

Book Reviews

Book Review Editor's Note: We are continuing to use the current currency codes. Thus Canadian dollars are CAD, U.S. dollars are USD, Euros are EUR, China Yuan Remimbi are CNY, Australian dollars are AUD and so on.

Birds of Borneo, Brunei, Sabah, Sarawak, and Kalimantan

By Susan Meyers. 2009. Princeton University Press, 41 William Street, Princeton, New Jersey. 08540. 272 pages., 29.95 USD Paper.

At 750 000 km², and somewhat larger than Saskatchewan, Borneo is the third largest island in the world. It has about 16 million socially diverse people living in parts of three countries – Indonesia [the provinces of East, South, West and Central Kalimantan], Malaya [the states of Sabah and Sarawak] and Brunei. It is surrounded by Malay Peninsula and Sumatra, Java, Sulawesi (Celebes) and the Philippines. In this relatively small space is crammed about 18 000 species of plants, over 200 species of mammals, and 630 species of birds. This diversity fills seven ecoregions.

In her book the author covers 633 species [430 resident], including an amazing 50 endemics. These range from the tiny enclave of House Crows that have recently arrived to the common and widespread Spotted Fantail. Borneo has some truly colourful birds. The flycatchers are not brown like ours but vibrant blue, orange yellow or red. The ten species of pitta [about the size of a short-tailed Phoebe] are even more multi-coloured. And the list goes on; minivets, sunbirds, orioles, leafbirds, kingfishers and trogons.

I thought 50 was high for number of endemics; 30 seemed more reasonable. The author has achieved this by including all the sub-species that are regarded as full species by some authorities, but not by others. So the Bornean Peacock-Pheasant is split from Malaysian Peacock-pheasant, the Bornean Bulbul from the Black-crested, the Pale-faced from the Flavescent Bulbul and so on. She also includes the Blue-banded Pitta which some references give a larger distribution than Borneo while others agree it is an endemic.

I was recently told the way to lose your hair was to edit a book that has multiple authors. I wonder if that holds for a book that has multiple artists? This book has contributions from 16 artists. Most of these people worked on Craig Robson's *A Guide to the Birds of Southeast Asia* [Also published by Princeton]. Indeed many of the illustrations have been recycled from that

publication. Nonetheless the illustrations are good. I have a few minor comments. I thought that the juvenile Chinese Sparrowhawk's belly barring was not defined enough, the Black Duck's facial pattern was a bit too strong and the spatulate tail of the Pomerine Jaeger did not show well.

For birders in Borneo, this is a good and useful book. The information given in the text is well-organised and gives all you need in a field guide, The range maps are easy to interpret. Rare vagrants, even if it is a single record, are included in the main text with the same detail as more common birds. I would have preferred the terms endemic and endangered to have been in red so they were more visible. Also the author does discuss "Similar species", but this section is a bit limited at times. There are several groups of look-alike birds for which a visiting birder could do with some extra help. I agree with Myers, though, when she discusses "Similar species" under snipe; she says "plumage differences have been overstated."

Sadly, there are two problems that mar this book's introduction. The illustration for Bornean Barbet is an incorrect repeat of the similar Blue-eared Barbet. The Temminck's Babbler is a repeat of the Abbots Babbler. This is most unlike this publisher and they have supplied an insert with the correct illustrations.

I have the paperback version that is missing the visual index and maps included in the cloth edition. These can be printed off the Princeton website should you choose to do so. I decided not to bother – at least at this time.

This is a great buy for the travelling birder and it will encourage people to take one of the many tours now being offered. Locals will also find it useful as, like many of the new Princeton guides, it is compact and light and easy to carry over difficult terrain.

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