

Threatened Birds of Asia:

The BirdLife International Red Data Book

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Recommended citation

BirdLife International (2001) *Threatened birds of Asia: the BirdLife International Red Data Book*. Cambridge, UK: BirdLife International.

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ISBN 0 946888 42 6 (Part A)

ISBN 0 946888 43 4 (Part B)

ISBN 0 946888 44 2 (Set)

British Library-in-Publication Data

A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

First published 2001 by BirdLife International

Designed and produced by the **Nature**Bureau, 36 Kingfisher Court, Hambridge Road, Newbury, Berkshire RG14 5SJ, United Kingdom

Available from the Natural History Book Service Ltd, 2–3 Wills Road, Totnes, Devon TQ9 5XN, UK. Tel: +44 1803 865913 Fax: +44 1803 865280 Email nhbs@nhbs.co.uk
Internet: www.nhbs.com/services/birdlife.html

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BROWN-BANDED RAIL

Data Deficient

Lewinia mirificus

DISTRIBUTION The Brown-banded Rail (see Remarks 1) has long been judged likely (but not proved, since no breeding has been confirmed, and rails are capable of migration over considerable distances) to be endemic to Luzon in the Philippines. There is, however, a long-standing but previously unpublished (except in Collar *et al.* 1999) record from Samar.

■ **PHILIPPINES** Localities are: *Luzon (western)* **Baguio**, at the Voice of America radio booster station, Benguet, 1,350 m, December 1979 (female in DMNH; see Remarks 2); **Santa Fe** near Aritao, Nueva Vizcaya, November 1958 (Parkes and Amadon 1959); **Imugan**, Nueva Vizcaya, 550 m, December 1972 (five specimens in DMNH); **Dalton Pass**, Nueva Vizcaya, (seven labelled 900 m, four 1,050 m), November 1958, November 1965, December 1967, November 1968, May, November and December 1969, June and November 1970, November 1971 (30 specimens in BMNH, CM, DMNH, FMNH, PNM, USNM; also Amadon and duPont 1970, McClure and Leelavit 1972; see also Population); unnamed river valley between Bamban and **Camp O'Donnell**, Tarlac, June 1993 (P. L. Alviola verbally 1993, 1997); **Papaya**, Nueva Ecija, in November 1958 (four specimens in CM, AMNH; Parkes and Amadon 1959); **Liwan** at Kenama, Kalinga-Apayao, January 1971 (three specimens in DMNH, YPM); (*southern*) **Labo** area, Camarines Norte, 1969 (McClure and Leelavit 1972);

Samar **Catarman** at the Samar Institute of Technology, April 1959 (male in PNM).

POPULATION Numbers of this species are entirely unknown. It is described as uncommon and secretive (Dickinson *et al.* 1991), although these two epithets tend to make sense more as alternatives than as complements. In addition to the 30-odd birds collected at Dalton Pass (see above), as many as 191 were ringed (banded) there in the six years 1965–1970, with 39 in 1965, 39 in 1966, 77 in 1967, 12 in 1968, seven in 1969 and 17 in 1970 (McClure and Leelavit 1972). However, Poulsen (1995) pointed out that, although rails, snipe and other paddyfield birds are regularly sold at roadsides in Luzon, this species never seemed to be among them when he checked, suggesting it is a genuinely rare animal, or at least one with strict habitat requirements.

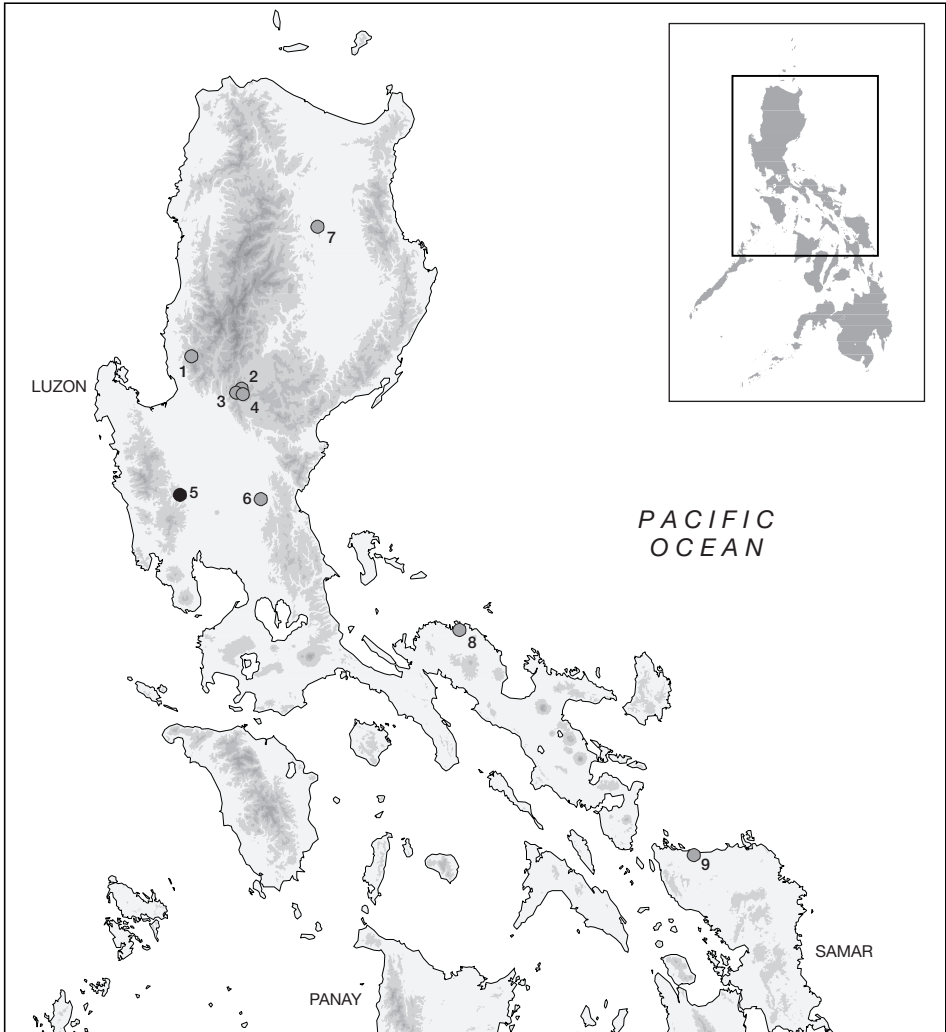
ECOLOGY *Habitat* Records are from the foothills, almost all of them apparently involving post-breeding dispersal (Dickinson *et al.* 1991). The adjacent habitat of the female from Baguio, January, which was found dead on the road, was “forest of mature pine mixed with sapling pine and many shrubs” (DMNH label data). It has been speculated that the species may have strict ecological requirements (Collar *et al.* 1994), but if this bird is so close to Lewin’s Rail *Lewinia pectoralis* as to be treated as conspecific (see Dickinson *et al.* 1991), then it could and perhaps does occur in a wide variety of habitats, just as Lewin’s Rail has been found (with great difficulty) in densely vegetated wetlands whether fresh or saline, lowland or upland, open or closed (grassed to forested), and even with records away from water in fields and parks, with some populations apparently resident and others migratory (see Beehler *et al.* 1986, Marchant and Higgins 1993). The record from Tarlac municipality was of a bird in a small (10 m by 20 m) undisturbed riverside swamp, primarily composed of “kangkong” *Ipomea aquatica* and surrounded by cane grass *Saccharum spontaneum* on an infertile substrate of “lahar” (volcanic debris) (P. L. Alviola verbally 1997).

Food Nothing is recorded.

Breeding The female from Baguio, December, was immature, skull 10% ossified, although an ovary was 8 × 4 mm (DMNH label data). Three males from Papaya, November, were immature (Amadon and duPont 1970). Two birds from Dalton Pass had slightly enlarged gonads, June, while one from September and five (three females, two males) from November

had gonad condition recorded as undeveloped (PNM label data). Apart from this, a comment about spring males (see Remarks 3) suggests that the breeding season possibly lies in the first half of the year; against this, the majority of records considered to represent “post-breeding dispersal” (see *Habitat* above) are from the period November–January.

Migration It has been suggested that this species might prove to be an immigrant to the Philippines, but its origins are unknown (Amadon and duPont 1970). Poulsen (1995) judged that the birds in Dalton Pass and Nueva Ecija may have been on migration either between the Cagayan valley and the “Central Plain” or between the Sierra Madre and the Cordillera Central. In the former scenario, the Camarines Norte and Samar records might then be explained as overshooting migrants (K. C. Parkes *in litt.* 1996).



The distribution of Brown-banded Rail *Lewinia mirificus*: (1) Baguio; (2) Santa Fe; (3) Imugan; (4) Dalton Pass; (5) Camp O’Donnell; (6) Papaya; (7) Liwan; (8) Labo; (9) Catarman.

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

THREATS None is known. Although trappers questioned in 1989–1990 did not report catching this species (Alonzo-Pasicolan 1992), it is nevertheless possible that bird-catchers (for food/subsistence and trade) at Dalton Pass, Nueva Vizcaya, take this species in some numbers, but the impact on the population cannot be gauged.

MEASURES TAKEN None is known.

MEASURES PROPOSED The difficulties of conserving this enigmatic species are similar to those posed by the Luzon Buttonquail *Turnix worcesteri* (see under equivalent section). Similarly, the priorities centre on research: fieldwork should be oriented towards clarifying the distribution and habitat requirements of the species and, with this information, identifying appropriate conservation strategies and potential sites for protection.

REMARKS (1) Paynter (1963) and Olson (1973) speculated that *mirificus* is a race of Lewin's Rail *Lewinia pectoralis*, to which Parkes and Amadon (1959) considered it most closely related, but Amadon and duPont (1970) preferred to reserve judgement until more is known of the former. (2) Dickinson *et al.* (1991) reported "Baguio in Dec 1979 (S. Gast *in litt.*)", which presumably refers to this record, as the specimen was collected by S. Gast (but also R. S. Kennedy). It must therefore not have arrived in DMNH when the inspection of other specimens there, referred to by Dickinson *et al.* (1991), took place. (3) In remarking that the base of the bill is brighter red than in the original description, Amadon and duPont (1970) appear to be referring to a single male from May; an intensification of bill colour in that month seems likely to reflect breeding condition, perhaps just passed or just being entered.