

them. Playback of their vocalisations brought them closer for better recordings.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank Mr Gerard (Herry) Najoan for assisting me in many ways on the trip. Jeff Groth prepared the sonograms. John Fitzpatrick and Greg Budney, of the Macaulay Library of Natural Sounds (where all of my tape recordings will eventually be deposited) at the Cornell Laboratory of Natural Sounds, provided tape recording equipment and other assistance.

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Territorial behaviour of Northern Boobook *Ninox japonica*, on Calayan Island, northern Philippines

BEN KING and NICKY ICARANGAL

King (2002) recommended that the Northern Boobook *Ninox japonica*, of north-eastern Asia, and Chocolate Boobook *N. randi*, of the Philippines and the Talaut Islands of northern Indonesia, be considered species separate from the Brown Boobook *Ninox scutulata*, and presented sonograms and descriptions of their distinctive songs. Dickinson *et al.* (1991) listed the Northern Boobook as occurring in a number of localities throughout the Philippines, including Calayan, but said nothing about its status, while Kennedy *et al.* (2000) repeated the localities and called it a migrant.

We have spent hundreds of hours at night searching for owls on the main islands of the Philippines (Luzon, Mindoro, Palawan, Cebu, Panay, Negros, Bohol, Samar, Mindanao and Tawi-Tawi) and have never heard the Northern Boobook vocalise there. Further, BK has spent hundreds of night hours searching for owls in other parts

of the wintering range of the Northern Boobook (Thailand, Vietnam, Malaysia, Sumatra, Kalimantan, Java, Sulawesi and Flores; Vaurie 1965, White and Bruce 1986) and never heard it vocalise there. Further, we are unaware of any published or unpublished record of Northern Boobook heard spontaneously vocalising outside its breeding range. Thus it appears likely that the Northern Boobook does not spontaneously vocalise in the areas where it is a migrant and winter visitor. The characterisation in Kennedy *et al.* (2002) of the species as a migrant in the Philippines is therefore likely correct.

Vaurie (1965) listed the southern subspecies of the Northern Boobook *Ninox japonica totogo* as breeding and apparently resident on the Ryu Kyu Islands, Taiwan, and Lanyu (Botel Tobago), and stated that it probably breeds on the small islands between Taiwan and Luzon. We visited Calayan Island (196 km², c.70 km north of Luzon's

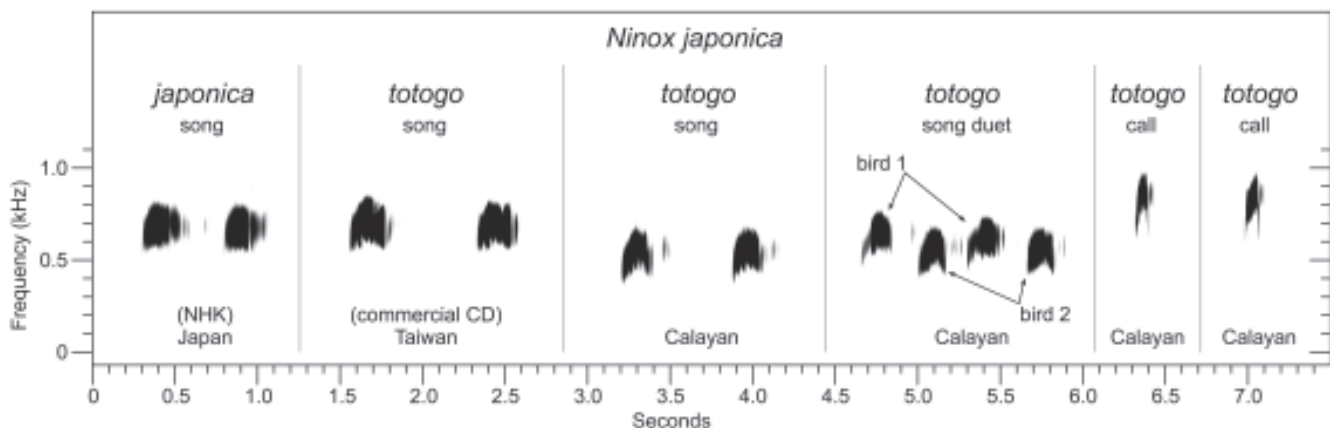


Figure 1. Comparison of songs of Northern Boobook *Ninox japonica* from Calayan, Japan and Taiwan. The call notes (on right) were uttered by a highly agitated bird.

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northern tip) in the Babuyan Islands of Cagayan Province, northern Philippines, from 20 to 26 March 2005, at which time the weather was mostly fair with a few rain showers. Northern Boobooks on Calayan were spontaneously highly vocal between c.45 minutes after sunset until c.45 minutes before sunrise. At 19°19.404'N 121°27.010'E, elevation 290 m, we tape-recorded their songs in a large patch of low primary forest (with some trees removed), interspersed with a few clearings for cultivation, and secondary forest.

The song and a call note that we recorded on Calayan are shown in Fig. 1, along with songs recorded on Taiwan and Japan. The Calayan song is similar to those recorded on Taiwan and Japan. However, the internote interval of the Taiwan and Calayan birds is longer than that of Japanese birds and could represent a difference between the two taxa (*N. j. totogo* on Taiwan and *N. j. japonica* on the main islands of Japan). However, our sample size is too small to permit analysis of variation, either within or between taxa. Further study is recommended on this question. The call (likely an alarm note), which was uttered by a very agitated bird in response to playback, was a short, thin, somewhat metallic yelp, *wuk* or *wut*, at a higher pitch than the song.

Once we tape-recorded the spontaneously vocalising Northern Boobook (only one bird was calling initially) we played back the recording 15–20 times over the course of an hour. With each playback the pair of owls became more agitated and called louder and more frequently. This strong response to playback suggests territoriality of a well-established pair of owls. As the Northern Boobook is not known to spontaneously vocalise outside its breeding grounds, this behavior strongly suggests that the boobooks breed on Calayan Island. While probable breeding does not prove residency, we expect that the Northern Boobook is resident on Calayan. A reassessment of the specimens

of *Ninox japonica* taken on Calayan might help to resolve the issues of residency and subspecific identification.

It is thus likely that breeding (and possibly residency) of the Northern Boobook in the Philippines is limited to the small islands north of Luzon (the taxon *N. j. totogo*), while migrant *N. j. japonica* is a migrant or winter visitor to the whole of the Philippines (Kennedy *et al.* 2000). The Elegant Scops Owl *Otus elegans* has a similar range to that of *N. j. totogo*, and is represented on Calayan by a resident race, *O. e. calayensis*, endemic to the Batan and Babuyan Islands, north of Luzon. This species was also spontaneously vocal during our visit.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

We wish to thank the mayor, Joseph Llopis, of Poblacion, Calayan, for his gracious hospitality and generous assistance throughout our stay on the island.

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Records of *Rhizothera (longirostris) dulitensis* in Sabah

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The Long-billed Partridge *Rhizothera longirostris* was first collected in Sabah at Paitan, near the north-east coast, by A. H. Everett in 1892. The specimen, long overlooked by authorities such as Moulton (1914) and Smythies (1957, 1960, 1981), still resides in the American Museum of Natural History (Sheldon *et al.* 2001). In the meantime, the species was listed by Comber (1971) from Tenom, Sabah, and was recorded at Danum Valley from field observations by Showler (1993). The species is confined to the Sundaic lowlands of south Tenasserim in Myanmar, peninsular Thailand, Peninsular Malaysia, Malaysian Borneo (Sabah and Sarawak), Brunei, and Kalimantan and Sumatra in Indonesia, and is considered Near Threatened (BirdLife International 2001).

Another taxon from Borneo, *Rhizothera dulitensis*, was described as a full species by Ogilvie-Grant (1895), but demoted to subspecies level as *R. longirostris dulitensis* by Peters (1934) who was followed by subsequent authors. It is distinguished by a broader grey breast band in males (c.10 cm *vs* 6 cm broad), and in both sexes by a whitish instead of rufous upper belly, darker upperparts, and more vermiculations on the greater secondary coverts and secondaries (Davison 1999). It is known from three localities in the eastern part of Sarawak: Mount Murud, Mount Dulit and Batu Song (Smythies 1999). This taxon was raised to species rank again by Davison (1999) and by Davison in Smythies (1999), using plumage characters that would satisfy the criteria of Helbig *et al.* (2002) but