

Threatened Birds of Asia:

The BirdLife International Red Data Book

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MALAYSIAN WHISTLING-THRUSH

Myophonus robinsoni

Critical —
Endangered —
Vulnerable A2c



This species qualifies as Vulnerable because development proposals threaten to reduce and fragment its upland forest habitat which would result in a rapid population decline in the near future.

DISTRIBUTION The Malaysian Whistling-thrush is endemic to central Peninsular Malaysia, ranging in the Main Range from the Cameron Highlands south to the Genting Highlands (Medway and Wells 1976). Records are from:

■ **MALAYSIA** ■ **Peninsular Malaysia Bukit Larut** (Maxwell Hill), near Taiping, Cameron Highlands, one, January 1985 (I. Lewis *in litt.* 1999, G. Poole *in litt.* 1999); Gunung Batu Brinchang, **Cameron Highlands Wildlife Sanctuary**, Pahang, c.480 m, three ringed during 10 one-week netting operations in low ericaceous cloud-forest, 1962 (Medway and Wells 1963), and another in 1963 (Medway and Wells 1964), with other records are from the Boh Tea Estate Centre where regular sightings were made in the 1990s (*Suara Enggang* May–June 1997) and Robinson falls and Parit waterfall, December 1980 (Gardner 1980), around 1985 (Harrap 1986a); **Tanah Rata**, “few”, January 1982 (C. F. Mann *in litt.* 1999); **Fraser’s Hill** (Bukit Fraser), Selangor/Pahang, 1,200 m, October 1909 (specimens in AMNH, BMNH, Robinson 1909b), nests found in the Sungei Tras valley, in Charok Lumut and below Peninjau, 1950–1959 (Madoc and Allen 1952, Madoc undated), seen around the waterfall and towards Semangko pass, c.1985 (Harrap 1986a), at the rubbish tip, October 1989 (*Enggang* 1989 [2 no.11]), April 1993 (Wartmann 1993), October 1998 (*Enggang* 1988 [1 no.11]), and by many observers down to the present (e.g. T. Atkinson, D. and F. Cooper, M. Rodgers and D. Rogers *in litt.* 1999), and at Semangko pass (“The Gap”), Selangor–Pahang boundary, 750–1,360 m, February 1908 (specimens in AMNH, ZRCNUS), one, October 1958 (Madoc and Allen 1952, Madoc undated); in the Genting Highlands at **Gunung Mengkuang Lebar** (Gunung Menkuang Lebah), 1,450 m, March 1907, January 1913 (Robinson 1909b, 1928; specimens in AMNH, BMNH, ZRCNUS), at Gunung Ulu Kali, Selangor, 1,400–1,750 m, February 1906 (Robinson 1909b, female in ZRCNUS), and scarce between here and Gunung Bunga



The distribution of Malayan Whistling-thrush *Myophonus robinsoni*: (1) Bukit Larut; (2) Cameron Highlands Wildlife Sanctuary; (3) Tanah Rata; (4) Fraser's Hill; (5) Gunung Mengkuang Lebar; (6) Gunung Menuang Gasing.

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

Buah, undated (Bransbury 1993); “Moé Nuang, Gazing”, this being **Gunung Menuang Gasing**, Ulu Langat, Selangor, 900–1,200 m, February 1912 (female in ZRCNUS).

POPULATION The species was thought “by no means uncommon” above 1,500 m in Selangor (Robinson 1909b). Nevertheless, although no population estimate has been attempted, total numbers are likely to be very moderate, owing to its highly restricted range and relative scarcity within it. In addition, its predilection for gullies and streams means that its distribution is somewhat linear and it thus occupies a relatively small proportion of available forest.

ECOLOGY Habitat The species inhabits the ground storey of hill and montane forest from around 750 to 1,750 m (Medway and Wells 1976), although there is a record from 480 m (see Distribution). It inhabits “deep, damp gullies and small jungle streams”, although it is apparently less tied to water than many congeners (Robinson 1928). Nevertheless, it is usually seen in steep gullies, with nests generally over or alongside small streams (Madoc and Allen 1952, Madoc undated). It has been observed “rooting among the dead leaves of the giant screw-pine” (Robinson 1928) and, although apparently very shy and often elusive (Madoc and Allen 1952), it occasionally frequents mountain roadsides at dawn and dusk (Robson 2000).

Food There is little information, but doubtless this species lives chiefly on invertebrates picked up in the lower storey and ground floor of forest. Robinson (1928) considered that the diet must be more varied than that of the Blue Whistling-thrush *Myophonus caeruleus*, which he found to dine “almost exclusively on snails”. The latter species is more closely tied with limestone formations in Peninsular Malaysia, a habitat where snails are extremely abundant; the Malaysian Whistling-thrush occurs more often on granite soils where snails are apparently scarcer (Robinson 1928).

Breeding Nests with eggs (clutch size 1–2) or young have been found in February–April and September (Madoc and Allen 1952, Madoc undated). One of these was a large solid cup-shaped structure (18 cm in diameter and 10 cm deep) built almost entirely of black tree-fern fibres with a few bryophytes and dead leaves, and placed in an epiphytic fern on a liana, c.4.5 m above a streambed; another was c.2 m above the ground, and also on a huge fern attached to a liana; a third was c.6 m above ground, built in the base of a large epiphytic fern in the fork of a riverside tree (Madoc and Allen 1952, Madoc undated, Medway and Wells 1976). A bird in the Cameron Highlands was seen carrying food behind a waterfall in April 1997, suggesting breeding (*Suara Enggang* May–June 1997).

Migration The species is presumably entirely sedentary.

THREATS The Malaysian Whistling-thrush is a threatened member of the suite of 20 bird species that are entirely restricted to the “Sumatra and Peninsular Malaysia Endemic Bird Area”, threats and conservation measures in which are profiled by Sujatnika *et al.* (1995) and Stattersfield *et al.* (1998). Threats to the habitat and range of the species are outlined under Mountain Peacock-pheasant *Polyplectron inopinatum*.

MEASURES TAKEN This whistling-thrush occurs in the Cameron Highlands Wildlife Sanctuary (649 km²) and Fraser’s Hill Wildlife Reserve (29 km²), although it is not clear what protection these sites confer.

MEASURES PROPOSED There is a clear need for an effective protected area in Malaysia to cover sufficient habitat on the Main Range, perhaps using the Mountain Peacock-pheasant (see relevant account for this and other recommendations) as a flagship for the process (P. J. K. McGowan *in litt.* 1999). An ecological study and searches for the species to the north and south of known records would establish more clearly its range and abundance, and would clarify how seriously it might be at risk from the disruption of its habitat.