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CHAPTER 1

BIRD SPECIES-RICHNESS PATTERN IN THE GREATER HIMALAYAN MOUNTAINS—A GENERAL INTRODUCTION

SWEN C. RENNER^{1,2,3}

¹*Conservation Ecology Center, National Zoological Park, Smithsonian Institution, 1500 Remount Road, Front Royal, Virginia 22630-5972, USA; and*

²Institute of Experimental Ecology, University of Ulm, Albert-Einstein-Allee 11, 89069 Ulm, Germany

ABSTRACT.—Any analysis of species distributions in Southeast Asia must confront several difficulties, including weak baseline data, a coarse sampling grid, and confused taxonomy. A critical portion of this region, namely the southeastern Himalayas and associated sub-Himalayan areas, are high in species richness and yet are poorly sampled or understood from an ornithogeographic and conservation perspective. Recent surveys in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh (northeast India), Yunnan (southwest China), and Kachin State (northern Myanmar) have revealed new taxa, confirming the hypothesis that the mountain range is of global conservation importance. In this monograph, we summarize current knowledge, historical and recent collection activities, and taxonomic, systematic, and biogeographic revisions and consider the need for additional work and where in the region that work should be focused.

Key words: Arunachal Pradesh, Assam, biogeography, bird collection, bird surveys, birds in Asia, Himalayan Mountains, Kachin State, northeast India, northern Burma, northern Myanmar, phylogeography, south Tibet, southeastern sub-Himalayan Mountains, southwest China, species-richness pattern, systematics, taxonomy, Yunnan.

WORLDWIDE, BIRDS ARE probably the best-studied clade in any scientific collection (Chapman 2009, Global Biodiversity Information Facility 2010; see Chapter 8 of the present volume), and collecting effort is ongoing (Remsen 1995). Nevertheless, global efforts of active bird collecting

are declining and all bird collections are spatially biased, often with a particular geographic focus (Global Biodiversity Information Facility 2010). A few areas are covered very well, such as the Americas, Australia, and Europe. Others are poorly sampled, if sampled at all (Fig. 1A).

³E-mail: swen.renner@uni-ulm.de