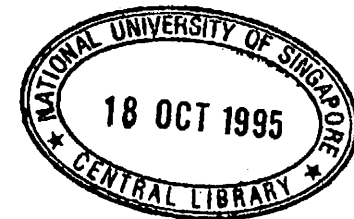


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Notes of the Terrestrial Vertebrate Fauna of Tawau Hills Park, Sabah

Robert B. Stuebing and Shukor Mohd. Nor

Abstract

An expedition to survey the terrestrial vertebrate fauna of Tawau Hills Park in South-eastern Sabah was made from November 26-December 3, 1989. Of a total of 129 vertebrate species found, 31 were frogs, 15 reptiles, 60 birds and 23 were mammals. Anuran diversity was surprisingly high, while the diversity of other vertebrate groups was comparable to that in other lowland forest reserves of eastern Sabah. Large mammals such as orangutan and rhinoceros are apparently absent, although the habitat within the Park appears to be suitable for them.

Abstrak

Satu ekspedisi ke kawasan Taman Buki-Bukit Tawau di bahagian Tenggara Negeri Sabah telah diadakan pada 26 November-3 Disember, 1989, yang bertujuan untuk menilaikan kepelbagaian flora dan fauna di kawasan tersebut. Sejumlah 129 spesies vertebrata darat telah dirakamkan, yang terdiri daripada 31 spesies katak, 15 spesies reptilia, 60 spesies burung dan 23 spesies mamalia. Kepelbagaian kumpulan anura didapati agak tinggi, tetapi kepelbagaian bagi kumpulan vertebrata yang lain tidak jauh berbeza daripada kepelbagaian yang telah dilaporkan bagi beberapa kawasan hutan tanah pamah yang lain di bahagian timur Sabah. Mamalia besar seperti badak sumbu ataupun mawas nampaknya tidak wujud di kawasan Taman ini, walaupun habitat di kawasan tersebut kelihatan sesuai untuk spesies-spesies berkenaan.

INTRODUCTION

Tawau Hills Park is located in the southeast corner of Sabah, and was gazetted as a park in 1979 in order to protect the forested watershed above Tawau. The area lies on volcanic soils and consists of a mixture of both primary and disturbed lowland and hill dipterocarp forest. Its southern bound-

The long-tailed giant rat, *Leopoldamys sabanus*, usually common in primary and logged forests in Sabah, was not caught. The long-tailed porcupine (*Trichys fasciculata*) was trapped in primary forest along the Tawau River.

No large mammals were seen, though deers (*Cervus, Muntiacus*) are likely to be present as Davies and Payne (1981) reported both rusa and kijang deer in nearby Brumas. Orangutan had been previously rumoured to inhabit the northwest corner of the Park, but no confirmation could be made. There was no evidence for the presence of rhinoceros (*Dicerorhinus sumatrensis*), present in both Tabin Reserve and Danum Valley (Jum, 1987; Ahmad, 1987). It is a reasonable assumption, however, that small populations of both rhinoceros and orangutan could survive (if introduced) in the Tawau Hills area.

While one of the primary reasons for gazetting Tawau Hills as part of the Sabah Parks system involved conservation of the watershed of the Tawau river, there is increasing appreciation of the Park's significance as a wildlife preserve. The area is unique within Sabah as it possesses a primary forest habitat growing on fertile soils of volcanic origin. Virtually all other such areas in Malaysia have already been cleared or are earmarked for agriculture. Soil fertility, besides being desirable for agriculture, is known to be an important factor in maintaining a healthy and diverse wildlife community (Bailey, 1982).

CONCLUSION

Tawau Hills Park represents an important reserve for terrestrial vertebrate diversity in Sabah. It has been found to possess a rich vertebrate community, comparable to other lowland wildlife preserves in Sabah. The amphibian community was found to be the most impressive, and further research on it should be encouraged. Though some of Sabah's large, threatened mammals are absent, introduction of rhinoceros or orangutan into the area on an experimental basis should not be ruled out.

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