

# Threatened Birds of Asia:

## The BirdLife International Red Data Book

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## RUECK'S BLUE-FLYCATCHER

### *Cyornis ruckii*



**Critical** ■ **D1**

Endangered  —

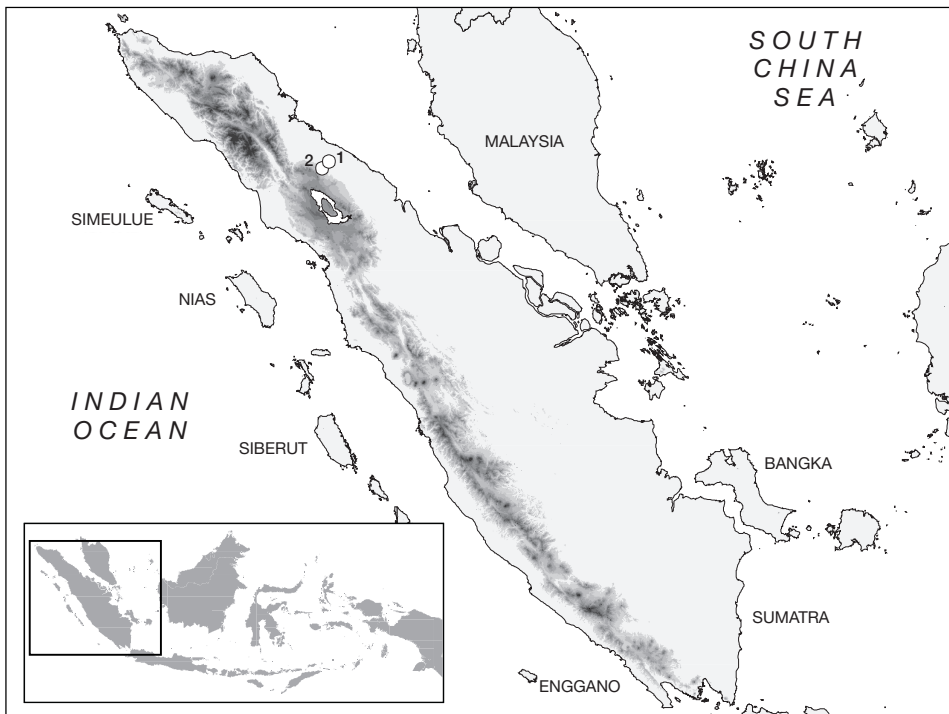
Vulnerable  —

*There is little information regarding this species, but given the limited extent of its probable range (and continuing destruction of lowland forest therein) it seems reasonable to assume that any surviving population will be tiny, and it therefore qualifies as Critical.*

**DISTRIBUTION** This mysterious species (see Remarks 1, 2, 3) was named on the basis of two specimens supposedly taken in Kesang, Melaka, Peninsular Malaysia (see Remarks 3), around 1880, before two further specimens, named *Cyornis vanheysti*, were taken in the lowlands of northern Sumatra, Indonesia. Records are as follows:

■ **INDONESIA** *Sumatra* ■ *North Sumatra* **Delitua** (Deli Tuwa), an immature (see Remarks 4), c.200 m, April 1917 (Robinson and Kloss 1919b, 1924a); **Tuntungang**, a male, c.150 m, February 1918 (Robinson and Kloss 1919b, 1924a).

A report that the species is “easy to spot” at Soraya rafting camp, Gunung Leuser National Park (Jepson and Ounsted 1997), is evidently a mistake.



**The distribution of Rueck's Blue-flycatcher *Cyornis ruckii*:** (1) Delitua; (2) Tuntungang.

○ Historical (pre-1950)

**POPULATION** This species must be extremely rare, given the fact that as few as four specimens have ever been taken, the most recent in 1918. Moreover, habitat loss at the two known sites on Sumatra has been near-total (see Threats).

**ECOLOGY Habitat** The ecology of this species is virtually unknown, but the Hainan Flycatcher *Cyornis hainana* of Indochina is closely related (see Remarks 1 and 2). It might be a habitat specialist, possibly in mangroves (Robinson and Kinnear 1928; see Remarks 1), but the two sites in Sumatra do not appear to be or have been in mangrove areas.

**Food** There is no information, but this species doubtless takes small invertebrates, mostly winged insects.

**Breeding** The specimen collected at Delitua in April was immature or juvenile (see Remarks 4).

**Migration** The possibility exists that the birds are migrants from further north (see Remarks 2, 4).

**THREATS** This is the only threatened bird species known exclusively from the lowland forests of Sumatra, and while it may prove to occur elsewhere (see Remarks 1 and 2) it is considered here as a prime victim of lowland forest loss on the island and is the second most threatened representative (after the Bornean Peacock-pheasant *Polyplectron schleiermacheri*) of the lowland Sundaic avifauna. Deforestation in the Sundaic lowlands—biologically one of the most diverse biomes of the world—has proceeded at catastrophic speed in the past few decades, seriously compromising the future of every one of the uncountable multitude of primary-forest life-forms in the region, including that of this particular species, even inside key protected areas (for an outline of the crisis, see Threats under Crestless Fireback *Lophura erythrophthalma*).

No forest cover is known to exist at the recorded localities for this species, which are near the large urban area of Binjai (western Medan), and its range must thus have shrunk considerably (Collar *et al.* 1994, D. A. Holmes *in litt.* 1999). Delitua and Tuntungan are situated on the outskirts of the large city of Medan, and it is believed that no forest in any condition is left in the area (SvB). However, if it is capable of surviving in “exploited forest”, like Hainan Blue-flycatcher, it may persist in adjacent wooded areas.

**MEASURES TAKEN** This species has been protected under Indonesian law since 1972 (Inskipp 1986). No other measure is known.

**MEASURES PROPOSED** Urgent concerted survey of and conservation effort for major tracts of extreme lowland primary forest in the Sundaic region is called for in the equivalent section under Crestless Fireback.

As a preliminary step, close examination of the skins is required to improve our understanding of the taxonomic standing of the form, and indeed (by consideration of wing length) to determine the likelihood of its being migratory or resident. Surveys at or near to the two old locations, in particular in any proposed and/or established reserves, should be carried out as soon as possible in the period January–April, using mistnets. The Besitang region of Leuser (on the Aceh border) is now about the only lowland forest left in the region, although there may be more further north in Aceh; these places require urgent exploration (D. A. Holmes *in litt.* 1999).

**REMARKS** (1) The taxonomic standing of this species and its distribution have been questioned (Medway and Wells 1976, van Marle and Voous 1988). Robinson and Kinnear (1928) compared the two “Malacca” specimens with the two specimens of *Cyornis vanheysti* (Robinson and Kloss 1919b) and determined that they were, as the original describers of the

latter had suspected, identical, and judged that, “were it not for the very different female and the rather robust bill, we should consider the species as an aberration of [Pale Blue Flycatcher] *C. unicolor*” (*contra* the original describers, who called the two “totally distinct”), instead accepting it “as a distinct species with a restricted or peculiar habitat, such as dense mangroves” (a view endorsed by Peters 1931–1987). It is perhaps best treated as member of the south and Indochinese Hainan Flycatcher *Cyornis hainana* group (van Marle and Voous 1988; see Remarks 2). (2) Its striking ecological and morphological similarity to *C. hainana*, the collection dates (February and April, one of the birds being an immature, though not a juvenile, bird; see Remarks 4) and the migratory behaviour of Hainan Flycatchers in the northern parts of their range, suggest that Rueck’s Blue-flycatcher may represent stray birds from an unlocated Indo- or southern Chinese population of *hainana* (SvB). Closer examination of the specimens in Paris and Leiden may elucidate this problem. (3) The specimens from “Malacca” are problematic: one has the appearance of a “Malacca” trade skin while the other does not, but in any case “though very carefully searched for, the species has never been recovered in the Malay Peninsula” (Robinson and Kinnear 1928; also Robinson and Kloss 1924a, Chasen 1939a, Medway and Wells 1976). Furthermore, it has been observed specifically that specimens of birds from Kesang, Malacca, “may easily be trade skins, falsely localised” (Gibson-Hill 1949:212). (4) The immature bird was originally sexed as male, but reidentified as a juvenile female by Robinson and Kinnear (1928). The illustration in Robinson and Kloss (1924a), and indeed the comment in the original description that adult dress is being acquired by this bird (Robinson and Kloss 1919b), indicates that “immature” is a more appropriate term and suggests that the specimen need not have been bred locally.