

Notes

DISTRIBUTION OF THE MICRONESIAN MEGAPODE *MEGAPODIUS LAPEROUSE* IN THE NORTHERN MARIANA ISLANDS.—Baker (1951) gives the geographic range of the endangered species, *Megapodius laperouse laperouse* Gaimard, as including the Mariana Islands of Asuncion, Agrihan, Pagan, Alamagan, Saipan, Tinian, Aguijan, Rota, and Guam and indicates that the bird is probably extinct on Saipan, Tinian, Rota and Guam.

To the above localities, the islands of Uracas (Farallon de Pajaros), Maug, Guguan, Sarigan, and Anatahan may now be added. This would extend the total known distribution, past or present, of this megapode to include all islands of the Marianas chain except Farallon de Medinilla, for which adequate reports are lacking.

The new localities are based on sightings made during botanical trips to the northern Marianas in the summers of 1971 and 1972. They include: one juvenile on Anatahan, adult pairs on Sarigan, Guguan, and Maug, and a single adult on Uracas. In addition to the sightings, calls of the birds were heard on Asuncion, and residents of Agrihan, Alamagan, and Pagan reported that a bird fitting the description of *Megapodius laperouse* is present on these islands. Local names given for the bird include: "sasangal" (Carolinian man of Agrihan), "sesengi" (Chamorro man of Alamagan), and "sasangat" (Chamorro-Carolinian children of Pagan).

Additionally, residents of Tinian report that a bird fitting the description of a megapode and called "sasengay" is still present on the island (Owen, 1974). Mr. Owen also reports having seen megapodes on Aguijan Island in 1955.

By distribution, the bird sighted would be *M.l. laperouse* Gaimard, however no specimens were collected and the descriptions given in Baker (1951) are not complete enough to allow for field distinctions between this subspecies and *M.l. senex* Hartlaub, which occurs in Palau.

All birds seen had the characteristic shape of a megapode similar to live specimens seen in Palau by the author. Adult birds were basically grey to black-brown with a slight crest of dark feathers on the crown and lighter, whitish grey feathers behind the crest and on the face. Feathers of the neck region were thinned and

exposed the reddish brown skin below. One bird appeared to have two magenta spots on its neck, but it could not be determined whether these spots were exposed skin or actual feather color. Bills were stout and orange, legs sturdy and yellow to orange with darker toes. Eyes were dark brown to orange brown when struck by light.

The juvenile differed from adults in having light flecks on a brown grey background and a less pronounced crest on its crown.

All birds had a gentle manner and appeared undisturbed by human presence when approached within 1–4 m. They seemed to be carrying on normal activities except for the lone individual on Uracas which was apparently surprised and walked away.

Undisturbed birds, including the juvenile, were involved in scratching and pecking in humus and dirt, and making a cluck-cooing call. The juvenile and one of the adults proved capable of limited flight, with the latter flying downward across a ravine for some 10 m and landing on a branch. Of the four sightings of adults, three were of pairs, and there seemed to be an exchange of calls by which the pairs remained in touch while foraging in different directions.

No nest mounds were seen; however there were tunnels in the volcanic cinder sand on Guguan and Uracas, the latter filled with humus. The steep terrain on Uracas would have made it very difficult for a megapode to build a mound nest with a circumference of 30 m and height of several meters as described by Takatsuk (*In* Baker, 1951) for *M.l. laperouse*.

The sighting on Uracas is especially notable as this young volcanic island possesses very little vegetation. The islands of Uracas, Maug, Guguan, and Asuncion are uninhabited by man and relatively undisturbed. Aguijan is uninhabited but overrun by goats, and Farallon de Medinilla is uninhabited and was undisturbed until used as a bombing range by the U. S. military in recent years. On formerly inhabited Sarigan, the megapode and particularly its nest, would seem to be threatened by the numerous rooting pigs and monitor lizards on the island. All other islands are inhabited.

REFERENCES CITED

- Baker, R. H.** 1951. The avifauna of Micronesia, its origin, evolution and distribution. Univ. Kansas Publ., Museum of Natural History 3(1): 1-359.
- Owen, R. P.** 1974. Environmental impact study on the terrestrial fauna and flora of Tinian with respect to the proposed establishment of a U. S. military base on that island. Prepared for the U. S. Air Force and Trust Territory Government.
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