	12.2	—	—	51.0	—	—	44.7	—	—	1.14	—	—
<i>P. subaffinis</i>												
males	12.6	0.37	4	52.1	1.66	8	44.6	1.66	7	1.17	0.03	7
females	12.5	0.42	6	50.5	1.98	8	44.6	1.75	7	1.13	0.01	7

Culmen measured from skull; wing maximum flattened length

**Table 1.** Summary statistics for measurements useful in identification of *Phylloscopus subaffinis* and *P. affinis*

I recently located a specimen from India in the collections of the University of Michigan Museum of Zoology (UMMZ 187549) that has proven to be typical *P. subaffinis*. The specimen, a female collected by Walter N. Koelz on 3 January 1953 at Mawphlang (25°26'N 91°42'E), about 20 km south-west of Shillong, Khasi Hills, Meghalaya, was originally correctly identified by Koelz (R. B. Payne verbally 1995) and catalogued as *P. subaffinis*, but has not previously been reported in the literature.

I compared the Khasi Hills specimen with the USNM series of both *P. affinis* (n = 25) and *P. subaffinis* (n = 25), and found it to be a typical *P. subaffinis*, based on criteria given by Alström and Olsson (1992, 1994). The colouration of the underparts is a nearly uniform yellow-buff, slightly paler in the centre of the belly, matching in tone *P. subaffinis* from China, and not matched by any *P. affinis* (although some *P. affinis* have the breast buff-tinged). The supercilium is buffy, only slightly more yellow in tone than the underparts, and is evenly coloured throughout its length. Unlike most *P. affinis* and like *P. subaffinis*, there is no hint of a dark line above the supercilium, and the degree of contrast between the ear-coverts and supercilium is slightly less than that of typical *P. affinis*, thus matching *P. subaffinis*. The lower mandible is almost entirely dark except for the extreme base, as in *P. subaffinis*, and unlike the mostly pale lower mandibles of *P. affinis*. No consistent interspecific differences were apparent in leg colour of the study skins examined. Wing length, and especially wing/tail ratio, of UMMZ 187549 correspond only to those of *P. subaffinis* (Table 1). In the USNM series there was no difference between the two species in bill length. Thus, all external morphological characters known to differ consistently between the two species indicate that the Khasi Hills specimen is a typical *P. subaffinis*.

There is no reason to doubt the correctness of the locality on the original specimen label, as there seems to be no history of locality discrepancies in the extensive Koelz collections. The specimen collected in January in the Khasi

Hills was presumably a wintering bird. Considering the known range of *P. subaffinis*, which breeds in the mountains of southern China and winters from northern Myanmar (Burma) through Indochina (Watson *et al.* 1986), this species seems highly likely to occur at least as a vagrant and possibly as a regular passage migrant or winterer in north-eastern India.

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