

A CONTRIBUTION TO THE ORNITHOLOGY OF NORTH-WESTERN THAILAND

by

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SUMMARY

A short introduction covers the history of ornithological exploration of the area under review which is on the borders of Mae Hongson and Chiangmai provinces.

Short notes are given upon 25 selected species seen there during a two week stay in October/November 1964. The full list of 103 species seen is appended: it does not include any of the 10 or 12 birds seen and not definitely identified.

It is suggested that the area visited has the avifauna one might reasonably expect in foothills in north-western Thailand and it is pointed out that many species are found higher here than elsewhere on account of the height to which '*pa daeng*' here grows.

INTRODUCTION

The area covered by these notes lies just east of the border between Mae Hongson and Chiangmai Provinces and along the line of the new road from Hod to Mae Sarieng (Map. 1.). The road runs for a little over one hundred kilometres from Hod (altitude 263 m.), first along the valley of the Mae Chaem for 23 kms., then climbing in the next 12 kms. onto the Bo Luang plateau: which maintains a fairly even height of 1000-1100 m. for 18 kms.; between km. 55 and 56 near the valley of the Huai Mae Tho and the village of Ban Kong Loi, the road dips into the valley, which brings it down to 800 m., and then climbs out again and undulates over hills as far as km. 86 where it begins to descend into the valley south of Mae Sarieng.

The road has been constructed entirely within the last few years, and in the time of H.G. DEIGNAN's fieldwork in North Thailand, which resulted in his classic book "**The Birds of Northern Thailand**" (1945), no comparable access to these hills existed. Mr. DEIGNAN has

told me that he himself never got up onto Bo Luang plateau. On the other hand CHARLES TAN (or L.K.A. CHARLES) who was collecting for Mr. DEIGNAN crossed over to Mae Sarieng late in 1936. His itinerary is given (Ibid. p. 10) as:

- Sept. 30. 1936 Bo Luang, Doi Mae Thian.
- Oct. 1. 1936 Bo Sali, Mae Wen, Huai Mae Lit.
- Oct. 4. 1936 Huai Mae Ka Nai, Mae Ho, Doi Lak Saen,
Doi Mae Lai.
- Oct. 5. 1936 Doi Mae Lai.
- Oct. 6. 1936 Mae Sarieng.

After working in the valley of Mae Sarieng he crossed back between November 1st and 4th.

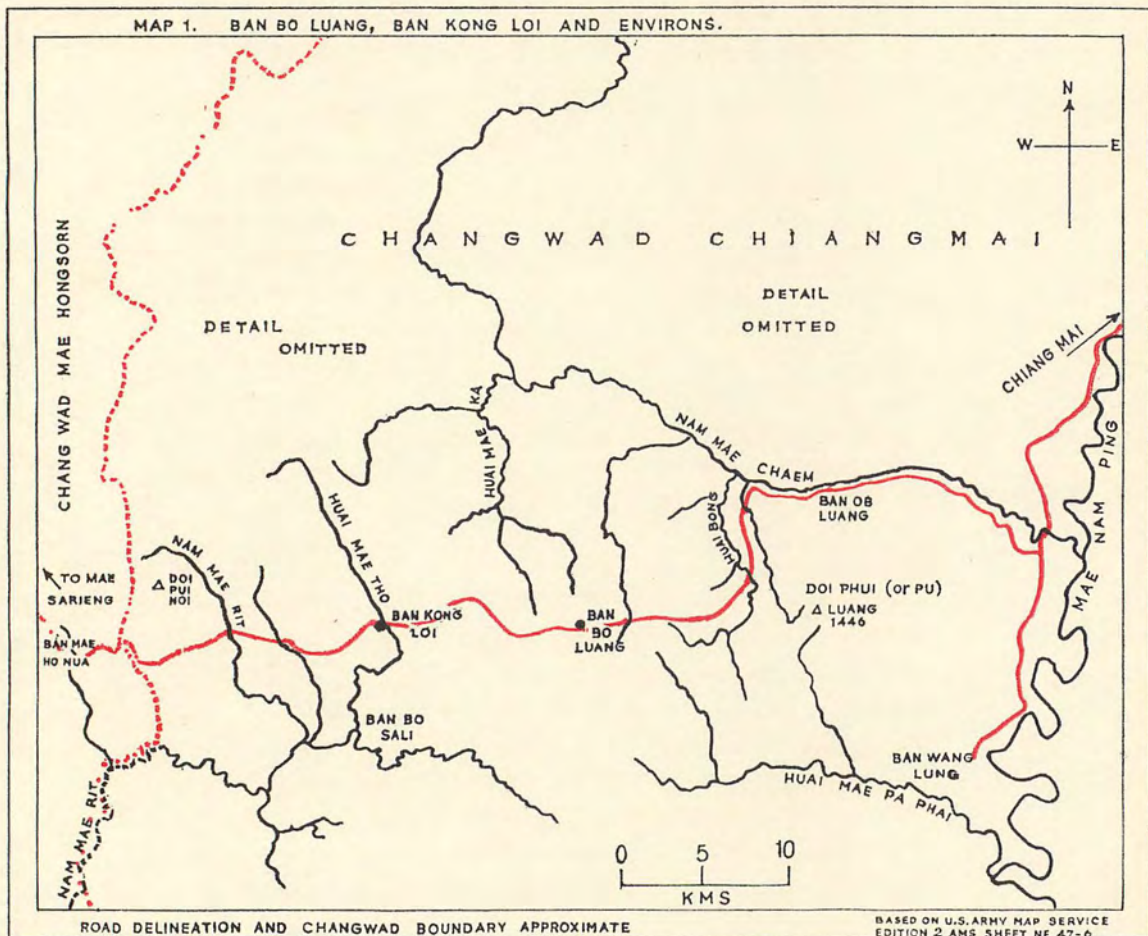
An effort to follow his travels on the map shows no Doi Mae Thian, but rising above Ban Mae Tian which lies on the old track from Bo Luang to Bo Sali is Doi Mon La-ang—a little over 1100 metres. Leaving Bo Sali he then crossed the Huai Mae Waen and probably followed down Nam Mae Rit to where the Nam Mae Ho joins it, up the latter stream to Ban Mae Ho, and over the hills for 2 or 3 kms. to the upper reaches of the Huai Mae Ka Nai which runs down into the valley and joins the Nam Mae Sarieng just east of the town. The maps do not show Doi Lak Saen or Doi Mae Lai; there is a Doi Luang Mae Lai but too near Bo Sali for the itinerary to make sense if it were that hill.

Twice in 1962 a group from **S.E.A.T.O. Medical Research Laboratory** including Nai KITTI THONGLONGYA were collecting in the Mae Sanam area near Bo Luang and certain birds collected are in the collections of that laboratory and of Dr. BOONSONG LEKAKUL.

The area has thus received only very limited attention.

From 30. 10. 64 until 14. 11. 64 the author and P.F. and V.M.S. CUMBERLEGE stayed in a pleasant bungalow in Ban Kong Loi put at our disposal most kindly by the construction company. During this time 103 species were definitely identified and a further 10 probably recorded. These notes result from those observations in the area,

MAP 1. BAN BO LUANG, BAN KONG LOI AND ENVIRONS.



NOTES UPON SELECTED SPECIES

Grey-faced Buzzard-Eagle (*Butastur indicus*)

Stated by DEIGNAN (op. cit) to be a regular but rather uncommon winter visitor to the plains and foothills. An excellent view was had of a bird at first perched and then in flight on 13. 11. 64. This was a little above the road at Km. 76 where a path leads north along a ridge onto Doi Pui Noi. The height of the road here is over 1000 metres.

Peregrine Falcon (*Falco peregrinus*).

There are five sight records and one specimen recorded by DEIGNAN (op. cit.). We saw one stooping on some prey in the valley near the bungalow on 30. 10. 64.

Kestrel (*Falco tinnunculus*).

Common in this area, at least during our time there.

Great-billed Parakeet (*Psittacula eupatria*).

The flock of 6-8 seen just south of the new road at Km. 32 on 10. 11. 64 is only slightly west of the range suggested by DEIGNAN (op. cit) but significant in that if birds reach one portion of the Bo Luang plateau then they may be expected to range all over it and throughout these hills.

Little Green Bee-eater (*Merops orientalis*).

DEIGNAN (op. cit.) records the species as a straggler to high altitudes and mentions occurrences in January and February at 4,000 ft. and over. It is thus worth mentioning that throughout our stay there was a flock in the valley of the Huai Mae Tho and that on 13. 11. 64 several were seen at a little over 1100 metres on Doi Pui Noi.

Black-billed Roller (*Coracias benghalensis*).

In dealing with the two Rollers (this species and *Eurystomas orientalis*) DEIGNAN considers this species a lowland bird and the other the natural inhabitant of "the hot, dry *pa daeng*". DEIGNAN (1945) defines *pa daeng* as follows:

"*Pa daeng* ('red jungle') . . . is a deciduous open forest of small or medium-sized trees (the dominant species being *Shorea obtusa*

and *Pentacme siamensis* of the family *Dipterocarpaceae*), with an abundant herbaceous undergrowth, chiefly of grasses. It is usually found at elevations below 2,500 ft. on rather poor lateritic, sandy or rocky soils . . .").

In general I would concur; but he makes another point and that is that whilst *Eurystomas orientalis* is common east of the Khun Tan range it is rare to the west. I suspect that this is in general true and certainly within the area under review, careful search of its normal habitat failed to produce it. It's ecological niche appears to have been taken over by this species which was common in the *pa daeng* and found up to 1100 metres on Doi Pui Noi.

Rufous-bellied Pied Woodpecker (*Dendrocopos hyperythrus*).

This problematical Woodpecker (considered by some to be a palearctic edition of the New World Sapsuckers and possessed of the call of a *Dinopium*) was rated as rare by DEIGNAN (op. cit.). There is apparently no record yet in print of the fact that the S.E.A.T.O. expedition to the area collected almost a dozen specimens near Mae Sanam which now repose in the collections of S.E.A.T.O. MEDICAL RESEARCH LAB. and Dr. BOONSONG LEKAKUL. It can I think be stated that this Woodpecker is one of the commonest in these hills. We saw between ten and fifteen birds on 5 dates over 6 different localities in the roadside forests from Km. 32 to as far west as Km. 65. A female was taken on 8. 11. 64 after we had established that the bird was in fact well distributed.

Dusky Crag Martin (*Hirundo concolor*).

One was seen on 10. 11. 64 at Km. 32. The nearest likely rock-faces were visible on Doi Pu Luang just to the East across the valley.

Small Minivet (*Pericrocotus cinnamomeus*).

DEIGNAN (op. cit.) says "the status and distribution . . . of this small minivet are far from clear". It would seem therefore useful to add any records. During the period we saw small (12-15 birds) flocks three times: twice they were attached to large mixed hunting parties, but keeping near the treetops, on the hills of the Bo Luang plateau: on the other occasion a flock was found near Ob Luang in the valley of the Mae Chaem.

Red-billed Blue Pie (*Cissa erythrorhyncha*).

DEIGNAN (op. cit.) mentions flocks of 5-6 birds as the usual. In these hills and at the particular time of year with which we are concerned the flocks varied between 6 and 15 with the mean nearer the higher limit.

Rufous Tree-Pie (*Crypsirina vagabunda*).

Only one seen, on 4. 11. 64 along the west bank of the Mae Chaem river about 11-12 kms. upstream from Ban Sop Mae Chaem. This bird has a very local distribution.

Great Tit (*Parus major*).

DEIGNAN says "The range . . . is strictly limited to those districts in which grow fairly extensive pine forests . . . I have taken it on the Bo Luang plateau at 3,500 ft." In fact the specimen(s) from Bo Luang must have been collected by CHARLES and DEIGNAN himself has not been up onto the Bo Luang plateau; had he, he would have known that there are no "fairly extensive pine forests" there, in fact very few pines at all; and, that the Great Tit is common in spite of that.

Spotted Babbler (*Pellorneum ruficeps*).

One caught on 2. 11. 64 had its primaries and secondaries in sheath, there was no sign of moult elsewhere, though the tail feathers appeared unworn and may have been freshly moulted.

Rubythroat (*Erithacus calliope*).

To the list of birds found in the hills—only three instances given by DEIGNAN (op. cit.)—can be added two males caught, ringed and released at Ban Kong Loi (800 m.) on 2. 11. 64 and 5. 11. 64.

Black-backed Forktail (*Enicurus immaculatus*).

DEIGNAN (op. cit.) records only 4 specimens all taken at the base of Doi Mae Kong Ka, which lies I believe in Mae Hongson province. A pair, living along the small stream on the east side of the valley of the Huai Mae Tho, was discovered by P.F.C. and subsequently seen on several occasions by both P.F.C. and the author. This species should now be looked for anywhere in the hills that separate the

Salween drainage from the Mae Ping drainage. This is thought to be the first record for Chiangmai province.

Pied Bushchat (*Saxicola caprata*).

Generally considered a bird of the lowlands and only recorded from the hills in the valley below Pha Mon on Doi Ang Ka according to DEIGNAN. It is common in the rice-growing valleys throughout these hills: such valleys being usually at elevations of 800-900 metres.

Thick-billed Reed Warbler (*Phragamaticola aedon*).

"A common winter visitor to the lowlands . . . extreme dates . . . November 21 . . . and May 10 . . . I have once found it . . . at 2,200 feet . . ." DEIGNAN (op. cit.). A bird caught and ringed on 3. 11. 64 at Ban Kong Loi (800 m.) is both earlier and higher.

Sooty Flycatcher (*Muscicapa sibirica*).

Hard to distinguish in the field from *M. latirostris*, but prior experience with *M. latirostris* in Thailand, and more recently experience of *M. sibirica* in Kashmir has convinced me that the bird seen in the hills just west of Ban Kong Loi on 7.11.64 was of this species, which is of rather uncertain status in Thailand.

White-browed Flycatcher (*Muscicapa superciliaris*).

Recorded by DEIGNAN (op. cit.) as a rare winter visitor, and he goes on to mention that his records extend from 5th December to March 20th and come only from Doi Suthep and Doi Chiang Dao. We saw 2 or more males near Km. 32 on 6.11.64 and another near Km. 65 on 8.11.64. They were associating with parties of *Nectarinia asiatica*, *Dendrocopos canicapillus*, *Sitta europaea*, and *Rhipidura aureola*.

White-browed Fantail (*Rhipidura aureola*).

In our area this species can without doubt be called common. It was a basic constituent species in all the mixed feeding parties, and was seen all over the area on most days.

Brown Shrike (*Lanius cristatus*).

DEIGNAN (op. cit.) records a very local lowland distribution. It is therefore relevant to mention that this Shrike was present in

some numbers in the cultivated valleys in these hills. Three immature birds were caught, ringed and released.

Black-collared Starling (*Sturnus nigricollis*).

To the single colony above 1,500 feet reported by DEIGNAN (op. cit.) on Doi Ang Ka, which incidentally still exists, can be added a small colony of 2 or 3 pairs near the village of Mae Sanam on the Bo Luang plateau.

Purple Sunbird (*Nectarinia asiatica*).

DIEGNAN (op. cit.) remarks "I have never noted it at an elevation in excess of 1,500 feet". We saw individuals near Ban Kong Loi and at Km. 32, in both places the elevation was in the order of 850-900 metres.

Scarlet-backed Flowerpecker (*Dicaeum cruentatum*)

"... ascends the hills to about 1,800 feet" DEIGNAN (op. cit.). Certainly present in the woods surrounding the valley of the Huai Mae Tho at Ban Kong Loi (elevation 800 m.)—where several were seen clearly, and many others thought to be this species seen and heard.

Common Rosefinch (*Carpodacus erythrinus*).

The earliest date for this winter visitor that is given by DEIGNAN (op. cit.) is 3rd December. A male seen by V.M.S.C. on the slopes of Doi Pui Noi on 12.11.64 appears therefore to be the earliest yet recorded.

GENERAL COMMENTS

A glance at the appendix, which shows a complete list of all the species seen during our stay in an area restricted by us to the valley of the Mae Chaem, and the hills over which the road to Mae Sarieng runs, will show what a rich area this is.

The main conclusions to be drawn from our notes and particularly those detailed above are:

1. That the area is as yet very ill known in its ornithology.
2. That because of the predominance of *pa daeng* and open

hill forest over these hills which rise to moderate heights the altitudinal upper limits of many species must be revised upwards.

3. That certain species thought to be of only marginal occurrence in Northern Thailand are likely to be present to a greater extent than was thought likely by DEIGNAN when writing in 1945.

It is suggested that these hills have an avifauna which can be called that of foothills, and since they have by and large got few pines and no cloud forest their vegetation supports such an avifauna to the general exclusion of montane forms.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My grateful thanks must go in the first place to Mr. & Mrs. CUMBERLEGE who arranged the holiday, and to the THAI CONSTRUCTION SYNDICATE CO., who so kindly put their bungalow at our disposal and did us many favours. To Nai PRIEW LINPISARL who was exceedingly helpful to us, and to Mr. KENNETH MACCORMIC of U.S.I.S. for help over maps, must also go many thanks. I have also to thank Dr. BOONSONG LEKAGUL for permission to inspect his collection and Dr. J. MARSHALL for access to the collection of S.E.A.T.O. MEDICAL RESEARCH LABORATORY.

I owe a special debt to Mr. HERBERT G. DEIGNAN for discussion on this subject and for reading my draft and commenting upon it, and to Messrs. JOE T. MARSHALL, PETER F. CUMBERLEGE and J. ALAN TUBB who have also read the draft and commented.

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APPENDIX I

Complete list of species identified :

<i>Ardeola ralloides</i>	<i>Coracias bengalensis</i>
<i>Anas querquedula</i>	<i>Upupa epops</i>
<i>Pernis ptilorhynchus</i>	<i>Megalaima zeylanica</i>
<i>Accipiter badius</i>	<i>Megalaima haemacephala</i>
<i>Butastur indicus</i>	<i>Picus erythropygius</i>
<i>Butastur liventer</i>	<i>Picus chlorolophus</i>
<i>Spilornis cheela</i>	<i>Dinopium javanense</i>
<i>Microhierax caerulescens</i>	<i>Dryocopus javensis</i>
<i>Polihierax insignis</i>	<i>Dendrocopos hyperythrus</i>
<i>Falco peregrinus</i>	<i>Dendrocopos canicapillus</i>
<i>Falco tinnunculus</i>	<i>Chrysocolaptes lucidus</i>
<i>Francolinus pintadeanus</i>	<i>Hirundo concolor</i>
<i>Gallus gallus</i>	<i>Hirundo daurica</i>
<i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>	<i>Tephrodornis pondicerianus</i>
<i>Psittacula eupatria</i>	<i>Tephrodornis virgatus</i>
<i>Psittacula finschii</i>	<i>Coracina novaehollandiae</i>
<i>Phaenicophaeus tristis</i>	<i>Pericrocotus roseus</i>
<i>Centropus sinensis</i>	<i>Pericrocotus cinnamomeus</i>
<i>Centropus toulou</i>	<i>Pericrocotus flammeus</i>
<i>Otus bakkamoena</i>	<i>Aegithina tiphia</i>
<i>Hemiprocne longipennis</i>	<i>Chloropsis aurifrons</i>
<i>Alcedo atthis</i>	<i>Chloropsis cochinchinensis</i>
<i>Halcyon smyrnensis</i>	<i>Pycnonotus melanicterus</i>
<i>Merops leschenaulti</i>	<i>Pycnonotus jocosus</i>
<i>Merops orientalis</i>	<i>Pycnonotus aurigaster</i>

<i>Hypsipetes propinquus</i>	<i>Myophonus caeruleus</i>
<i>Hypsipetes madagascariensis</i>	<i>Seicercus burkii</i>
<i>Dicrurus adsimilis</i>	<i>Phragmaticola aedon</i>
<i>Dicrurus leucophaeus</i>	<i>Orthotomus sutorius</i>
<i>Dicrurus paradiseus</i>	<i>Prinia rufescens</i>
<i>Dicrurus hottentotus</i>	<i>Muscicapa sibirica</i>
<i>Dicrurus aeneus</i>	<i>Muscicapa parva</i>
<i>Oriolus xanthornus</i>	<i>Muscicapa superciliaris</i>
<i>Garrulus glandarius</i>	<i>Muscicapa banyumas</i>
<i>Cissa chinensis</i>	<i>Rhipidura aureola</i>
<i>Cissa erythrorhyncha</i>	<i>Hypothymis azurea</i>
<i>Crypsirina vagabunda</i>	<i>Motacilla alba</i>
<i>Parus major</i>	<i>Motacilla caspica</i>
<i>Sitta europaea</i>	<i>Anthus hodgsoni</i>
<i>Sitta frontalis</i>	<i>Anthus novae-seelandiae</i>
<i>Pellorneum ruficeps</i>	<i>Lanius cristatus</i>
<i>Macronous gularis</i>	<i>Lanius nasutus</i>
<i>Garrulax monilegerus</i>	<i>Lanius collurioides</i>
<i>Garrulax leucolophus</i>	<i>Sturnus nigricollis</i>
<i>Garrulax chinensis</i>	<i>Sturnus tristis</i>
<i>Erithacus calliope</i>	<i>Gracula religiosa</i>
<i>Copsychus saularis</i>	<i>Nectarinia asiatica</i>
<i>Copsychus malabaricus</i>	<i>Dicaeum concolor</i>
<i>Enicurus immaculatus</i>	<i>Dicaeum cruentatum</i>
<i>Saxicola caprata</i>	<i>Lonchura striata</i>
<i>Saxicola ferrea</i>	<i>Carpodacus erythrinus</i>
<i>Monticola solitarius</i>	