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Sulawesi & Halmahera

10th – 29th September 2007

Leader: James Eaton

Max Group Size: 6

The four-legged island of Sulawesi, lying east of the famous Wallace's Line, a distinct boundary between distinct faunal regions. Sulawesi is the largest and geographically most complex Wallacean island and during our journey we will see for ourselves the amazing avifauna which is so different from the islands of the Greater Sundas to the west, including no less than 70 species found nowhere else on earth. We shall cover all habitats from coastal mangroves to forest-cloaked mountains in search of such mouth-watering specialties as Diabolical Nightjar, Purple-bearded Bee-eater, Great Shortwing and the magnificent Maleo.

We also visit Halmahera, the largest of the fabled 'Spice Islands' with a noticeable Australasian shift to the avifauna. Halmahera holds an equally exciting set of endemics with the highlight perhaps the famous Wallace's Standardwing, one of the most spectacular and bizarre of the birds of paradise, which we will be able to watch at one of its amazing display sites.

Day 1:

After a morning arrival in Manado, situated on the northern Minahassa peninsula, we shall transfer directly to the nearby Tangkoko-Dua Saudara National Park. As we approach the park we may encounter our first endemics; Purple-winged Roller, Sulawesi Crested Myna and White-rumped Cuckoo-shrike all being possible. In the evening we shall take a walk around the surrounding grasslands hoping to add to our endemic tally and as dusk approaches we shall visit a nearby roost tree of the smallest primate in the world, the Spectral Tarsier. This incredible looking species with its endearing large eyes was the inspiration for Steven Spielberg's "ET" and we will watch in amazement as they spring from branch to branch.
Night at Tangkoko.

Day 2-3:

This wonderful park with forest rising from coastal to sub-montane, supports a large range of the region's endemic birds. The highly sought-after endemic quartet of Kingfisher, Lilac-cheeked, Green-backed, Sulawesi Dwarf and Scaly are all possible, though the former two are the most likely to be observed. On one day we will take a boat trip into the mangroves to search for a fifth endemic kingfisher, the huge Black-billed.

The park boasts the highest density of the brilliant Knobbed Hornbill on Sulawesi and the uncommon Dwarf Hornbill also occurs, sometimes following troops of Black Macaque, which patrol the forest like miniature Gorillas! A variety of other endemics are possible; Ornate Lorikeet, Silver-tipped Imperial Pigeon, Sulawesi Black Pigeon, Yellow-billed Malkoha and Ashy Woodpecker to name just a few.

Walking up through the forest, close attention to the forest understory could produce skulkers such as the gorgeous Red-backed Thrush and other ground-dwellers, with both Red-bellied and Hooded Pitta and Stephan's Dove occurring.

Nocturnal forays could prove rewarding as the surrounding grasslands and secondary forest are home to three endemics, Sulawesi Scops-Owl and Sulawesi Masked Owls along with Sulawesi Nightjar among greater numbers of hawking Great Eared Nightjar.

Night at Tangkoko.

Day 4:

We will spend a final morning at Tangkoko making a special effort for any species missed thus far. As the temperatures rise we will drive southwest to the town of Kotamobagu, our base for exploration for the next 4 nights.

Night in Kotamobagu.

Day 5-7:

We will explore the nearby Dumoga-bone National Park visiting a lowland forest area on the eastern side of this extensive park. Despite large-scale deforestation on the perimeters of the park the birds continue to hang-on and the list of possibilities is huge. Sulawesi endemics abound, and we will be looking for Bay Coucal, Black-billed Koel and Sulawesi Black Pigeon feeding in the understory, while frugivores in the sub-canopy will hopefully include Yellow-breasted Raquet-tail, Maroon-chinned Fruit Dove, Sulawesi Triller, Pied Cuckoo-shrike and both Large and Small Sulawesi Hanging-parrots. Once again, a host of ground-dwellers are possible, Red-bellied Pitta, the secretive Sulawesi Ground-dove and even the rarely seen Blue-faced Rail occurs here. We will also keep an eye to the sky as all four of the Sulawesi endemic *accipiters* are here; Small, Vinous-breasted and Spot-tailed Sparrowhawk along with the rare Sulawesi Goshawk. Sulawesi Serpent Eagle and Sulawesi Hawk Eagle complete the set of endemic raptors present, but localised Barred Honey Buzzard and Spotted Harriers are also present in the area.

Once again night-birding can be productive and we have a chance of encountering Sulawesi Scops-Owl, Sulawesi Masked Owl and both Speckled and Ochre-bellied Boobooks.

One morning we will visit the nesting grounds of the unique Maleo, a large pied megapode that is Sulawesi's most famed and enigmatic species. Maleo's use geothermal heat in the volcanic soil in their communal breeding grounds to incubate the eggs and the young are able to fly as soon as they dig their way out of the ground once hatched! Unfortunately Maleo eggs suffer from high predation, predominately by humans, though an on-going safe hatchery on-site should help maintain the population at this site at least in the near future.

To the north of Kotamobagu lies another national park, Gunung Ambang. This park will give us access to sub-montane forests that are equally rich in birdlife. Though forest clearance is a severe threat to the park, some excellent tracts remain, holding some of Sulawesi's least known and rarest species, including the recently described Cinnabar Boobook, only known from here and a handful of other sites. We shall make an effort to find this species and another local speciality, the rather drab Matinan Flycatcher, known only from the hill forests of the Minahassa Peninsula. Other species here include the rarely observed and skulking Sombre Pigeon, Scaly Kingfisher and Red-backed Thrush.

Days 8:

Today will predominately be a travelling day. We head off early morning to Manado Airport to connect with our flight to Ternate, one of the fabled 'Spice Islands' which is our hopping off point for Halmahera. After a short boat ride across the open water we shall arrive at Sidangoli, a tranquil fishing village located on the west coast of Halmahera. Frigatebirds may well be flocking overhead, the majority will be Lesser there is a possibility of Greater Frigatebird among them. Beach Kingfisher is another possibility, although later in our stay we will search more thoroughly for this noisy but sometimes elusive species.

Night at Sidangoli.

Days 9-14:

Spending 6 nights on Halmahera will give us the opportunity to search for some of the most prized species on earth including Wallace's Standardwing and Ivory-breasted Pitta. We should see both, and will hope to observe the Standardwing's at a lek site, truly magical experience as the birds greet the rising sun by jumping up and parachute down accompanied by an amazing cacophony of noise whenever a female approaches. Birding in the tropical forests of Halmahera is an exhilarating experience and a whole host of island and Moluccan endemics can be expected, some more difficult than others. *Psittacidae* are a common feature of the landscape, White Cockatoo are still reasonably common, though numbers of Chattering and Violet-necked Lory are declining due to trapping of the beautiful birds for the cage-bird trade. Other frugivores make use of the often abundant fruiting trees in the area with several species of Fruit Dove possible, including the elusive Scarlet-breasted, while Paradise Crow (a rather drab, *corvid*-like bird-of-paradise), Halmahera Oriole and the aptly-named Goliath Coucal are also likely. Raptors are again much in evidence, Variable and Moluccan Goshawk, Rufous-necked Sparrowhawk and Gurney's Eagle all possible while night-birding is a must here as we hope to spot-light the bizarre looking Moluccan Owlet-nightjar along with Moluccan Scops and Moluccan Hawk Owls.

One evening we shall take a journey along the coast to visit the communal breeding grounds of the Moluccan Scrubfowl, sitting quietly we can hope to encounter one or more of these birds as they come down from the

forests to lay their single egg on the beach. A short boat ride along the nearby mangroves will be required to search for the noisy but often inconspicuous Beach Kingfisher.
Nights on Halmahera.

Days 15:

We will bid farewell to this marvellous island this morning as we take the short boat ride back to Ternate for our flight back to Manado and connect with our onward flight to Makassar, the hub of Southern Sulawesi for an overnight stop. Allowing ourselves enough time in the afternoon we will make the short journey to the remaining forest patches at Karaenta to search for yet another localised endemic, Black-ringed White-eye. The forest is also home to several other endemics including diminutive Yellow-sided and Grey-sided Flowerpeckers and Black Sunbirds.
Night in Makassar.

Days 16-19:

Following a short flight north to Palu, in central Sulawesi we head to one of Indonesia's greatest national parks, Lore Lindu, for a 4-night stay. We shall base ourselves in the lowlands making frequent forays to the higher reaches of the park for some of the really special endemics of Sulawesi.

It is difficult to know where to start to describe the incredible diversity of species that inhabit the national park, which is home to nearly all of Sulawesi's remarkable endemics. The higher reaches of the park, accessible along an old logging road, are home to 4 of the most wanted endemics; Diabolical (Satanic) Nightjar, Geomalia, Great Shortwing and one of the world's most spectacular Bee-eaters; Purple-throated Bee-eater, which breeds in roadside banks and often perches conspicuously, giving great views. Once again, Pigeons are much in evidence, White-bellied and Grey-headed Imperial are regularly seen, as are Superb and Red-eared Fruit Doves. Feeding flocks often comprise several endemics; Yellow-vented and Sulphur-bellied Whistlers, Cerulean and Pygmy Cuckoo-shrikes, Rusty-bellied Fantail, Sulawesi Myzomela and both Lesser and Greater Sulawesi Honeyeater. Birding at a slightly lower altitude will produce a shift in avifauna. Here we can find the taxonomically perplexing Malia, flocks of which sometimes contain the rare Sulawesi Thrush, an equally perplexing species that behaves more like a babbler than a thrush! The forest understory is home to the rarely seen Maroon-backed Whistler, Sulawesi Ground Dove and even such mega-rarities as Blue-faced Rail and Sulawesi Woodcock are present, albeit seen by only the most fortunate birders.

Nights in Lore Lindu National Park

Day 20:

Unfortunately we shall have to drag ourselves away from Lore Lindu this morning as we head back to Palu for our flight back to Makassar to connect with international flights. Fortunately we will be able to reflect on some great memories from a great 3 week birding adventure among some of Asia's most prized species in these fascinating, far-flung islands.

Total tour cost £ 2795

Single room supplement £ 290

Deposit £ 300

These prices are available in US dollars, please contact us for details.

The cost includes:

All accommodation, all main meals, overland transport, internal flights, permits, entrance fees & guide fees

The cost excludes:

International flights, departure taxes, tourist visa, insurance, drinks & other items of a personal nature

For further information please contact us at info@birdtourasia.com