

NOTEBOOK

Giant Scops Owl *Otus [Mimizuku] gurneyi* restored to the Samar avifauna

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The Giant Scops Owl *Otus gurneyi*, formerly placed in the genus *Mimizuku* until it was shown to sit within the broad *Otus* clade (Miranda *et al.* 1997, 2011), is endemic to the Philippines, where it is known with certainty from the islands of Mindanao and adjacent Siargao and Dinagat (duPont & Rabor 1973, Dickinson *et al.* 1991, Collar *et al.* 1999). On the basis of a specimen in the Philippine National Museum it has also been treated as present on the island of Samar (Collar *et al.* 1999), but following the identification of this specimen as a juvenile Philippine Eagle Owl *Bubo philippensis* the species was duly removed from this island's avifauna (Allen & Collar 2008).

However, on 5 August 2010, on a forest trail in Barangay Surok, Borongan, eastern Samar, Bruce Young, who was then working on a potable water system for the barangay, encountered a hunter who was carrying a collection of large lizards and an owl, bundled together on a pole (Plate 1). Some of

the lizards were apparently still alive. The hunter said that the lizards were abundant in the area and made good eating, and allowed a photograph of his catch to be taken. Interested in the identity of the lizards, in May 2012 Mr Young sent a copy of the photograph to Ipat Luna and Joey Soriano who, having identified the owl, kindly forwarded it to us. The owl is evidently a Giant Scops Owl—it's medium size, lack of bright yellow iris and dark eye-ring, bold pale buff superciliary line and edge of facial disc, short, teardrop-shaped streaks on the underparts and crown streaks with transverse bars distinguish it from the Philippine Eagle Owl, which is known to occur on Samar.

Distressing as it is to witness animals in such circumstances, the record at least offers the encouragement that the Giant Scops Owl has a wider range than was recently believed. Indeed, if the species is present on Samar it is also likely to occur on Leyte, since the avifaunas of the two

Plate 1. Giant Scops Owl *Otus gurneyi* tied on hunter's pole, Barangay Surok, Borongan, eastern Samar, Philippines, 5 August 2010.



islands are, or at least were, virtually identical (Parkes 1973, Dickinson *et al.* 1991).

A number of species share a range on the three large islands of Mindanao, Samar and Leyte, usually with the addition of Bohol and Basilan, e.g. Mindanao Bleeding-heart *Gallicolumba crinigera*, Black-faced Coucal *Centropus melanops*, Azure-breasted Pitta *Pitta steerii*, Yellowish Bulbul *Ixos everetti*, Streaked Ground Babbler *Ptilocichla mindanensis*, Brown Tit Babbler *Macronus striaticeps* and Little Slaty Flycatcher *Ficedula basilanica* (Dickinson 2003); so the record of Giant Scops Owl from Samar fits an established pattern.

However, several of the species listed above are differentiated at the subspecies level between Mindanao on the one side and Samar and Leyte on the other, and in some cases the levels of morphological differentiation have been sufficient to redefine species limits in taxa spread across these islands: Northern Silvery Kingfisher *Alcedo flumenicola* and Southern Silvery Kingfisher *A. argentata*, Mindanao Broadbill *Eurylaimus steerii* and Visayan Broadbill *E. samarensis*, Mindanao Pygmy Babbler *Stachyris plateni* and Visayan Pygmy Babbler *S. pygmaea*, and Mindanao Miniature Babbler *Micromacronus sordidus* and Visayan Miniature Babbler *M. leytensis* (Collar 2006, 2011), plus Mindanao Blue Fantail *Rhipidura superciliaris* and Visayan Blue Fantail *R. samarensis* (Sánchez-González & Moyle 2011).

Future searchers for the Giant Scops Owl (and other species) in Samar and Leyte might therefore bear in mind the possibility that the birds on these islands may prove to be taxonomically distinct from those of Mindanao.

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