

Threatened Birds of Asia:

The BirdLife International Red Data Book

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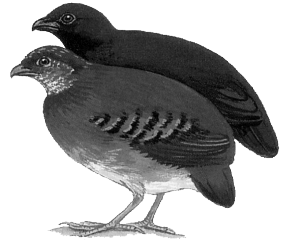
BLACK PARTRIDGE

Melanoperdix nigra

Critical —

Endangered —

Vulnerable A1c,d; A2c,d



The continuing rapid reduction in extent and quality of habitat across much of this partridge's range infer that its population is undergoing a rapid decline, qualifying it as Vulnerable.

DISTRIBUTION The Black Partridge is endemic to the Greater Sunda region of South-East Asia, occurring in the Malaysian Peninsula in the southern two-thirds but not in Penang or any of the islands (Robinson and Chasen 1936, Wells 1999). In Borneo, whose population is very weakly distinguished as the race *borneensis* (see Riley 1938), it has been characterised as a bird of the lowlands of the south and west (Smythies 1957, 1981; see Remarks 1), but the map tends to suggest that it is moderately evenly distributed throughout the island, albeit with a slight bias of records to the western half (and there are four untraced localities in West Kalimantan). Records are from:

■ **MALAYSIA** ■ **Peninsular Malaysia** **Pondok Tanjong Forest Reserve**, Perak, before 1935 (Robinson and Chasen 1936); **Terong** (based on label actually stating “Triang”), Perak, September 1912 (male in BMNH); **Larut**, Perak, undated (Wells 1999), with simply Perak indicated, April 1885 (two specimens in RMNH); **Dindings** (not mapped), Perak, December 1902 (Morioka and Yang 1996); **Taman Negara National Park** at Gunung Tahan, 300 m, August 1905 (female in BMNH), at Kuala Tahan before 1935 (Robinson and Chasen 1936), undated but in 1980s or 1990s (H. Buck *per* D. Yong verbally 1997) and Triang river, before 1935 (Robinson and Chasen 1936), although it is unclear whether this record is from inside or outside present day Taman Negara National Park, Pahang; **Telok Anson estate** (Teluk Amon), Perak, May 1915 (male in NRM); **Kuala Lompat**, Pahang, 50 m, c.1980 (Davison and Scriven 1983); **Kerau Wildlife Reserve**, currently (McGowan *et al.* 1995, McGowan 1998); **Rawang**, Selangor, July 1912 (Robinson and Chasen 1936); **Kuala Lumpur**, Selangor, 1908 (male in NRM); **Subang Forest Reserve**, 1962 (Medway and Wells 1963; see Threats); **Ayer Kring**, Negeri Sembilan–Pahang border, March 1912 (male in BMNH); **Pasoh Forest Reserve**, Negeri Sembilan, 50 m, c.1980 (Davison and Scriven 1983), early 1986 (Harrap 1986), undated (D. Yong verbally 1997); **Rompin river**, Pahang, June 1902 (Riley 1938); **Endau river**, Johor, June 1901 (Riley 1938); **Melaka** (Malacca), nineteenth century (many specimens in BMNH); **Asahan**, Johor/Melaka border, 1950s (Batchelor 1954); **Limuk Tanjong** (untraced), August 1918 (two specimens in BMNH); **Jaigeng** (untraced), September 1912 (female in BMNH); **Rembaro** (Rembaw) (untraced), before 1888 (female in BMNH; Ogilvie Grant 1893);

■ **Sabah** (see Remarks 1) **Kinabalu**, in what is presumably today **Kinabalu Park**, June/July 1903 (female in AMNH; also Chasen and Kloss 1932a; see Remarks 2); **Danum Valley**, undated (E. J. F. Gasis-Campbell *per* R. Sözer *in litt.* 2000; see Remarks 3);

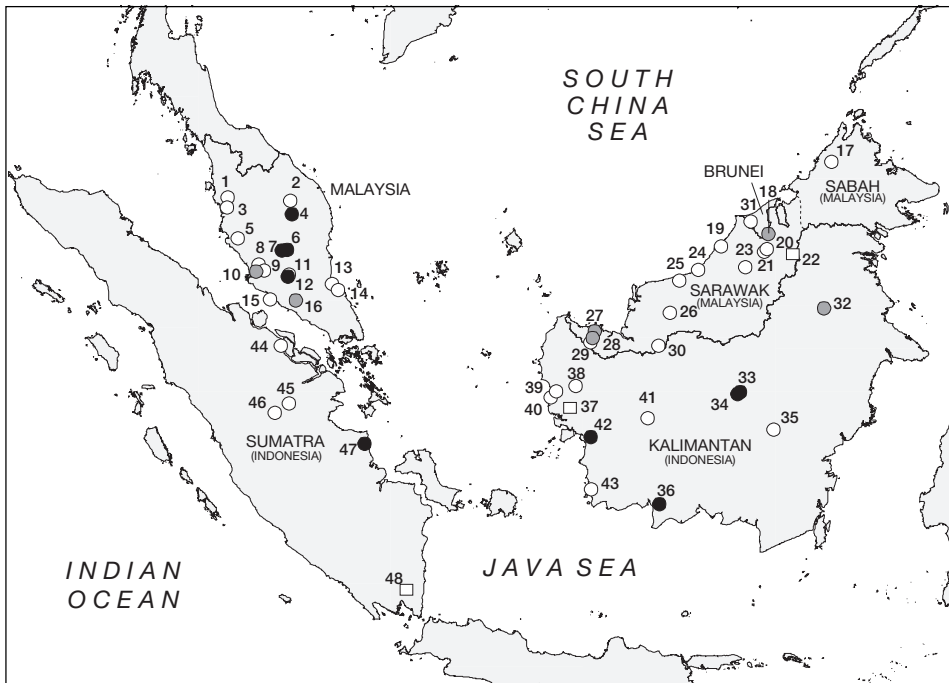
■ **Sarawak** **Gunung Mulu National Park**, in the lowlands, April–May 1978 (Wells *et al.* 1978, Davison 1979); **Suai** (Buai river), before 1892 (male in BMNH; also Ogilvie Grant 1893); **Batu Song**, January 1892 (two specimens in BMNH; also Ogilvie Grant 1893); **Baram district**, before 1900 (three pulli in BMNH; also Ogilvie Grant 1893); **Entoyut river** (untraced), Baram river, November 1894 (specimen in AMNH); near **Pa Mein salt springs**, Kelabit uplands, October of an unspecified year, 1,200 m (Smythies 1981, Smythies and Davison 1999, G. W. H. Davison *in litt.* 2000); base of **Gunung Dulit**, last century (Hose 1893), January 1894 (male in ZMB), 300 m, October 1898 (two specimens in BMNH); **Bintulu**, mid-1870s (Sharpe 1876–1879);

Balingian (Balangean) (type locality of race *borneensis*), December 1902 (male in AMNH); April 1903 (Rothschild 1917); **Poi river** (Poeh river), undated (Sharpe 1893–1894) but a specimen relabelled “Mt Poeh” (in AMNH gives August 1892 (this presumably the “Mt Poi” specimen in Chasen and Kloss 1932a); **Kuching**, 1950–1954 (Smythies 1957); **Semengo Forest Reserve**, near sea-level, October 1964–November 1965 (Fogden 1976); **Tegora**, October 1877 (female in BMNH; also Ogilvie Grant 1893); **Betong**, Seribas, August 1916 (male in BMNH);

■ **BRUNEI** Tutong river, November 1897 (female in BMNH);

■ **INDONESIA** Kalimantan ■ *East Kalimantan* Kayan Mentarang National Park, by local report (Holmes 1997), but apparently accepted in Smythies and Davison (1999); “Kemawen”, apparently therefore **Kihammawon**, August–October 1969 (seven specimens in MZB);

■ *Central Kalimantan* above **Muara Joloi** at the confluence of the Busang and Murung rivers, Barito Ulu (Barito river headwaters), 800–900 m, July–September 1989 (Wilkinson *et al.* 1991a,b); **Sungai Busang**, 1,500 m, July–September 1989 (Dutson *et al.* 1989); **Lihong Bahaija**, only place found (caught in traps), January 1882 (Blasius 1884a, Grabowsky 1885); **Tanjung Puting National Park**, in period since c.1970 (bin Jalan and Galdikas 1987, Nash and Nash



The distribution of Black Partridge *Melanoperdix nigra*: (1) Pondok Tanjung Forest Reserve; (2) Terong; (3) Larut; (4) Taman Negara National Park; (5) Telok Anson estate; (6) Kuala Lompat; (7) Kerau Wildlife Reserve; (8) Rawang; (9) Kuala Lumpur; (10) Subang Forest Reserve; (11) Ayer Kring; (12) Pasoh Forest Reserve; (13) Rompin river; (14) Endau river; (15) Melaka; (16) Asahan; (17) Kinabalu Park; (18) Gunung Mulu National Park; (19) Suai; (20) Batu Song; (21) Baram district; (22) Pa Mein salt springs; (23) Gunung Dulit; (24) Bintulu; (25) Balingian; (26) Poi river; (27) Kuching; (28) Semengo Forest Reserve; (29) Tegora; (30) Betong; (31) Tutong river; (32) Kihammawon; (33) Muara Joloi; (34) Sungai Busang; (35) Lihong Bahaija; (36) Tanjung Puting National Park; (37) Sungai Kapuas; (38) Batu Ampar; (39) Pontianak; (40) Ngara; (41) Gunung Kenepai; (42) Gunung Palung National Park; (43) Kendawangan river; (44) Sungai Siak; (45) Japura; (46) Peranap; (47) Berbak National Park; (48) Lampung.

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

1988, B. F. King verbally 1998); ■ **West Kalimantan Sungai Kapuas**, September 1905 (female in USNM), undated (specimen in RMNH; site here assumed to be in West rather than in eastern Central Kalimantan); **Batu Ampar**, Kubu, Pontianak, January 1930 (Coomans de Ruiter (1946b)); **Pontianak**, January and February 1893, and 1893 with no month (Blasius 1896), March–April 1931 (Chasen and Kloss 1932a); **Ngara (Mandor)**, January 1931 (specimen in RMNH); **Gunung Kenepai** (including southern foot), January–February 1894 (Büttikofer 1899, specimens in MCZ, RMNH, USNM, ZMB), including Ruma Manual (foot of Gunung Kenepai), December 1893–January 1894 (Büttikofer 1899); **Gunung Palung National Park** at Cabang Panti, 1986–1995 (Laman *et al.* 1996, Holmes 1997, B. F. King verbally 1998), and, adjacent to the park in the community forest area, September 1998 (E. Pollard *in litt.* 2000); **Sungai Kendawangan**, August 1908 (seven specimens in USNM); Ipoh (Mandor) (untraced), July 1931 (male in MZB); Gunung Raja (untraced), Singkawang, May 1934, nest with three eggs (Coomans de Ruiter 1946b); Sungei Tjagat (untraced), Peniti, “West Borneo”, April 1931 (two specimens in MZB); Maveling (untraced), March 1907 (Parrot 1908);

Sumatra (see Remarks 4) ■ **Riau Sungai Siak** (upper and, apparently, lower), December 1906 (four specimens in USNM); **Japura** and **Peranap**, 1898–1899 (van Marle and Voous 1988); Mandau river (untraced but almost certainly in Riau and close to Sungai Siak, given dates and same collector, W. L. Abbott), November–December 1906 (10 specimens in USNM); by local report at Gelumpang, Bukit Tigapuluh, 1991 (Danielsen and Heegaard 1995a); ■ **Jambi Berbak National Park**, 1983 (Silvius and Verheugt 1986, van Marle and Voous 1988); ■ **Lampung** unspecified locality (van Marle and Voous 1988); probably also in Bengkulu (van Marle and Voous 1988).

POPULATION As an inhabitant of level lowland primary forest, this species must have undergone a very steep decline in recent decades (see Threats), and although it had recently been considered “relatively secure” (Holmes 1989) and “not uncommon in the lowlands of S and W Borneo” (MacKinnon and Phillipps 1993), there is a broad concern that this is now a rare and rapidly declining species (D. A. Holmes, F. R. Lambert, D. Yong verbally 1999, P. J. K. McGowan *in litt.* 2000). In the mid-1990s the population was put at over 1,000 (McGowan *et al.* 1995), but no maximum limit was suggested. Quantification of decline has been attempted, but this exercise was greatly hampered by paucity of data: 25 localities were traced, 17 before and eight after 1970 (i.e. none shared) (McGowan *et al.* 1998a); in the present review, 57 localities have been traced, 49 before 1980 and eight after 1980 (one in both periods). In 1962 the area of Subang Forest Reserve was extremely small (“one-half square mile of forest”) and a third of it was cleared during that year (Medway and Wells 1963), so it seems most unlikely that the species persists there.

On the Malay Peninsula in the first half of the twentieth century it was considered “one of the rarer game birds” albeit “not uncommon” at a few sites (Robinson and Chasen 1936). It is now described as “sparse to uncommon” (Wells 1999).

In its Bornean range it has been considered “not uncommon” (Smythies 1957). Banks (1937a) believed it was rarer in northern Borneo and it was “not a common bird” around Gunung Dulit (Hose 1893), but “numerous specimens” were reported from Ruma Manual and Gunung Kenepai in the 1890s (Büttikofer 1899). The map reveals the notable absence of post-1980 records from Malaysian Borneo, and indeed the predominance there of pre-1950 records, suggesting that some significant population losses may have occurred. However, in Barito Ulu, Kalimantan, 1989, there were six sightings in six days’ fieldwork at two sites, involving five single males and a pair (Wilkinson *et al.* 1991a,b), and the species is “uncommon” in Gunung Palung National Park (Laman *et al.* 1996).

In Berbak National Park on Sumatra it “may be more common than the few records indicate” (Silvius and Verheugt 1986), but see Threats; moreover, apart from some circumstantial evidence in southern Riau (Danielsen and Heegaard 1995a) there were no

subsequent reports from Sumatra down to the mid-1990s (Holmes 1996), and indeed the record from Berbak in 1983 remains the only one since W. L. Abbott's tally of 15 specimens in late 1906 (in USNM).

ECOLOGY Habitat This is chiefly a bird of the floor of lowland primary and closed-canopy secondary evergreen forest (Wells 1999). The view that it benefits from logging, because this encourages invasion by its supposedly favoured bertam palm *Eugeissona tristis*, requires confirmation (Wells 1999). In the Malay Peninsula its historical northern limit coincided with the change from Malay evergreen to Thai-Burmese semi-evergreen forest at c.6°N, and records were stated to have come from lowland hilly country to “600 m”—although Wells (1999) could find no evidence to support this claim, and preferred to regard it as an extreme lowland specialist—with an undergrowth of stemless palms (Robinson and Chasen 1936) and lowland dipterocarp forest over gently sloping ground (Davison and Scriven 1983). In Borneo it inhabits “brushwood and high bamboo-jungle” (Büttikofer 1899), dry but not stony alluvial forest (Davison 1979) and swamp forest and lowland forest at Gunung Palung (Laman *et al.* 1996). In the latter reserve a group (male and two females) were seen “jumping around on exposed roots in flooded riparian peatswamp forest” (E. Pollard *in litt.* 2000). Although judged to be a lowland specialist with a proclivity for alluvial forest (Davison 1979, Hose 1893, Wells 1985), other evidence suggests that it may indeed have a partial association with peatswamp forest, including upland formations (D. Yong verbally 1997; see also above); Wilkinson *et al.* (1991a,b) mentioned peatswamp forest as well as lowland primary forest. It certainly reaches lower montane regions, e.g. at Kelabit (Smythies 1981), on Gunung Kenepai (Büttikofer 1897) and in Barito Ulu (Wilkinson *et al.* 1991a,b). The upper elevational limit is, in fact, unknown (McGowan *et al.* 1995), although recently given as 1,200 m on Borneo (Smythies and Davison 1999), which is anomalously high.

Food There is no information.

Breeding The breeding season appears to be extended throughout the species's range, albeit with the preponderance of evidence stemming from July to October. In Peninsular Malaysia downy young have been taken in August and pulli seen in August and September (Wells 1999). In Sumatra a half-grown pullus was collected in mid-December (specimen in USNM). On Borneo three nests each contained five eggs (Hose 1893). In south-west Borneo a pair with several hatchlings was found in mid-July, and a nest containing a piped egg and some eggshell (suggesting the adults had led the other chicks away) in mid-September, the nest being a simple depression (13 cm diameter) lined with dead leaves (Nash and Nash 1988). In southern Borneo a clutch of two eggs was obtained in January and one of three eggs in May (Coomans de Ruiter 1946b). A pullus was found in the Kelabit uplands in late October (Smythies 1981).

THREATS The species must be suffering from habitat loss and alteration, clear-felling for timber, forest degradation and loss to agriculture, possibly (in Indonesia) also hunting (McGowan *et al.* 1995). 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*). Information on peatswamp forest loss in Borneo and Sumatra is presented in Threats under Hook-billed Bulbul *Setornis criniger*.

There is no known trade in this species out of Indonesia (R. Sözer verbally 1999) or out of Malaysia (P. J. K. McGowan *in litt.* 2000).

MEASURES TAKEN Although legally protected in Sarawak (Smythies and Davison 1999), the only conservation this species has experienced is through protected areas. It was recently

determined as present in 16 protected areas, of which three—Gunung Mulu National Park, Kerau Wildlife Reserve and Taman Negara National Park—are considered irreplaceably important to the long-term security of eastern Asian galliforms, and two—Kinabalu Park and Pasoh Forest Reserve—are considered important for the security of this particular species (McGowan *et al.* 1999; see Remarks 2). In the account above, the species has also been recorded from Tanjung Putting and Gunung Palung National Parks (Kalimantan) and Berbak National Park (Sumatra) (see Distribution, but also Threats under Crestless Fireback).

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.

Survey work is needed to determine the status and habitat requirements of the Black Partridge more fully, followed by appropriate habitat management (McGowan *et al.* 1995). Indeed, its ecology needs to be clarified through studies of population density, breeding success, feeding patterns, dispersal and survival in a number of carefully evaluated habitats. The determination of its key vocalisations would in this regard be extremely helpful, and the use of radio-telemetry essential. The results of this work will allow for improved reserve design and habitat management in all future efforts to secure viable populations of the species. A call for a dedicated programme of research into galliform resource partitioning on Borneo is made under Bornean Peacock-pheasant *Polyplectron schleiermacheri*.

REMARKS (1) Sheldon *et al.* (in press) report a specimen in ANSP from “Tenton” or “Teuton”, June 1895, an untraced locality apparently near Kudat, and provide an unconfirmed but highly likely observation from Poring Hot Springs in December 1981 (apparently accepted by Smythies and Davison 1999), and mention a specimen in Papar market in 1961 reportedly taken at Ulu Papar. However, only the Kinabalu specimen in AMNH provides solid evidence that the species occurs (or occurred) in the state. Indeed, the “Teuton” specimen was apparently collected by J. B. Bell, who is thought to have collected at Kudat but is known to have surveyed the Lawas river, so “Teuton” is very probably Tutong in Brunei (G. W. H. Davison *in litt.* 2000)—and indeed Tutong is the only site in Brunei from which the species is known (see Distribution). (2) McGowan *et al.* (1999) regarded Kinabalu Park as a key site for the Black Partridge, although the park was not listed at all in McGowan *et al.* (1995), and the evidence for its occurrence at Kinabalu is now very old and very obscure, resting on a single century-old specimen in BMNH (missed by Gore [1968] but mentioned once in a paper on birds in south-west Borneo in 1932). Whether the species persists in the area must be open to doubt. (3) This record is treated as provisional mainly because there appear to be no others from this very well-watched area. (4) There are specimens simply marked “Sumatra” in AMNH, MCZ, SMNS, ZMB.