

# Threatened Birds of Asia:

## The BirdLife International Red Data Book

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**Recommended citation**

BirdLife International (2001) *Threatened birds of Asia: the BirdLife International Red Data Book*. Cambridge, UK: BirdLife International.

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ISBN 0 946888 42 6 (Part A)

ISBN 0 946888 43 4 (Part B)

ISBN 0 946888 44 2 (Set)

British Library-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

First published 2001 by BirdLife International

Designed and produced by the **Nature**Bureau, 36 Kingfisher Court, Hambridge Road, Newbury, Berkshire RG14 5SJ, United Kingdom

Available from the Natural History Book Service Ltd, 2–3 Wills Road, Totnes, Devon TQ9 5XN, UK. Tel: +44 1803 865913 Fax: +44 1803 865280 Email [nhbs@nhbs.co.uk](mailto:nhbs@nhbs.co.uk)  
Internet: [www.nhbs.com/services/birdlife.html](http://www.nhbs.com/services/birdlife.html)

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## BLACK-HOODED COUCAL

### *Centropus steeri*

**Critical** ■ C1; C2a

Endangered □ B1+2a,b,c,d,e; D1

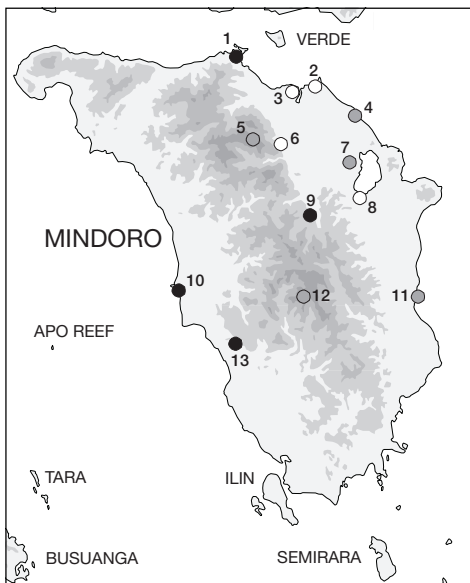
Vulnerable □ A1c,d; A2c,d; D2



*This coucal qualifies as Critical because it is believed to have an extremely small, severely fragmented population, which continues to decline owing to losses of remaining forest fragments.*

**DISTRIBUTION** This cuckoo is endemic to the island of Mindoro in the Philippines (see Remarks 1).

■ **PHILIPPINES** Mindoro Specific records are: **Puerto Galera** at Mt Malasimbo, June 1997 (Gonzalez *et al.* 1997); **Calapan**, June and July 1890 (three specimens in BMNH, ZMB); **Balete**, on the Baco River near Mt Halcon, April 1905 (three males in FMNH, USNM; also McGregor 1905c); **San Luis**, Naujan, at 30 m in May 1954 (Ripley and Rabor 1958); **Mt Halcon**, without specific locality, April 1937 (Peters 1939), at Barawan (Barawan) Peak, 750 m, April 1954 (male in YPM; Ripley and Rabor 1958), and at Bignay, April 1937 (two specimens in MCZ); foot of **Mt Dulangan**, November 1895 and January 1896 (three specimens in AMNH, BMNH); **Alcate**, Victoria, at 60 m, March–April 1954 (Ripley and Rabor 1958; 10 males in ANSP, UPLB, YPM, ZMH); **Pasi**, March 1937 (Peters 1939 based on MCZ female also labelled “Pola”); **MUFRC Experimental Forest**, Victoria, 1980 (Catibog-Sinha 1982); **Siburan**, Sablayan Penal Colony, December 1991 and December 1992 (Dutson *et al.* 1992, Evans *et al.* 1993a, Brooks *et al.* 1995b), and 1994–1997 (Hornbuckle 1994, T. M. Brooks *in litt.* 1997, B. Gee *in litt.* 1997); **Bok-bok**, Bongabong, July 1963 (male in AMNH); **Mt Iglit-Baco National Park** at Bayanan, December 1979 (R. Callo verbally 1997); **Malpalon** (Calintaan), 430 m, October 1991 (Dutson *et al.* 1992, Evans *et al.* 1993a), May 1995 (J. C. T.



#### The distribution of Black-hooded Coucal

**Centropus steerii**: (1) Puerto Galera; (2) Calapan; (3) Balete; (4) San Luis; (5) Mt Halcon; (6) Mt Dulangan; (7) Alcate; (8) Pasi; (9) MUFRC Experimental Forest; (10) Siburan; (11) Bok-bok; (12) Mt Iglit-Baco National Park; (13) Malpalon.

○ Historical (pre-1950) ● Fairly recent (1950–1979)  
● Recent (1980–present)

Gonzalez verbally 1997). A record from Coco Beach (Puerto Galera), in May or June 1992 (Scotwin 1992), deserves mention but requires confirmation.

**POPULATION** At the time of its first description the Black-hooded Coucal was considered “not uncommon” (Bourns and Worcester 1894). In 1905 it was abundant along the Balete River (McGregor 1905c; see Remarks 2), and this was soon after modified to “fairly abundant” as an index for the entire island (McGregor 1909–1910). In 1954, it was “fairly common” in lowland dipterocarp forest, from 30–60 m, but occasional in transitional dipterocarp/mid-mountain forest at 760 m (Ripley and Rabor 1958). At present, however, the population is believed to be extremely small; four was the largest recorded number at Siburan in 1994 (Custodio *et al.* 1994), although four on one day and two elsewhere on the next suggested at least six, August 1994 (T. M. Brooks *in litt.* 1997). The total number of localities at which the species has been recorded since (and excluding) 1980 is three, two of them being adjacent: the global population can therefore be assumed to be tiny.

**ECOLOGY Habitat** This bird is known to be restricted to primary lowland forest (“invariably found in deep forests”: Bourns and Worcester 1894) up to 760 m (Ogilvie Grant 1896b, Ripley and Rabor 1958, Dickinson *et al.* 1991), where it inhabits high forest trees (Whitehead 1899c) or, in McGregor’s (1905c) experience, is “usually seen in the tops of vine-covered shrubs” (see Remarks 3), and, in recent observations, tangled thickets (e.g. of vines and rattan), streamsides, treefalls, bamboo within primary forest (G. C. L. Dutson *in litt.* 1996, P. A. J. Morris *in litt.* 1996, B. Gee *in litt.* 1997). It seems to be dependent on lowland forest with minimal disturbance (Evans *et al.* 1993a), and may be displaced at forest edge or in semi-degraded forest by the Philippine Coucal *Centropus viridis*, a bird of scrub and second growth (Collar and Andrew 1988; also Brooks *et al.* 1995b). Birds at Malpalon were seen in tangled forest undergrowth with numerous vines near a cultivated area, and in an isolated forest fragment amidst grassland, the latter bird apparently moving between remnant forest tracts (J. C. T. Gonzalez verbally 1997). The species has been said to occupy the same ecological niche as the Black-faced Coucal *C. melanops* in the southern Philippines (Ripley and Rabor 1958), but field comparisons in the 1990s suggested that they are not particularly close ecologically (G. C. L. Dutson *in litt.* 1996). Single birds at Siburan, 1991, were (1) inside closed-canopy forest and (2) in a strip of recent second growth adjacent to closed-canopy forest, while the two at Malpalon were in a 600 m-wide tract of primary forest extending from a rocky ridge downhill through broken terrain with occasional 5 m-high boulders, the substrate causing the forest to be extremely broken with many sunny openings and a heavy infestation of bamboos and creepers, with scattered big trees reaching 30 m and casting deep shade over areas relatively free of undergrowth in small patches (Dutson *et al.* 1992, Evans *et al.* 1993a). Like other Philippine forest congeners, this coucal runs along branches, preferring thick tangles of climbing plants, and is reluctant to fly yet inquisitive, but unlike these congeners—based on a small number of observations—it associates little with conspecifics or other birds (Dutson *et al.* 1992).

**Food** The label of the BMNH female from Calapan is inscribed “larger insects”. Bourns and Worcester (1894) noted that “the strong, hooked beak... is very noticeable” (see also Remarks 1), which presumably indicates a foraging adaptation.

**Breeding** There appears to be no information.

**Migration** The species is presumably highly sedentary.

**THREATS** Forest destruction within the altitudinal range of the species is almost total, and what little remains is small and highly fragmented; indeed it was anticipated all to be cleared within 10–20 years of 1991 (Dutson *et al.* 1992, Evans *et al.* 1993a), except perhaps for the area of forest at Malpalon, where the roughness of the ground appeared to be the reason for

the survival of the strip of forest in an area of cultivation (Dutson *et al.* 1992). Even if the majority of existing sites are conserved, the problem must be one of overall viability in so sedentary and forest-dependent a species, with genetic and stochastic factors steadily affecting the tiny populations that currently survive in each isolated patch of habitat. In Mt Iglit-Baco National Park, the main threat is *kaingin* farming (BRT). At Siburan/Sablayan, the species may be threatened by disturbance to the forest undergrowth owing to the collection of rattan by prisoners for furniture production, and by occasional selective logging of large trees, for milling on site, again for furniture production (B. Gee *in litt.* 1997), and also by encroaching *kaingin*, illegal tree-cutting and collection of forest products by locally resettled people and Mt Pinatubo refugees (Custodio *et al.* 1994, Brooks *et al.* 1995b).

**MEASURES TAKEN** Information provided in the equivalent section for Mindoro Bleeding-heart *Gallicolumba platenae* relating to Siburan and Puerto Galera is relevant here. The MUFRC Experimental Forest covered (in 1980) 7,853 ha (Catibog-Sinha 1982). Mt Iglit-Baco National Park is a NIPAP site but its importance for the Black-hooded Coucal may well be negligible.

**MEASURES PROPOSED** Apart from the areas mentioned in the preceding section, the species is known from within or near three “key sites” (Mt Halcon, Lake Naujan and Malpalon) and these deserve further survey and, at least in part, formal designation under the NIPAS process (although in the case of Lake Naujan it needs to be established if and where sufficient forest occurs to support this species). The equivalent section under Mindoro Bleeding-heart makes general recommendations. A conservation strategy for the island of Mindoro should consider the distributions and requirements of all threatened endemic and near-endemic birds (see Remarks 4).

**REMARKS** (1) The species is sympatric with a black-winged form *mindorensis* of Philippine Coucal *Centropus viridis*, a curious inversion of the usual character displacement process. Peters (1939) made the following remarks: “While the two are about the same size, *steerei* [*sic*] is a much stockier and more heavily built bird; the bill is much longer, thicker and more strongly decurved; the body color... is bronzy with a strong greenish gloss... The hind claw is quite unlike that of *mindorensis*, rather stout for a *Centropus* and not exceeding the hallux in length (instead of being slender and twice the length of the hallux)”. (2) McGregor (1905c) actually wrote that it was “quite as abundant as the last species”, that is *C. (viridis) mindorensis*, which he described as “abundant in the localities visited”, which effectively means the Baco River between Chicago and Balete. (3) McGregor’s (1909–1910) remark that the species inhabits “thick grass patches and jungle” can be discarded as he was combining its preferences with those of *C. viridis*. (4) Three other threatened species are wholly reliant on the forests of Mindoro for their survival (Mindoro Bleeding-heart, Mindoro Imperial-pigeon *Ducula mindorensis* and Mindoro Hornbill *Penelopides mindorensis*) while a few other species have very important populations on the island (e.g. Spotted Imperial-pigeon *Ducula carola*, Scarlet-collared Flowerpecker *Dicaeum retrocinctum*).