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**INDONESIA – CONSERVING BIODIVERSITY
THE ENDEMIC BIRD AREA APPROACH**
by Sujantnika, Paul Jepson, Tonny R. Soehartono,
Mike J. Crosby and Ani Mardiasuti

1996. *BirdLife International, Jakarta*. Pp. 287, many b&w photos, line drawings and maps, 290 x 210 mm, softcover. No price given.

The perception of endemic bird areas as a key to the definition of more general conservation areas derives largely from the publication of *Putting Biodiversity on the Map: Priority Areas for Global Conservation*, published in 1992 by the International Council for Bird Preservation (ICBP). This new volume with detailed data and information on bird biodiversity and endemic bird areas in the Indonesian archipelago is another positive step towards effective conservation of biodiversity in South East Asia.

The 1992 ICBP data showed that many bird species had limited ranges and were confined to restricted areas or habitats. These restricted areas were often mountains, islands or isolated patches of forest. Comparative data on the occurrence of such groups of species with limited ranges and distributions led to the definition of 221 Endemic Bird Areas (EBAs) embracing 2484 species of birds.

The 1992 publication showed that the tropics are the most important climatic zone with 76% of all EBAs. Among tropical countries, Indonesia is by far the most important with 24 EBAs and 411 restricted range species of which 339 are found only in Indonesia. This is due largely to the thousands of islands which make up Indonesia, to the volcanic mountains which have participated in forming the island chains, and to the tropical climate and the fertile volcanic soils which have allowed rainforest to proliferate.

While conservation remains as an ideal in many countries, the actual implementation of measures to conserve habitats and species often takes second place to the needs of economics and development. One reason for this is often the lack of hard data on which to establish priorities for conservation, while the data on the economic value of a forest or a swamp can be defined readily in dollar terms. Accepting that there are difficulties in persuading administrators that conservation should have a priority when there is a need for land for food production for people, or for money for industrial development, many developing countries, including Indonesia, have acknowledged the value of conservation. The National Conservation Plan of 1982 saw the

definition of hundreds of areas throughout Indonesia for conservation at various levels of management protection, from National Parks to recreation areas. Sadly, the implementation of the National Conservation Plan has been slower than had been hoped.

The present publication provides added incentive for rapid implementation of conservation measures on many of the islands and forest areas of Indonesia. It supplies information in Bahasa Indonesia as well as in English, so bringing the information within the reach of many Government officials, developers, and the general public in Indonesia. It is an effective weapon in the fight for conservation and the rational use of natural resources. In 211 pages it provides detailed maps of the Indonesian EBAs and lists the bird species defining those areas.

This does not represent a comprehensive statement of the spatial occurrence of biodiversity within Indonesia. This is an attempt at the definition of particular types of habitats by comparative analysis of the known properties of the bird species occurring in the area. There are unquestionably other areas in Indonesia where there are high concentrations of species, which may be migratory, assembled for breeding on isolated islands, or using a particularly favourable environment. These species would not be assessed as forming EBAs if they range widely throughout the archipelago and beyond. The conservation of EBAs alone would not be a successful conclusion to the conservation of avian biodiversity in Indonesia as a whole.

The publication provides a detailed and clear statement of the limitations of the EBA approach to conservation. It details Government commitment to conservation objectives through formulation of the Biodiversity Action Plan for Indonesia, and as a signatory of the Biodiversity Convention, Laws and legislation related to conservation and environmental management are detailed.

The impact on conservation of developments in forestry, mining and the spread of agriculture and transmigration areas is discussed in some detail.

Each of the major islands is examined. EBAs on the islands are shown on maps and bird species listed for each area. Each page is packed with data, maps, diagrams and facts. The general habitat, distribution and conservation status of each bird species with a restricted range is listed. Existing conservation areas are recorded, as are any problems with them. Other areas which merit conservation on the basis of their EBA status are noted. Threats to particular species are recorded

and abundant references are given to cotemporary literature. Where information is lacking or further surveys are necessary this is noted. This becomes particularly noticeable in the case of Irian Jaya where the size of the areas and the relative inaccessibility of many of them provide many opportunities for future workers. Assessment of conservation areas then becomes a race against large scale logging and settlement. One table lists 81 areas that were proposed as conservation areas in the 1982 National Conservation Plan but which, along with scores of others, were never implemented. These 81 areas all lie within recently defined EBAs.

The question remains as to whether the conservation of EBAs will ensure that other taxa are also conserved. The validity of use of the EBAs as an indicator of wider conservation values is detailed in the 1992 publication by ICBP. Conservation areas based on EBAs seem likely to provide a reasonable degree of protection for areas of high species diversity of reptiles, amphibians and mammals. There is much less certainty that areas of high species diversity of taxa of the smaller invertebrates will be included within the EBAs.

This publication provides an impetus towards selective and rational conservation of areas which can be defined as of high conservation value. It is a fitting and appropriate volume to set alongside the set of books, again in both English and Bahasa Indonesia, on the Ecology of Indonesia. Instead of just documenting in research publications in English the decline in conservation values of the natural environment of Indonesia, these books, by virtue of their availability in Bahasa Indonesia, offer an opportunity to Indonesians, which they have not previously had, of direct personal involvement in conservation of their own natural resources, using the latest information, techniques, and data.

In a country where the rate of loss of tropical forest to development and agriculture proceeds at high speed, conservation of any area of known high species diversity is a valuable investment for the future. In remote areas of Irian Jaya, mining roads, and the creation of the Trans-Irian Highway, are opening up huge areas of rainforest for exploitation and development. The biodiversity of the entire region is under threat, not merely from development, but from the pressures of indigenous people displaced from their original environments and from natural and semi-natural disasters, such as forest fires that burn into peat soils and devastate entire ecosystems.

This book is invaluable. Any ornithologist who has

a chance to visit Indonesia should have this book with them. It should be an essential item in the library of any ecologist working in Indonesia. It will figure prominently in the libraries of the many environmental NGOs in Indonesia. It should be on the bookshelf of every logging company, road construction and mining company in Indonesia. It should be one of the best used books on those shelves.

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