

# New records and other observations of birds on the island of Tablas, Romblon province, Philippines

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During six visits to the island of Tablas, Romblon province, Philippines, totalling 41 days during 1998–2002, I recorded 97 species including 23 new species for the island. I observed many of the endemic subspecies of which the two most distinct—Streak-breasted Bulbul *Ixos siquijorensis cinereiceps* and Spangled Drongo *Dicrurus hottentottus menagei*—may warrant specific status. I recorded the following species of conservation interest: Philippine Duck *Anas luzonica* (Vulnerable), Blue-naped Parrot *Tanygnathus lucionensis* (Near Threatened), Mantanani Scops Owl *Otus mantananensis* (Near Threatened), Rufous-lored Kingfisher *Todiramphus winchelli* (Vulnerable) and Streak-breasted Bulbul (Endangered).

## INTRODUCTION

The Philippines are well known for their high number (and proportion) of threatened and endemic bird species (BirdLife International 2001). However, until relatively recently, little attention has been paid to subspecies. Collar (1997, 2003) drew attention to the problem of taxa that had been reduced from species to subspecies status with scant study at a time when such lumping seemed preferable. He pointed out how such distinct but lumped forms now provide a problem for conservationists when legislation and priorities usually operate only at the species level.

There are many such obviously distinct forms in the Philippines, and some less obvious, but the present-day status of many of the 708+ endemic subspecies scattered through the Philippine archipelago remains little known. For example, four endemic subspecies are considered restricted to just Tablas or Tablas and Romblon, but there had been no recent studies on either of these islands. None of these subspecies has been considered a full species in recent literature, although three taxa are particularly distinct: Spangled Drongo *Dicrurus hottentottus menagei* and Blue-headed Fantail *Rhipidura cyaniceps sauli*, both restricted to Tablas, and Streak-breasted Bulbul *Ixos siquijorensis cinereiceps*, which is known from both Tablas and Romblon. Other taxa restricted to Tablas, or Tablas and other small islands, include Orange-bellied Flowerpecker *Dicaeum trigonostigma cnecolaemum*, Coppersmith Barbet *Megalaima haemacephala homochroa*, Rufous-lored Kingfisher *Todiramphus winchelli nesydrionetes* and Mantanani Scops Owl *Otus mantananensis romblonis*.

Of all these local endemics, the long-and-curved-tailed Spangled Drongo is particularly distinctive and had apparently not been seen for many years, leading Collar (1997) to speculate that it was ‘alas, probably already extinct’. His article was one stimulus for me to visit Tablas and look for this bird.

## Geography

Tablas lies east of Mindoro and just north of Boracay and Panay, at 12°24'N 122°02'E. At 686 km<sup>2</sup>, it is the largest of the three main islands of Romblon province, the other two being Romblon (82 km<sup>2</sup>) and Sibuyan (449 km<sup>2</sup>). The three islands are separated by deep water except for the northern ends of Romblon and Tablas, which are connected by a submarine bar at a depth of less than 50 m. Romblon and Tablas appear never to have had a land

connection with Sibuyan or with the neighbouring larger islands such as the Visayas, Mindoro or Luzon (Heaney 1985).

Tablas was described as a ‘well-wooded island’ at the turn of the nineteenth century (Worcester and Bourns 1898), but now most low-lying areas are cultivated with rice paddies, and hilly areas have been converted to rough pasture or coconut plantation, although some steep valleys are still wooded. At the north end lies a rugged karst outcrop called Tablas Peak (665 m). There is no surface water over most of this, and while patchy forest remains, it is mostly stunted secondary growth. To the west lies Mt



Figure 1. Map showing locations on Tablas island. Shading denotes forest according to a DENR map.

Payapau (441 m), also karst, and on which heavily logged forest with only a few large trees remains.

The largest area of remaining forest now lies in the centre of the northern part of the island, around and between Mt Palaupau (585 m) and Mt Progreso (c.640 m). This is labelled on maps as the Burburanan Forest. In 1998, most of the forest on the western slopes of Mt Palaupau was regenerating and only 3–5 m high, but on the summit at c.550 m and on its steep, south-eastern slope there was still some original forest >10 m high. At least 100 ha of tall forest extends along the ridge running south from Mt Progreso, overlooking San Agustin (formerly Badajoz). The main ridge, with a height generally above 450 m, continues south, parallel to the east coast for about two-thirds of the length of the island, sloping steeply to the coastal plain. Near Ferrol there are some very rugged, low hills, some with almost impenetrable secondary forest, but most areas have been cleared. The areas around Looc appeared denuded, including the high points of Mt Lunas (c.480 m) and Mt Malbug (277 m). Although maps at the Department of Environment and Natural Resources (DENR) office at Odiongan indicate many widely scattered reserve forests, few appear to be larger than 100 ha. None in the south of the island is thought to retain mature forest.

## METHODS

I visited Tablas on the following dates: 31 August–3 September 1998 (based at Odiongan on the west coast); 31 August and 2–3 September 1998 (forest east of the Sicop Bridge); 21–23 March 1999 (based at San Agustin); 2–13 August 1999 (Odiongan, San Agustin, Ferrol and Guinawayan); 6–16 August 2001 (accompanying a team led by Marisol Pedregosa to the Dobboban and Balogo areas); 25–29 March 2002 (Odiongan and San Agustin areas); and 31 July–5 August 2002 (hills south-west of San Agustin; also Mt Payapau and Tablas Peak). In total I spent c.41 days in the field, with typically 10–12 hours observations per day. Birds were sought in all habitats visited, but were principally looked for in forest, using binoculars, a microphone and minidisc recorder, and on occasions a telescope. Playback of recorded song was used sometimes to confirm the identity of a bird, and sound recordings were made. Where possible, birds were also photographed with a camera and/or digital video camera. The majority of records below are substantiated by video, sound recordings and/or photographs.

## RESULTS

A total of 97 species was recorded, including 23 new records for the island (taking the distributions given by Kennedy *et al.* [2000] as a baseline), and five threatened and Near Threatened species (as listed in BirdLife International 2001): Philippine Duck *Anas luzonica* (Vulnerable), Blue-naped Parrot *Tanygnathus lucionensis* (Near Threatened), Mantanani Scops Owl (Near Threatened), Rufous-lored Kingfisher (Vulnerable), Streak-breasted Bulbul (Endangered). The selected species accounts below provide details for new records for the islands, endemic taxa and threatened and Near Threatened species. Trinomials are given where observations relate to an identified subspecies.

### LITTLE EGRET *Egretta garzetta*

New island record: five birds were seen feeding in newly created, almost empty fishponds on the south side of Odiongan town on 27 March 2002. Two had yellow feet and the others black feet. The former were presumably of the subspecies *garzetta*, and the latter may have been of the subspecies *nigripes* (see Hancock and Kushlan 1984).

### GREAT EGRET *Casmerodius albus*

New island record: four birds were present with Little Egrets in the empty fishponds south of Odiongan on 27 March 2002.

### PHILIPPINE DUCK *Anas luzonica*

Vulnerable. This species was reported by local people as occurring regularly (in flocks of up to 100–200 birds) on the coast c.3 km north of Odiongan, and 12 birds were observed there on 31 July 2002. J. Willis (*in litt.* 2004) also reported the species from Looc Bay on 26 July 2001.

### BLACK-SHOULDERED KITE *Elanus caeruleus*

New island record: a lone adult was seen (also by L. Paguntalan and M. Pedregosa) on an exposed tree on a hill 2 km south of Calatrava on 11 August 2001. This species is now rarely recorded in the Philippines (Kennedy *et al.* 2000).

### BARRED BUTTONQUAIL *Turnix suscitator*

New island record: single birds were seen in the areas of Sicop Bridge, Cogon and Sogod.

### BARRED RAIL *Gallirallus torquatus*

New island record: probably widespread as it was seen in the Cogon, Carmen and Odiongan areas.

### SLATY-LEGGED CRAKE *Rallina eurizonoides*

New island record: two birds were seen well 2 September 1998 on a trail to the summit of the hill east of Sicop Bridge.

### WHITE-BREASTED WATERHEN *Amaurornis phoenicurus*

New island record: two birds were seen in a seasonally wet area of tall weeds between bushes and rice fields c.1 km north of Odiongan on 26 March 2002.

### PACIFIC GOLDEN PLOVER *Pluvialis fulva*

New island record: 14 birds were seen, some coming into breeding plumage, in one of the dried-up fishponds south of Odiongan on 27 March 2002.

### COMMON SANDPIPER *Actitis hypoleucos*

New island record: at least ten individuals were seen in dried-up fishponds south of Odiongan on 27 March 2002.

### RED TURTLE DOVE *Streptopelia tranquebarica*

New island record: a large flock of doves, including about 20 of this species along with Spotted Doves *Streptopelia chinensis* and Zebra Doves *Geopelia striata*, were seen feeding in a field of newly sown rice south of Ferrol on 5 August 1999.

### SPOTTED DOVE *Streptopelia chinensis*

New island record: this species is probably widespread; at least 20 birds were feeding in a dove flock south of Ferrol on 5 August 1999, and three individuals were seen in rice fields north of Odiongan on 27 March 2002.

**PINK-NECKED GREEN PIGEON** *Treron vernans*

New island record: this species is probably widespread as it was seen in the Dobdohan, Ferrol, Odiongan and Cawayan areas during 1999–2002.

**BLUE-NAPED PARROT** *Tanygnathus lucionensis*

Near Threatened. Two captive immatures seen on 31 July 2002 had recently been caught in the forest above Sogod.

**MANTANANI SCOPS OWL** *Otus mantananensis romblonis*

Near Threatened; restricted-range. This species seems to be common in the coconut palms around San Agustin, with ten individuals being heard along the road to Dobdohan on 4 August 2002. It was reported to be common near Odiongan, although I never heard it in that area. My guide, R. Montesa, showed me an open nest of this species at the base of a leaf in the crown of a coconut palm on 29 March 2002; one bird was sitting on two eggs.

The subspecies *romblonis* has so far only been recorded on Banton, Romblon, Semirara, Sibuyan, Tablas and Tres Reyes. The calls are similar to those of the subspecies *mantananensis* and *sibutuensis*.

**GRASS OWL** *Tyto capensis*

New island record: a single captive bird was shown to me at a house north of Odiongan on 26 March 2002; the owners insisted that it had been caught there the night before.

**PURPLE NEEDLETAIL** *Hirundapus celebensis*

New island record: up to ten were seen from San Agustin town on 7 and 9 August 1999, possibly on migration or post-breeding dispersal.

**RUFOUS-LORED KINGFISHER***Todiramphus winchelli nesydrionetes*

Vulnerable. This species seems quite widespread and fairly frequent in those areas retaining original forest, and it was seen or heard on many visits to the Dobdohan watershed. It also seems to persist further north, as a single bird was heard calling in heavily degraded karst forest on Mt Payapao, Sogod, on 2 August 2002. Little seems to have been published regarding the behaviour of this species. One bird was observed giving a single note alarm call, and, just as in Collared Kingfisher *T. chloris*, it cocked its tail at a right-angle to its back when the call-note was delivered. A female was heard making a sound rather like a woodpecker and was seen tapping a branch while holding a 20-mm long beetle in its bill, possibly hitting it to break open the carapace. The nest of this species has never been reported (Fry and Fry 1992, Kennedy 2000): R. Montesa (verbally 2001) stated that it nests in arboreal termitaria, as has been reported for Collared Kingfisher.

**BLUE-TAILED BEE-EATER** *Merops philippinus*

New island record: five birds were seen over paddyfields in the Ferrol area on 4 August 1999. Two individuals were also seen over rice fields north of Odiongan on 26 March 2002.

**COPPERSMITH BARBET***Megalaima haemacephala homochroa*

This species was frequently heard in forested areas on Tablas but never seen. The subspecies *homochroa* is known with certainty only from Tablas, but it almost certainly

also occurred on Romblon (and perhaps still occurs there), and probably also on Masbate. Dziadosz and Parkes (1984) opined, when describing *homochroa*, that the only known specimens from Masbate were those of McGregor, but that they had been destroyed during World War II. However, a male specimen collected by McGregor on 21 June 1902 survives in the Smithsonian Institution, Washington D.C. (USNM 192589). Photographs of this specimen appear to match the description of *homochroa*, although more detailed examination is necessary to confirm this.

**BARN SWALLOW** *Hirundo rustica*

New island record: this species was common in the San Agustin area in March 1999, and single birds were seen in the same area in August 1999. At least four were seen near Odiongan on 25 March 2002.

**PACIFIC SWALLOW** *Hirundo tahitica*

New island record: this species was seen in many parts of the island during most visits, e.g. at least 50 were hawking over paddyfields north of Odiongan on 25 March 2002.

**STREAK-BREADED BULBUL** *Ixos siquijorensis cinereiceps*

Endangered; restricted-range. The subspecies *cinereiceps* was fairly common in primary and logged forest at Balogo, and very common above Dobdohan, calling from trees within cultivated areas that were surrounded by native forest. It was absent from areas without native forest, but occurred in very degraded forest around Ferrol, and two birds were heard in low secondary growth on the hill east of Sicop Bridge. It is not clear, though, whether the species was successfully breeding in these areas or had dispersed there from more suitable habitat.

Three subspecies are known: *cinereiceps* from Tablas and Romblon, *monticola* from Cebu, and *siquijorensis* from Siquijor. The former seems to be almost extinct on Romblon (personal observations). Baud (1976) compared two female specimens from Romblon with two from Tablas and noted differences in wing size, head colour and contrast of the belly, but further study is needed to determine the distinctiveness of these birds.

*I. s. monticola* is 30% shorter than *cinereiceps*: 21–22 cm versus 27–29 cm, while *siquijorensis* is intermediate at 24–25 cm (males larger in each case; values for *monticola* and *cinereiceps* are taken from Bourns and Worcester [1894]; values for *siquijorensis* are taken from skins at the Natural History Museum, Tring [NHM]). Adult *cinereiceps* are olive-brown above and whitish below; the crown feathers are tipped ashy-grey but do not seem to form a crest even when the birds are agitated; the chin, throat and centre of the breast are white, while the upper breast and breast-sides are light olive-brown with distinct white shaft markings. Only three old specimens of *monticola* exist, and only one bird has been captured and photographed. The bird appears similar to *cinereiceps*, but with a blackish cast to the crown, a fulvous tone to the upperparts and a less striking white throat. *I. s. siquijorensis* is olive-brown above, with streaked underparts and a blackish-brown crown and nape, of which the crown feathers are often raised to form a small peaked crest; the fringes of the median and greater coverts are paler edged, producing two indistinct wing-bars. These wing-bars are visible in all four specimens in NHM, and in all photos taken in August on Siquijor, but are absent in the other



two subspecies. The small feathers of the lower chin and throat have whitish centres aligned as stripes, so the throat does not appear bright white; as the feathers increase in size down the underside the stripes become mottled bands.

The three subspecies differ in many of their vocalisations. *I. s. cinereiceps* has a variety of calls which include 'squeaky toy' notes, both falling and rising at a variety of pitches; it also gives *chree* or *chirree* notes which vary in their grating quality and seem similar to those of *siquijorensis*. A commonly heard phrase is *chirit choroyroy* or *chree choroyroy*, which may have other phrases put around it; e.g. *hihohi-chirit-choroyroy chirit choroyroy chiREEEchroyroy chiREEEchroyroy*. The territorial song seems to be based around a pattern of typical bulbul notes: *hi-ho-hi-ghrrek-ghrreghrrek-si-rrediyeray*. This lasts about 2.5 seconds and the last phrase may be omitted. Other phrases include a clearer *chirikruk chirikruk reerik-ruruk*, and *chirarache chirarache chiririchree-ririru*. A repeated *chi—chi—chi—chi* may be an alarm call. *I. s. siquijorensis* has a typically rasping, grating quality to its calls, with *chree* and *chichaw* calls which may resemble those of *cinereiceps*, and occasional 'squeaky toy' squeals. The song appears to be a 2.5 second *chichachichachichaCHI—CHA—CHI—CHA*, or *chichachichachichaCHREE—CHRAW CHREE CHRAW*, reminiscent of a rusty saw, and the last notes being louder and slightly wider-spaced (c.0.3 seconds long, separated by 0.1 second). *I. s. monticola* co-occurs with Philippine Bulbul *Ixos philippinus*, and it is very difficult to be sure which vocalisations belong to which species: I relied on the knowledge of a local guide. *I. s. monticola* produces distinctly low-pitched rasping calls, especially in response to playback, possibly to distinguish itself from the high-pitched squeaky calls of Philippine Bulbul. However, when the rasping calls of *siquijorensis* were played back, only Philippine Bulbul seemed to respond. Although no songs similar to that of *cinereiceps* or *siquijorensis* were heard, the territorial song was not recorded.

Given these differences in morphology and vocalisations, the taxonomic status of these three subspecies should be reviewed.

#### SPANGLED DRONGO *Dicrurus hottentottus menagei*

In March 1999, two birds were seen in the mid-canopy of tall trees over a stream that flows through Dobdohan; they were present on two successive days and seem likely to have been a pair. In August 1999, again in the same general area above Dobdohan, 2–3 family parties of 2–4 birds were seen. These parties were quite active, but the birds with more developed tails—presumably adults—tended to be shyer. In August 2001, only one immature was seen with an adult. Two single adults were also seen on Mt Palapau (M. Pedregosa and L. Paguntalan verbally 2001). In March 2002, one was seen and another heard during two days in the forest above Dobdohan. In August 2002, a single bird, probably an immature, was seen in low secondary forest on Tablas Peak, and recognised by our local guide, who said the species was rare there. The species was almost always seen in relatively mature, closed-canopy forest. On only one occasion were birds seen in a tree at the edge of a clearing, feeding actively in a manner more typical of mainland Spangled Drongo. Birds were never seen in open areas.

These are the first observations for many decades of the subspecies *menagei*, which is endemic to Tablas. It is very distinctive in having a very long and very deeply

forked tail that curves widely outwards and somewhat upwards. Although it has spangles on the breast, these are small and few in number; the neck hackles are small. The metallic feathers of the crown do not extend to the nape as they do in its nearest geographical relatives *D. h. palawanensis* and *D. h. cuyensis*, but like these two, and unlike *D. h. borneensis* of Borneo, it lacks frontal filaments on the forehead. Bourns and Worcester (1894) originally described this form as *Chibia menagei*. Hachisuka (1928) considered it sufficiently distinct to deserve its own genus *Dicrachibia*. Inskipp *et al.* (1996) followed the arrangement proposed by Delacour and Mayr (1946) and supported by Vaurie (1949), including *menagei* within a very broad Spangled Drongo *Dicrurus hottentottus* complex comprising 32 subspecies, whose characteristics include spangles on the breast and a lack of gloss on the mantle. None of these forms occurs on the large islands nearest to Tablas, i.e. Mindoro, Panay and Luzon, where they are replaced by the glossy-backed Balicassiao *D. balicassius*.

In the field, the flight feathers and tail of *menagei* were somewhat glossy, with a slight greenish or purplish iridescence. The belly, back, nape and sides of the head sometimes seemed dull black, but in better light could be seen to have a purple tinge to them; they were velvety rather than glossy. There were some slight spangles on the sides of the neck but these were not very noticeable. The tail feathers of adults curl outwards. On some birds they appeared flat, but one bird in a group had very elongated tail feathers that curled up towards their tips like a partial helix. An immature had a splayed end to the tail, and had yet to grow the elongated outer feathers; video footage shows that it seems to have a brownish-black head and underparts, and iridescent blue-black back and wings.

Both Spangled Drongo and Balicassiao, as with many other species of drongos, are well known for the range of sounds they can produce, but *D. h. menagei* seemed not to be very vocal. On some occasions, birds were quite shy and mostly silent, although from time to time they gave a very cicada-like, rasping *gzzzzzzt*, recalling a metal comb being scratched. This call lasted about one second and was uttered at irregular intervals of 2–10 seconds. Occasionally birds gave a rasping *dzak-tsee-ik*, which was similar to a call of White-vented Whistler *Pachycephala homeyeri*. On another occasion two birds were recorded duetting 30 m apart, with the *dzak-tsee-ik* call being answered with a *jieeh* call. Birds occasionally approached in response to playback of the *dzak-tsee-ik* call. On another occasion an immature called incessantly with squealing notes that seemed to be a begging call.

The only recording in the British Library National Sound Archive of a nearby form of Spangled Drongo is that of *D. h. palawanensis* (by R. Drijvers; recording number 67523). This sounds similar but is nevertheless distinct: a 'comb-scratching' call is followed by a hoarse whistled *pishee!* It is unclear if the latter is the same bird or a reply. None of the piercing whistles so characteristic of Spangled Drongo over much of its range, and of Balicassiao, were heard from birds on Tablas. However, it remains possible that other typical Spangled Drongo-type songs and calls may be made at times of the year other than those of my visits.

One bird of a pair flicked its flat scissor-like tail up and out, perhaps nervously, every 1–3 seconds, while the other sat motionlessly, apparently watching me, for at least ten

minutes. Calling birds were several times observed to open and close their tails like scissors while giving the *dzee-ik* call. Two groups were observed foraging in vine tangles like coucals, apparently feeding on insects in dead leaves. Individuals sometimes held a dead leaf with one foot, hung on to the vine with the other foot, and stripped out insects with their bill.

Given its morphological distinctiveness and apparent differences in voice, behaviour and habitat preferences from other forms of Spangled Drongo, *menagei* must be a strong candidate for regaining full species status.

**PIED BUSHCHAT** *Saxicola caprata*

New island record: several singles were seen east of Sicop Bridge, at Ferrol and at Guinawayan on 1–5 August 1999.

**GOLDEN-BELLIED GERYGONE** *Gerygone sulphurea*

New island record: birds were seen and heard in mangroves and secondary forest south of Ferrol, south of Odiongan and also in the north of the island.

**WHITE-VENTED WHISTLER** *Pachycephala homeyeri*

This taxon was frequent in native forest and remnant forest pockets. When Parkes (1989) revised and split ‘White-bellied Whistler’ *Pachycephala homeyeri* from Mangrove Whistler *P. grisola*, he commented that the Tablas and Sibuyan populations that he placed with *P. homeyeri* could conceivably be separated as a subspecies distinct from *winchelli* and *major* on size. Further studies are needed to determine the distinctiveness of these birds, and molecular studies would help to clarify the relationships between all forms in the *cinerea* group.

**LONG-TAILED SHRIKE** *Lanius schach*

New island record: single birds were seen near Sicop Bridge on 1 September 1998, on the hills west of San Agustin and also between Ferrol and Guinagoman on 4–5 August 1999, and in the Sogod area on 2 August 2002. Birds showed the black cap typical of *L. s. nasutus*, but also very considerable variation in the amount of rufous and grey in the plumage: on one bird the grey covered almost all the back and there was little rufous on the flanks; another bird had a largely rufous back, the grey being restricted to the upper back, and extensive rufous on the flanks. Specimens of *L. s. nasutus* in NHM show similar variation, but this is not mentioned by Lefranc and Worfolk (1997). These records fill a gap in the distribution illustrated in Lefranc and Worfolk (1997).

**BLUE-HEADED FANTAIL** *Rhipidura cyaniceps sauli*

This species was fairly common in native forest in the Balogo-Dobdohan region, and it was also seen on Tablas Peak. A pair seemed to be defending a territory and feeding young near Dobdohan on 22–23 March 2002. The subspecies *sauli* is endemic to Tablas. The calls were lower in pitch than those of the nominate subspecies on Luzon, but the territorial song has not yet been recorded. More research is needed on the distinctness of this form from the other much smaller forms on Luzon and the West Visayas.

**ORANGE-BELLIED FLOWERPECKER**

*Dicaeum trigonostigma cnecolaemum*

This species was fairly common in native forest and adjacent secondary vegetation in the Balogo-Dobdohan

area, and was also present on Tablas Peak, and forest east of Sicop Bridge.

The subspecies *cnecolaemum* is endemic to Tablas. Bourns and Worcester (1894) wrote in the type description of *D. t. intermedium* (type locality Romblon): ‘It may ultimately prove that the Tablas birds are distinct, the four specimens secured by us in that island having a much heavier wash of yellow on the throat than the Romblon birds’. However, in his type description of *cnecolaemum* (type locality: Tablas), Parkes (1989) wrote: ‘Similar to *D. t. intermedium* of Romblon Island, but adult males with throat washed with yellow instead of being *pale neutral gray* [sic]...immature males have chins distinctly yellow rather than *gray* as in *intermedium*’ (my italics). Cheke *et al.* (2001) did not clear up this confusion and stated that *cnecolaemum* ‘differs from *intermedium* by throat washed yellow rather than pale, neutral grey’ but for *intermedium* stated ‘chin and throat pale[r] grey, washed with yellow’. Photographs of the type specimen in the USNM and of living birds on Tablas indicate *cnecolaemum* has a faint wash of yellow mainly on the chin and upper throat. A photograph of the *intermedium* type specimen seems to show only pale grey, although a yellow wash too faint to see in the field or in images may be present. Further work is needed to establish whether the populations on these adjacent islands really do differ.

**EURASIAN TREE SPARROW** *Passer montanus*

New island record: this species now seems to be frequent in all of the main towns visited: Odiongan, San Agustin, Looc, Ferrol, Carmen and the north-east coastal villages.

**JAVA SPARROW** *Lonchura oryzivora*

New island record: a single bird was seen east of Odiongan near Sicop Bridge in an area of pasture and cultivation on 31 August 1998. No others were seen on return trips to this area in August 1999 and 2001. In March 2002, a flock of at least 50 birds including many immatures was found in bushes by paddyfields c.2 km north of Odiongan; and on 31 July 2002, a small flock of at least four birds was found north of San Agustin near Carmen. J. Willis (*in litt.* 2005) also reported seeing this species at Looc on 27 July 2001.

**Unconfirmed records**

A single snipe, probably Swinhoe’s Snipe *Gallinago megala*, was flushed three times from a damp patch of pasture east of Sicop Bridge on 1 September 1998. It appeared rather large and flew slowly and directly before landing. Twice it landed close by and on the third time flew off a longer distance. It did not show a white trailing edge to the wing and uttered a single low *grrrk* on two occasions.

In addition, three species were heard, but not seen and remain unconfirmed: (1) Pink-bellied Imperial Pigeon *Ducula poliocephala*: at least two birds were heard and recorded giving a distinctive double *boom* from ridgetop trees above Dobdohan in August 2001, and another was heard at Balogo, in August 2002; (2) Philippine Nightjar *Caprimulgus manillensis*: several birds were heard giving the characteristic *chock-chorr* call at midnight in the Dobdohan valley on 29 March 2002; R. Montesa, who was accompanying me, recognised this as the nightbird known locally as ‘tok-tor’, which he said nests on the ground laying a dirty-white egg with brown spots; (3) unidentified hawk owl *Ninox* sp.: the calls of an apparent

hawk owl, probably Philippine Hawk Owl *Ninox philippensis* of the subspecies *spilonota*, were heard regularly and recorded around the campsite at Dobdohan, and occasionally at Balogo. Unfortunately the birds stayed in the canopy and became silent when a recording was played back to them; the vocalisations were somewhat similar to some of the other forms in the *N. [p.] spilonota* group, notably *mindorensis* and the Cebuano *spilonota*.

#### Additional notes

A specimen of uncertain identity—either Rusty-breasted Cuckoo *Cacomantis sepulchralis* or Plaintive Cuckoo *C. merulinus*—is mentioned in Dickinson *et al.* (1991). This specimen was located in the Philippine National Museum (specimen number 4825 collected 25 May 1954 by T. Oane) with an original label indicating *C. merulinus*, but was confirmed as Rusty-breasted Cuckoo.

The following records for Tablas, overlooked when Kennedy *et al.* (2000) was compiled (E. C. Dickinson verbally 2005), are listed in Goodman *et al.* (1995: 46–47), and were confirmed by sight observations on Tablas: Philippine Duck *Anas luzonica*, Zebra Dove *Geopelia striata striata*, Yellow-breasted Fruit Dove *Ptilinopus occipitalis*, Pygmy Swiftlet *Collocalia troglodytes* and Large-billed Crow *Corvus macrorhynchos philippinus*.

A record of Philippine Dwarf Kingfisher *Ceyx melanurus* on Tablas has appeared in print three times (Collar *et al.* 1999, BirdLife International 2001, Mallari *et al.* 2001). This refers to a specimen (055945) in the DMNH, which, although once thought to have originated at Looc, Tablas in February 1976, was actually collected at Looc, Lubang island (G. Hess *in litt.* 1999).

## DISCUSSION

The 23 new records for Tablas represent a 20% increase in the island's known avifauna. Most of the winter migrants to the Philippines could reasonably be expected to turn up on any island containing suitable habitat: swallows, in particular, are not at all unexpected. However, of the new records, 15 are almost certainly resident species. Although the island does not support tits, woodpeckers or babblers, it does not seem to be as impoverished as previously thought. Some of the additions may be recent arrivals, e.g. Eurasian Tree Sparrow, Spotted Dove and Zebra Dove may have followed habitat modification by humans. Many of the others, such as Slaty-legged Crake, Barred Rail, White-breasted Waterhen, Pink-necked Green Pigeon and Golden-bellied Gerygone would appear simply to have been overlooked. Further resident species may yet be discovered.

Although the Philippine Cockatoo *Cacatua haematuropygia* was formerly known to occur on Tablas, no evidence was found for its continued survival there. However, there are some areas marked on DENR maps as being forest that have yet to be surveyed.

More studies are needed of the endemic taxa and their relatives to establish if any merit recognition as full species, in particular: the drongos on Tablas, Cuyo and Palawan; the three subspecies of Blue-headed Fantail, Philippine Hawk Owl throughout its range; and Streak-breasted Bulbul on Tablas and Cebu. Elevation of any of the endemic subspecies to species status would have implications for conservation priorities, as they have

restricted ranges and are threatened by habitat loss. A paper addressing conservation issues on Tablas is in preparation.

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## APPENDIX

List of birds of Tablas island, Romblon province. Sequence follows Dickinson *et al.* (1991).

Species	Status	Species	Status
PURPLE HERON <i>Ardea purpurea</i>	X	SPOTTED DOVE <i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>	NR
LITTLE EGRET <i>Egretta garzetta</i>	NR	ZEBRA DOVE <i>Geopelia striata</i>	C
PACIFIC REEF EGRET <i>Egretta sacra</i>	X	EMERALD DOVE <i>Chalcophaps indica</i>	X
GREAT EGRET <i>Casmerodius albus</i>	NR	PHILIPPINE COCKATOO <i>Cacatua haematuropygia</i>	NC
CATTLE EGRET <i>Bubulcus ibis</i>	X	BLUE-CROWNED RACQUET-TAIL <i>Prioniturus discurus</i>	X
LITTLE HERON <i>Butorides striatus</i>	X	BLUE-NAPED PARROT <i>Tanygnathus lucionensis</i>	X
RUFIOUS NIGHT HERON <i>Nycticorax caledonicus</i>	X	PHILIPPINE HANGING PARROT <i>Loriculus philippensis</i>	X
YELLOW BITTERN <i>Ixobrychus sinensis</i>	X	PHILIPPINE HAWK CUCKOO <i>Hierococcyx (fugax) pectoralis</i>	X
CINNAMON BITTERN <i>Ixobrychus cinnamomeus</i>	X	RUSTY-BREASTED CUCKOO <i>Cacomantis sepulchralis</i>	C
PHILIPPINE DUCK <i>Anas luzonica</i>	C	ASIAN KOEL <i>Eudynamis scolopaceus</i>	X
BARRED HONEY-BUZZARD <i>Pernis celebensis</i>	X	PHILIPPINE COUCAL <i>Centropus viridis</i>	X
BLACK-SHOULDERED KITE <i>Elanus caeruleus</i>	NR	GRASS OWL <i>Tyto capensis</i>	NR
BRAHMINY KITE <i>Haliastur indus</i>	X	MANTANANI SCOPS OWL <i>Otus mantananensis romblonis</i>	X
WHITE-BELLIED SEA EAGLE <i>Haliaeetus leucogaster</i>	X	PHILIPPINE HAWK OWL <i>Ninox philippensis spilonota</i>	NC
PHILIPPINE SERPENT-EAGLE <i>Spilornis holospilus</i>	X	WHISKERED TREESWIFT <i>Hemiprocne comata</i>	NC
RUFIOUS-BELLIED EAGLE <i>Hieraaetus kienerii</i>	NC	UNIFORM SWIFTLET <i>Collocalia vanikorensis</i>	NC
TABON SCRUBFOWL <i>Megapodius cumingi</i>	NC	GLOSSY SWIFTLET <i>Collocalia esculenta</i>	X
RED JUNGLEFOWL <i>Gallus gallus</i>	X	PYGMY SWIFTLET <i>Collocalia troglodytes</i>	C
BARRED BUTTONQUAIL <i>Turnix suscitator</i>	NR	PURPLE NEEDLETAIL <i>Hirundapus celebensis</i>	NR
BARRED RAIL <i>Gallirallus torquatus</i>	NR	COMMON KINGFISHER <i>Alcedo atthis</i>	X
SLATY-LEGGED CRAKE <i>Rallina eurizonoides</i>	NR	VARIABLE DWARF KINGFISHER <i>Ceyx lepidus margarethae</i>	X
WHITE-BREASTED WATERHEN <i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>	NR	STORK-BILLED KINGFISHER <i>Halcyon capensis</i>	X
WATERCOCK <i>Gallixrex cinerea</i>	NC	WHITE-THROATED KINGFISHER <i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>	X
PACIFIC GOLDEN PLOVER <i>Pluvialis fulva</i>	NR	RUFIOUS-LORED KINGFISHER	
LITTLE RINGED PLOVER <i>Charadrius dubius</i>	X	<i>Todiramphus winchelli nesydrionetes</i>	X
COMMON SANDPIPER <i>Actitis hypoleucos</i>	NR	COLLARED KINGFISHER <i>Todiramphus chloris</i>	X
GREAT CRESTED TERN <i>Sterna bergii</i>	NC	BLUE-THROATED BEE-EATER <i>Merops viridis</i>	X
POMPADOUR GREEN PIGEON <i>Treron pompadora</i>	X	BLUE-TAILED BEE-EATER <i>Merops philippinus</i>	NR
PINK-NECKED GREEN PIGEON <i>Treron vernans</i>	NR	DOLLARBIRD <i>Eurystomus orientalis</i>	X
WHITE-EARED BROWN DOVE <i>Phapitreron leucotis</i>	X	COPPERSMITH BARBET <i>Megalaima haemacephala homochroa</i>	X
YELLOW-BREASTED FRUIT DOVE <i>Ptilinopus occipitalis</i>	NR	RED-BELLIED PITTA <i>Pitta erythrogaster</i>	X
BLACK-CHINNED FRUIT DOVE <i>Ptilinopus leclancheri</i>	X	HOODED PITTA <i>Pitta sordida</i>	X
GREEN IMPERIAL PIGEON <i>Ducula aenea</i>	X	BARN SWALLOW <i>Hirundo rustica</i>	NR
PHILIPPINE CUCKOO DOVE		PACIFIC SWALLOW <i>Hirundo tahitica</i>	NR
<i>Macropygia (amboinensis) tenuirostris</i>	NC	BAR-BELLIED CUCKOOSHRIKE <i>Coracina striata</i>	X
ISLAND COLLARED DOVE <i>Streptopelia bitorquata</i>	X	PIED TRILLER <i>Lalage nigra</i>	X
RED TURTLE DOVE <i>Streptopelia tranquebarica</i>	NR	YELLOW-VENTED BULBUL <i>Pycnonotus goiavier</i>	X

Species	Status	Species	Status
STREAK-BREASTED BULBUL <i>Ixos siquijorensis cinereiceps</i>	X	GREY WAGTAIL <i>Motacilla cinerea</i>	X
SPANGLED DRONGO <i>Dicrurus hottentottus menagei</i>	X	PADDYFIELD PIPIT <i>Anthus rufulus</i>	X
BLACK-NAPED ORIOLE <i>Oriolus chinensis</i>	X	PECHORA PIPIT <i>Anthus gustavi</i>	NC
LARGE-BILLED CROW <i>Corvus macrorhynchos</i>	C	WHITE-BREASTED WOODSWALLOW <i>Artamus leucorhynchus</i>	X
ORIENTAL MAGPIE ROBIN <i>Copsychus saularis</i>	X	BROWN SHRIKE <i>Lanius cristatus</i>	X
PIED BUSHCHAT <i>Saxicola caprata</i>	NR	LONG-TAILED SHRIKE <i>Lanius schach</i>	NR
BLUE ROCK THRUSH <i>Monticola solitarius</i>	X	ASIAN GLOSSY STARLING <i>Aplonis panayensis</i>	X
GOLDEN-BELLIED GERYGONE <i>Gerygone sulphurea</i>	NR	COLETO <i>Sarcops calvus</i>	X
ARCTIC WARBLER <i>Phylloscopus borealis</i>	NC	PLAIN-THROATED SUNBIRD <i>Anthreptes malacensis</i>	X
GRAY'S WARBLER <i>Locustella fasciolata</i>	NC	PURPLE-THROATED SUNBIRD <i>Nectarinia sperata</i>	X
TAWNY GRASSBIRD <i>Megalurus timoriensis</i>	X	OLIVE-BACKED SUNBIRD <i>Nectarinia jugularis</i>	X
BRIGHT-HEADED CISTICOLA <i>Cisticola exilis</i>	X	CRIMSON SUNBIRD <i>Aethopyga siparaja</i>	X
MANGROVE BLUE FLYCATCHER <i>Cyornis rufigastra</i>	X	ORANGE-BELLIED FLOWERPECKER	
CITRINE CANARY FLYCATCHER <i>Culicicapa helianthea</i>	X	<i>Dicaeum trigonostigma cnecolaemum</i>	X
BLUE-HEADED FANTAIL <i>Rhipidura cyaniceps sauli</i>	X	EURASIAN TREE SPARROW <i>Passer montanus</i>	NR
PIED FANTAIL <i>Rhipidura javanica</i>	X	JAVA SPARROW <i>Lonchura oryzivora</i>	NR
BLACK-NAPED MONARCH <i>Hypothymis azurea</i>	X	WHITE-BELLIED MUNIA <i>Lonchura leucogastra</i>	X
RUFIOUS PARADISE-FLYCATCHER <i>Terpsiphone cinnamomea</i>	X	BLACK-HEADED MUNIA <i>Lonchura malacca</i>	X
WHITE-VENTED WHISTLER <i>Pachycephala homeyeri winchelli</i>	X		

**Key**

X = listed in Kennedy *et al.* (2000) and seen during these surveys

NC = listed in Kennedy *et al.* (2000) but not observed during these surveys

C = confirmed; not listed in Kennedy *et al.* (2000), or seen during these surveys, but confirmed from Goodman *et al.* (1995) or from a museum specimen

NR = new island record