

# Threatened Birds of Asia:

## The BirdLife International Red Data Book

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## CELESTIAL MONARCH

### *Hypothymis coelestis*



Critical  —

Endangered  —

Vulnerable  A1c; A2c; C1; C2a

*This remarkable insectivore is declining rapidly as a consequence of widespread and continuing reductions in the extent and quality of lowland forest. This is causing severe fragmentation of its presumably small population, qualifying it as Vulnerable.*

**DISTRIBUTION** The Celestial Monarch is endemic to the Philippines in two subspecies: nominate *coelestis* on Luzon, Samar, Dinagat, Mindanao, Basilan and possibly Tawitawi, race *rabori* on Negros and probably this form on Sibuyan (Dickinson *et al.* 1991). Records (north to south) are as follows:

■ **PHILIPPINES** *Luzon (western)* **Mariveles**, Bataan province, March 1902 (McGregor 1903; see Remarks 1); **Angat Dam**, Bulacan, January 1990 (Lambert 1993c), February 1994 (Hornbuckle 1994) and April 1997 (I. Mauro *per* F. Verbelen *in litt.* 1997); (*eastern*) **San Pascual** on Mt Cagua, Gonzaga, 150–300 m, April 1960 (two specimens in FMNH); **Mt Cetaceo** at Sawa, May 1960 (female in UPLB); **Cayapa**, Cagayan, April–May 1992 (Danielsen *et al.* 1994, Poulsen 1995); **Minuma**, Isabela province, March 1992 (Danielsen *et al.* 1994, Poulsen 1995) and May 1994, when breeding was proven (Robson and Davidson 1995); (*central*) **Pangil**, Laguna, December 1983 (male in WFVZ);

*Sibuyan* unspecified locality, October 1892 (female in CM; Bourns and Worcester 1894);

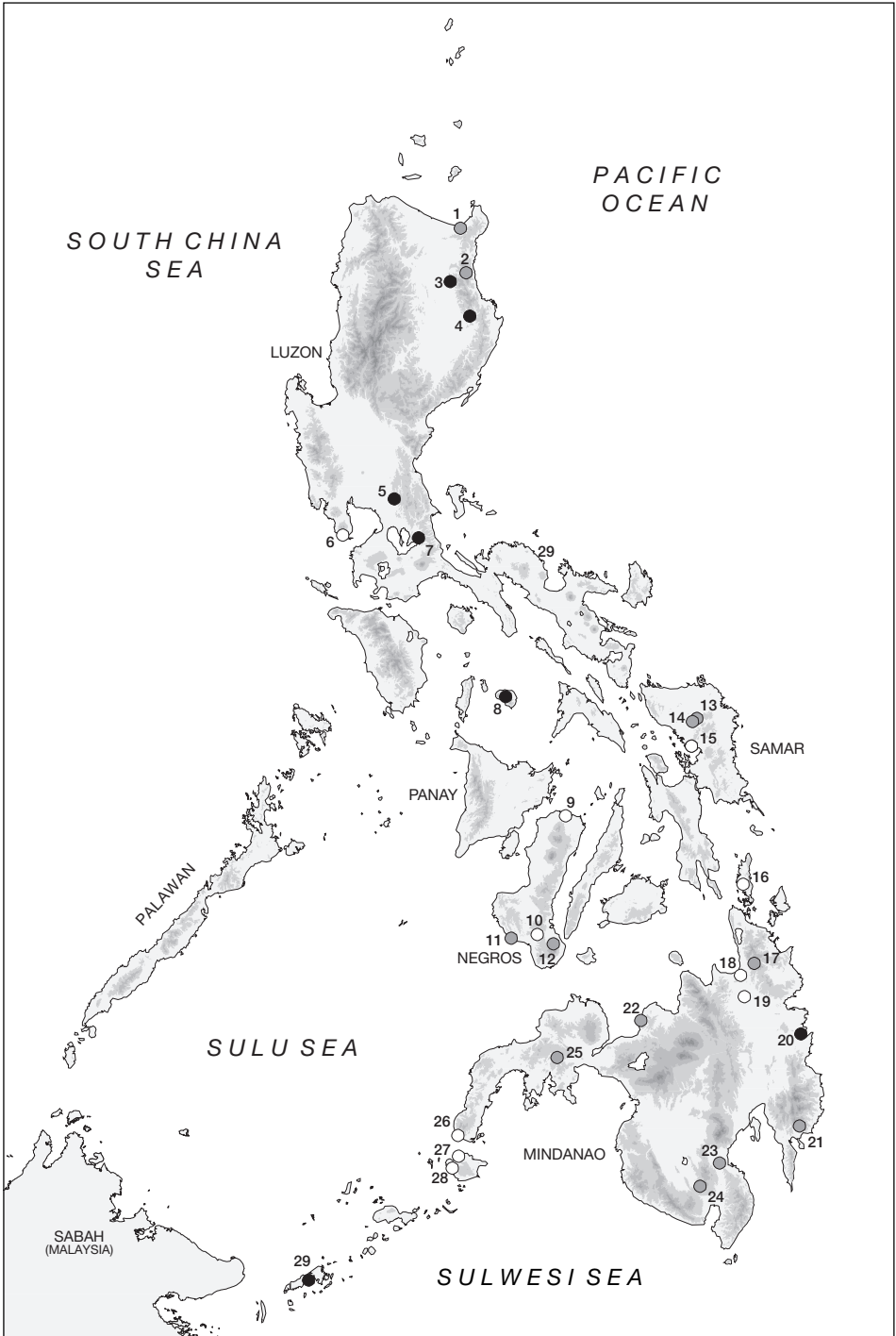
*Negros* **Cadiz**, February–March 1909 (McGregor 1911); **Basay** (sometimes “Besay”), type locality of the race *rabori*, Bayawan, October 1953 (male in ZMH), December 1959 (Rand 1970a, Dickinson *et al.* 1991; 12 specimens in AMNH, DMNH, FMNH, UPLB, YPM); **Lake Balinsasayao**, reported in the period January 1977 to July 1978 (Alcala and Carumbana 1980); **Amio** at Ugdangan, May 1948 (female in FMNH);

*Samar* **Mt Capoto-an**, 600–750 m, May 1957 (female in FMNH); **Matuguinao**, April, May and June 1957 (five specimens, two specifying San Isidro, in FMNH, UPLB, YPM; see Remarks 2); **Catbalogan**, April 1888 (male in BMNH) and August 1892 (male in USNM);

*Dinagat* unspecified locality (type locality), June 1877 (Tweeddale 1878a) and in 1991 (P. C. Gonzales *per* A. Jensen in Collar *et al.* 1994);

*Mindanao (eastern)* **Mt Hilong-hilong** at Balangbalang, Cabadbaran, 150–300 m, April 1963 (male in USNM); **Bislig** in the PICOP concession, February 1994 (T. H. Fisher verbally 1997), February 1996 and February 1997 (P. A. J. Morris *in litt.* 1997), June 1997 (BRT); **Mt Mayo** at Limot, Mati, 150–330 m, June 1965 (male in USNM); (*central*) **Butuan**, September–December 1907 (McGregor 1909); **Esperanza**, Agusan Valley, September–December 1907 (McGregor 1909); **Manticao** at “Mainit, Mahayahay” (Manticao not specified on label but inferred from many other labels; see, e.g. under Mindanao Broadbill *Eurylaimus steerii*), May 1968 (female in DMNH); **Mt Matutum** at Balisong, Kablon, Tupi, Cotabato, February 1962 (female in PNM); **Kibawalan**, Malalag, 360–670 m, December 1963 and February 1964 (two specimens in UPLB); (*western*) **Mt Sugarloaf** at Tandasag Hill, Diak, Midsalip, May 1969 (five specimens in AMNH, DMNH, FMNH); **Ayala**, August 1891 (male in MCZ);

*Basilan* near **Isabela**, December 1906 to March 1907 (McGregor 1907a; four birds dated January and February 1907 and simply labelled “Basilan” in AMNH, USNM); and 15 km north-east of **Maluso**, April 1937 (Peters 1939);



*Tawitawi Buan*, where two birds were seen in August 1994 (Dutson *et al.* 1996) and December 1996 (D. Allen *in litt.* 1997).

On Luzon, indigenous *Aetas* people reported the species from Diagonanay, Isabela, up to 1989–1990 (Danielsen *et al.* 1994, Poulsen 1995).

**POPULATION** This species has been regarded as “a very rare bird... found only by accident” (F. S. Bourns and D. C. Worcester in McGregor 1909–1910) and “very rare... found in small numbers” (McGregor 1909–1910). In Luzon’s Sierra Madre it proved to be “very common” at Cayapa (Danielsen *et al.* 1994), although this referred to three or four birds seen daily (NADM), but it was uncommon (two birds seen) at Minuma and not found elsewhere; moreover, it was reported by indigenous *Aetas* in the Diagonanay area as previously more plentiful but now rare and declining, not having been seen since 1989–1990 (Danielsen *et al.* 1994, Poulsen 1995). Further testimony to the fact that it can be patchily common (possibly in time as well as space) is that it was “fairly abundant” on Basilan in 1906–1907 (McGregor 1907a), and that no fewer than 13 specimens were collected in December 1959 at the type locality of race *rabori* on Negros (see Distribution; also Remarks 3). The bird was not observed in a recent survey on Negros (Brooks *et al.* 1992, Evans *et al.* 1993a), and it may be that it is now extinct on the island. Surveys on Sibuyan between 1989 and 1992 also failed to locate it (Evans *et al.* 1993a, Goodman *et al.* 1995), although Worcester (1898:584) described it as “comparatively common” there. It was not found on Dinagat in 1972 (duPont and Rabor 1973b) but it proved not uncommon there in 1991 (Collar *et al.* 1994), but most recently it was not located during a survey in November–December 1994 (NADM and BRT). As a canopy species with a little-known voice, however, it is easy to overlook (P. A. J. Morris *in litt.* 1996), an idea echoed by D. Allen (*in litt.* 1997), given that it may be “extremely localised” on Tawitawi.

**ECOLOGY Habitat** The Celestial Monarch inhabits the canopy and middle storey of forest, forest edge and second growth below 1,000 m, singly or in mixed flocks (Rand 1970a, Dickinson *et al.* 1991). It may, however, be a lowland riverine specialist, which would help explain its seemingly patchy abundance (see Collar *et al.* 1994), and certainly there seems to be no evidence that it attains even 1,000 m, no record under Distribution being higher than 750 m, and most being much lower; however, recent observations (e.g. from tall logged forest on Tawitawi) do not bear out a connexion with watercourses (G. C. L. Dutson *in litt.* 1996, D. Allen verbally 1997). An alternative postulation relates to rainfall seasonality: in areas of constant precipitation (such as Tawitawi), there is no recourse to riverine forest, whereas such seasonal local migration is conceivable in areas with a marked dry season (D. Allen verbally 1997). Indigenous people of Diagonanay, Luzon, reported this bird to be a rare resident of the lower primary forest on the Sierra Madre, and during a survey it was observed to occur in selectively logged and degraded forest at 175–450 m (Danielsen *et al.* 1994). The specimen from Ugdangan, Negros, is marked as having been “in a group of several individuals feeding on a low bush in dense secondary growth” (FMNH label data). In the Angat watershed, Luzon, a pair were observed at 250–300 m in the subcanopy of small trees at 5–8 m from the ground in little-disturbed forest on a steep slope (Lambert 1993c). On Samar the species was found “only inside original forest, preferably in the upper two stories of tree growth” (Rand and Rabor 1960).

**The distribution of Celestial Monarch *Hypothymis coelestis* (map opposite; sequence not as in text):**

- (1) San Pascual; (2) Mt Cetaceo; (3) Cayapa; (4) Minuma; (5) Angat Dam; (6) Mariveles; (7) Pangil; (8) Sibuyan; (9) Cadiz; (10) Arnio; (11) Basay; (12) Lake Balinsasayao; (13) Mt Capoto-an; (14) Matuguiniao; (15) Catbalogan; (16) Dinagat; (17) Mt Hilong-hilong; (18) Butuan; (19) Esperanza; (20) Bislig; (21) Mt Mayo; (22) Manticao; (23) Kibawalan; (24) Mt Matutum; (25) Mt Sugarloaf; (26) Ayala; (27) Isabela; (28) Maluso; (29) Buan.

○ Historical (pre-1950) ● Fairly recent (1950–1979) ● Recent (1980–present)

**Food** Details of the diet are unknown but this is presumably chiefly a sallier after flying insects. The Angat watershed pair were feeding in a mixed-species flock consisting of the Black-naped Monarch *Hypothymis azurea*, Blue-headed Fantail *Rhipidura cyaniceps*, Stripe-headed Rhabdornis *Rhabdornis mystacalis*, Sulphur-billed Nuthatch *Sitta (frontalis) oenochlamys*, Yellow-bellied Whistler *Pachycephala philippinensis* and Lemon-throated Leaf-warbler *Phylloscopus cebuensis* (Lambert 1993c; see also McGregor 1907a, Hachisuka 1931–1935).

**Breeding** A male from Matuguinao (Samar), April, had enlarged testes, as did both males from Tandasag Hill, Mindanao, May, and a male from Mt Mayo in late June (DMNH, FMNH, USNM label data). A pair and single fledgling were observed in mid-May, Luzon (Robson and Davidson 1995). A male in December, Negros, is immature (AMNH label data).

**Migration** There is no evidence of movement in this species (although see the comment under Habitat).

**THREATS** The available information suggests that this species is a lowland forest specialist and as such the extensive and continuing habitat destruction within its range is a major threat to its survival. The apparent loss of the species from several islands (see Distribution) can only be attributed to the loss of its habitat. At Bislig on Mindanao good primary forest is being clear-felled (under the PICOP logging concession) and the land planted with exotic trees for paper production (B. Gee *in litt.* 1997; also Caufield 1983). On Sibuyan within the Kuyasian Forest, March 1992, there was considerable logging activity, particularly of the remaining large hardwoods, with the Atlas Mining Corporation on the neighbouring island of Masbate being the biggest purchaser in spite of no legal logging concession existing on the island (Goodman and Ingle 1993, Goodman *et al.* 1995). Observers in around 1987 and September 1991 considered that “extensive forest still exists” on Tawitawi (Krupa and Buck 1988, Lambert 1993c), but such forest (as seen from the air) appears actually to be young secondary growth, and logging of the few remaining areas with large trees appears to be unsustainable and soon to be followed by uncontrolled settlement and full conversion to agriculture as the island develops and malaria is eradicated (D. Allen *in litt.* 1996, 1997).

**MEASURES TAKEN** This bird has been recorded from within or near two CPPAP sites (Northern Sierra Madre Natural Park on Luzon; Agusan Marsh on Mindanao; see Appendix). In addition, four areas have been proposed for FPE funding (see Appendix): Dinagat Island (including the Kambinlio/Redondo “key site”), the Mt Talinis/Twin Lakes area on Negros (including the Eastern Cuernos de Negros and Lake Balinsasayao “key sites”), coastal areas of Tawitawi and Mt Matutum. Some protection may be afforded by the watershed reserve at Mt Hilong-hilong.

**MEASURES PROPOSED** Apart from the areas targeted for conservation above, the species is known, at least historically, from eight “key sites” (Mt Cagua, Mt Cetaceo, Angat Watershed and Mariveles Mts on Luzon; Mts Cabalantian/Capoto-an on Samar; Mts Sugarloaf and Mayo on Mindanao; Central Basilan; see Appendix) which deserve further fieldwork effort and formal designation as protected areas under the NIPAS process. In addition, it seems necessary to provide protection to the remaining lowland forest of Cayapa in the Sierra Madre as this area appears to be a stronghold of the species. Dinagat should be investigated to determine its modern status on the island. Appropriate conservation strategies in different portions of the species’s Philippine range (in parentheses) are outlined under Green Racquet-tail *Prioniturus luconensis* (Luzon), Visayan Wrinkled Hornbill *Aceros waldeni* (Negros), Sulu Hornbill *Anthracoceros montani* (Tawitawi) and Blue-capped Kingfisher *Actenoides hombroni* (Mindanao). The Celestial Monarch could, owing to its extraordinary beauty, be

made into a flagship species for lowland forest conservation in the Philippines, and used widely on posters, postcards and promotional materials.

**REMARKS** (1) McGregor (1903) reported that he obtained this specimen, the first record for Luzon, on “the same day and from a small tree next the one from which I shot the male *Oriolus isabellae* half an hour later”. (2) Rand and Rabor (1960) provided a single Samar record, from Matuguinao on 20 April 1957, and claimed this as the first from the island. Apart from the fact that they were evidently unaware of the two nineteenth century records, it is curious that they made no mention of the two specimens, now in YPM, both also taken in April 1957 (one nine days *before* the one they document), the two specimens in FMNH taken the following month, and the singleton in UPLB from the month after that, all clearly collected on the same expedition and by D. S. Rabor himself. (3) The voice of this species was tape-recorded in 1991 and 1992, and this may prove very valuable in discovering its distribution and status with more accuracy.