

# Threatened Birds of Asia:

## The BirdLife International Red Data Book

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## PHILIPPINE EAGLE-OWL

### *Bubo philippensis*

Critical  —

Endangered  —

Vulnerable  A1c,d; A2c,d; C1; C2a



*This species has a small, severely fragmented population which is undergoing a rapid decline as a result of extensive lowland deforestation throughout its range and perhaps hunting, qualifying it as Vulnerable.*

**DISTRIBUTION** The Philippine Eagle-owl (see Remarks 1) is endemic to the Philippines in two races, nominate *philippensis* on Luzon and Catanduanes, *mindanensis* in Samar, Leyte, Bohol and Mindanao (Dickinson *et al.* 1991, Collar *et al.* 1994; see also Parkes 1971a), with the likelihood that the nominate race occurs on Sibuyan (see Remarks 2). Records are as follows:

■ **PHILIPPINES** *Luzon (western)* **Pagudpud** at Balaoi, Ilocos Norte, 75 m, April 1959 (female in FMNH); **La Trinidad**, Benguet, March 1894 (two specimens in BMNH; Whitehead 1899a, McGregor 1920); **Irisan**, Benguet, April–June 1903 (McGregor 1904a, 1909–1910); unspecified locality, Pampanga province (de Elera 1895); **Sacobia river**, 15 km west-south-west of the Clark Air Base, Pampanga, January 1966 (female in USNM); (*eastern*) “Cagayan” (de Elera 1895); **Cayapa** at 200 m, April 1992 (Danielsen *et al.* 1993, Poulsen 1995); Isabela Province, 1894 (Whitehead 1899a); **Maconacon** at 350 m, March 1991 (Danielsen *et al.* 1993, Poulsen 1995); near **Palanan** at 50 m, March 1991 (Danielsen *et al.* 1993, Poulsen 1995); (*central*) **Angat Dam**, recently (N. Bostock verbally 1993, T. H. Fisher *per* P. A. J. Morris *in litt.* 1996); **Ipo Dam**, Bulacan, 240 m, December 1969 (female in DMNH); unspecified locality, Bulacan province (de Elera 1895); “Muntinluzon”, Rizal, January 1929 (female in DMNH); near **Manila**, before 1886 (Wardlaw Ramsay 1886; three specimens in BMNH); **Laguna de Bay**, January 1895 (three specimens in AMNH, BMNH; hence Whitehead 1899a and possibly de Elera 1895); **Balian**, Pangil, Laguna, May 1960 (male in AMNH); **UP Laguna Land Grant**, Amiakan, May 1992 (Gonzalez 1995); **UP Quezon Land Grant**, Real, 114 km from Manila via Santa Cruz, recently (Baril 1990, BRT); **Calauan**, July 1888 (male in BMNH); **Mt Makiling**, Los Baños, Laguna, in recent years (Alviola 1977, Scharringa 1988, Mendoza 1987, Miranda 1987); **Quezon National Park**, Atimonan, March 1990 (Redman 1990); **Silang**, Cavite, November 1915 (male in AMNH) and at an unspecified locality in Cavite, October 1909 (male in USNM); (*southern*) **Jagusara**, Juban, Sorsogon, June 1956 (male in PNM); **Tugas**, Matnog, Sorsogon, May 1961 (female in FMNH);

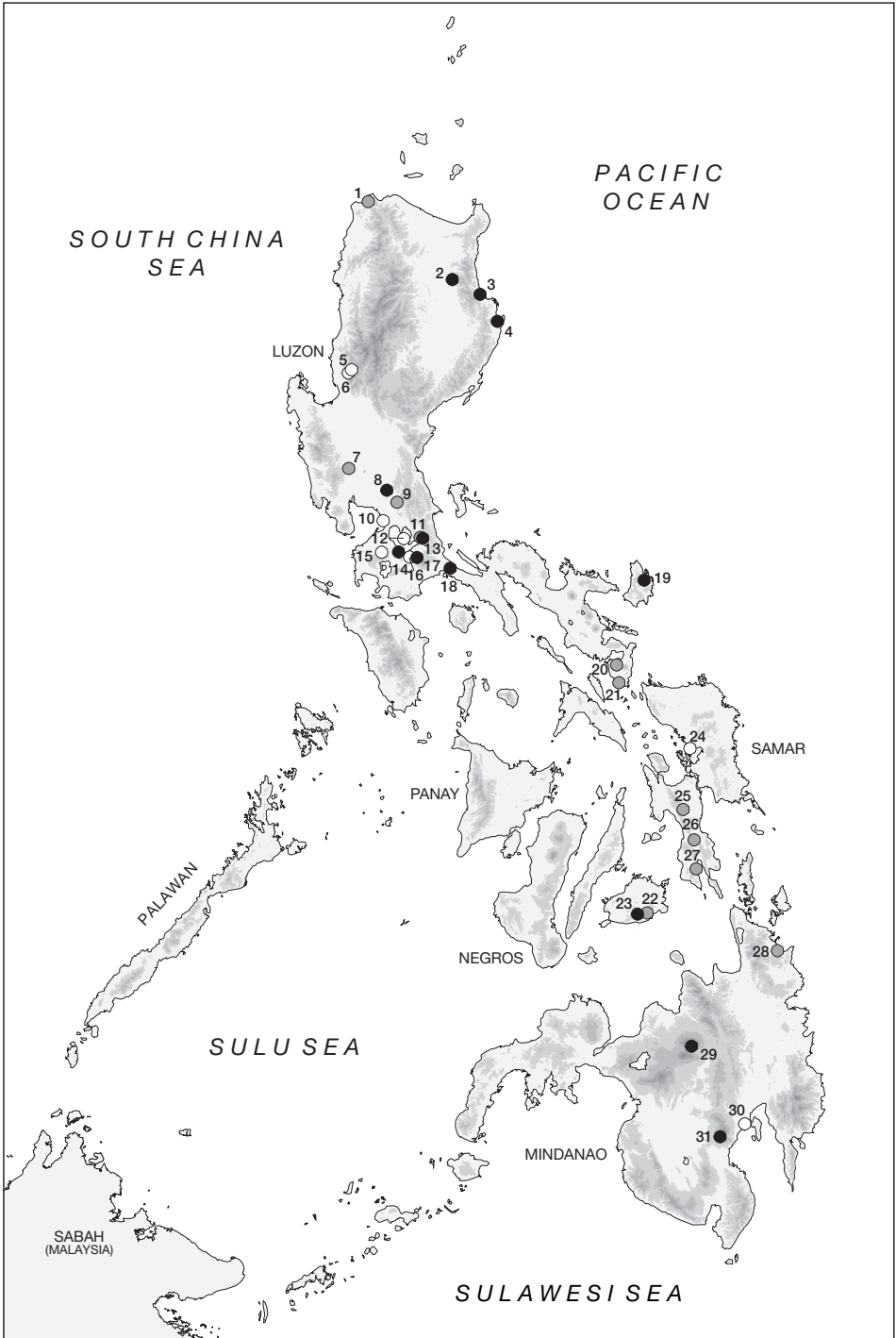
*Catanduanes* **Burgos**, Viga, 300 m, May 1981 (female in DMNH; also Gonzales 1983);

*Samar* **Catbalogan**, captured live in or before April 1921 (McGregor 1921b);

*Leyte* **Mt Lobi** at Tambis, Burauen, May 1964 (female in USNM; Parkes 1973); **Helosig**, midway between Baybay and Abuyog, May 1937 and April–July 1964 (Rabor 1938, Parkes 1973); **Tomas Oppus** at Kalagagan (60 m) and Anahawan (600 m), August 1979 (three males in DMNH);

*Bohol* **Duao**, Sierra Bullones, December 1958 (male in DMNH; hence the first record—previously unreported—for the island, *pace* Brooks *et al.* 1995c, Brooks and Dutson 1997); **Rajah Sikatuna National Park**, January 1994 (P. A. J. Morris *in litt.* 1996) and July 1994 (Brooks *et al.* 1995c);

*Mindanao (eastern)* “**Car–Can–Mad–Lan**” area, 330–640 m, May 1963 (female in USNM); (*central*) **Mt Kitanglad**, March 1987 (Jensen and Hornskov 1992); **Mt Apo** at Baracatan Eagle



Station, 1984 (Gibbs 1984), probably also in 1929 (Hachisuka 1931–1935); **Davao**, May 1905 (Ogilvie-Grant 1906, Dickinson *et al.* 1991).

**POPULATION** The Philippine Eagle-owl is clearly uncommon (Gonzales 1983, Dickinson *et al.* 1991) and the few recent records suggest that it is now rare (Collar *et al.* 1994). This conclusion is supported by there being so few records (three or four at three sites) during recent prolonged fieldwork (three-month periods in both 1991 and 1992) in the Sierra Madre (Danielsen *et al.* 1993). On Leyte in 1937 the species was found to be rare, although this was in “practically untouched virgin forest” at 750–1,250 m (Rabor 1938), possibly above the optimum altitudinal range of the species. On Mindanao there have been no records since 1987.

**ECOLOGY Habitat** The Philippine Eagle-owl occurs in forest at lower elevations, often near rivers and lakes (Whitehead 1899a). In the Sierra Madre it was observed in degraded and selectively logged forest from sea-level to 400 m, not obviously near any significant waterbodies (Danielsen *et al.* 1993, Poulsen 1995), while on Leyte it was recorded at higher altitudes, from 750 to 1,250 m (Rabor 1938, Parkes 1973). At the UP Laguna Land Grant, the species was recorded in heavily disturbed forest (Gonzalez 1995). On Catanduanes it ranges from the lowlands to the mountains, occurring in a wide variety of habitats including coconut plantations with patches of thick second growth, the wooded banks of rivers and marshes, second growth and primary forests (Gonzales 1983). It is usually found singly while asleep in the dark corner of a shady and leafy tree, or in thick tangles of vines (Gonzales 1983). On Mt Makiling, 1988, a hunting bird perched on a rock 10 m above a creek at dusk (NADM).

**Food** In coloration this powerful owl resembles the Asian fishing owls *Ketupa*, but the structure of its legs and feet indicates that it feeds on mammals and birds (Delacour and Mayr 1946); even so, Whitehead (1899a) was so struck by the resemblance to *Ketupa*, and the fact that birds were seemingly always found near water, that he believed some food would be found to be obtained in rivers and lakes.

**Breeding** No breeding information is available (Dickinson *et al.* 1991) except that the testes of two males from Leyte, August, were small (DMNH label data) and an immature was collected in May (Rabor 1938). Young birds were seen in April 1993 at an unspecified locality (N. Bostock verbally 1993).

**Migration** There is no evidence of seasonal or other movement in this species, and it would be expected to be sedentary.

**THREATS** Forest destruction throughout the Philippines, particularly at the lower elevations, has been extensive in the course of this century, with relatively little habitat remaining below 1,000 m; it is inevitable that so much loss will have had a major and continuing effect on populations of this species (Collar *et al.* 1994). Hunting may also have had a deleterious impact on populations (Poulsen 1995). The UP Laguna Land Grant is under “severe threat of degradation by illegal logging operations” (Gonzalez 1995), and the fate of better-known sites is equally discouraging.

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**The distribution of Philippine Eagle-owl *Bubo philippensis* (map opposite; sequence not as in text):** (1) Pagudpud; (2) Cayapa; (3) Maconacon; (4) Palanan; (5) La Trinidad; (6) Irisan; (7) Sacobia river; (8) Angat Dam; (9) Ipo Dam; (10) Manila; (11) Balian; (12) Laguna de Bay; (13) UP Laguna Land Grant; (14) Mt Makiling National Park; (15) Silang; (16) Calauan; (17) UP Quezon Land Grant; (18) Quezon National Park; (19) Burgos; (20) Jagusara; (21) Tugas; (22) Duao; (23) Rajah Sikatuna National Park; (24) Catbalogan; (25) Mt Lobi; (26) Helosig; (27) Tomas Oppus; (28) Car–Can–Mad–Lan; (29) Mt Kitanglad; (30) Davao; (31) Mt Apo.  
○ Historical (pre-1950) ● Fairly recent (1950–1979) ● Recent (1980–present)

**MEASURES TAKEN** The Philippine Eagle-owl is known from three CPPAP sites (Northern Sierra Madre Natural Park on Luzon; Mts Kitanglad and Apo on Mindanao; see Appendix). Furthermore, it receives some protection in Mt Makiling and (the highly degraded) Quezon National Parks on Luzon and Rajah Sikatuna National Park on Bohol. In the mid-1990s it was featured on an environmental awareness poster focusing on owls 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). The species is listed on Appendix II of CITES.

**MEASURES PROPOSED** Apart from the areas targeted for conservation above, the species is known from two “key sites” (Central Catanduanes; Angat Watershed on Luzon; see Appendix) which deserve formal designation under the NIPAS process. This species will benefit from an integrated conservation strategy targeting the forests of Mindanao and Luzon along with several other species heavily reliant on the proposed and existing protected areas on those islands (see equivalent sections under Green Racquet-tail *Prioniturus luconensis* and Blue-capped Kingfisher *Actenoides hombroni*). In addition, immediate protection of the forest in the UP Laguna Land Grant, in accordance with its official status, is long overdue (see Gonzalez 1995). Further fieldwork is needed involving night surveys of calling birds, using tape-playback if appropriate, so that the true distribution and status of the species can be more clearly understood.

**REMARKS** (1) Meise (1933) showed that the genus assigned to this species, *Pseudoptynx*, was inappropriate, given the evidence that the species of *Bubo* and *Ketupa* show such intergradation; he judged that the Philippine species, although in colour pattern closest to Buffy Fish-owl *Ketupa ketupu*, is structurally closer to *Bubo*. (2) Goodman *et al.* (1995) drew attention to the view of Marshall (1978) that a large forest owl on Sibuyan might be this species, and themselves encountered a local who recognised an illustration of it and reported it to occur in the forested areas of the island.