

Threatened Birds of Asia:

The BirdLife International Red Data Book

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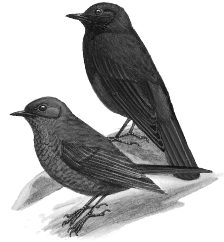
LUZON WATER-REDSTART

Rhyacornis bicolor

Critical —

Endangered —

Vulnerable A1c,e; A2c,e; B1+2a,b,c,d,e; C1; D2



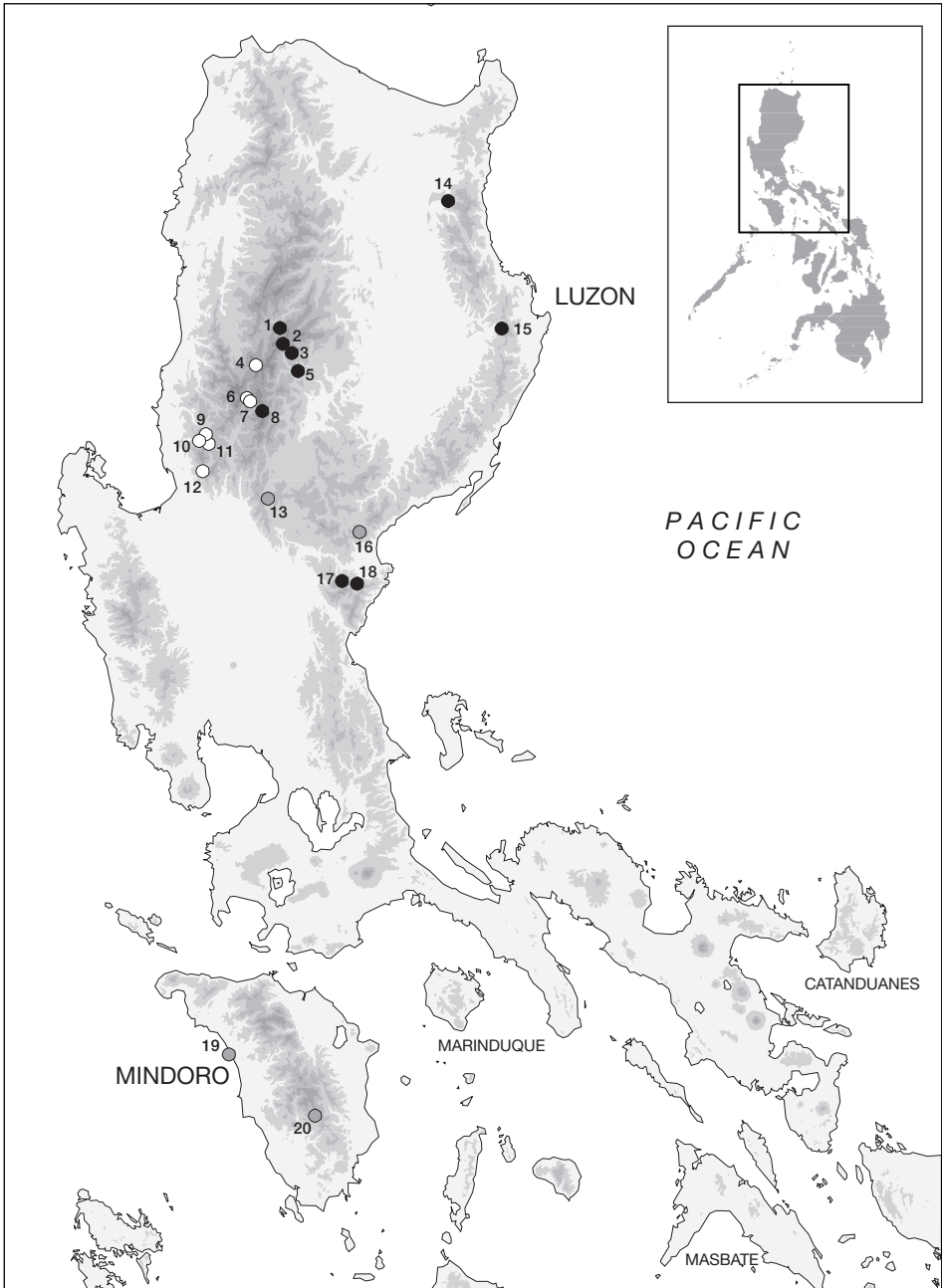
This species qualifies as Vulnerable because of its small population, which is thought to be declining rapidly as a result of a deterioration in the quality of suitable habitat. Furthermore, given its ecological specialisation, it is assumed to have a small, severely fragmented, declining occupied range.

DISTRIBUTION The Luzon Water-redstart occurs on Luzon in the Philippines, where it is principally known from the southern part of the Cordillera Central; the species was thought to be endemic to the island, but there are two recently published specimens from Mindoro in the 1960s (Collar 1998a, Stattersfield *et al.* 1998). Localities are:

■ **PHILIPPINES** *Luzon (western)* **Talubin bridge**, June 1987 (Jensen and Hornskov 1992); **Mt Polis**, February 1997 (T. H. Fisher verbally 1997, P. A. J. Morris *in litt.* 1997), and at Bay-yo since February 1994 (Hornbuckle 1994, P. A. J. Morris *in litt.* 1996, B. Gee *in litt.* 1997, F. Verbelen *in litt.* 1997); **Banaue**, Ifugao province, December 1981 (Fisher mss), May 1983 (J. W. Wall *in litt.* to D. Sargeant *in litt.* 1987), February 1984 (Gibbs 1984), March 1991 (N. J. Redman *in litt.* 1996) and subsequently (T. H. Fisher verbally 1997); **Mt Data**, January–February 1895 (14 specimens, three labelled 1,820 m, in AMNH, BMNH; also Ogilvie-Grant 1895c, Whitehead 1899b; see Remarks 1) and April–May 1946 (Rabor 1955a,b); **Lagawe gorge**, December 1985 (Fisher mss); **Lutab** (a barrio of Kabayan), 1,000 m, July 1908 (McGregor 1910b); **Kabayan**, Benguet, March 1948 (female in PNM); near **Mt Pulog** in the national park (at four distinct sites within an area of 40 km² on both sides of the Cordillera Central, one specified site being Atapuan near the western border), 1,200–1,900 m, December 1990 to January 1991 (Andersen *et al.* 1992, Jensen *et al.* 1994), and at Lucod, January 1997 (I. Mauro *per* F. Verbelen *in litt.* 1997); **La Trinidad**, Benguet, January 1894 (Whitehead 1899b; see Remarks 2); **Irisan**, Benguet, May and June 1903 (McGregor 1904a,b, 1909–1910; male in USNM); **Baguio**, Benguet, April 1907 (two specimens in USNM); **Bued river canyon**, Benguet wagon road, April 1907 (four specimens in USNM); **Dalton Pass**, Decembers of 1965, 1967 and 1969 (three specimens in PNM), and at 1,050 m in August 1969 (female in DMNH; also Dickinson *et al.* 1991); (*eastern*) **Naganduyan** on the Pared River, San Miguel, Baggao, Cagayan province (close to Mt Cetaceo), November 1997 (P. L. Alviola verbally 1997); unspecified locality in Quirino subprovince, Nueva Vizcaya (Dickinson *et al.* 1991); **Mt Palanan** area, June 1987 (Jensen and Hornskov 1992), this presumably being the unpublished record from Isabela mentioned by Andersen *et al.* (1992); **Tabayong river**, Quirino at the border with Aurora, June 1978 (R. S. Kennedy *in litt.* 1998), this being the sight record from Quirino mentioned in Dickinson *et al.* (1991); **Maria Aurora Memorial National Park**, May 1997 (R. S. Kennedy *per* T. H. Fisher verbally 1997); **Diteki** along the Diteki river, Maria Aurora, Aurora province, September 1997 (P. L. Alviola verbally 1997);

Mindoro **Tilago**, Santa Cruz, June 1965 (specimen in PNM); **Mt Roosevelt**, in Mt Iglit-Baco National Park, July 1963 (specimen in PNM).

POPULATION The species must have been locally common up to the past few decades at least; the collection of four birds in one day (in the Bued River canyon, 11 April 1907; see above) suggests this, as does Rabor's (1955b) report of birds being "often seen" in his fieldwork



The distribution of Luzon Water-redstart *Rhyacornis bicolor*: (1) Talubin bridge; (2) Mt Polis; (3) Banaue; (4) Mt Data; (5) Lagawe gorge; (6) Lutab; (7) Kabayan; (8) Mt Pulog National Park; (9) La Trinidad; (10) Irisan; (11) Baguio; (12) Bued river canyon; (13) Dalton Pass; (14) Naganduyan; (15) Mt Palanan; (16) Tabayong river; (17) Maria Aurora Memorial National Park; (18) Diteki; (19) Tilago; (20) Mt Roosevelt.
 ○ Historical (pre-1950) ◐ Fairly recent (1950–1979) ● Recent (1980–present)

on Mt Data in April and early May 1946. Even recently it was found locally common in Mt Pulog National Park, where local people reported it along all streams (Andersen *et al.* 1992) and it was observed on 10 occasions at four widely spaced sites (Jensen *et al.* 1994); up to four were present at Bay-yo, 1996 (P. A. J. Morris *in litt.* 1996). In a similar vein, up to seven were seen in a day at Mt Polis in February 1997 (P. A. J. Morris *in litt.* 1997), where pairs appeared separated by intervals of only 200–300 m (T. H. Fisher verbally 1997). However, overall it is regarded as uncommon and probably declining (Dickinson *et al.* 1991; see Threats), and has been characterised as rare (McGregor 1904a, Hachisuka 1936) owing doubtless to its restricted habitat use within a restricted range; even so, at two sites listed under Distribution, Banaue and Lagawe Gorge, extensive searches were made in December 1989–January 1990 without success (F. R. Lambert *in litt.* 1990), suggesting that in some places the species may be patchy in space and time.

ECOLOGY Habitat This is a bird of the margins (boulders, thickets) of clear, undisturbed, fast-flowing and rocky-sided mountain streams (several metres wide) and rivers above 300 m, with adjacent habitat being tropical montane forest or pine forest (Dickinson *et al.* 1991, Andersen *et al.* 1992), or indeed just scrub and scattered trees (P. A. J. Morris *in litt.* 1996). One pair appeared to occupy a territory consisting of about 500 m of stream (Andersen *et al.* 1992), although this may perhaps only be held when breeding. The type specimen was obtained “among some huge boulders in a mountain-torrent” (Whitehead 1899b). The association with water is made in the bird’s name, and may be absolute, yet Rabor (1955b) gave a different impression when recording it “under heavy bush growths adjoining open grassy areas” on Mt Data, where it shared the same habitat as Long-tailed Ground-warbler *Bradypterus caudatus*, “both birds being often observed under the dense growth of bushes close to the top of the plateau”. Andersen *et al.* (1992), who were unaware of Rabor’s observations, recorded one bird in a bush by a stream but otherwise found their birds on rocks in or near streams. The terrestrial habits of this bird are testified to by the fact that Rabor (1955b) caught his only two specimens (one destroyed by insects) in rat traps.

Food The birds move quickly from boulder to boulder, catching invertebrates on the ground at the edges of streams or flying to take passing insects flycatcher-style (Andersen *et al.* 1992).

Breeding Local people reported that the nest is made (often of pine needles) below rocks next to streams, clutch-size 2–4 (usually three), in the period June to August (Andersen *et al.* 1992, Jensen *et al.* 1994). However, a pair were feeding young at Bay-yo, Mt Polis, in February 1994; the nest was 1.5 m up a rocky bank, and had also been in use in March 1993 (Hornbuckle 1994, Robson 1994). Moreover, the male from Irisan, June, was juvenile, moulting into adult plumage (McGregor 1909–1910), and the record from Lutab, July, involved an immature male (McGregor 1910b).

Migration The records (three in December, one in August) from Dalton Pass, the notorious bird-catching area, reveal that some birds wander, although to what pattern is not clear; it seems very unlikely that a distinct seasonal migration occurs. The dates of the records from Mindoro tend to suggest a breeding (i.e. resident) population.

THREATS Pollution and siltation of streams caused by mining and logging are thought to be threatening the species (Dickinson *et al.* 1991), as is the increased use of fertilisers, herbicides and pesticides by farmers (Poulsen 1995); all these things negatively affect water quality and prey abundance (Andersen *et al.* 1992). Within Mt Pulog National Park clearings and cultivations are being made inside the forest at an alarming rate, and are predicted to cause erosion and siltation in due course, which, along with subsequent biocide run-off, will compromise the purity of the aquatic systems on which the water-redstart depends (Andersen *et al.* 1992). Mt Data is now reported to be devoid of forest (NADM), and there may therefore

be some unfavourable alteration in the silt load of the streams there. The hunting of this bird for sport, mentioned by Collar and Andrew (1988) based on evidence later presented in Jensen and Hornskov (1992), is probably not a serious threat (Poulsen 1995).

MEASURES TAKEN The species has been recorded from two NIPAP sites (Mt Pulog National Park on Luzon; Mt Iglit-Baco National Park on Mindoro) and one CPPAP site (Northern Sierra Madre Natural Park on Luzon; see Appendix). In addition, a recent record derives from Maria Aurora Memorial National Park and any surviving population receives at least partial protection there.

MEASURES PROPOSED Apart from the areas targeted for conservation above, two further “key sites” (Mts Cetaceo and Polis; see Appendix) support populations of the Luzon Water-redstart and deserve incorporation into the NIPAS network. Being a specialist of upland aquatic systems, this species does not fall within the general category of threatened forest birds on Luzon (see equivalent section under Green Racquet-tail *Prioniturus luconensis*) and an appropriate conservation strategy needs careful consideration; as far as possible, the species should be conserved on rivers running through habitat suitable for other threatened species, although particular attention to riverine ecology is essential. In this regard, the Philippine government via DENR must fully implement laws controlling the pollution of rivers through logging and mining activities, as much for broader environmental and human social reasons as for the preservation of this waterside bird. A comprehensive study of the distribution, biology and ecology of the bird, including the regions from which it is known in Mindoro and involving marked individuals along streams, would be extremely valuable in planning measures and indeed in establishing baseline data for monitoring its status and also that of the local environment; indeed, the species should be tested as an indicator of habitat (including water) quality in the southern Cordillera Central (Jensen *et al.* 1994).

REMARKS (1) Eight specimens (collected by J. Whitehead) labelled from Mt Data range from 28 January (BMNH) to 12 February (AMNH). AMNH, MCML, RMNH and USNM possess six Whitehead birds from “North Luzon” taken between these dates, and it is therefore virtually certain that all six were taken on Mt Data (indeed the USNM specimen was taken on the same day as one Data bird in BMNH). (2) La Trinidad is the type locality (Collar 1998a). The type was taken in early January 1894 in the “mountains of northern Luzon” (Warren and Harrison 1971, Dickinson *et al.* 1991), but it is labelled “La Trinidad” (*sic*), where Whitehead (1899a) had arrived on the last day of 1893.