

# Threatened Birds of Asia:

## The BirdLife International Red Data Book

Editors

N. J. COLLAR (Editor-in-chief),  
A. V. ANDREEV, S. CHAN, M. J. CROSBY, S. SUBRAMANYA and J. A. TOBIAS

Maps by

RUDYANTO and M. J. CROSBY

Principal compilers and data contributors

■ **BANGLADESH** P. Thompson ■ **BHUTAN** R. Pradhan; C. Inskipp, T. Inskipp ■ **CAMBODIA** Sun Huan; C. M. Poole ■ **CHINA** ■ **MAINLAND CHINA** Zheng Guangmei; Ding Changqing, Gao Wei, Gao Yuren, Li Fulai, Liu Naifa, Ma Zhijun, the late Tan Yaokuang, Wang Qishan, Xu Weishu, Yang Lan, Yu Zhiwei, Zhang Zhengwang. ■ **HONG KONG** Hong Kong Bird Watching Society (BirdLife Affiliate); H. F. Cheung; F. N. Y. Lock, C. K. W. Ma, Y. T. Yu. ■ **TAIWAN** Wild Bird Federation of Taiwan (BirdLife Partner); L. Liu Severinghaus; Chang Chin-lung, Chiang Ming-liang, Fang Woei-horng, Ho Yi-hsian, Hwang Kwang-yin, Lin Wei-yuan, Lin Wen-horn, Lo Hung-ren, Sha Chian-chung, Yau Cheng-teh. ■ **INDIA** Bombay Natural History Society (BirdLife Partner Designate) and Sálím Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History; L. Vijayan and V. S. Vijayan; S. Balachandran, R. Bhargava, P. C. Bhattacharjee, S. Bhupathy, A. Chaudhury, P. Gole, S. A. Hussain, R. Kaul, U. Lachungpa, R. Naroji, S. Pandey, A. Pittie, V. Prakash, A. Rahmani, P. Saikia, R. Sankaran, P. Singh, R. Sugathan, Zafar-ul Islam ■ **INDONESIA** BirdLife International Indonesia Country Programme; Ria Saryanthi; D. Agista, S. van Balen, Y. Cahyadin, R. F. A. Grimmett, F. R. Lambert, M. Poulsen, Rudyanto, I. Setiawan, C. Trainor ■ **JAPAN** Wild Bird Society of Japan (BirdLife Partner); Y. Fujimaki; Y. Kanai, H. Morioka, K. Ono, H. Uchida, M. Ueta, N. Yanagisawa ■ **KOREA** ■ **NORTH KOREA** Pak U-il; Chong Jong-ryol, Rim Chuyon. ■ **SOUTH KOREA** Lee Woo-shin; Han Sang-hoon, Kim Jin-han, Lee Ki-sup, Park Jin-young ■ **LAOS** K. Khounbolin; W. J. Duckworth ■ **MALAYSIA** Malaysian Nature Society (BirdLife Partner); K. Kumar; G. Noramly, M. J. Kohler ■ **MONGOLIA** D. Batdelger; A. Bräunlich, N. Tseveenmyadag ■ **MYANMAR** Khin Ma Ma Thwin ■ **NEPAL** Bird Conservation Nepal (BirdLife Affiliate); H. S. Baral; C. Inskipp, T. P. Inskipp ■ **PAKISTAN** Ornithological Society of Pakistan (BirdLife Affiliate) ■ **PHILIPPINES** Haribon Foundation for Conservation of Natural Resources (BirdLife Partner); N. A. D. Mallari, B. R. Tabaranza, Jr. ■ **RUSSIA** Russian Bird Conservation Union (BirdLife Partner Designate); A. V. Andreev; A. G. Degtyarev, V. G. Degtyarev, V. A. Dugintsov, N. N. Gerasimov, Yu. N. Gerasimov, N. I. Germogenov, O. A. Goroshko, A. V. Kondrat'ev, Yu. V. Labutin, N. M. Litvinenko, Yu. N. Nazarov, V. A. Nechaev, V. I. Perfil'ev, R. V. Ryabtsev, Yu. V. Shibaev, S. G. Surmach, E. E. Tkachenko, O. P. Val'chuk, B. A. Voronov. ■ **SINGAPORE** The Nature Society (Singapore) (BirdLife Partner); Lim Kim Seng ■ **SRI LANKA** Field Ornithology Group of Sri Lanka (BirdLife Affiliate); S. Kotagama; S. Aryaprema, S. Corea, J. P. G. Jones, U. Fernando, R. Perera, M. Siriwardhane, K. Weerakoon ■ **THAILAND** Bird Conservation Society of Thailand (BirdLife Partner); U. Treesucon; R. Jugmongkol, V. Kongthong, P. Poonswad, P. D. Round, S. Supparatvirkorn ■ **VIETNAM** BirdLife International Vietnam Country Programme; Nguyen Cu; J. C. Eames, A. W. Tordoff, Le Trong Trai, Nguyen Duc Tu.

With contributions from: S. H. M. Butchart, D. S. Butler (maps), P. Davidson, J. C. Lowen, G. C. L. Dutson, N. B. Peet, T. Vetta (maps), J. M. Villasper (maps), M. G. Wilson

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Wellbrook Court, Girton Road, Cambridge, CB3 0NA, United Kingdom

Tel: +44 1223 277318 Fax: +44 1223 277200 Email: [birdlife@birdlife.org.uk](mailto:birdlife@birdlife.org.uk)

Internet: [www.birdlife.net](http://www.birdlife.net)

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## SUMATRAN COCHOA

### *Cochoa beccarii*

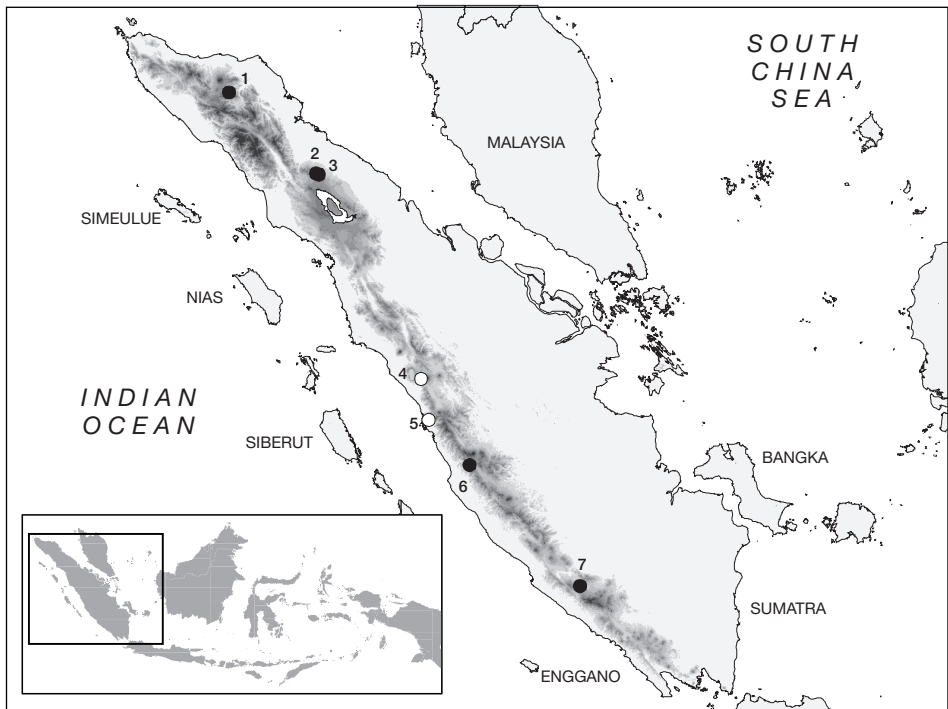
Critical  —  
Endangered  —  
Vulnerable  C1; C2a



*This species is treated as Vulnerable because it lives at very low densities and thus has a small population, which is doubtless undergoing a continuing decline and severe fragmentation owing to habitat loss at the lower fringes of its range.*

**DISTRIBUTION** The Sumatran Cochoa (see Remarks 1) is endemic to the island of Sumatra, Indonesia, where it has been found at sites over a large part of the Barisan range, but only at a few localities, as follows:

■ **INDONESIA Sumatra** ■ **Aceh** above **Bintang**, south-east end of Lake Tawar (by Takengon), 1,360 m, August 1995 (A. Elliott and I. Martinez *in litt.* 1999); ■ **North Sumatra Berastagi** (on the route to Gunung Sibayak), 1,600–1,700 m, Batak Highlands, May 1982 (van Marle and Voous 1988, Holmes 1996); **Tanjungbarus**, 1984 (R. Eve and A. M. Guigue *in van Marle and Voous 1988*); ■ **West Sumatra Gunung Singgalang**, Padangpanjang county, June and July 1878 (Salvadori 1879, Büttikofer 1887: 68; see Remarks 2); **Barungbaru** (“Barong Bharu”),



**The distribution of Sumatran Cochoa *Cochoa beccarii*:** (1) Bintang; (2) Berastagi; (3) Tanjungbarus; (4) Gunung Singgalang; (5) Barungbaru; (6) Kerinci Seblat National Park; (7) Gunung Dempo.

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

1,200 m, Barisan range, one male collected at 1,200 m, June 1914 (Robinson and Kloss 1918a, male in BMNH; see Remarks 3); **Kerinci-Seblat National Park** at Sungaikumbang (Sungei Kumbang), one male collected at 1,420 m in May 1914, and the remains of another, killed by a predator, in the same area at that time (Robinson and Kloss 1918a; male in AMNH), and at 1,000 m at an unspecified locality, 1993 (W. Rodenburg *per* J. Wind in Collar *et al.* 1994), July 1998 (P. A. J. Morris verbally 1998, F. Verbelen *in litt.* 1999, 2000), May–July 1999 (I. Mauro, E. Vercruysse, F. Verbelen *in litt.* 1999), June 2000 (P. A. J. Morris verbally 2000), and above Keresek Tua, 2,000 m, February 1994 (Simpson 1995; see Remarks 4); ■ **South Sumatra Gunung Dempo**, song tape-recorded, October 1995 (F. Verbelen *in litt.* 1999).

**POPULATION** The species is notably unobtrusive, sitting motionless for long periods in heavy cover (Simpson 1995, F. Verbelen *in litt.* 1999). Even so, Robinson and Kloss (1918a) considered that “the bird must be very rare as these are the only specimens obtained since the original types were collected by Beccari on Mt Singalang thirty-five years ago”, and Simpson (1995) agreed that, however inconspicuous it is, it must also be “very thinly distributed”. Presumably numbers continue to be lost as clearance proceeds in forest habitat in the lower parts of its elevational range (see Threats).

**ECOLOGY Habitat** Records in Distribution indicate that a slight revision is needed to the elevation of 1,200–1,600 m given in van Marle and Voous (1988), the span being 1,000–2,000 m. Moreover, the assertion that the species inhabits the upper storey of tropical lower montane forest (van Marle and Voous 1988) also requires slight revision, since Robinson and Kloss (1918a) reported the birds which they had collected as having being shot “in one instance on the ground, in the other among low shrubs” (see also Food). A pair were seen on Kerinci, some 15 m up in forest with a feeding flock (P. A. J. Morris verbally 1998).

**Food** Birds have been seen to take small fruits (Simpson 1995). A solitary female was observed feeding on small green berries 5–10 m off the ground (P. A. J. Morris verbally 1998).

**Breeding** A juvenile bird was recorded in May (van Marle and Voous 1988, Holmes 1996) and an immature in the same month (E. Vercruysse *per* F. Verbelen *in litt.* 1999); a spotty immature was seen in late June 2000 on Kerinci (P. A. J. Morris verbally 2000). Two birds seen in February 1994 on Gunung Kerinci were suspected to be feeding young (Simpson 1995). The second of two syntypes, collected in early July, was not fully adult (Salvadori 1878). A male was in song daily on Kerinci, June 1999 (I. Mauro *in litt.* 1999).

**THREATS** The Sumatran Cochoa is a threatened member of the suite of 20 bird species that are entirely restricted to the “Sumatra and Peninsular Malaysia Endemic Bird Area”, threats and conservation measures in which are profiled by Sujatnika *et al.* (1995) and Stattersfield *et al.* (1998). The extent of deforestation in the lower elevational range of this species, the general plight of upland forest on Sumatra, and the particular plight of Kerinci-Seblat National Park, are outlined in Threats under Sumatran Ground-cuckoo *Carpococcyx viridis*. All known localities for the Sumatran Cochoa are in areas with a high pressure from agriculture on the lower periphery (SvB).

Hunting with air rifles is widespread in the lower forest at Kerinci, which may be a threat to the species (F. Verbelen *in litt.* 1999).

Evidence that the species is, at least occasionally, entering international trade emerged recently with the publication of a photograph of a captive bird, apparently in the Netherlands (Borgstein 2000). Such evidence strongly suggests that birds may also be in local trade. Any commerce in what appears to be so uncommon a species seems likely to be very damaging to local populations.

**MEASURES TAKEN** It is present in Kerinci-Seblat National Park (see Distribution but also Threats). Gunung Singgalang is a 97 km<sup>2</sup> protection forest, but with garden (“ladang”) encroachment along the lower peripheries (SvB). Bukit Dingin/Gunung Dempo consists of c.380 km<sup>2</sup> protection forest (SvB).

**MEASURES PROPOSED** Both Gunung Singgalang and Bukit Dingin/Gunung Dempo have been proposed for upgrading to reserves (D. A. Holmes *in litt.* 1999). There is a good case for creating a large reserve in the Batak Highlands, and endeavours to find an appropriate area which holds the full complement of threatened upland forest bird species, including Schneider’s *Pitta pitta schneideri* (also known from this area), would be welcome. Several much larger areas to the north-east, totalling c.2,140 km<sup>2</sup> of rich rainforest between 100 and 3,021 m (Sekundur, Langkat Selatan and Langkat Barat), are proposed nature reserves and very likely to hold these species (SvB). A strict hunting ban is needed at Kerinci and Dempo (F. Verbelen *in litt.* 1999).

A CITES Appendix listing may well be appropriate for this species.

**REMARKS** (1) This species was inexplicably placed as a subspecies of Javan Cochoa *Cochoa azurea* by Chasen (1935), and was treated as such thereafter (including by van Marle and Voous 1988) until distinguished by Collar and Andrew (1987, 1988). Even now, however, there has been no formal statement of evidence for its separation, partly because its original lumping was so completely mistaken. Salvadori (1878) and Robinson and Kloss (1918a) had already indicated that its affinities are with Purple Cochoa *C. purpurea*, from which it is “at once distinguished by the deep shining black of the mantle and under surface”, adding that it is “a very much larger bird than *C. azurea* of Java”. (2) Van Marle and Voous (1988) gave Padangpanjang as a locality associated with a watercolour by L. F. de Beaufort, the record (rather than the painting) apparently being dated 1909. It appears, however, that Padangpanjang is situated on Gunung Singgalang and is therefore here treated as a sublocality of the mountain. (3) Van Marle and Voous (1988) missed this record. (4) It is possible that all post-1994 records have been from above Kereseck Tua.