

# Threatened Birds of Asia:

## The BirdLife International Red Data Book

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## MINIATURE TIT-BABBLER

Data Deficient

### *Micromacronus leytensis*

**DISTRIBUTION** The Miniature Tit-babbler is endemic to the Philippines (see Remarks 1) in two races on four islands: nominate *leytensis* on Samar, Leyte and presumably Biliran, *sordidus* on Mindanao (see Remarks 2). The recent report from Biliran is reproduced here with caution.

■ **PHILIPPINES** There are very few records from very few and widely disjunct localities, as follows:

*Samar* **Bihid river** drainage in Maraput, western Samar, undated sight record (Dickinson *et al.* 1991);

*Biliran* unspecified locality, April 1987 (R. E. Fernandez verbally 1996);

*Leyte* **Mt Lobi** on the eastern flank at Dagami (type locality), Patok, 500 m, August and September 1961 (Amadon 1962, Parkes 1973; female in AMNH);

*Mindanao (eastern)* **Mt Pasian**, Davao Oriental, 1,100 m, December 1996 (K. Wilson *per* T. H. Fisher verbally 1997); (*central*) **Mt Kitanglad** above 1,000 m, January 1995 (AJL); **Mt Piapayungan** at Saronayan, Lumba-Bayabao, 1,050–1,200 m, May and June 1970 (Ripley and Rabor 1968; three males, only one with elevation, in DMNH, UPLB, USNM), and at Siwagat (see Remarks 3), Lumba-Bayabao, 1,200–1,650 m, June 1970 (male in USNM); **Mt Apo** at Baracatan, 1980s (R. Krupa *per* T. H. Fisher verbally 1997; see Remarks 4); **Mt Matutum** at Tucay E-el, Tupi, 1,000–1,300 m, February 1964 (Ripley and Rabor 1968; also female in USNM), and simply at Tupi, 820–1,670 m, June 1966 (12 specimens in AMNH, DMNH, FMNH, UPLB, USNM, YPM); **Mt Three Kings** at Traan-keni, South Cotabato, May 1993 (female in PNM); **Mt Busa** near Kiamba, Sarangani, 800–900 m in April 1993 (A. C. Diesmos and R. E. Fernandez verbally 1996); (*western*) **Mt Sugarloaf** at Tumindog Hill, 600–800 m, and at Buracan Hill (no elevation), Midsalip, May 1969 (two specimens in DMNH, UPLB).

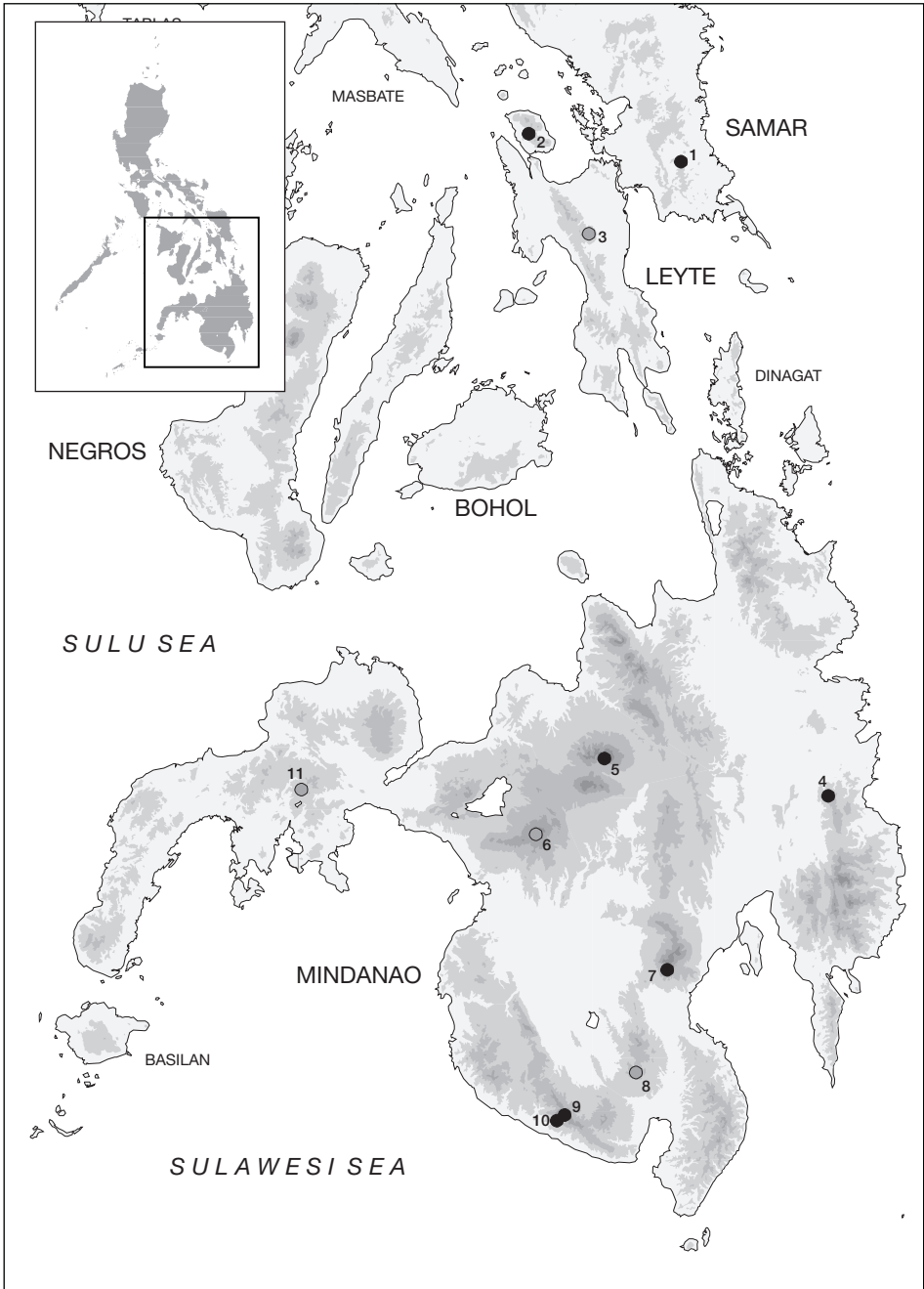
**POPULATION** The species is regarded as very rare (Dickinson *et al.* 1991), and there have been numerous skilled observers in suitable areas in Mindanao who have failed to report it. However, it is tiny and unpatterned (its countershaded coloration recalling a *Phylloscopus*, suggesting that it may be a canopy-dweller), so it may be highly elusive, and will yet prove commoner and widespread once its currently unknown call has been recorded and learnt by observers; also there are areas of montane forest on Mindanao suffering from peace and order problems that have consequently not been surveyed.

**ECOLOGY** *Habitat* This is a bird of forest and forest edge (Dickinson *et al.* 1991), with records from between 500 and 1,670 m, the majority being above 1,000 m (see Distribution). At least 12 individuals have been observed in a mixed feeding flock in undergrowth vegetation (R. E. Fernandez verbally). The type series of four was collected from a flock of over 10 that were at the forest edge in an area on the eastern shoulders of Mt Lobi where the original forest was broken by clearings (Amadon 1962). On Mt Kitanglad in 1995 at least three birds were foraging in the canopy of montane forest in a flock with Mountain Leaf-warblers *Phylloscopus trivirgatus* (AJL).

*Food* The flock from which the type series was taken was feeding some 15 m up on a tall flowering tree, the birds being noisy and active, repeatedly moving from branch to branch; feeding with them were *Zosterops* and *Dicaeum* (Amadon 1962).

*Breeding* The testes of a male from Mt Piapayungan, May, and two from Mt Matutum, June, were enlarged (specimen each in DMNH, FMNH, USNM). A juvenile female collected on Mt Matutum in late June was considered “not long out of the nest” (Ripley and Rabor 1968).

*Migration* There is no information on possible vertical movements.



**The distribution of Miniature Tit-babbler *Micromacronus leytensis*:** (1) Bihid river; (2) Biliran; (3) Mt Lobi; (4) Mt Pasion; (5) Mt Kitanglad; (6) Mt Piapayungan; (7) Mt Apo; (8) Mt Matutum; (9) Mt Three Kings; (10) Mt Busa; (11) Mt Sugarloaf.

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

**THREATS** Forest destruction is the only but considerable problem for this very poorly known and seemingly rare and very range-restricted bird (Collar *et al.* 1994), although its presence above 1,000 m at several sites is partly reassuring. Mining applications, particularly on Samar and Leyte, are a severe potential threat (NADM). It is not clear what proportion of forest has been lost on Samar and Leyte, but PEWG (1996), using 1989 DENR statistics, credited them with possessing as little as 433 km<sup>2</sup> of old-growth dipterocarp, although other sources judged their forest cover considerably higher (see Threats *Habitat loss* for Samar and Leyte under Philippine Eagle *Pithecophaga jefferyi*).

**MEASURES TAKEN** Mts Apo and Kitanglad Natural Parks are CPPAP sites. FPE funding is currently available for Mt Matutum (see Appendix). A moratorium on logging has been imposed at Mt Busa (Chiong-bian verbally 1996).

**MEASURES PROPOSED** Apart from the areas targeted for conservation above, the species is known from six “key sites” (Mts Cabalantian/Capoto-an on Samar; Mt Lobi range on Leyte; Mts Diwata, Sugarloaf, Piapayungan and Three Kings on Mindanao; see Appendix) and these require formal designation under the NIPAS process. Various mountain ranges on Mindanao remain officially unprotected yet are very important sites for several other threatened species (see equivalent section under Blue-capped Kingfisher *Actenoides hombroni*). Serious consideration must now be given to the conservation of their forests. In addition, a concerted effort is needed to locate and study a population of this species (so as to provide baseline data on its ecology) and to record and disseminate its common calls, so that future fieldworkers can search for it elsewhere. The record from Biliran requires follow-up, and it is time this interesting and neglected island became the target of a fuller biological survey, always recalling that the search there for the Philippine Eagle *Pithecophaga jefferyi* was inconclusive (see Distribution in relevant account).

**REMARKS** (1) This, like *Dasycrotapha* and *Mimizuku*, is one of only a few Philippine endemic avian species that is maintained in its own genus. It is a highly distinctive bird which, discounting the Trochilidae, is one of the smallest in the world (Amadon 1962). (2) Rand (1970b) implied that the two subspecies might be worthy of specific recognition, listing several differences. (3) The handwriting on the label of this specimen is unclear; it is conceivable that “Siwagat” is a misreading for “Saronayan”, as the date of the specimen falls between the dates of the two for this latter locality. (4) This is the record in Collar *et al.* (1994) from “one unspecified recent locality” (F. R. Lambert *in litt.* 1997).