

# Threatened Birds of Asia:

## The BirdLife International Red Data Book

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## BLACK SICKLEBILL

### *Epimachus fastuosus*

Critical  —  
Endangered  —  
Vulnerable  C1



*This species, the largest-plumed member of its family, is listed as Vulnerable based on an estimated small population which is believed to be declining rapidly owing to hunting. The overall rate of decline is unknown but is extrapolated from historic and recent data from the few study sites. Large areas in its range remain inaccessible and largely uninhabited.*

**DISTRIBUTION AND POPULATION** The Black Sicklebill is patchily distributed in the mountains of western and central New Guinea, from the Vogelkop and Wandammen mountains, Papua (formerly Irian Jaya), **Indonesia**, to the Torricelli and Bewani mountains in **Papua New Guinea**, but it is unknown from large areas within this range—in some cases these areas have never been surveyed, while in others the species is definitely absent (Frith and Beehler 1998). It is generally scarce to rare or locally absent, and even where reported to be locally common, for instance on Mt Bosavi, it occurs at low densities (Coates 1990, Frith and Beehler 1998, I. Burrows *in litt.* 1999).

**ECOLOGY** It is restricted to mid-montane forest at 1,800–2,150 m, occasionally 1,280–2,550 m (Frith and Beehler 1998). It is usually found in primary forest, but is less often in adjacent secondary growth and garden edges (B. M. Whitney *in litt.* 2000). It forages equally for fruit and small animals in the forest canopy, often probing moss and epiphytes for arthropods (Beehler and Pruett-Jones 1983, Kwapena 1985, Frith and Beehler 1998).

**THREATS** It is hunted for its tail feathers and as food; skins are becoming increasingly valuable and hunting pressure is increasing with the spread of shotguns (K. D. Bishop *in litt.* 1999). Hunters target adult males and, although the species persists in areas lacking such males, it is possible that this is merely attributable to immigration, since the ability of “young” males to contribute to reproductive output remains unstudied (B. M. Whitney *in litt.* 2000). Populations increased at Crater mountain after an enforced hunting ban (Frith and Beehler 1998). Forest in the favoured geographical and altitudinal range is under considerable pressure for clearance for agriculture by the large and increasing human population; it is intolerant of secondary forest, caused by both shifting agriculture and logging (Diamond 1972, Kwapena 1985, Frith and Beehler 1998).

**MEASURES TAKEN** It is protected by law in Indonesia and Papua New Guinea.

**MEASURES PROPOSED** • Survey gaps within its known range. • Estimate population densities and sizes at known sites. • Research rates of forest loss in preferred the altitudinal range. • Monitor numbers at the most accessible sites such as Ambua Lodge. • Monitor effects of hunting bans at Ok Tedi and Crater mountain. • Monitor trade prices and volume. • Investigate population trends through interviews with local hunters. • Investigate hunting levels and attitudes to control amongst hunters. • Create large locally managed forest reserves with an enforced hunting ban. • Run awareness programmes for land-owners. • Enforce existing legislation. • Utilise it as a flagship species for ecotourism ventures.