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Sulawesi & Halmahera, Indonesia

28th August - 17th September 2011

Leader: Rob Hutchinson

Maximum Group Size: 7

The four-legged island of Sulawesi lies to the east of the famous Wallace's Line, an imaginary boundary between distinct faunal regions. It 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 up to 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 Geomalia, 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 in the avifauna. Halmahera holds an equally exciting set of endemics including Ivory-breasted Pitta, Scarlet-breasted Fruit Dove and Sombre Kingfisher, though perhaps the highlight is the unique Wallace's Standardwing, one of the most spectacular and bizarre birds-of-paradise which we will be able to watch at one of its lek sites.

Day 1:

International arrivals into Makassar (formally known as Ujung Pandang), the hub of south Sulawesi for an overnight stay.

Day 2:

We leave early this morning to explore the limestone karst forest at Karaenta, searching primarily for Black-ringed White-eye, a very localised endemic. The forest is also home to several other endemics including Sulawesi Dwarf Hornbill, White-necked Myna, Piping Crow and an undescribed endemic *muscipapa* species. In the afternoon, following a short flight north to Palu in central Sulawesi, we head to one of Indonesia's greatest national parks – Lore Lindu – for a four night stay.

Days 3-5:

We shall base ourselves in the lowlands, making daily 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; it is home to nearly all of Sulawesi's remarkable endemics. The higher reaches of the park are accessible along a famed old logging road, the Anaso Trail, and home to four of the most wanted endemics; Diabolical Nightjar, Geomalia, Great Shortwing and one of the world's most spectacular bee-eaters; Purple-bearded Bee-eater. The bee-eater breeds in roadside banks and often perches conspicuously, giving great views. Once again, pigeons and doves are much in evidence, with White-bellied and Grey-headed Imperial Pigeons regularly seen, as are Superb and Red-eared Fruit Doves while the inconspicuous Sombre Pigeon is sometimes encountered. Feeding flocks often comprise several more endemics; Yellow-vented Whistler, Streak-headed White-eye, Blue-fronted Flycatcher, Cerulean and Pygmy Cuckooshrikes, Rusty-bellied Fantail, Sulawesi Myzomela and both Lesser and Greater Sulawesi Honeyeaters. Overhead we will look for fast-flying Yellow-and-green Lorikeet and Golden-mantled Racquet-tail while Chestnut-backed Bush Warblers skulk in the understory. In the higher forests we will be searching for the inconspicuous Olive-flanked Whistler which recent studies show not to be at all related to the whistlers and is now placed in its own monotypic family.

Birding at a slightly lower altitude will produce a shift in bird life. Here we can find the taxonomically perplexing Malia, flocks of which sometimes contain the rare Sulawesi Thrush, an equally fascinating species

that behaves more like a babbler than a thrush! The forest understorey is home to the rarely seen Maroon-backed Whistler, Sulawesi Ground Dove and even such mega-rarities as Blue-faced Rail and Sulawesi Woodcock, although the last two are seen by only the most fortunate observers.

Day 6:

After a final morning in search of any missing species at Lore Lindu we return to Palu in the afternoon, stopping along the way in search of Red-backed Buttonquail, Savanna Nightjar and the scarce Pale-headed Munia. Night in Palu.

Day 7:

Today is predominantly a travel day as we fly first to Makassar before continuing to Manado on the Minahassa peninsula of north Sulawesi. Upon arrival we will drive south-west to the town of Kotamobagu, our base for exploration for the next four nights. Night in Kotamobagu.

Days 8-10:

We will explore several areas of the nearby Dumoga-Bone National Park, including lowland forest areas on the eastern side of this extensive park. Despite large-scale deforestation around the perimeter of the park the birds continue to hang-on and the list of possibilities is exciting. Sulawesi endemics abound, and we will be looking for Bay Coucal, Black-billed Koel and Sulawesi Yellow-billed Malkoha in forest tangles. Frugivores in the canopy will hopefully include Sulawesi Black Pigeon, Yellow-breasted Racquet-tail, Maroon-chinned Fruit Dove, Sulawesi Triller, Pied Cuckooshrike and both Large and Small Sulawesi Hanging-parrots. We will also keep an eye to the sky, as several interesting raptors are possible here; Vinous-breasted Sparrowhawk, Spot-tailed Sparrowhawk and Sulawesi Goshawk, Sulawesi Serpent Eagle, Sulawesi Hawk Eagle and Sulawesi Honey Buzzard are all regular, while Spotted Harriers also occur 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. Maleos use geothermal heat in the volcanic soil in their communal breeding grounds to incubate their eggs, and the young are able to fly as soon as they dig their way out of the ground after hatching! Unfortunately Maleo eggs suffer from high predation, predominately by humans, but it is hoped that on-going conservation work should help protect the birds at this site. The more open habitat here is ideal for Purple-winged Roller, White-necked Myna and Sulawesi Crested Myna while grassy habitats throughout might produce the skulking Isabelline Water-hen.

To the north of Kotamobagu lies another national park, Gunung Ambang. This park will give us access to submontane forests that are equally rich in bird life. Though forest clearance is a severe threat to the park, some excellent tracts remain, holding some of Sulawesi's least known and rarest species. They include 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 rare Matinan Flycatcher, known only from the hill forests of the Minahassa Peninsula. Other species include the rarely observed and skulking Sombre Pigeon, Scaly Kingfisher and Red-backed Thrush. Nights in Kotamobagu.

Day 11:

After a final morning seeking out anything we have missed thus far in the Kotamobagu area we will return to Manado in the afternoon for an overnight stay.

Day 12:

We will leave early this morning to visit the remnant forest patches of Gunung Mahawu in the Minahassa highlands above Manado. Here we will be hoping to locate Scaly Kingfisher, perhaps the most elusive of the endemic Sulawesi kingfishers. In the forest here we might also hope to find other Sulawesi montane species familiar from our time at Lore Lindu before we return 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 arrive at Sidangoli, a tranquil fishing village located on the west coast of Halmahera. The crossing sometimes produces Aleutian Tern or Bulwer's Petrel and frigatebirds may well be flocking overhead, the majority being Lesser though there is the possibility of Great Frigatebird among them. Beach Kingfisher is present in the mangroves which skirt the town of Sidangoli. Night at Sidangoli.

Days 13-17:

Spending five 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 at a lek site – a truly magical experience as the birds greet the rising sun by jumping up and parachuting down again, 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. Parrots are a common feature of the landscape, with White Cockatoos still reasonably common, although numbers of Chattering and Violet-necked Lory are declining due to trapping of these beautiful species for the cage-bird trade. Other frugivores making use of the often abundant fruiting trees in the area include the elusive Scarlet-breasted Fruit Dove, striking Grey-headed and cute Blue-capped Fruit Doves, while Moluccan and Cinnamon-bellied Imperial Pigeons are usually more conspicuous. Paradise Crow (a generally uniform, corvid-like bird-of-paradise), Dusky Scrubfowl, Rufous-bellied Triller, White-streaked Friarbird, Halmahera Flowerpecker, Halmahera Oriole and

the aptly-named Goliath Coucal are also likely. Raptors are again much in evidence, with Grey-throated and Moluccan Goshawks, Rufous-necked Sparrowhawk and Gurney's Eagle all possible.

Sombre Kingfisher and Common Paradise Kingfishers usually stayed concealed within the forest whereas scanning open perches at the forest edge might find Blue-and-white Kingfisher or even the ultra-rare Purple Dollarbird.

Night birding is a must here as we hope to spot-light the bizarre looking Moluccan Owlet Nightjar along with Moluccan Scops Owl and Halmahera Boobook.

One evening we shall take a journey along the coast to visit the communal breeding grounds of the Moluccan Scrubfowl. By 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. Nights on Halmahera.

Day 18:

We will bid farewell to this marvellous island as we take the short boat ride back to Ternate for our flight back to Manado. Upon arrival we will transfer to the nearby Tangkoko-Dua Saudara National Park. As we approach the park we may encounter open country endemics such as White-rumped Cuckoo-shrike, Purple-winged Roller, Sulawesi Crested Myna, Yellow-breasted Racquet-tail or Silver-tipped Imperial Pigeon. Night at Tangkoko.

Days 19-20:

The wonderful park of Tangkoko with its forest rising from coastal to submontane, supports a large range of the region's endemic birds. A highly sought set of endemic kingfishers are likely; Lilac-cheeked, Green-backed and Sulawesi Dwarf Kingfisher in the forest and on one day we will take a boat trip into the mangroves to search for a fourth endemic kingfisher, the huge Black-billed.

The park boasts the highest density of the brilliant Knobbed Hornbill on Sulawesi and the uncommon Sulawesi Dwarf Hornbill also occurs, sometimes following troops of Sulawesi Crested 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. Close attention to the forest understory could produce skulkers such as the gorgeous Red-backed Thrush, Red-bellied and Hooded Pittas, Tabon Scrubfowl and Stephan's Dove.

On one evening we will visit a roost tree for one of the smallest primates 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. Nights at Tangkoko. Night-time forays should prove rewarding, with the surrounding grasslands and secondary forest home to four nocturnal endemics; Ochre-bellied Boobook, Sulawesi Scops Owl, Sulawesi Masked Owls and Sulawesi Nightjar. Nights at Tangkoko.

Day 21:

This morning we return to Manado to connect with our international flights.

For further information please contact us via [e-mail](#) or telephone **+44 1332 516254**