

# 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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## SILVERY WOOD-PIGEON

### *Columba argentina*

Critical ■ D1

Endangered □ —

Vulnerable □ —

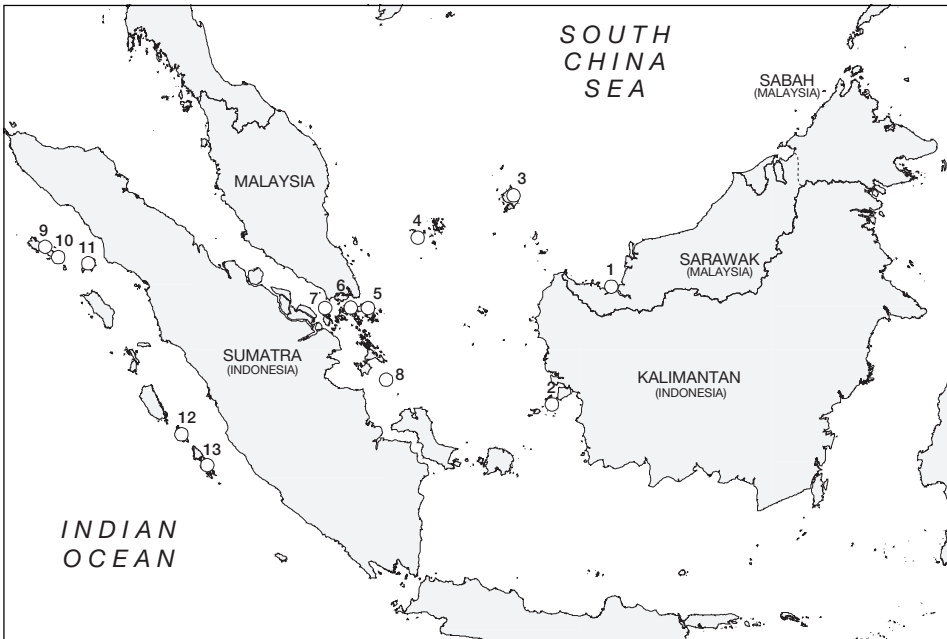


*There have been no confirmed records of this poorly known pigeon for 70 years, suggesting that its population is tiny. As such it is listed as Critical, although any positively identified flocks might trigger and immediate downgrading to Endangered, or even Vulnerable.*

**DISTRIBUTION** The Silvery Wood-pigeon has a dispersed yet highly constricted range on islands off the west and east coasts of Sumatra, Indonesia, extending onto the Malaysian islands west of Borneo. As “a wandering seasonal species”, this bird is anticipated to occur “from time to time on all the west Sumatran islands” (Ripley 1944). Reliable records are very few owing to considerable identification difficulties (see Remarks 1).

■ **MALAYSIA** There is a sight record, best treated as unconfirmed, from Pulau Jarak in the Straits of Melaka (Robinson and Chasen 1936; also Chasen 1939a). There is also an unacceptable record from Sabah (see Remarks 4 under Crestless Fireback *Lophura erythrophthalma*). Otherwise the only record appears to be from:

■ **Sarawak Burong island** (off the mouth of the Lupar river), April 1899 (Smythies 1957, 1981).



**The distribution of Silvery Wood-pigeon *Columba argentina*:** (1) Burong island; (2) Pulau Gurung Besar; (3) Pulau Bunguran; (4) Pulau Jemaja; (5) Bintang; (6) Batam; (7) Monos; (8) Saya; (9) Teluk Dalam; (10) Labuan Bajau Bay; (11) Airdingin; (12) Sipura; (13) Pulau Pagai Selatan.

○ Historical (pre-1950)

■ **INDONESIA** Records are from islands in the waters between westernmost Borneo, northern Sumatra and Peninsular Malaysia, and from several West Sumatran islands, as follows:

*Karimata Islands Pulau Gurungan Besar* (Gurong), March 1931 (Chasen and Kloss 1932b);

*North Natunas* undated, including (by report) Pulau Laut (Chasen 1935, Smythies 1981), and **Pulau Bunguran**, September 1928 (male in ZRCNUS);

*Anamba Islands Pulau Jemaja*, October 1925 (male in ZRCNUS);

*Riau archipelago* on **Bintang**, June 1930 (Chasen 1931), but with no recent records (Rajathurai 1996), **Batam**, undated (Gibson-Hill 1952b), and Karimun Besar (at **Monos**, August 1908: two specimens in BMNH, ZRCNUS);

*Lingga archipelago Saya* island (“Pulo Taya”), July 1899 (Richmond 1903, Oberholser 1919, Gibson-Hill 1952b, van Marle and Voous 1988).

*Simeulue* (see Migration, then Remarks 2) **Teluk Dalam**, common, November or December 1901 (Richmond 1903 [under the name *Columba phasma*]); **Teluk Labuan Bajau**, November or December 1901 (Richmond 1903 [under the name *Columba phasma*]);

*Tuanku Airdingin* (Ajer Dingin), undated juvenile (Junge 1936); unspecified localities, March and May 1913 (two females in RMNH);

*Sipura* undated (Ripley 1944; see Remarks 3);

*Pulau Pagai Selatan (South Pagai)* December 1902 (Ripley 1944; specimens in AMNH, BMNH, ZRCNUS).

Records from Padang-Sugihan Wildlife Reserve, South Sumatra, November 1984 and June 1985, are regarded as provisional, although that from the former date is given as if certain (Nash and Nash 1985); but in any case Padang Sugihan reserve has been overrun by local settlers (Rudyanto verbally 2000). Unprecedented records of large numbers in the tidal zone of the same province (Verheugt *et al.* 1993; see Population) are considered provisional here (see Remarks 1). A listing from Berbak Game Reserve, Jambi, was also regarded as provisional (Silvius and Verheugt 1986), although it was accepted by van Marle and Voous (1988). An undated but pre-1850 specimen (in RMNH) from Pontianak, West Kalimantan, Borneo, was accepted as a valid record by Smythies (1957) but, given the status of this species as a small-island specialist, is treated as doubtful here.

**POPULATION** This species may once have been locally common but it appears to have undergone a catastrophic decline, with no reliable recent records (all dated records are from between 1899 and 1931, and there are no confirmed reports subsequent to the latter year), the problem partly being its extreme similarity at any distance to the Pied Imperial-pigeon *Ducula bicolor*, which also occupies offshore islands (del Hoyo *et al.* 1997). This confusion extends to Simeulue, where the species was found to have a native name, indicating “that it is not so rare”, although E. Jacobson found it “not common but sometimes caught in traps by natives” (Junge 1936) and reports of greater abundance may have been based on confusion with Pied Imperial-pigeon (see Remarks 2); certainly W. L. Abbott found it at only two places on the island, at one of which (Teluk Dalam) it was common, but its general scarcity caused it to be considered “rare” (Richmond 1903; also Robinson and Chasen 1936). On the Natuna Islands it was well known to the inhabitants although they recognised it to be less common than Pied Imperial-pigeon (Robinson and Chasen 1936). It formerly bred on Burong inshore in Sarawak, but (unsurprisingly, given the island’s inshore rivermouth position) has not done so since 1899 (Smythies 1981).

The species is suspected as being a common resident in mangroves and to a lesser extent swamp forests in South Sumatra, notably (apparently) the Banyuasin peninsula; birds resembling this species were “widespread and seen in large numbers, especially along the Sembilang River in March 1989”, when it appeared to be the commonest large pigeon; “if correct, these observations would be unprecedented” (Verheugt *et al.* 1993). However, they

have not been supported by subsequent records, and thus must remain provisional (see Remarks 1).

**ECOLOGY Habitat** The species occupies mangroves, woodland and coconut groves in the lowlands and hills of offshore islands, occasionally found in similar habitat below 100 m on main islands (del Hoyo *et al.* 1997). Burong was in 1899 “an uninhabited rocky islet” (Smythies 1957). The species seems commonly to associate with Pied Imperial-pigeon (e.g. on Pulau Burong, Saya island, Karimun: Robinson and Chasen 1936).

**Food** There is no information.

**Breeding** The species lays a single egg in a typical pigeon nest in a tree or shrub (del Hoyo *et al.* 1997). A male from the Karimatas had enlarged testes in March (MZB label data).

**Migration** Ripley (1944) judged that this species wanders seasonally and probably occurs or occurred from time to time on all west Sumatran islands (but see Remarks 2).

**THREATS** Deforestation and disturbance may be a problem on the islands habitually occupied by this species, as well as hunting (Collar *et al.* 1994). Its rarity is attributed to deforestation by MacKinnon and Phillipps (1993), and certainly the Pagai Islands have been subject to heavy logging since the 1970s, and the company involved was recently caught smuggling timber from the islands (*Down to Earth* 44: 5–6). A further consideration may be the spread through these islands of alien predators, and this was one of the fears that governed the proposal for reserve status for much of Simeulue (see below).

**MEASURES TAKEN** None is known. A reserve has long been proposed for the inland western half of Simeulue (see below) but never acted on.

**MEASURES PROPOSED** A game reserve 250 km<sup>2</sup> in extent has been proposed as a high priority for the island of Simeulue (FAO 1981–1982, Mitchell 1981), and it needs to be stressed that protection for the forests on this island could prove crucial to the preservation of this species. This pigeon needs to be surveyed throughout its known range, especially in the West Sumatran islands, and it should be sought on other islands in the Riau and Lingga archipelagos (Rajathurai 1996); the Linggas are still largely forested and surveys there are urgently needed (D. A. Holmes *in litt.* 1999).

**REMARKS** (1) Holmes (1996) called for care in ensuring that observers distinguish between this and the very similar Pied Imperial-pigeon *Ducula bicolor*, and it is not clear whether some records have eliminated the latter species (for an example of this problem, see Remarks 2). (2) Explorers in 1913 were told that in certain months of the year the species is “very abundant in Pulu Si Laut (Cocos islands, North Simalur)” (Junge 1936)—see the first map in Forbes (1885)—but this turned out to be in error for Pied Imperial-pigeon (Junge 1937). (3) Ripley’s record is accepted here, but its source has not been traced (it is not, e.g., Chasen and Kloss 1926). However, AMNH possesses a male and female from an untraceable “Si Obau”, Mentawai Islands, July 1894, which may be the same.