

Threatened Birds of Asia:

The BirdLife International Red Data Book

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GREY-CROWNED CROCIAS

Crocias langbianis



Critical —

Endangered B1+2a,b,c,d,e

Vulnerable D2

This species is recently known from only three sites and is inferred to have a very small, declining range as a result of the destruction and degradation of its montane evergreen forest habitat. It therefore qualifies as Endangered.

DISTRIBUTION The Grey-crowned Crocias (see Remarks 1) is restricted to a few sites on the Da Lat plateau (highlands of Lam Dong and Dac Lac provinces), Vietnam, with records as follows:

■ **VIETNAM** Chu Yang Sin Nature Reserve, Dac Lac, one pair, 1,000 m, January 1994 (Eames 1994), thereafter many observations in the vicinity (see *Oriental Bird Club Bull.* 24 [1996]: 59–65), especially during March and April 1995 (Eames *et al.* 1995b); Bi Doup-Nui Ba Nature Reserve, Lam Dong, on **Mt Lang Bian**, a pair and a single, April 1938 (Gyldenstolpe 1939, specimens in NRM; see Remarks 2), but no recent records from within the reserve (A. W. Tordoff *in litt.* 2001); **Tuyen Lam** lake, 6 km south-west of Da Lat, two, December 1994 (Dymond 1998), one, April 1996 (*Oriental Bird Club Bull.* 24 [1996]: 59–65), one, December 1996 (C. R. Robson *in litt.* 1997), three, February 1998 (Mauro 1999), a pair, 1,300 m, April 1998 (Hornbuckle 1998b), one, April 1999 (B. Wright *in litt.* 1999); **Dran**, c.950 m, July 1939 (female in MCZ); **Cam Ly**, c.1,675 m, July 1939 (female in USNM), one record in the 1990s (J. C. Eames *in litt.* 1999).

POPULATION The fact that two intensive collecting expeditions within the currently known range of this babbler (i.e. Robinson and Kloss 1919a, Delacour and Jabouille 1927b) failed to detect it implies that it is highly elusive and/or very uncommon, or that the wrong habitat and elevation were being searched. In addition, recent surveys of the Da Lat area proved fruitless (Eames and Robson 1992, Robson *et al.* 1993). However, when finally rediscovered



The distribution of Grey-crowned Crocias

Crocias langbianis: (1) Chu Yang Sin Nature Reserve; (2) Mt Lang Bian; (3) Tuyen Lam; (4) Dran; (5) Cam Ly.

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

at Chu Yang Sin Nature Reserve, it appeared to be fairly common, with 1–5 encountered on 13 occasions during March and April 1995 (Eames *et al.* 1995b), yet it was not recorded at two similar sites nearby, implying that it is localised, perhaps owing to specific ecological requirements (Eames *et al.* 1995b). It has been located with increasing frequency over recent years, but this is a function of the increasing number of visitors searching for it at the same few sites; the general impression is still that it is “scarce and local” (Robson 2000).

ECOLOGY Habitat The species occurs entirely in closed-canopy evergreen forest (avoiding *Pinus kesiya* pine forest) at altitudes between 900 and 1,700 m, tending to associate with mixed-species foraging flocks (Eames *et al.* 1995b, Robson 2000; elevation limits from Distribution). It is generally encountered in singles or pairs, although small groups of up to five have been observed (Eames *et al.* 1995b). During fieldwork at Chu Yang Sin Nature Reserve in 1995 all individuals were observed in a narrow altitudinal band between 910 and 1,130 m, occurring in forest alongside watercourses, on slopes and on ridge-tops (Eames *et al.* 1995b). Tree height in the favoured area varied from 8 to 25 m, while average canopy height was 15–20 m; 52 tree genera were identified at the study site, with *Castanopsis*, *Lindera*, *Lithocarpus*, *Schefflera*, *Schima* and *Syzygium* predominant (Eames *et al.* 1995b). No particular associations with other flocking species were noted (Eames *et al.* 1995b), although it has been reported accompanying Rufous-backed Sibia *Heterophasia annectans* and a large flock of Blue-winged Minlas *Minla cyanouroptera* (Dymond 1998). Although its behaviour has been compared to that of the Rufous-backed Sibia (Dymond 1998), the crocias differs in that it does not forage on the main trunks and branches, keeping instead to the clumps of outer foliage (J. C. Eames *in litt.* 1999).

Food The species forages almost entirely in the (usually outer) canopy of broad-leaved evergreen tree species, only occasionally amongst lianas or around trunks (Eames *et al.* 1995b). Information on diet is scant but it has been observed feeding on caterpillars on several occasions (Eames *et al.* 1995b).

Breeding An individual was observed carrying nesting material (50 cm long plant fibre) on 17 April 1996 (*Oriental Bird Club Bull.* 24 [1996]: 59–65).

THREATS The Grey-crowned Crocias is one of two threatened members of the suite of four bird species that are entirely restricted to the “Da Lat Plateau Endemic Bird Area”, threats and conservation measures in which are profiled by Stattersfield *et al.* (1998).

Habitat loss and alteration The remaining forests of Vietnam face a variety of threats, including commercial logging, fuelwood collection, charcoal production and the continued clearance of land for cultivation (Nguyen Cu and Eames 1993; see equivalent section under Crested Argus *Rheimardia ocellata*). On the Da Lat plateau, an area that embraces the entire range of the Grey-crowned Crocias, large areas have already been cleared and much of the remainder is gradually being deforested (Eames 1995a). On Mt Lang Bian, for example, all land below 1,500 m has been logged or is currently under cultivation, and evergreen forest throughout the area is gradually being reduced in extent by intensive *in situ* charcoal production, fuelwood collection and timber extraction (Robson *et al.* 1991, 1993). Although no immediate threats to Chu Yang Sin Nature Reserve were noted during fieldwork, potentially destructive developments in Krong Bong district included the construction of a dirt road from Chu Pui to the banks of the Ea K”Tour river, beyond which a motorable track continued to within 1 km of the 900 m contour, and along which small-scale timber extraction was occurring (Eames *et al.* 1995b). Clearings were also being made in the forest by local villagers (Eames *et al.* 1995b). Small-scale unofficial logging has also been recorded around Tuyen Lam lake, with evergreen forest being cleared for agriculture and charcoal production (Robson *et al.* 1993, Dymond 1998). In April 1998, forest in the same area was apparently still fast disappearing as woodcutters and charcoal burners were busy in dry weather (Hornbuckle 1998b). The burning of

evergreen forests on the Da Lat plateau results in a habitat mosaic dominated by stands of conifers (e.g. *Pinus kesiya*) which are unsuitable for this and several other threatened bird species found in the area (Robson *et al.* 1991, Eames 1995a).

A further difficulty is presented by increases in the area's human population. Through government policy and spontaneous migration, immigrants from northern Vietnam have settled in resource-rich provinces in the central highlands, including Dac Lac (Eames *et al.* 1995b). Widespread wet-rice cultivation and a reversion to shifting cultivation by some groups have resulted in accelerated deforestation rates, and further social and spatial marginalisation of indigenous ethnic minority communities will undoubtedly increase pressure on the remaining forest, including that within Chu Yang Sin Nature Reserve (Eames *et al.* 1995b).

MEASURES TAKEN Although Chu Yang Sin Nature Reserve was included on the list of Vietnamese protected areas in August 1985, the final boundaries of the reserve have not been agreed and no protective measures currently exist (Eames *et al.* 1995b). Currently, this site is under less severe pressure from logging and hunting than most other areas on the Da Lat plateau because it is more remote (Eames 1994, 1995a); this is likely to change in the near future unless preventative measures are taken. The species once occurred in Bi Doup-Nui Ba Nature Reserve and although there have been no recent records (A. W. Tordoff *in litt.* 2001) it may still do so.

MEASURES PROPOSED The effective protection of broadleaved evergreen forest on the Da Lat plateau is essential for the two threatened Da Lat endemics (this species and the Collared Laughingthrush *Garrulax yersini*), as well as several other Near Threatened or widespread threatened species (see Remarks 3). The BirdLife International Vietnam Programme, together with provincial authorities, is developing a proposal to GEF for a major conservation project Chu Yang Sin Nature Reserve (A. W. Tordoff verbally 2000). In addition, a 164 km² extension of this important area has been proposed (Le Trong Trai *et al.* 1996b, Wege *et al.* 1999). Apart from this extension, four further protected areas should be established at sites likely to contain populations of the species; these should include the southern (382 km²) and eastern (74 km²) extensions of Bi Doup-Nui Ba Nature Reserve, the Ta Dung extension (170 km²) and another area in southern Lam Dong province (277 km²) (Eames *et al.* 1992, Wege *et al.* 1999). The suitability for protection of Tuyen Lam lake should be assessed.

It has been recommended that immigration into the districts of Dac Lac and Krong Bong should be halted, and that existing communities in these areas be supported by development assistance as part of a coherent conservation and development programme (Eames 1995a, Eames *et al.* 1995b). There is a clear need for socio-economic and cultural research to complement conservation action in the area, with a view to introducing measures designed to reduce the reliance of local people on natural resources.

REMARKS (1) There is only one other member of the genus, the Spotted Crocias *Crocias albonotatus*, which frequents the canopy of montane evergreen forests of western Java and is considered Near Threatened (see appropriate section). (2) Although there is some confusion about the provenance of these specimens (J. C. Eames *in litt.* 1999), both the resultant scientific name (*langbianis*) and database records at NRM ("S. Annam: Langbian/Dalat") strongly suggest that they were taken on Mt Lang Bian. The current distribution of forest on this mountain is generally above the known altitudinal range of the species and the species is thus unlikely to persist there (J. C. Eames *in litt.* 1999). (3) Forest on the Da Lat and Di Linh plateaus supports populations of several other threatened and Near Threatened species, including Crested Argus *Rheinardia ocellata*, Pale-capped Pigeon *Columba punicea*, Blyth's Kingfisher *Alcedo hercules*, Collared Laughingthrush *Garrulax yersini*, Black-hooded Laughingthrush *G. milleti* and Short-tailed Scimitar-babbler *Jabouilleia danjoui* (Eames 1995a).