

# Threatened Birds of Asia:

## The BirdLife International Red Data Book

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## ASHY-BREASTED FLYCATCHER

### *Muscicapa randi*



Critical  —  
Endangered  —  
Vulnerable  A1c; A2c

*This lowland flycatcher qualifies as Vulnerable because its population is believed to be declining rapidly as a result of continuing extensive deforestation throughout its known range.*

**DISTRIBUTION** The Ashy-breasted Flycatcher is a monotypic species (see Remarks 1) presumed (see Ecology) endemic to the Philippines, where it has been recorded from three islands, Luzon, Negros and Samar (previously unpublished). This distribution is unusual from a biogeographic standpoint, and may indicate that the species is widespread in the archipelago than has yet been established. Records are as follows:

■ **PHILIPPINES** *Luzon (western)* **Santa Fe**, Nueva Vizcaya, 300 m, May 1985 (two specimens in CM, NCSM); **Dalton Pass**, 1,050 m, August and September 1969 (Amadon and duPont 1970, plus four specimens in DMNH; see Remarks 2); (*eastern*) **Los Dos Cuernos**, Cagayan, 950 m, April 1991 and May 1992 (Danielsen *et al.* 1994, Poulsen 1995), February 1995 (P. A. J. Morris *in litt.* 1996), including at 450 m on Mt Hamut, December 1993 (N. J. Redman *in litt.* 1996), March 1996 (W. Simpson *in litt.* 1997) and May 1997 (*Oriental Bird Club Bull.* 26 [1997]: 60–66); **Mt Palanan**, Isabela, in Northern Sierra Madre Natural Park, June 1987 (Jensen and Hornskov 1992); (*central*) **Angat Dam**, Bulacan, 1988 (T. H. Fisher verbally 1997); **Diman**, Balian, Pangil, Laguna, 300 m, February 1970 (four specimens in AMNH, DMNH); **UP Laguna Land Grant** at Amiakán, Laguna, 300–400 m, May 1992 (Gonzalez 1995); **Dakil**, Lopez, Quezon, 480 m, October 1979 (male in DMNH);

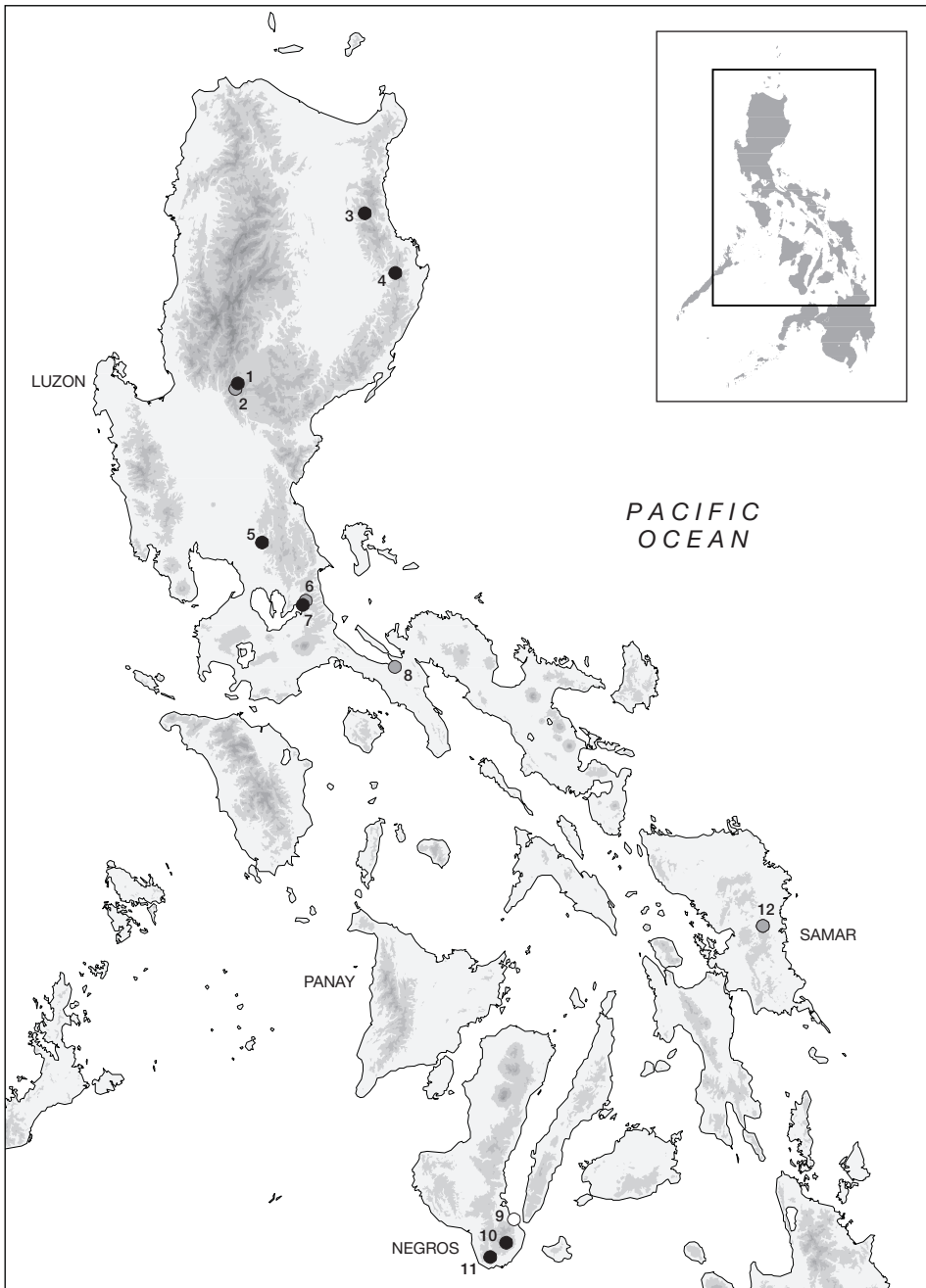
*Negros* **Valencia**, August 1877 (female immature in BMNH; see Tweeddale 1878c, Deignan 1957, Dickinson *et al.* 1991); **Mt Talinis**, two birds trapped in mid-1992 (R. Pa-alan *in litt.* 1994); **Candugay**, Siaton, one bird trapped in mid-1992 (R. Pa-alan *in litt.* 1994; see Remarks 3);

*Samar* **San Rafael** at Camp 5, Taft, May 1970 (female in PNM).

A record from Mt Makiling, Laguna, Luzon, 1987–1988 (Sargeant 1989) has not been repeated despite substantial observer coverage, and is here treated as provisional.

**POPULATION** The original description of this bird refers to its “inordinate rarity”, which suggested it might be a migrant (and presumably therefore a straggler) to the Philippines; but since the evidence is to the contrary (see Migration), another explanation might be that it is under pressure from similar wintering flycatchers (Amadon and duPont 1970). The species is certainly considered rare in the Sierra Madre, where (e.g.) a single pair was observed at the same site at Los Dos Cuernos, twice in 1991 and again in May 1992 (Danielsen *et al.* 1994, Poulsen 1995). On Negros, the species must be very rare, despite its recent rediscovery; a survey on the island in 1991 failed to record it (Brooks *et al.* 1992, Evans *et al.* 1993a). However, it is possible that mist-netting will reveal it to be commoner than observation indicates, as it has done in the case of the Cryptic Flycatcher *Ficedula crypta* (no longer treated as threatened or even near-threatened owing to evidence from CMNH fieldwork).

**ECOLOGY** *Habitat* The Ashy-breasted Flycatcher is a lowland forest species, all records being below 1,200 m, and probably a bird of the understorey where it occurs singly or in pairs (Dickinson *et al.* 1991). It appears to tolerate some habitat degradation, occurring in



**The distribution of Ashy-breasted Flycatcher *Muscicapa randi*:** (1) Santa Fe; (2) Dalton Pass; (3) Los Dos Cuernos; (4) Mt Palanan; (5) Angat Dam; (6) Diman; (7) UP Laguna Land Grant; (8) Dakil; (9) Valencia; (10) Mt Talinis; (11) Candugay; (12) San Rafael.

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

disturbed forest at UP Laguna Land Grant (Gonzalez 1995). On Los Dos Cuernos in the Sierra Madre, birds were observed at 950 m in a clearing in selectively logged forest and 10 m above the ground in dead branches (Danielsen *et al.* 1994, also Poulsen 1995). Other observations have also involved birds c. 10 m up inside forest, in one case a dead tree (J. C. T. Gonzalez verbally 1996, P. A. J. Morris *in litt.* 1996).

**Food** The species takes flying insects in the normal flycatcher manner (Danielsen *et al.* 1994, P. A. J. Morris *in litt.* 1996; also CM, NCSM label data).

**Breeding** At Los Dos Cuernos in April 1991 the behaviour of two birds “indicated breeding”, the evidence for this being their strict site fidelity over a five-day period (Danielsen *et al.* 1994). A pair was feeding young there in May 1997 (*Oriental Bird Club Bull.* 26 [1997]: 60–66). A female at Santa Fe, May, had granular, i.e. inactive, ovaries (NCSM label data). The bird observed in June 1987 at Palanan, Luzon, was juvenile, and constituted the first evidence of breeding on the island (Hornskov 1995a). The specimen from Negros, taken in August, was moulting out of juvenile plumage (Dickinson *et al.* 1991). The testes of a male, Quezon, October, were not enlarged (DMNH label data).

**Migration** Four birds taken at Dalton Pass, the notorious bird-catching area, indicate that this species undertakes at least within-island displacements, albeit possibly little more than “post-breeding dispersal” (Dickinson *et al.* 1991). Records subsequent to Dickinson *et al.* (1991) show that their assumption of the bird’s residence—based on Amadon and duPont’s (1970) wing measurements and the fact that the 1877 Negros bird was “still bearing traces of the maculated juvenal dress” (Deignan 1957)—was justified.

**THREATS** This bird, being a lowland forest species, must clearly be affected by the extensive and continuing forest destruction within its elevational range (Collar *et al.* 1994). Apart from this, its rarity irrespective of habitat loss has been suggested to be (see Population) a function of the competition exerted by wintering flycatchers with similar ecological requirements (Amadon and duPont 1970).

**MEASURES TAKEN** The Ashy-breasted Flycatcher has been recorded from Northern Sierra Madre Natural Park, a CPPAP site (see Appendix). It is also known from the Mt Talinis/Twin Lakes area on Negros (covering the Eastern Cuernos de Negros and Lake Balinsasayao “key sites”), which has been proposed for receipt of FPE funding.

**MEASURES PROPOSED** Apart from the areas targeted for conservation above, the species is known from two “key sites” (Mt Los Dos Cuernos and Angat Watershed on Luzon; see Appendix) and these should be formally designated under the NIPAS process. The Northern Sierra Madre Natural Park should be extended to embrace Los Dos Cuernos. Furthermore, immediate protection of the forest in the UP Land Grant, in accordance with its status on paper, is long overdue (see Gonzalez 1995). Integrated forest conservation strategies should consider the distribution and requirements of this species and a suite of other threatened endemic, or near-endemic, birds on Luzon (see account under Green Racquet-tail *Prioniturus luconensis*) and Negros (see account under Visayan Wrinkled Hornbill *Aceros waldeni*).

**REMARKS** (1) This taxon was only described in 1970 and only elevated to species status in 1991, so the re-examination of museum material to check identities is required—hence the Negros record, based on a BMNH skin. There may be other such material. (2) Amadon and duPont (1970) referred to “several specimens collected in August, 1959, at Dalton Pass”, but the individual selected as the type was from August 1969; “1959” is evidently an error. (3) Pa-alan (1993) mentioned that the species had also been recorded at Siaton by Alcala and Carumbana (1980), which is not in fact the case.