

# Threatened Birds of Asia:

## The BirdLife International Red Data Book

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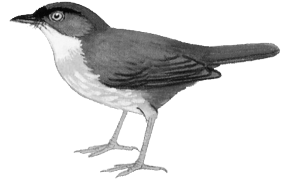
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## BLACK-BROWED BABBLER

### *Malacocincla perspicillata*

Critical  —  
Endangered  —  
Vulnerable  D1



*This enigmatic babbler, known only from a type specimen of uncertain provenance, qualifies as Vulnerable because of the scale of recent and forecast lowland deforestation in Kalimantan, where it is believed to occur.*

**DISTRIBUTION** The Black-browed Babbler (see Remarks 1) is known from a single specimen (in RMNH) of uncertain provenance in Kalimantan (see Remarks 2), Indonesia, as follows:

■ **INDONESIA** Kalimantan site unknown, but most likely around Martapura (or, slightly less likely, Banjarmasin), South Kalimantan, between 1843 and 1848 (Mees 1995).

An unconfirmed record from Sarawak, Malaysia, is mentioned in Smythies (1957) but not Smythies (1981), suggesting that this report no longer had any validity. Büttikofer (1895) mentioned that both Java and Sumatra had been mentioned as “habitat” of this species, but indicated that the only known specimen was from Borneo.

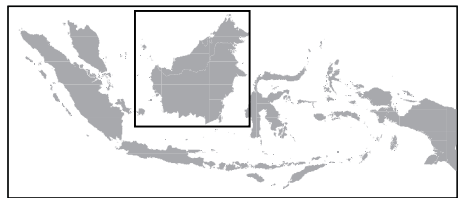
**POPULATION** Nothing is known except that numbers of this species are likely to have decreased with habitat loss in recent decades (see Threats).

**ECOLOGY** *Habitat* The type specimen appears to have been taken in lowland forest, and the relatively short tarsus suggests that it might be rather more arboreal than its congeners (Mees 1995; also Collar *et al.* 1994).

*Food* Nothing is known.

*Breeding* Nothing is known.

**THREATS** The vague presumed type locality (the Martapura region) lies within a lowland area of agricultural development and heavy logging, and speculation that all lowland forest



**The distribution of Black-browed babbler**  
*Malacocincla perspicillata*: (?) Martapura area  
(pre-1950).

habitat might have disappeared (SvB, Collar *et al.* 1994) has proved correct (D. A. Holmes *in litt.* 1999). 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, even inside key protected areas (for an outline of the crisis, see Threats under Crestless Fireback *Lophura erythrophthalma*). Two nature reserves in South Kalimantan might be hoped to hold the species (SvB)—Pleihari Tanah Laut, a swampy coastal reserve covering 350 km<sup>2</sup> (FAO 1981–1982, Scott 1989), and Pleihari Martapura, near the (presumed) type locality, covering 300 km<sup>2</sup> at 200–1,170 m (FAO 1981–1982)—but the former “was long since extinguished as a habitat”, while the latter now consists of “severely degraded hilly forest” (D. A. Holmes *in litt.* 2000).

**MEASURES TAKEN** Nothing has been done, owing at least in part to the long period of uncertainty over the taxonomic status of this species (see Remarks 1).

**MEASURES PROPOSED** Further archival investigations at RMNH might yet be possible to resolve the question of the provenance of the type. Searches in Pleihari Martapuri may still be worthwhile, despite its condition (see Threats).

**REMARKS** (1) This species was previously considered a local race of Horsfield’s Babbler *Trichastoma sepiarium* (Delacour 1947, Smythies 1957) or conspecific with the equally enigmatic (and recently discredited) Vanderbilt’s Babbler *Trichastoma vanderbilti* (Smythies 1981), but is now considered a valid and distinctive monotypic species (Hoogerwerf 1966, Mees 1995). (2) Despite “Java” being written on the label, Mees (1995) maintained that the true provenance of the type was Borneo; but others remain sceptical (MacKinnon and Phillipps 1993, Inskipp *et al.* 1996).