

# Threatened Birds of Asia:

## The BirdLife International Red Data Book

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## GOLD-FRONTED FULVETTA

### *Alcippe variegaticeps*



Critical  —

Endangered  —

Vulnerable  B1+2a,b,c,d,e; C1; C2a

*This species qualifies as Vulnerable because it is inferred to have a small, declining, severely fragmented population and range as a result of destruction of forest through logging and conversion to agriculture.*

**DISTRIBUTION** The Gold-fronted Fulvetta is endemic to southern mainland China, where it is known from two widely disjunct areas in south-central Sichuan and the mountains of northern Guangxi, although it presumably may also occur in some of the intervening areas. Records (by province) are from:

■ **CHINA** ■ **Sichuan** Labahe Nature Reserve, Tianquan county, one collected, January 1991 (Li Guiyuan and Zhang Qingmao 1994, Yu Zhiwei *in litt.* 1997); **Emei Shan** (Emei Shan), two males collected, c.1,750–1,900 m, May 1959 (Cheng Tso-hsin *et al.* 1963b, Yu Zhiwei *in litt.* 1997), c.20 in a single flock below Xianfeng, 1,500 m, c.20 below Hongchun terrace, 1,050 m, March 1988, in selectively logged montane forest (Nickel 1988); **Ebian**, May 1940



**The distribution of Gold-fronted Fulvetta *Alcippe variegaticeps*:** (1) Labahe Nature Reserve; (2) Emei Shan; (3) Ebian; (4) Huanglianshan-Wuzhishan; (5) Yangsiba; (6) Mabian Dafengding Nature Reserve; (7) Shatuo; (8) Ledugou-Erbagou; (9) Xining river; (10) Longsheng county; (11) Dayao Shan Nature Reserve.  
○ Historical (pre-1950) ● Fairly recent (1950–1979) ● Recent (1980–present)

(specimen in ASCN); **Huanglianshan–Wuzhishan**, Mabian, Muchuan and Pingshan counties, five collected on Wuzhishan, June–July 1965 (Yu Zhiwei *in litt.* 1997), pair visiting a nest with four eggs at Huanglianshan, 1,520 m, July 1994, in primary forest (in an area which was found in 1997 to have been destroyed by logging activities) (Dowell *et al.* 1997, G. M. Kirwan *in litt.* 1999), one just below Huanglianshan peak, 1,595 m, April 1997, on a mossy branch above a stream in secondary broadleaf forest (Dowell *et al.* 1997); **Yangsiba**, Mabian and Leibo counties, at several sites during surveys in April 1997: four to six near Dianjiping, 1,380 m, in primary forest, one in the Erping area, 1,380 m, in primary forest, six around the Banlixi ridge, 1,395–1,455 m, near streams in primary forest, singles mist-netted and seen (and both photographed) on the Banlixi ridge, 1,455 m, close to a stream in primary forest (Dowell *et al.* 1997); **Mabian Dafengding Nature Reserve**, two pairs, 1,200 m, April 1986, in bamboo in secondary forest (King 1989b); Xichangba, southern slope of Xiaoguandoushan mountain, **Shatuo** township, Leibo county, pair, June 1996, in scrub on the edge of primary broadleaf forest (Dai Bo 1996); **Ledugou–Erbagou**, Leibo county, three pairs in the Erbagou valley, including a pair with a recently fledged juvenile, 1,410 and 1,445 m, May 1997, in replanted broadleaf forest (Dowell *et al.* 1997); south of the **Xining river**, Leibo county, one or two at Yuerba, 1,440 m, May 1997, in replanted broadleaf forest (Dowell *et al.* 1997);

■ **Guangxi Longsheng county**, April and June 1955 (two specimens in ASCN); **Dayao Shan Nature Reserve** (Yaoshan), Jinxiu county, adult male, two adult females (including the type), juvenile male and juvenile female collected, 700–2,000 m, May–July 1931 (Yen 1932b, 1933–1934, specimen in BMNH; also Delacour 1933), 20 at Shengtangshan, 1,800 m, September 1998 (KFBG in prep. a).

**POPULATION** There have been no systematic studies of the population of this species. The pattern of records suggests that it occurs at low densities, perhaps because it has specialised habitat requirements (see Ecology). Given the limited area of suitable broadleaf forest that remains in its known range, and the pressures on this habitat (see Threats), its total population is likely to be small and declining.

**ECOLOGY Habitat** This species inhabits subtropical broadleaf forest, usually with an extensive bamboo undergrowth, between about 700 and 2,000 m (Stattersfield *et al.* 1998). During surveys in Sichuan in April–May 1997, all records were within a remarkably narrow altitudinal range of 1,365–1,595 m (although this may reflect the altitudinal limits of remaining habitat in the Daliang Shan) (Dowell *et al.* 1997). In this part of Sichuan, it appeared to have specialised habitat requirements, as it was only seen in small stream valleys within 50 m of running water, in scrubby streamside forest with a near-complete coverage of arboreal, hanging moss, although where suitable stream-valley habitats were available it was found in primary and in secondary or replanted forest (Dowell *et al.* 1997). In the Dayao Shan range in Guangxi, it was recorded between 700 and 2,000 m in May–July (Yen 1933–1934), apparently indicating that in that part of the range it has or had much broader altitudinal limits. Birds in Dayao Shan Nature Reserve in Guangxi in September 1998 were at 1,800 m in low, moss-covered forest with a dense understorey of shrubs and bamboo (KFBG in prep. a).

**Food** This species feeds on insects and spiders (Cheng Tso-hsin *et al.* 1987). It was frequently seen foraging on mossy branches by creeping up and down them, using its thin bill to probe for moss-dwelling invertebrates (Dowell *et al.* 1997).

**Breeding** A pair was seen visiting a nest with four eggs at Huanglianshan on 8 July 1994, in primary forest at 1,520 m (G. M. Kirwan *in litt.* 1999). A pair with a recently fledged juvenile were seen on 14 May 1997, in replanted broadleaf forest at 1,445 m (Dowell *et al.* 1997).

**Migration** Dowell *et al.* (1997) speculated that this insectivorous species might be expected to undertake limited altitudinal migration during the winter, but a winter record of up to

**Table 1. Changes in the extent of natural habitats within this species's range in southern China**

The data in this table are reproduced from MacKinnon *et al.* (1996), and show the estimated areas (both original and remaining in km<sup>2</sup>) of presumably suitable habitats within this species's known range, and the area of each habitat estimated within existing protected areas. However, it is important to note that this only gives an indication of the extent of reduction of presumed habitats, as there is no information on the time-scale over which they have been lost, and this species does not necessarily occur throughout each habitat in each province.

Province	Habitat	Original	Remaining	%	Protected	%
Sichuan	deciduous broadleaf forest	55,413	3,887	7	1,623	2.9
Sichuan	deciduous/evergreen broadleaf forest	34,461	4,048	12	2,123	6.2
Sichuan	subtropical evergreen broadleaf forest	141,433	1,892	1	3,067	2.2
Guangxi	deciduous broadleaf forest	1,560	780	50	0	0
Guangxi	deciduous/evergreen broadleaf forest	15,066	12,146	81	1,263	8.4
Guangxi	subtropical evergreen broadleaf forest	53,976	9,758	18	3,154	5.8

three birds (at an unspecified locality) in 2000 proved that it is resident in the broadleaf forests where it breeds (Dowell and Dai Bo 2000).

**THREATS** The Gold-fronted Fulvetta is one of four threatened members of the suite of five bird species that are entirely restricted to the "Chinese Subtropical Forests Endemic Bird Area", threats and conservation measures in which are profiled by Stattersfield *et al.* (1998).

**Habitat loss** The main threat to this species is the loss and fragmentation of its habitat, as much of the natural forest within its range has already been cleared or degraded, and many of the remaining forests are under pressure; for example, forest cover in Sichuan was estimated to have been reduced from 19% to 12.6% between the early 1950s and 1988 (Smil 1993), and the relatively accessible, low-altitude subtropical forests have been disproportionately badly affected (see Table 1). The Dayao Shan (Yaoshan) range in Guangxi suffered two decades of rapid deforestation due to conversion of forest to agricultural land, with large additional areas destroyed by uncontrolled fires (Smil 1984). There was widespread clear-felling there in the 1950s and 1960s, and most of the remaining natural forest is 20–30-year-old secondary regrowth, with limited areas of primary forest mainly confined to the inaccessible higher peaks (MacKinnon *et al.* 1996). Most of the primary broadleaf forests in southern Sichuan where the species was recorded by Dowell *et al.* (1997) in 1996 and 1997 were scheduled for logging in the next 20–25 years, but a ban on logging in the upper Yangtze basin appears to have led to a complete halt to deforestation within the range of the species (Dowell and Dai Bo 2000; see Measures Taken). However, in addition to legal logging, forest was also being cleared for agriculture or illegally logged, and disturbance was caused by large numbers of people entering the forest to collect bamboo shoots in spring and early autumn and by livestock either grazing in the forest or moving through it to pastures above the treeline (Dowell *et al.* 1997). The observed specialisation of the species to stream valleys may make it especially vulnerable to logging, as these valleys are frequently used as routes for the downslope transportation of logs; suitable habitat could regenerate in secondary or replanted forest, but to allow this species to recolonise secondary areas, corridors of intact stream-valley habitat need to be left in the vicinity of the areas which are clear-felled (Dowell *et al.* 1997).

**MEASURES TAKEN** *Protected areas* Several nature reserves are known or suspected to support populations of this species. In Sichuan, it has been recorded in Mabian Dafengding Nature Reserve (340 km<sup>2</sup>) (and could occur in the relatively small areas of subtropical forest in the adjacent Meigu Dafengding Nature Reserve), where Dai Bo (1998) estimated that 192 km<sup>2</sup> of subtropical broadleaf forest remains; Labahe Nature Reserve (200 km<sup>2</sup>, forest apparently much logged but still valuable: MacKinnon *et al.* 1996); and Emei Shan Protected Scenic Site (100 km<sup>2</sup>, forest apparently in good condition but disturbed by very large numbers

of tourists: MacKinnon *et al.* 1996). In Guangxi, it is known from Dayao Shan Nature Reserve (2,022 km<sup>2</sup>, which apparently has a moderately good forest cover of c.58%, although rather little primary forest remains and most of the remaining natural forest is 20–30-year-old secondary regrowth: MacKinnon *et al.* 1996). Emei Shan is one of China's five sacred mountains (Robson 1989) and has therefore not been subject to forest clearance, but development for tourism has caused some localised forest loss there, particularly in the subtropical zone (MJC). There are several other protected areas in Sichuan and Guangxi with subtropical broadleaf forests, and perhaps also in Guizhou and Guangdong, where this species could occur (see Li Wenhua and Zhao Xianjing 1989, MacKinnon *et al.* 1996). The record from Longsheng county in northern Guangxi indicates that it could occur in one or more of the nature reserves in or adjacent to this county. These (size and condition from MacKinnon *et al.* 1996) include Huaping (174 km<sup>2</sup>, forests apparently in very good condition), Jianxin (49 km<sup>2</sup>, forests apparently badly damaged), and Maer Shan (451 km<sup>2</sup>, forest cover c.68% and apparently in quite good condition).

**Habitat protection and management** Until very recently, the main threat to the species in Sichuan was habitat destruction through commercial logging of primary forest; however, in August 1998 the Chinese government announced a ban on logging in the upper Yangtze basin, which has subsequently been fully implemented, apparently leading to a complete halt to deforestation within its range in Sichuan (Dowell and Dai Bo 2000; see Measures Taken under Sichuan Partridge *Arborophila rufipectus*).

**Research** Several recent surveys in southern Sichuan, mainly targeted at Sichuan Partridge, have also improved knowledge of the distribution, population density, and ecological and conservation requirements of this species (Dai Bo 1996, Dowell *et al.* 1997).

**MEASURES PROPOSED Protected areas** Following a series of surveys in south-central Sichuan and north-eastern Yunnan in 1996–1998, Dowell *et al.* (1997), Dai Bo (1998) and Dai Bo *et al.* (1998) made a number of recommendations relevant to the conservation of this species and its habitat there, including the establishment of several new protected areas and an extension to Mabian Dafengding Nature Reserve. Their surveys were principally targeted at Sichuan Partridge, and the full details of their recommendations (and those of Yu Zhiwei *in litt.* 1997) are given in the account for that species. The long-term plan of the Wildlife Division of the Sichuan Forestry Department (*per* Dowell and Dai Bo 2000) to establish several new reserves to protect broadleaf subtropical forest is also described in the equivalent section under Sichuan Partridge. MacKinnon *et al.* (1996) made the following recommendations for the protected areas where Gold-fronted Fulvetta has been recorded: at Labahe Nature Reserve, reconstruct forest corridors to the Qionglai Shan conservation unit in the north-east; at Mabian Dafengding Nature Reserve, jointly manage with Meigu Dafengding reserve; at Emei Shan Protected Scenic Site, gazette as a nature reserve (if not already done so), control tourism and strengthen research work; at Dayao Shan Nature Reserve, control illegal logging and the planting of star anis *Illicium verum*.

**Research** Information on the distribution and habitat requirements of Gold-fronted Fulvetta is currently incomplete and further surveys and ecological studies are required, targeted at this species and the other threatened birds with similar habitat requirements and range (including Sichuan Partridge, Omei Shan Liocichla *Liocichla omeiensis* and Silver Oriole *Oriolus mellianus*). Surveys could initially focus on those protected areas where it has been recorded or could occur (see above), with the aim of determining densities and hence whether they contain sufficient areas of suitable habitat to support viable populations. Li Wenhua and Zhao Xianjing (1989) described several other protected areas in Guizhou, Guangxi and Guangdong as containing subtropical broadleaf forest, which could also be targeted for ornithological surveys. Any potentially suitable unprotected areas of subtropical broadleaf forest should be surveyed, with the aim of proposing new protected areas. For example,

unknown populations may still exist in southern Sichuan (Yu Zhiwei *in litt.* 1997). Ecological studies should aim to determine whether the apparent habitat specialisation and narrow altitudinal limits observed in southern Sichuan is true and applies throughout its range; if it is and does, appropriate recommendations will then be needed for the management of the forests where it occurs.