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Address: J. Cabot, Estación Biológica de Doñana, Pabellón del Perú, Avda Ma Luisa s/n. Apdo 1056, Sevilla 41013, Spain.

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## Notes on Philippine Birds, 16. First records of the Red-tailed Tropicbird *Phaethon rubricauda* and Merlin *Falco columbarius* from the Philippines

by Robert S. Kennedy

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Over the past 15 years, with increased field activity in the Philippines and with the scouring of museums in preparation for the forthcoming *The Birds of the Philippines* (British Ornithologists' Union Check-list No. 12) by E. C. Dickinson, R. S. Kennedy & K. C. Parkes, no fewer than 8 species of birds have been added to the Philippine list. Of these, Javan Pond-Heron *Ardeola speciosa* (Kennedy *et al.* 1984), Gadwall *Anas strepera* (Kennedy & Dickinson 1980) and Baer's Pochard *Aythya baeri* (Glass *et al.* 1979) are based on field observations; Red Phalarope *Phalaropus fulicaria* (Wischusen *et al.* 1984), Dusky Warbler *Phylloscopus fuscatus* (Temme 1976) and Red-breasted Flycatcher *Ficedula parva* (McGowan & Pritchard 1990) are confirmed by recently obtained specimens; and Common Ringed Plover *Charadrius hiaticula* (Gonzales & Kennedy 1989) and Mallard *Anas platyrhynchos* (Kennedy *et al.* in prep.) are from previously unpublished records of specimens in the Philippine National Museum. Here I report on 2 additional species new to the Philippine list.

### RED-TAILED TROPICBIRD *Phaethon rubricauda*

During the round-the-world cruise of the research vessel 'Dana', Jespersen (1933) reportedly sighted one individual sometime on 22 May 1929 in Philippine waters. The noon position of the boat that day was 19°09'N, 120°05'E, c. 40 km off the northwest coast of Luzon, and it apparently reached Aparri on the north coast of Luzon that evening. Although Gould *et al.* (1974) listed this sighting (as well as a Taiwan



record by Hachisuka & Udagawa 1951), it was not listed by Delacour & Mayr (1946) or duPont (1971), who either were not aware of the record or did not accept it. These authors would have had good reason for rejecting the record as Jespersen (1933) indicated that his records based on observations were not always "absolutely certain".

Regardless of the validity of Jespersen's record, we now have a positive record of a Red-tailed Tropicbird from the Philippines. In May or June 1988, a ringed (U.S. Fish & Wildlife ring number 544-51684) individual was caught in the open sea off Socorro, Surigao del Norte, Bucas Grande Island (northeast of Mindanao) by Dominico Toren, a fisherman from Doyos, Carrascal, Surigao del Sur on Mindanao. The identification was confirmed by a colour photograph that clearly showed details of the bird, including the red tail feathers, and by the Office of Migratory Bird Management of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. The bird had been ringed on 12 January 1969 on Kate Island, Eniwetok Atoll, Marshall Islands, c. 3800 km distant, by the Smithsonian Institution's Pacific Ocean Biological Survey Program.

The bird is assigned to *Phaethon rubricauda melanorhynchos*, the subspecies known from the Marshall Islands (Dorst & Mougín 1979).

The Red-tailed Tropicbird ranges widely across the tropical and subtropical Pacific (Gould *et al.* 1974) and it is surprising that it has not been confirmed from the Philippines before now. I suspect, however, that this and many other species previously unrecorded from the archipelago are regular visitors to pelagic waters in the Philippines, especially in the Pacific.

#### **MERLIN** *Falco columbarius*

The Merlin is not known from Taiwan (Severinghaus & Blackshaw 1976, Yen 1979), nor are there any previous records from the Philippines (duPont 1971). It therefore came as a great surprise to find among the dozen or so specimens of Philippine birds in the Cincinnati Museum of Natural History (CMNH) a female Merlin (CMNH 27766), collected 28 November 1928 by Lieut. Stuart from Calamba, Laguna Province in central Luzon. The label attached to the specimen indicated that it was part of the "Philippine Collection of Lieut. L. R. Wolfe, U.S. Army" and carried the number A247. This is the first record of this species from the Philippines. The species must be accidental to the archipelago and will likely not be recorded again for some time.

The specimen was identified as *F. c. pacificus* by H. C. Oberholser in 1958. I have confirmed this by comparing it with other individuals of this subspecies in the CMNH collection.

This Merlin was part of the Herbert W. Brandt Memorial Collection of 6000 specimens, purchased from Brandt's widow by the University of Cincinnati in 1956 and transferred to the CMNH in 1971. Brandt amassed this collection through personal collecting and by purchasing specimens from collectors all over the world. There are no records in the CMNH that indicate when he received the specimen or from whom he obtained it. Surprisingly, Wolfe (1938) does not mention this important record in his paper on the birds of central Luzon, but aside from this omission, there is no reason to question its validity.



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Address: Dr R. S. Kennedy, Cincinnati Museum of Natural History, 1720 Gilbert Ave., Cincinnati, Ohio 45202 USA.

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## IN BRIEF

### THE GENDER OF THE AVIAN GENUS *BATIS*

Clancey (1989, *Bull. Brit. Orn. Cl.* 109: 122) submits that the gender of the genus *Batis* Boie 1833 (Afrotropical flycatchers of the family Platysteiridae or Muscicapidae) should be treated as of the feminine gender on the basis of consensus of usage over the past century or more. However,



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