

# 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](mailto:nhbs@nhbs.co.uk)  
Internet: [www.nhbs.com/services/birdlife.html](http://www.nhbs.com/services/birdlife.html)

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## GIANT SCOPS-OWL

### *Mimizuku gurneyi*

Critical  —

Endangered  —

Vulnerable  A1c,d; A2c,d; C1; C2a



*This owl has a small population which is undergoing a rapid decline and severe fragmentation as a result of extensive deforestation. It therefore qualifies as Vulnerable.*

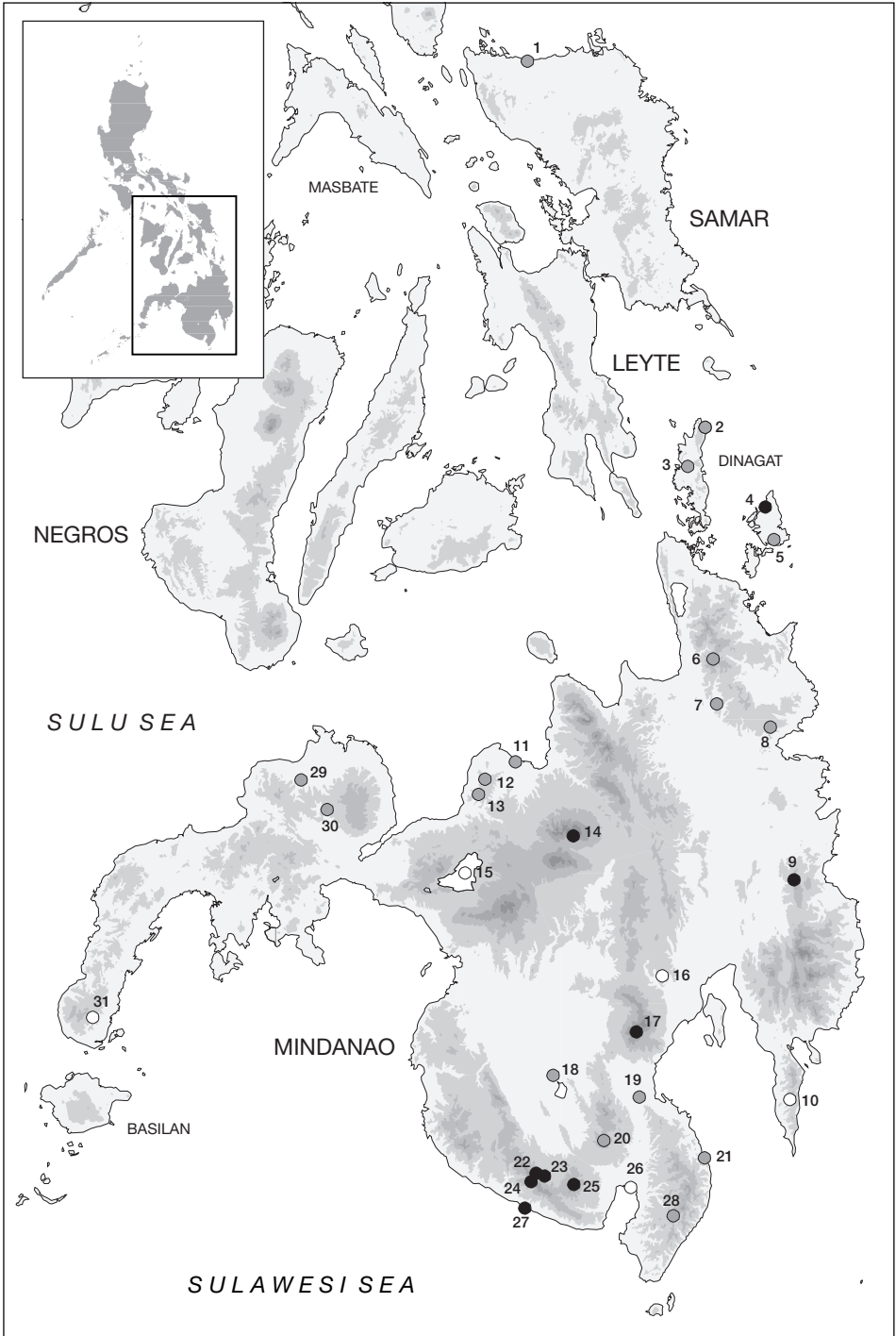
**DISTRIBUTION** The Giant Scops-owl, a species in its own genus (see Remarks 1), is endemic to the Philippines on the islands of Samar (previously unpublished), Dinagat, Siargao and Mindanao (Dickinson *et al.* 1991). DuPont (1972b) provided reasons for rejecting Hachisuka's (1931–1935, 1941) claimed evidence of breeding on Marinduque, an island also included in the species's range, along with Luzon (this presumably in plain error), by Gonzales and Alcalá (1969); de Elera's (1895) mention of "Paragua" (i.e. Palawan) must also be an error. Records are as follows:

■ **PHILIPPINES** **Samar** **Catarman** at the Samar Institute of Technology, May 1959 (male in PNM; see Remarks 2);

*Dinagat* **Kambinlio**, Loreto (birds heard) and **Plaridel**, Albor, April 1972 (male in DMNH; also duPont and Rabor 1973b);

*Siargao* **San Benito** at Nuevo Campo, recently (R. E. Fernandez verbally 1996, BRT); **Osmeña**, Dapa, April 1972 (two males in DMNH; also duPont and Rabor 1973b);

*Mindanao (eastern)* **Mt Hilong-hilong** at Balangbalang, Cabadbaran, 150–300 m, April 1963 (female in USNM); **Sumile** at 100–500 m, November/December 1976 (Sanguila and Tabaranza 1979); **Mt Diwata**, Diatagon, Lianga, 300 m, April 1976 (specimen in MSU); **Mt Pasian**, 2.25 km north and 1 km east of the peak, PICOP road 6, May 1994 (male in CMNH), and at Bay View Hills, PICOP, recently (T. H. Fisher *per* P. A. J. Morris *in litt.* 1996); "**Agustín Peninsula**", 1927–1928 (Hachisuka 1941); (*central*) **Opol** (Malibato), June 1968 (female in FMNH); **Tagbalogo**, Naawan, Misamis Oriental, February 1975 (female in UPLB); **Tu-od** (Ma-asin and Camp Dunque), Manticao, Misamis Oriental, September 1952 (specimen in ZMC: M. Heegaard *in litt.* 1989), June and August 1968 (five specimens in AMNH, DMNH, FMNH, USNM); **Mt Kitanglad** at Malaybalay, 1,300 m, May 1960 (Ripley and Rabor 1961; two females in UPLB, YPM) and regularly since 1990 (Greensmith 1990, Evans *et al.* 1993a, many observers *in litt.* 1996, 1997; but see Remarks 5); **Lake Lanao**, April 1906 and August 1907 (Meyer de Schauensee 1957; two females in ANSP); "**Davao**" (here for convenience taken to refer to the city or its environs), September 1899 (male in ZMB), 1930 (Hachisuka 1941); **Mt Apo** at Baracatan, March 1987 (Jensen and Hornskov 1992), April and May 1994 (Davidson ms, C. R. Robson verbally 1997); **Buluan**, Cotabato, April 1966 (male in UMMZ); **Kibawalan**, Malalag, Davao, 360–670 m, November 1963 (female in DMNH); **Mt Matutum** at Balisong, Tupi, October 1963 (female in PNM); **Talagutong**, Malita, below 300 m, January 1964 (male in UPLB); **Mt Three Kings** high peak, South Cotabato, May 1993 (male in PNM); **Lake Sebu** at Sitio Siete, 1,000 m, February 1994 (P. A. J. Morris *in litt.* 1996), April 1994 (C. R. Robson verbally 1997); **Mt Cabaay**, Mt Busa range, at Binati, April 1993 (female in CMNH); **Mt Parker**, T'boli, May 1993 (male in PNM); **Sputon**, Buayan, Cotabato, 60 m, January 1947 (female in PNM); **Kiamba**, Kiamba municipality, April 1993 (male in CMNH); **Mt Tuduk** at Datal-Bukay, Glan, May 1966 (two males in UPLB); (*western*) **Matam**, Katipunan, Zamboanga del Norte, May 1952 (female in FMNH); **Mt Dapiak** at Diway, April 1952 (male in FMNH); **Zamboanga**, the type locality, April 1878



(Tweeddale 1878h). An untraced locality on Mindanao is Tomayan, Davao, July 1941 (female in YIO).

**POPULATION** This bird has been described as common, but the source of this assertion is not clear (see Remarks 3). It was considered “very rare” by Grossman and Hamlet (1964; see Remarks 4), was noted as uncommon by Dickinson *et al.* (1991), and was upgraded from “near-threatened” in Collar and Andrew (1988) to threatened in Collar *et al.* (1994). Despite recent records at new sites (nine since 1990), the information in Distribution generally tends to confirm this assessment, although it may be that surveys using tape-playback will substantially increase future assessments of the species’s numerical strength at individual sites (but see Remarks 5).

**ECOLOGY Habitat** The Giant Scops-owl inhabits forest, chiefly in the lowlands (Collar *et al.* 1994). The female from Mt Hilong-hilong, April, was “shot on a low branch of shrub at edge of trail in broken forest” (FMNH label data). The altitudinal range from evidence under Distribution is 60–1,300 m, although all specific records but two are from below 670 m, and the bird at Plaridel, Dinagat, was on a “low hill... not far from the coast”, at the edge of a clearing inside logged dipterocarp forest (duPont and Rabor 1973b). The male from Mt Pasion, May 1994, was at the edge of virgin mossy forest on a logging road (CMNH register data), and calls attributed with confidence to the species have been heard coming from small patches of remnant dipterocarp forests mixed with dense second-growth forests adjacent to cultivated fields in foothills, or indeed from patches of secondary growth itself (duPont and Rabor 1973b). However, Clark and Mikkola (1989) cited B. F. King as informing them that he had found calling *Mimizuku* at 900 m and 1,200 m (localities not stated), and that “most montane species are, as yet, not seriously endangered”, clearly implying that *Mimizuku* is, in fact, montane.

**Food** Nothing appears to have been recorded, even of the stomach contents of the most recently collected material (1993/1994).

**Breeding** The male type specimen, taken in April, was “pairing” (Tweeddale 1878h), while the female from Matam, May, had ovaries slightly enlarged (FMNH label data), and the female from Lake Lanao, April, is a recently fledged bird (D. Agro verbally 1996). Otherwise nothing appears to have been recorded, even of the gonad condition of the most recently collected material (1993/1994).

**Migration** There is no information on this; but possible elevational movements may occur.

**THREATS** Forest destruction (illegal logging and *kaingin*) is eating into this species’s range (Collar *et al.* 1994), and it appears particularly vulnerable on account of its occupancy of relatively low-lying areas (see Habitat). The deliberate conflagration of forests on Mindanao—associated with insurgency—is a problem, particularly on the Zamboanga Peninsula (D. Allen verbally 1997), while at Bislig 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). Owls are considered harbingers of misfortune by local people: the species may be persecuted as a result (D. Allen verbally 1997).

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**The distribution of Giant Scops-owl *Mimizuku gurneyi* (map opposite):** (1) Catarman; (2) Kambinlio; (3) Plaridel; (4) San Benito; (5) Osmeña; (6) Mt Hilong-hilong; (7) Sumile; (8) Mt Diwata; (9) Mt Pasion; (10) Agustin Peninsula; (11) Opol; (12) Tagbalogo; (13) Tu-od; (14) Mt Kitanglad; (15) Lake Lanao; (16) Davao; (17) Mt Apo; (18) Buluan; (19) Kibawalan; (20) Mt Matutum; (21) Talagutong; (22) Mt Three Kings; (23) Lake Sebu; (24) Mt Cabaay; (25) Mt Parker; (26) Sputon; (27) Kiamba; (28) Mt Tuduk; (29) Matam; (30) Mt Dapiak; (31) Zamboanga.

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

**MEASURES TAKEN** The species was legally protected in August 1964 (Gonzales and Alcalá 1969) and is known from three CPPAP sites (Mt Kitanglad, Mt Apo and Siargao Island; see Appendix). In addition, conservation-related activities are supported by FPE funding on Mt Matutum (see Appendix). The same action is proposed for Dinagat Island (including the Kambinlio/Redondo “key site”) although no progress is known. There is a watershed reserve at Mt Hilong-hilong.

In the mid-1990s the species was featured on an environmental awareness poster focusing on owls as part of the “Only in the Philippines” series, funded by British Airways Assisting Conservation and FFI, with text in English and Tagalog (W. L. R. Oliver verbally 1997). It is listed on Appendix I of CITES.

**MEASURES PROPOSED** Apart from the areas targeted for conservation above, the Giant Scops-owl has been recorded in three “key sites” (Mts Diwata, Dapiak and Three Kings on Mindanao; see Appendix) and these deserve further survey and formal designation, at least in part, under the NIPAS process. Use of voice playback at night would provide a profile of abundance at various sites, elevations and habitats.

**REMARKS** (1) Delacour and Mayr (1945b) objected to the genus *Mimizuku*, of which *gurneyi* is the only representative, on the grounds that it was merely a large *Otus*. On the other hand, Ripley and Rabor (1961) referred to its distance from *Otus*, and, although biochemical analysis shows it indeed to be derived from *Otus* rather than from *Bubo*, its generic distinctiveness remains (Miranda *et al.* 1997). This, therefore, like *Dasyrotapha* and *Micromacronus*, is one of only a few Philippine endemic avian species that is maintained in its own genus. (2) The specimen from Samar is very much larger than birds from Mindanao (to the extent that it was originally labelled as *Bubo philippensis* and only reidentified in the late 1960s by J. T. Marshall), and must represent an undescribed taxon. (3) Clark and Mikkola (1989) cited “Marshall and King (1988)” for the information that it is “common for so large a bird, whose extensive foraging makes it... widely spaced”. They went on: “Marshall and King (1988) state that Robert Kennedy, Ben King and Joe Marshall regard it as common”. However, the reference they cited for Marshall and King (1988) is the section on the genus *Otus* in Amadon and Bull (1988), which contains nothing on the status of *Mimizuku* (section authored by Amadon and Bull) other than that it is “uncommon”. (4) A generalised statement by a major reviewing handbook such as Grossman and Hamlet (1964) would not necessarily be accurate, but it is worth noting that the author J. Hamlet spent some time in Mindanao in the 1940s, when he became familiar with the Philippine Eagle *Pithecophaga jefferyi* (see relevant account), so the status assessment of the owl has some possibly personal authority. (5) In a total of four months of fieldwork in 1992–1993, this bird was not observed on Mt Kitanglad (Gonzalez and Mallari 1993, Heaney *et al.* 1993).