

## Corn Crake *Crex crex* in Vietnam: the first for South-East Asia

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During a visit to Vietnam in January 1996, I visited the small town of Phung Hiep in Soc Trang province in the Mekong delta. Phung Hiep lies about half way between the towns of Can Tho to the north and Soc trang to the south.

We were advised to visit Phung Hiep because of its interest as a snake market but it soon became apparent that as well as snakes large numbers of birds were also on sale as food or, in some cases, as traditional medicines. The birds on sale were chiefly Rallidae, and their numbers are detailed in Table 1. Almost all of the birds were still alive, although some had begun to succumb.

In one wicker basket containing some 30 Slaty-breasted Rails *Gallirallus striatus*, I noticed a single example of a different species which I immediately, but somewhat incredulously, recognized as a Corn Crake *Crex crex*. I photographed the bird (below) and then went to fetch our interpreter so that I could make enquiries as to the bird's origin. Through our interpreter I was able to discover that all of the birds on sale had been caught in Soc Trang, but whether this meant in the vicinity of the town of that name or within the province, was not clear. What was clear was that capture must have been very recent as few of the birds on sale could have survived more than one or two days in the conditions in which they were being kept.

There are no previous records of Corn Crake in South-East Asia. Records from the Oriental region are few: one from Pakistan (Roberts 1991), two from Sri Lanka (Phillips 1978), one from a boat near Sri Lanka (Ali and Ripley 1987), two from Ladakh, India (Vaurie 1972, Williams and Delany 1985), one collected in the Indian subcontinent in the 1870s (Ali and Ripley 1987), and from extreme north-west China (Cheng 1987). There are also two records for Australia and one for New Zealand (Marchant and Higgins 1993), but the vast majority of Corn Crakes, even those from the eastern part of the range of the species at nearly 120°E in Siberia (Cramp 1980), apparently winter in south-east Africa.



Species	Number
GREATER COUCAL <i>Centropus sinensis</i>	10
SPOTTED DOVE <i>Streptopelia chinensis</i>	25
RED COLLARED DOVE <i>Streptopelia tranquebarica</i>	15
SLATY-BREASTED RAIL <i>Gallirallus striatus</i>	50
CORN CRAKE <i>Crex crex</i>	1
BAILLON'S CRAKE <i>Porzana pusilla</i>	100
RUDDY-BREASTED CRAKE <i>Porzana fusca</i>	100
WHITE-BREASTED WATERHEN <i>Amaurornis phoenicurus</i>	5
WATERCOCK <i>Gallinula cinerea</i>	150
PURPLE SWAMPHEN <i>Porphyrio porphyrio</i>	1
COMMON MOORHEN <i>Gallinula chloropus</i>	1
PINTAIL SNIPE <i>Gallinago stenura</i>	1
GREATER PAINTED-SNIPE <i>Rostratula benghalensis</i>	1

Table 1. Estimated numbers of birds for sale in Phung Hiep market, Soc Trang province, Vietnam, 14 January 1996

The figures presented in Table 1 suggest that, if this rate of capture is repeated in many other localities, then considerable numbers of Rallidae must be involved. I did not record a market on this scale anywhere else during our three day tour of the delta, but on 13 January at Long Xuyen (An Giang province) there were c. 50 Slaty-breasted Rails on sale, together with several cages of Baya Weavers *Ploceus philippinus*, while on 14 January on a ferry crossing in Ving Long province, a bundle of 10 Watercocks and 10 Black-winged Stilts *Himantopus himantopus* were being offered round the boat.

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