

Muang Bay in the south. In addition, tourists visit the island during the dry season, being concentrated at Pansang Resort on the north-east shore of the island. Neither native inhabitants nor tourists normally enter the forest, which makes it a safe harbour for forest birds. No recent logging was observed, but small fields were found at the forest edge, particularly at Panka village and at Pansang Resort. Also, no persecution of shorebirds by local inhabitants was observed.

Domestic animals seemed to be no threat to the birds, although one pair of domestic cats with three kittens (one of them in very bad condition), housed at Pansang Resort, is potentially endangering the existence of the near-threatened Nicobar Pigeon on the island.

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Merlin *Falco columbarius*, the first record for Thailand

A. ROADHOUSE

When birdwatching on an area of dry, stubble-covered, rice paddies c. 1-2 km south of Ban Tha Ton, Mae Ai District, Chiang Mai on 4 December 1999, I found a Merlin *Falco columbarius* at 07h30. I was watching a female Eastern Marsh Harrier *Circus (aeruginosus) spilonotus*, and two Common Kestrels *Falco tinnunculus* in flight, when a smaller falcon flew across my field of view and started mobbing the Eastern Marsh Harrier; it continued this for about ten minutes. The bird eventually flew off to the west. I immediately identified the small falcon as a Merlin *Falco columbarius*, a species not depicted in Boonsong Lekagul and Round (1991) and it was assumed, therefore, to be an addition to the Thai faunal list. The bird was also seen by a second observer, Rob Smith.

On the following day, while birding alone in similar habitat about 1 km further south, c. 13h00, I again encountered the Merlin, once again mobbing an Eastern Marsh Harrier. This time, however, it perched in a tree for c. 2 minutes, before darting off in pursuit of a Barn Swallow *Hirundo rustica*, which it missed; it then flew on northwards and was lost to sight after less than 10 minutes. All observations were made with a 10 x 42 binocular at a range down to roughly 100 m.

I am highly familiar with the Merlin from the northern U.K., having seen adult birds on the breeding grounds, and many immatures on passage in spring and autumn on the coast.

Description: A small, compact falcon, smaller than Common Kestrel with shorter wings and tail. The flight

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was distinctive with fast, fluttering wing-beats interspersed with short glides, rather than the slower flapping and longer glides of, for example, *Accipiter* hawks. When mobbing the Eastern Marsh Harrier it regularly fanned its tail as it turned swiftly in flight.

Mantle and upperwing uniform mid-brown, not as warm as Common Kestrel and lacking the contrast between the blackish primaries and the paler rest of the upperwing of that species. Cap mid-brown; a thin, distinct moustachial stripe. Tail barred with bold, broad bars. Underparts pale with thin but obvious dark streaks on a creamy-buff ground colour. The streaks were much finer than those on the underparts of Eurasian Hobby *Falco subbuteo*. It was immediately distinguished from Peregrine Falcon *F peregrinus* by its smaller size and lack of a broad blackish moustachial stripe.

The Merlin breeds in the northern Holarctic and NW China, migrating south to temperate and northern tropical latitudes, with previous South-East Asian records from north Laos and Central Annam (Robson 2000).

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