



Report for the James Rennie Bequest

An 8 week conservation project in South East Sulawesi, Indonesia

(Adrian Pike, 1st Feb 2000)

In the summer of last year (1999), I spent 8 weeks involved with Operation Wallacea, a non-profit organisation that brings volunteers and scientists together to carry out conservation projects in Indonesia. In mid-July, I arrived on Buton Island (South East Sulawesi), which was to be my base for the next 6 weeks and having spent a few days getting used to the new surroundings, I got my first experience of the rainforest when I had a week of forest survival. This involved a series of lectures, explaining the dangers and life within in the forest as well as trekking and constructing shelters in which we could sleep. It was an excellent opportunity to get to know the other volunteers and also talk to the locals, gaining an insight into their way of life, learning things not told in any textbooks. As a zoologist, it was also very exciting when we came across various native wildlife such as macaques, snakes and a number of raptors, for which we were told many intriguing facts by our local guides.

Several weeks before travelling to Indonesia, myself and a friend had been gathering information that would allow us to conduct a survey of small mammals living in the forests of the island. Following the survival training, we started our survey, travelling around the island for 5 weeks, trapping in various different locations and habitats. We used modified versions of locally made rat traps and tried different baits (coconut, fish, chocolate etc...) to see which one was most successful. A typical day involved checking and resetting the traps early in the morning (6am) and again in the late afternoon. If we had a catch, various measurements and descriptions were made, allowing an identification from records of mainland Sulawesi species. When not checking the traps, I was able to assist with other projects that were running, (bird surveys and tarsier tracking) and also to mix with the locals, learning the language (Bahasa Indonesia) and involving myself in activities with the villagers. On finishing the 5 weeks of trapping, we wrote up the procedures used, which could then be used by future volunteers to survey other parts of the island.

My final two weeks in Indonesia was spent on Hoga island, a 12 hour boat journey from Buton, where the marine projects were based. I passed both my 'Open water' and 'Advanced' scuba diving courses and this allowed me to make dives up to 30 metres and to participate in night dives. Unfortunately, I was unable to help out with any of the marine surveys, but my time underwater, experiencing the wonders of the magnificent coral reefs taught me a lot about life on the reefs. When not diving, I was able to gain an insight into the projects being undertaken and read the vast amount of scientific literature available on the island.

I would like to thank the James Rennie Bequest for giving me the opportunity to travel to Indonesia and to carry out such worthwhile work and I hope that with continued interest in conservation, these areas of outstanding beauty can be protected for future generations to appreciate.