

Threatened Birds of Asia:

The BirdLife International Red Data Book

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FLORES SCOPS-OWL

Otus alfredi

Critical —

Endangered B1+2b,c,d,e

Vulnerable C1; C2b



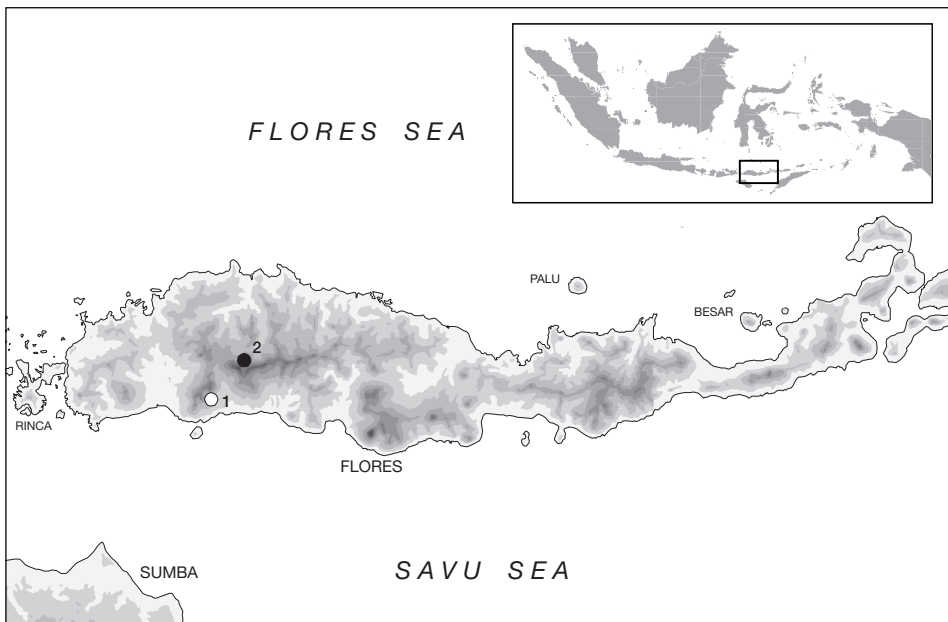
This owl is known from only two localities in a very small range which is undergoing fragmentation and decline as a result of continuing habitat loss and degradation. This necessitates its classification as Endangered.

DISTRIBUTION The Flores Scops-owl (see Remarks 1) is endemic to the island of Flores (see Remarks 2), Nusa Tenggara, Indonesia. Records are from:

■ **INDONESIA Flores Gunung Repok** “and other hills” at about 1,000 m, October–November 1896 (Hartert 1897b); **Ruteng Nature Recreation Park (NRP)** on the north slope of Poco Mandasawu, 1,400 m, May 1994 (Widodo *et al.* 1999; also King 1995, Butchart *et al.* 1996) and at Lake Rana Mese, 1,200 m, March 1994 (Widodo *et al.* 1999), September 1997 (Pilgrim *et al.* 1997, 2000).

Villagers at Kampung Repok reported an owl smaller and redder than Wallace’s Scops-owl *Otus silvicola*, whose call was a single high-pitched whistle and which only occurred in forest, but Butchart *et al.* (1993, 1996) found discrepancies in their other statements about owls and thus regarded this information as unreliable.

It has been pointed out that Moluccan Scops *Otus magicus albiventris* also occurs at higher elevations on Flores, but whereas in the Ruteng area (Rana Mese, Poco Ranaka,



The distribution of Flores Scops-owl *Otus alfredi*: (1) Gunung Repok; (2) Ruteng Nature Recreation Park.
○ Historical (pre-1950) ● Recent (1980–present)

Golo Lusang) of western Flores it stops at 500–600 m, it is found in central and eastern Flores at 1,000 m on Aegila, up to 1,500 m on Keli Mutu, and 1,000 m at Ili Wengot (R. Drijvers *in litt.* 1999). This suggests that *alfredi* may be absent in the centre and east of Flores, and therefore has a considerably restricted range in the higher, wetter, western part of the island.

POPULATION It is now clear that the puzzling lack of records of this species for almost a century (see Remarks 3) can best be explained by its silence (as suggested by E. Schmutz in Collar and Andrew 1988) or an extremely unfamiliar call. The total number of birds may number in the low hundreds or the low thousands.

ECOLOGY Habitat The habitat of the type specimens, although not stated in Hartert 1897b, has been presumed to be montane forest at 1,000 m (White and Bruce 1986, Butchart *et al.* 1993); the Poco Mandasawu specimen was in relatively undisturbed wet montane forest, while the 1994 Rana Mese bird was in mixed deciduous and evergreen forest (Widodo *et al.* 1999) and the 1997 bird (same locality) was 15 m up in the subcanopy of a tree in upper lowland evergreen forest, and was there sympatric with the common Wallace's Scops-owl (Pilgrim *et al.* 1997, 2000).

Food There is no information.

Breeding Two nests of this or Wallace's Scops-owl were found in September and October (Verheijen 1964). The specimen collected in May 1994 was a not fully grown juvenile (Widodo *et al.* 1999).

THREATS The Ruteng forests are under severe threat from illegal timber harvesting and conversion to cropland, owing to the high human population in the area, and all commercially valuable trees have been forecast to have been removed by the end of this decade; moreover, numerous communities dispute the current boundaries of the nature recreation park (Trainor 2000; see Remarks 4).

The Flores Scops-owl is one of (now) five threatened members of the suite of 17 bird species that are entirely restricted to the "Northern Nusa Tenggara Endemic Bird Area", threats and conservation measures in which are profiled by Sujatnika *et al.* (1995) and Stattersfield *et al.* (1998).

MEASURES TAKEN The endeavour to establish a national recreation park at Ruteng is described under Remarks 4. Apart from this, there is c.105 km² of montane forest close to (but isolated from) Ruteng NRP whose current status is "protection forest", which means that it is unmanaged but not available for exploitation (Trainor and Lesmana 2000, C. Trainor *in litt.* 2001; see below).

MEASURES PROPOSED Butchart *et al.* (1996) recommended the establishment of an upper-elevation evergreen rainforest reserve on Flores, to secure the future of a range of avian endemics, near-threatened species and distinctive subspecies; and in suggesting the region of Ruteng they anticipated that this would additionally protect likely habitat of the Flores Scops-owl. Butchart *et al.* (1993, 1996) also recommended extensive nocturnal fieldwork, involving mist-netting, on other mountains in the Ruteng massif in an endeavour to relocate the species elsewhere, and also the ridge forests of Mata Wae Ndeo north of the Tanjung Kerita Mese peninsula in south-west Manggarai.

Despite the achievements of Widodo *et al.* (1999) and Pilgrim *et al.* (1997, 2000), this initiative still appears to be needed, since it is not yet clear what the optimal habitat for the owl is. Moreover, management of Ruteng NRP so that its population of owls is secure must now be an important component of the conservation of the species. This is equally important

for the three endemic Flores rodents *Papagomys armandvelleri*, *Rattus hainaldi* and *Bunomys naso*, and for the suite of endemic plants also requiring sanctuary from the current onslaught on the forests (Trainor 2000); the site also holds 19 (C. Trainor *in litt.* 2000) of the 25 restricted-range bird species known from Flores within the Northern Nusa Tenggara Endemic Bird Area (Stattersfield *et al.* 1998; see also Sujatnika *et al.* 1995). A new initiative to bring biodiversity conservation to Ruteng is therefore urgently needed.

On the south side of Gunung Repok there is extensive unsurveyed forest which has been reported to extend down to sea-level; it could possibly therefore hold all four Flores endemic birds and merits investigation (C. Trainor *in litt.* 1999). This forest is part of the Repok/ Todo Protection Forest described under Measures Taken, and the entire 105 km² block is clearly worth investigation (Trainor and Lesmana 2000).

REMARKS (1) The specific status of this bird, although for some time in doubt (e.g. Sibley and Monroe 1990), has now been confirmed (Widodo *et al.* 1999). (2) B. F. King (*per* P. C. Rasmussen *in litt.* 1997) has recorded a scops-owl on Sumba which he considers may possibly be *alfredi*; however, there are others who now think this may be an undescribed *Ninox* (see, e.g., Widodo *et al.* 1999). (3) Explanations for the lack of records of this species were fourfold in Butchart *et al.* (1993), who adapted b–d below from Verhoeye (undated): (a) it is an invalid taxon (although of course being a red phase of another species does not explain why there are no records of it); (b) it is present but silent in the dry season, when all attempts to locate it have been made; (c) it is extinct (see Threats); (d) the original specimens were mislabelled as from Flores. (4) From around 1993 to 1998 the Ruteng forests were the target of an Asian Development Bank project seeking to integrate land use and conservation, and involving the establishment of a nature recreation park (the 1997 observation of Flores Scops-owl took place inside this park: Pilgrim *et al.* 1997); however, there was little consultation with local people over the boundaries to the park (see Threats), and the effect of the manner in which the project was implemented may have been counter-productive, increasing local resolve to exploit the forest and its resources against the will of central government (C. Trainor verbally 2000). As an example of the lack of planning in this project, a tourist visitor centre was built at Rana Mese which after only two or three years stands abandoned (C. Trainor verbally 2000).