Threatened Birds of Asia:
The BirdLife International Red Data Book

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VISAYAN WRINKLED HORNBILL

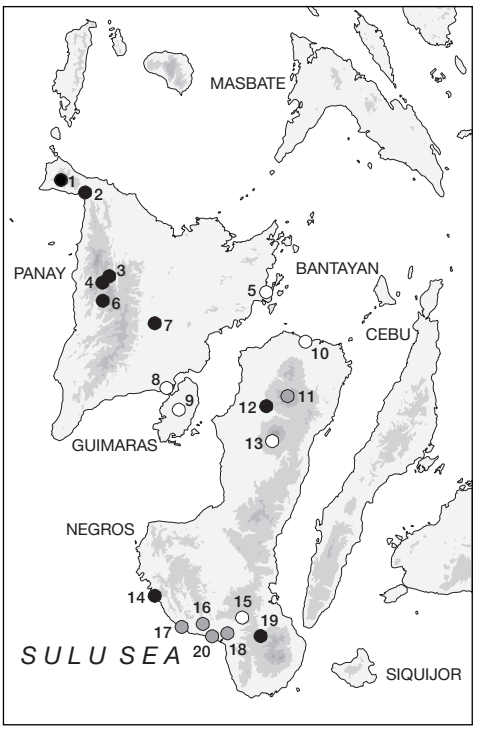
Aceros waldeni

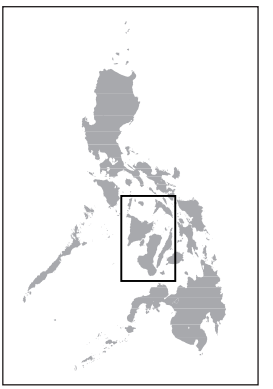
Critical ■ A1c,d; A2c,d; C1; C2a
Endangered □ B1+2a,b,c,d,e; D1
Vulnerable □ D2

This species has a tiny, severely fragmented, remaining population. A combination of extensive loss of low to mid-altitude forest and hunting has resulted in an extremely rapid and continuing population decline. It therefore qualifies as Critical.

DISTRIBUTION The Visayan Wrinkled or Writh-billed Hornbill (see Remarks 1) is endemic to the Western Visayan islands in the central Philippines, where it is known historically from three islands—Panay, Guimaras and Negros—although it is now believed to survive (in tiny numbers) only on the first and last.

■ ***PHILIPPINES*** *Panay* Certain records are from: **Sibaliw**, 400–450 m, one pair, 1997 (E. Curio *in litt*. 1997); **Malumpati**, Pandan, Antique, May 1996 (Y. de Soye *in litt*. 1997); **Dalagsaan**, on the Aklan River, Aklan province, 25–30 individuals, c.900 m, July 1994 (Curio 1995, 1996b,c), 600–950 m, September 1994 (Robson 1994, F. R. Lambert verbally 1997); western slope of **Mt Madja-as**, 1,200 m, November 1992 (Diesmos and Pedregosa 1995) and reported by villagers, August 1997 (D. Allen verbally 1997); **Concepcion**, Iloilo, January 1888 (three specimens in BMNH); **Mt Balabag** (more precisely, Mt Sonogong) at Hamtang forest,





The distribution of Visayan Wrinkled Hornbill *Aceros waldeni*: (1) Sibaliw; (2) Malumpati; (3) Dalagsaan; (4) Mt Madja-as; (5) Concepcion; (6) Mt Balabag; (7) Lambunao; (8) Iloilo; (9) Guimaras; (10) Cadiz; (11) Liboton; (12) Patag; (13) Mt Canlaon; (14) Hinoba-an; (15) Amio; (16) Katumbahan; (17) Basay; (18) Hinubungan; (19) Lake Balinsasayao; (20) Candomao.
○ Historical (pre-1950) ◍ Fairly recent (1950–1979) ● Recent (1980–present)

1995–1996 (Curio 1995, Curio *et al.* 1996b,c, Wirth 1996); **Lambunao**, Iloilo (two illegally captured young females transferred to the West Visayas State University for captive breeding), 1994 (A. C. Diesmos and M. Pedregosa verbally 1995); mountains west of **Iloilo**, mid-1870s (Sharpe 1877). Unconfirmed local reports, all in 1994, are from Mt Baloy, Mt Inaman, Mt Mudbud, Mt Nangtud and Mt Tinagtacan (Diesmos and Pedregosa 1995). In October 1997 there was an incident at sitio Botong (barangay Laserna, Nabas municipality, Aklan) in which a number of birds were reported shot (Y. de Soye *in litt*. 1998; see Threats for details).

Guimaras The only record is from an unspecified locality, January and December 1888 (five specimens in BMNH, ZMB; also Eagle Clarke 1894).

Negros Records are from: **Cadiz**, February–March 1909 (McGregor 1911); **Liboton**, in North Negros Forest Reserve, one pair, 1996 (Curio *et al*. in prep.); **Patag**, in North Negros Forest Reserve, 1996 (Curio *et al*. in prep.; see Remarks 2); **Mt Canlaon**, March 1896 (specimen in BMNH) and by local report, 1994 (Diesmos and Pedregosa 1995); **Hinoba-an**, Negros Occidental, inside the ILCO (logging company) concession area, March 1979 (S. Alonzo-Pasicolan verbally 1993), and, more precisely, at Panganawan, Sanki, December 1993 and January 1994 (M. Ebreo verbally 1996); **Amio** at Pamo-at, April 1948 (two specimens in FMNH); **Katumbahan**, Tolong, June 1952 (male in YPM); **Basay**, Bayawan, December 1959 (male in YPM); **Hinubungan**, Tolong, November and December 1948 (two specimens in AMNH and FMNH), this evidently the "Inubongan, Sta Catalina" at which four birds were obtained in December 1951 (in YPM, ZMH) and one in December 1953 (in AMNH); **Lake Balinsasayao**, 900 m, 1949–1959 (14 specimens in AMNH, DMNH, FMNH, UPD, YPM), January 1977 to July 1978 (Alcala and Carumbana 1980), July 1991 (four seen) (Brooks *et al.* 1992, Evans *et al.* 1993a), April 1994 (Diesmos and Pedregosa 1995) and March 1997 (I. Mauro *per* F. Verbelen *in litt.* 1997), with one record specifying Sibulan, October 1959 (two specimens in UPLB); **Candomao**, Tolong, 300 m, April 1950 (two specimens in MCZ).

POPULATION This hornbill must now be regarded as one of the rarest and most precariously placed of all Philippine bird species, with remnant populations only on Panay (highest recent record: 25–30) and Negros (highest recent record: four). The very recent incident in which as many as 40 hornbills were shot in one day in north-west Panay (see Threats) has two consequences: first, it strongly indicates that there were more birds on the island than had been assumed (and birds of this species were still present at the Sibaliw study site following the incident, so clearly some birds escaped the slaughter: Y. de Soye *in litt*. 1998); and second, it nevertheless reveals that the status of the species must have been very badly affected and rendered all the more parlous on the island. The total world population seems quite possibly to be less than 50 mature individuals, although a somewhat more sanguine speculation might indicate less than 100 pairs. The most recent estimate, based on extrapolation from fieldwork to all remaining forest areas on the islands, is 60–80 pairs (Y. de Soye *in litt*. 1998).

Panay When the type was collected in or soon after December 1874 the species was "not very rare" but nevertheless confined to "the only place where any of the virgin forest is left" (Sharpe 1877). However, hornbills in general had become scarce, at least in Antique province, by around 1920 (McGregor 1921a). The population of the Visayan Wrinkled Hornbill must now be very small on Panay: R. S. Kennedy and P. C. Gonzales did not record the species during their fieldwork on this island in 1988 (Evans *et al.* 1993a), and the studies of E. Curio and co-workers has shown it to be extremely rare and "markedly outnumbered" by the also rare and threatened Visayan Tarictic *Penelopides panini* (Curio *et al.* 1996c). Hunters reported in 1994 that only one or two groups (of no more than four individuals) were usually encountered per week (Diesmos and Pedregosa 1995). A record of 25–30 birds in a fruiting tree near Dalagsaan, July 1994 (Curio 1995), appears to represent the highest number ever reported for this species, but the birds involved could, just conceivably, have been the entire complement of the island. In September 1994, small flocks of up to four birds were observed,

and local people reported a flock of 50–60 (F. R. Lambert verbally 1997), although this is more likely to have involved a mixed flock of *A. waldeni* and *P. panini* (D. Allen verbally 1997). Just two or three pairs are thought to remain in Hamtang forest (Curio *et al.* in prep.); four to five birds were seen there in 1995 (density of adults per km^2 was estimated at 0.04), and there were then two birds in captivity at Lambunao and one in Aklan province (Lastimosa 1995, 1996, Curio *et al.* 1996c). An estimate for the north-west Panay peninsula (Pandan forest) of 10–20 pairs may have been too low in the light of the October 1997 hunting incident but, even if there were rather more prior to this event, the figure cannot be far wrong now (Y. de Soye *in litt*. 1998). Of the global estimate of 60–80 pairs, probably 30–40 pairs are present in the central Panay mountains (Y. de Soye *in litt*. 1998).

Guimaras The bird is now presumed to be extinct on the island (Collar *et al.* 1994; see Threats). This possibility was not registered by Rivera (1993), who listed and mapped the island as part of the species's range.

Negros From January 1977 to July 1978 the average number of birds of this species seen per month at Balinsasayao was 3.75, as against 2.0 for Visayan Tarictic (Alcala and Carumbana 1980). However, only one group of four individuals—two females and two males—was recorded and seen twice at Balinsasayao in 1991 and, given that a total of 87 man-hours over four days were spent in the field, it seems that the species survives at only very low density in the area (Brooks *et al.* 1992). Although all large hornbills are generally low-density species, encounter rates with the closely related *A. leucocephalus* on Mindanao were much higher (Evans *et al.* 1993a). Fewer than 50 pairs are estimated to remain on Negros: 10 in North Negros Forest Reserve, a few around Mt Canlaon and 20–30 at Mt Talinis (Y. de Soye verbally 1997), although this may be an overestimate given that 15 months of recent fieldwork resulted in two or three encounters of one or two individuals in the North Negros Forest Reserve, and none was seen during a week on Mt Talinis (E. Curio *in litt*. 1997).

ECOLOGY ***Habitat*** There is very little information on habitat or elevation for this species. It is clearly a forest bird, doubtless often, as Dickinson *et al.* (1991) indicated, "occurring in trees in clearings". Local inhabitants on both Negros and Panay reported the species as being confined to closed-canopy forests, shunning degraded habitat (Diesmos and Pedregosa 1995, E. Curio *in litt.* 1997); in one study it had a 76% frequency of occurrence in primary forest but only 26% in logged-over areas (S. Alonzo-Pasicolan *in litt*. 1993). It apparently prefers the canopy, whereas *P. panini* inhabits the subcanopy (Diesmos and Pedregosa 1995). Birds seen by Whitehead (1899c) were solitary and frequented the highest trees. Dickinson *et al.* (1991), not distinguishing between *A. waldeni* and *A. leucocephalus*, generalised elevation as "usually above 800 m", but this was not accepted by Brooks *et al*. (1992). The only specimen evidence for *waldeni* derives from two birds taken at 950 m at Lake Balinsasayao in May and June (FMNH). The species was again observed at this locality and elevation in August 1991 (Brooks *et al*. 1992, Evans *et al.* 1993a) and at 1,000 m in Hamtang forest, Panay (Curio *et al.* 1996b). Local inhabitants indicated *A. waldeni* to occupy forest at higher elevations than *P. panini* (Diesmos and Pedregosa 1995; but see Ecology under that species).

Food The flock of 25–30 seen on Panay, 1994, was frequenting a fruiting "babagnun" *Aglaia* (see Remarks 3), and other observations were of birds feeding in fig trees (Curio *et al.* 1996b,c). Clearly the species will be close to *A. leucocephalus* in this as in other aspects of its ecology.

Breeding Breeding on Panay seems likely to start in March, given (a) the disappearance of females from a fruiting fig at that time, and (b) an active nest (which eventually fledged three young) found in May 1995 (Curio *et al.* 1996b,c). Two evident immatures (not fully grown, bills small) were collected on Guimaras in December (specimens in BMNH). Eggs and chicks are reportedly collected in May–July (Diesmos and Pedregosa 1995).

Nests are reported by local people as frequently in "balakbakan" *Shorea polysperma* trees (family Dipterocarpaceae), with two (or occasionally three) eggs laid (Diesmos and Pedregosa 1995).

Migration There is likely to be some movement, altitudinal or nomadic, in search of fruit.

THREATS Habitat loss on the Western Visayas has clearly been a chronic problem for its wildlife: thus this hornbill was originally discovered on Panay in the 1870s in what was even then considered the last place where primary forest remained on the island (Sharpe 1877). Extensive habitat loss is the cause of its great rarity and of its evident extinction on Guimaras, where forest clearance has been all but total (SSC 1988, Development Alternatives Inc. 1992). The absence of records from elevations above 1,000 m indicates that (despite local reports of its range above *P. panini*) it is adapted to lower- or at least mid-elevation forest, of which virtually none remains within its entire range. Given that it is a frugivore dependent on a resource that can be patchy in both space and time, it seems possible that extinction is as close as the next significant fruiting failure within its now much reduced habitat.

A second major threat is hunting, which is particularly severe on Panay (Diesmos and Pedregosa 1995, Wirth 1996). The fact that birds concentrate at certain times of the year (e.g. at Dalagsaan, July 1994) renders hunting a particularly serious danger, and this appears to have been the case in 1997: at sitio Botong, Aklan, as many as 40 hornbills, not necessarily all this species but probably involving at least a quarter of all *A. waldeni* in north-west Panay, were very reliably reported shot in the course of a single day as they came to visit a single large well-known fruiting fig tree ("lunok"), resulting in a major local feast with the excess meat being sold on the market for 120 pesos per kg (Y. de Soye *in litt*. 1998).

A third major threat is collection for the pet trade (Diesmos and Pedregosa 1995, Wirth 1996). The species is reportedly trapped on Panay to exhibit in local "mini-zoos" as part of "environmental awareness" initiatives (Diesmos and Pedregosa 1995), but it is much more likely that birds are offered for sale to private collectors locally, probably mainly as a by-product of hunting for "finger-food" (W. L. R. Oliver *in litt*. 1997). The fact that two young females happened to be found for sale in 1994 (see Distribution) clearly indicated that this pressure is of a type that could result in complete suppression of breeding success year on year.

To compound these difficulties, a chronic understaffing of the few protected areas in which this species occurs renders its conservation difficult to enforce, both in terms of habitat protection and control of hunting (E. Curio *in litt*. 1997).

MEASURES TAKEN This species is currently a main target of the Philippine Endemic Species Conservation Project of the Frankfurt Zoological Society (see Curio *et al.* 1996c), and of the Philippine Threatened Species Programme of ZGAP and FFI (see Oliver and Wirth 1996, Wirth 1996). It was featured on an environmental awareness poster focusing on hornbills as part of the "Only in the Philippines" series, funded by British Airways Assisting Conservation and FFI, with text in English and Tagalog (W. L. R. Oliver verbally 1997). It is listed on Appendix II of CITES.

Panay A public awareness scheme incorporating this species has recently been initiated in north-west Panay (E. Curio *in litt*. 1997). Hamtang forest on Mt Balabag is clearly important for this and the Visayan Tarictic, but is insufficient in itself to maintain a viable population, at least of the Visayan Wrinkled Hornbill. The fledging of the three young at this site in 1995 was the consequence of a nest-protection scheme operated by E. Curio and co-workers (Wirth 1996), enacting their own earlier recommendations (Curio 1993). Mt Madja-as was surveyed

by DENR in collaboration with the Japan Wildlife Research Center in 1993 and 1994 in support of its proposal as a protected area (C. Custodio verbally 1995, NADM). Mts Baloy and Madja-as are listed as FPE sites and form part of the proposed Central Panay Mountains National Park (see Appendix).

Negros One "key site," Mt Canlaon, is a CPPAP site (see Appendix). The species also occurs in small numbers within the unprotected North Negros Forest Reserve, which embraces Mts Silay/Mandalagan (see next section). Conservation campaigns have been initiated on Mt Talinis by the Center for Tropical Conservation Studies, Silliman University (R. Pa-alan verbally 1995). Mt Talinis and Balinsasayao (Twin Lakes) comprise a single site in receipt of FPE funding (see Appendix).

MEASURES PROPOSED A conservation strategy for the forests of Negros, Panay and other islands in the Western Visayas should take into account the distribution and ecological requirements of all threatened endemic birds in this area (see Remarks 4). Most of these species are restricted to the same remnant forest fragments and there is considerable overlap in protected area requirements and management prescriptions between species. Fieldwork should be targeted at identifying further lowland sites supporting populations of several Western Visayan endemics. Specific recommendations for *A. waldeni* are as follows.

Panay Three areas where the species has been found are treated as "key sites" (the north-west Panay peninsula, Mts Madja-as/Hantod-tubig and Mt Baloy; see Appendix) and deserve formal designation, at least in part, under the NIPAS process. Furthermore, Hamtang forest deserves full legal protection as a reserve (E. Curio *in litt*. 1997). Two major areas of forest (Mt Inaman and the north-west Panay peninsula) remain at least partially unsurveyed; further fieldwork should be undertaken as soon as possible and appropriate conservation action taken (Y. de Soye verbally 1996, D. Allen verbally 1997). The confirmation of presence (and consequent development of conservation initiatives) at sites from which the species was reported by locals in the 1990s is clearly needed.

Negros Apart from the area targeted for conservation above, the species has been reported from three "key sites" on the island (Mts Silay/Mandalagan, Eastern Cuernos de Negros, Hinoba-an and Lake Balinsasayao; see Appendix) and these deserve legal protection under the NIPAS process. In 1980 it was proposed that the remaining forested areas of southern Negros be closed to logging to protect the remaining wildlife (and the Balinsasayao area declared a forest reserve and wildlife sanctuary), moves argued as necessary for the ecosystem to fulfil "other human needs such as recreation and scientific studies" (Alcala and Carumbana 1980). Mt Talinis has already been proposed as a protected area by the DENR-JWRC Biodiversity Research Team in 1992 (C. Custodio verbally 1995), and this recommendation should be implemented as soon as possible. The confirmation of presence (and consequent development of conservation) at sites from which the species was reported by locals in the 1990s is clearly needed.

Throughout the species's limited remaining range the problem of hunting needs to be urgently addressed in the most sensitive manner. It is apparent that local people are likely to be deeply resistant to any attempts at strict enforcement of hunting laws, given the attitudes of those interviewed in relation to the October 1997 catastrophe (Y. de Soye *in litt*. 1998). It is also apparent that the poster campaign missed a significant part of its target audience. In these circumstances a concerted programme of education and awareness is needed within the communities in and around the known key sites for the species, but preferably only when combined with a programme of local small-scale economic support and self-help, such that conservation can be widely appreciated as providing a genuine source of benefit to these communities.

Support is currently being generated for a captive breeding programme at Mari-it Conservation Center, College of Agriculture and Forestry, West Visayas State University,

Panay, using birds formerly illegally held by private owners (L. Lastimosa, W. L. R. Oliver *in litt*. 1997).

REMARKS (1) Kemp (1988) treated *A. waldeni* as a species distinct from Mindanao Wrinkled Hornbill *A. leucocephalus*, and was followed in this by Sibley and Monroe (1990) and Poonswad (1993) but not by Dickinson *et al.* (1991), apparently for want of knowing which of the ("admittedly considerable") differences between the two formed the basis of the split; nor by Rivera (1993). Kemp (1995) accepted that "comparative studies are necessary for confirmation of full specific status", but the differences are indeed considerable (e.g. bill pattern, head and tail coloration) and it seems entirely likely that the separation of the two forms will remain. (2) There is a report of five nests in the Northern Negros Forest Reserve in 1995 which required confirmation (Curio *et al.* 1996b), but this was not forthcoming (E. Curio *in litt*. 1997). (3) This genus was earlier misspelt *Alaiga* in Curio *et al.* (1996b). (4) A suite of threatened species is restricted to the Western Visayas (Negros Bleeding-heart *Gallicolumba keayi*, Visayan Tarictic *Penelopides panini*, White-winged Cuckoo-shrike *Coracina ostenta*, White-throated Jungle-flycatcher *Rhinomyias albigularis*, Negros Striped-babbler *Stachyris nigrorum*, Flame-templed Babbler *Dasycrotapha speciosa* and Visayan Flowerpecker *Dicaeum haematostictum*) and conservation efforts should target as many sites as possible where these species are sympatric.