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by Jabang Nurdin

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Observed behaviour of Crested Serpent Eagle (*Spilornis cheela*) in Wild boar (*Sus scrofa*)-Wallow

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INTRODUCTION:

Due to the role of raptors as top predators, they are considered important for maintaining healthy ecosystems. As such, in Indonesia, all diurnal raptor species are now protected by law (UU No 5/1990 and PP No 7 & 8/1991) (Rakhman et al., 2012). One of the most common raptor encountered in Indonesian forests is the Crested Serpent Eagle, *Spilornis cheela* (Prawiradilaga et al., 2003). These birds perch for long hours, possibly as part of a sit-and-wait hunting and foraging strategy (Liu, 2011). As their name indicates, serpent eagles hunt small animals like snakes, amphibians and reptiles as well as rodents and other small vertebrates (Gokula, 2012). Their reptilian and amphibian prey often lives in aquatic areas, serpent eagles are often found near water, and they hunt in and around water bodies on the forest floor (Wells, 1999; Gokula, 2012). Animal wallows (large muddy puddles where species like wild boars and rhinos often bath) may provide an important water source for forest eagles and their prey species, and may also provide minerals or resources that benefit the Crested Serpent Eagle. Our research seeks to explore the importance of animal wallows for these forest dwelling eagles.

MATERIALS AND METHODS:

We conducted camera trapping around wallow sites to observe the frequency of use and behaviour of raptors at wallows. Between September and December 2012 and April and July 2013, we placed three camera traps at wild boar-wallows inside the Biology Education and Research Forest (Hutan Pendidikan dan Penelitian Biologi—HPPB) at Andalas University, West Sumatera (Sumatra) Indonesia. Cameras took pictures and 5 second videos at both day and night (using infrared flash unseen by animals), and were set to be triggered a maximum of once per minute. All photos and videos had date and time stamps.



RESULTS AND DISCUSSION:

Of total 122 days of observations in three different wallow sites, we obtained 113 photos and 150 video recording (of 5-second each). Twenty seven photos and twenty two videos recording were of Crested Serpent-Eagle, representing 13 unique visiting times amounting to 23.8 % of total photos taken at wallows. Crested Serpent Eagle visited wallows as single birds and only during the day (08.00 hrs to 17.00 hrs). The Crested Serpent Eagle's behaviour at wallow was as follows: it descended 1-2 m from the wallow, then walked into the pit (water puddle area) where it spent two to four minutes, often putting the head down to the water, either drinking or searching for prey, before it walked out of the water, and then flew away.

CONCLUSIONS:

The high frequency with which the Crested Serpent Eagles visited wallows indicates that it is an important habitat or resource for them in Indonesian forests. They visit wallows: possibly to hunt, clean themselves, drink water, or for geophagy to gain essential minerals. We conclude that more research is needed on the behaviour of Crested Serpent Eagles at wallows to understand why they are important for eagles living in closed tropical rain forests.

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