

Threatened Birds of Asia:

The BirdLife International Red Data Book

Editors

N. J. COLLAR (Editor-in-chief),
A. V. ANDREEV, S. CHAN, M. J. CROSBY, S. SUBRAMANYA and J. A. TOBIAS

Maps by

RUDYANTO and M. J. CROSBY

Principal compilers and data contributors

■ **BANGLADESH** P. Thompson ■ **BHUTAN** R. Pradhan; C. Inskipp, T. Inskipp ■ **CAMBODIA** Sun Huan; C. M. Poole ■ **CHINA** ■ **MAINLAND CHINA** Zheng Guangmei; Ding Changqing, Gao Wei, Gao Yuren, Li Fulai, Liu Naifa, Ma Zhijun, the late Tan Yaokuang, Wang Qishan, Xu Weishu, Yang Lan, Yu Zhiwei, Zhang Zhengwang. ■ **HONG KONG** Hong Kong Bird Watching Society (BirdLife Affiliate); H. F. Cheung; F. N. Y. Lock, C. K. W. Ma, Y. T. Yu. ■ **TAIWAN** Wild Bird Federation of Taiwan (BirdLife Partner); L. Liu Severinghaus; Chang Chin-lung, Chiang Ming-liang, Fang Woei-horng, Ho Yi-hsian, Hwang Kwang-yin, Lin Wei-yuan, Lin Wen-horn, Lo Hung-ren, Sha Chian-chung, Yau Cheng-teh. ■ **INDIA** Bombay Natural History Society (BirdLife Partner Designate) and Sálím Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History; L. Vijayan and V. S. Vijayan; S. Balachandran, R. Bhargava, P. C. Bhattacharjee, S. Bhupathy, A. Chaudhury, P. Gole, S. A. Hussain, R. Kaul, U. Lachungpa, R. Naroji, S. Pandey, A. Pittie, V. Prakash, A. Rahmani, P. Saikia, R. Sankaran, P. Singh, R. Sugathan, Zafar-ul Islam ■ **INDONESIA** BirdLife International Indonesia Country Programme; Ria Saryanthi; D. Agista, S. van Balen, Y. Cahyadin, R. F. A. Grimmett, F. R. Lambert, M. Poulsen, Rudyanto, I. Setiawan, C. Trainor ■ **JAPAN** Wild Bird Society of Japan (BirdLife Partner); Y. Fujimaki; Y. Kanai, H. Morioka, K. Ono, H. Uchida, M. Ueta, N. Yanagisawa ■ **KOREA** ■ **NORTH KOREA** Pak U-il; Chong Jong-ryol, Rim Chuyon. ■ **SOUTH KOREA** Lee Woo-shin; Han Sang-hoon, Kim Jin-han, Lee Ki-sup, Park Jin-young ■ **LAOS** K. Khounbolin; W. J. Duckworth ■ **MALAYSIA** Malaysian Nature Society (BirdLife Partner); K. Kumar; G. Noramly, M. J. Kohler ■ **MONGOLIA** D. Batdelger; A. Bräunlich, N. Tseveenmyadag ■ **MYANMAR** Khin Ma Ma Thwin ■ **NEPAL** Bird Conservation Nepal (BirdLife Affiliate); H. S. Baral; C. Inskipp, T. P. Inskipp ■ **PAKISTAN** Ornithological Society of Pakistan (BirdLife Affiliate) ■ **PHILIPPINES** Haribon Foundation for Conservation of Natural Resources (BirdLife Partner); N. A. D. Mallari, B. R. Tabaranza, Jr. ■ **RUSSIA** Russian Bird Conservation Union (BirdLife Partner Designate); A. V. Andreev; A. G. Degtyarev, V. G. Degtyarev, V. A. Dugintsov, N. N. Gerasimov, Yu. N. Gerasimov, N. I. Germogenov, O. A. Goroshko, A. V. Kondrat'ev, Yu. V. Labutin, N. M. Litvinenko, Yu. N. Nazarov, V. A. Nechaev, V. I. Perfil'ev, R. V. Ryabtsev, Yu. V. Shibaev, S. G. Surmach, E. E. Tkachenko, O. P. Val'chuk, B. A. Voronov. ■ **SINGAPORE** The Nature Society (Singapore) (BirdLife Partner); Lim Kim Seng ■ **SRI LANKA** Field Ornithology Group of Sri Lanka (BirdLife Affiliate); S. Kotagama; S. Aryaprema, S. Corea, J. P. G. Jones, U. Fernando, R. Perera, M. Siriwardhane, K. Weerakoon ■ **THAILAND** Bird Conservation Society of Thailand (BirdLife Partner); U. Treesucon; R. Jugmongkol, V. Kongthong, P. Poonswad, P. D. Round, S. Supparatvirkorn ■ **VIETNAM** BirdLife International Vietnam Country Programme; Nguyen Cu; J. C. Eames, A. W. Tordoff, Le Trong Trai, Nguyen Duc Tu.

With contributions from: S. H. M. Butchart, D. S. Butler (maps), P. Davidson, J. C. Lowen, G. C. L. Dutson, N. B. Peet, T. Vetta (maps), J. M. Villasper (maps), M. G. Wilson

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Wellbrook Court, Girton Road, Cambridge, CB3 0NA, United Kingdom

Tel: +44 1223 277318 Fax: +44 1223 277200 Email: birdlife@birdlife.org.uk

Internet: www.birdlife.net

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TIMOR SPARROW

Padda fuscata

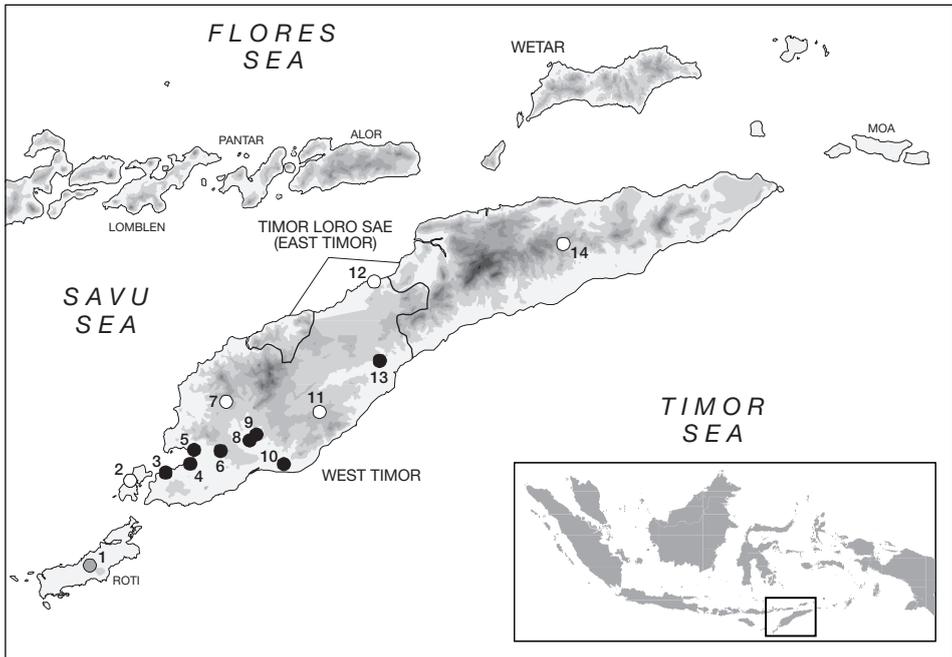
Critical —
Endangered —
Vulnerable **A2d**



This species qualifies as Vulnerable because it is likely to suffer a rapid decline in the near future, as a result of increasing exploitation for the cagebird trade and habitat loss.

DISTRIBUTION The Timor Sparrow is endemic to the island of Timor and its satellites Roti and Samau, in Nusa Tenggara province (Lesser Sundas), Indonesia and Timor Loro Sae (East Timor). Records are from:

- **INDONESIA** Roti unspecified locality, sight record, 1970s (Verheijen 1976);
Semau unspecified locality, 1859 (Wallace 1863b, Hellmayr 1914);
West Timor **Kupang**, c.1890 (Büttikofer 1891), December 1931 (Mayr 1944), September 1985 (P. Andrew *in litt.* 2000), with very few there in 1993–1994 (D. A. Holmes *in litt.* 1999);
Tambak Oibelo, August–October 1985 (P. Andrew *in litt.* 2000); **Bipolo**, January 1990 (Gibbs 1990), March 1999 (I. Mauro *in litt.* 1999), 50 m, April 1999 (D. Lesmana *in litt.* 2000), August 1999 (K. D. Bishop *in litt.* 2000), and specifically at Uel, 5 km from Bipolo towards Kupang Bay, March 1985 (P. Andrew *in litt.* 2000); **Camplong**, January 1932 (Mayr 1944),



The distribution of Timor Sparrow *Padda fuscata*: (1) Roti; (2) Semau; (3) Kupang; (4) Tambak Oibelo; (5) Bipolo; (6) Camplong; (7) Lelogama; (8) Noilmina; (9) Besi Pae; (10) Bena Plain; (11) Niki Niki; (12) Atapupu; (13) Kateri Wildlife Reserve; (14) Timor Loro Sae.

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

March 1999 (I. Mauro *in litt.* 1999), including 46 km from Camplong along the Soe road, September 1995 (F. Verbelen *in litt.* 2000); **Lelogama**, May 1911 (Hellmayr 1914); Takari, 5 km from **Noilmina**, March 1985 (P. Andrew *in litt.* 2000); **Besi Pae**, May 1984 (P. Andrew *in litt.* 2000); **Bena Plain** (including near the Noilmina estuary), May 1984 and March 1985 (P. Andrew *in litt.* 2000); **Niki Niki**, June 1911 (Hellmayr 1914); **Atapupu**, July 1897 (Hartert 1898c); **Kateri Wildlife Sanctuary**, May 1999 (D. Lesmana *in litt.* 2000); Nifu (untraced), June 1911 (Hellmayr 1914); Amarassi (untraced), c.1890 (Büttikofer 1891); Ofu (untraced), June 1911 (Hellmayr 1914);

TIMOR LORO SAE (*East Timor*) unspecified locality, 1861 (three specimens in BMNH).

POPULATION The species is generally uncommon and local, in places moderately common, occurring usually in pairs, sometimes in groups of 3–5 birds (Coates and Bishop 1997). One visitor to Timor in 1990 noted that the species can “often be seen flying over giving their short *chit* call” (Gibbs 1990), but another, searching deliberately albeit in two short visits in 1992, failed to find it (Restall 1996). It appears to occur very sparsely as singletons and in small flocks (P. Andrew, D. Lesmana *in litt.* 2000); flocks of c.30 and c.10 were seen at Uel near Bipolo and the species was “common” on Bena Plain in March 1985, but it appeared to be highly limited in habitat and otherwise scarce on the island during field surveys of the avifauna in 1984 and 1985 (P. Andrew *in litt.* 2000). A flock of 15 was seen near Bipolo in August 1999 (K. D. Bishop *in litt.* 2000).

ECOLOGY Habitat The species has been found in savanna, lightly wooded cattle pasture, scrub and the edges of cultivation up to 720 m, perching on grasses and the ground, also in trees and occasionally on fence-posts and tree-stumps (Coates and Bishop 1997). It is nonetheless “a very peculiar bird” which has been found on saltflats overrun with castor-oil scrub, marginal agricultural land and overgrown gardens, but not in active agricultural land or (*contra* Restall 1996; but see Food) dry paddyfields, and it appears to be limited to low-lying areas, chiefly below 100 m (P. Andrew *in litt.* 2000). Five birds were in degraded forest at 50 m, Bipolo, and one was in a mixed estrildid flock in deciduous forest with teak trees near a small spring in Kateri sanctuary at 300 m (D. Lesmana *in litt.* 2000). It has been recorded near villages (Gibbs 1990) and in newly created wet cattle pasture between a forest patch and the inland side of mangroves (K. D. Bishop *in litt.* 2000).

Food The species has been recorded feeding on spilt rice “around the villages” (Gibbs 1990), and on seedheads of grasses 0.5–1.0 m high in wet cattle pasture (K. D. Bishop *in litt.* 2000). Birds have been seen drinking at a small spring and feeding on the ground in recently burnt “swamp forest” dominated by *Corypha* palm (D. Lesmana *in litt.* 2000, 2001).

Breeding The gonads of six males and a female collected in December and January were not developed (AMNH label data). Two birds were inspecting a nest hole high up in a dead tree at Bipolo in June 2000 (R. F. A. Grimmett *in litt.* 2001). Several immatures were in a flock observed in August (K. D. Bishop *in litt.* 2000). In October 1984 a pair was observed carrying nesting material and entering a large hole formed from a knot-hole in a woodland tree within a mosaic of degraded woodland, pasture and gardens (K. D. Bishop *in litt.* 2000).

THREATS The Timor Sparrow is one of five (but note composition now different) threatened members of the suite of 23 bird species that are entirely restricted to the “Timor and Wetar Endemic Bird Area”, threats and conservation measures in which are profiled by Sujatnika *et al.* (1995) and Stattersfield *et al.* (1998). Loss of monsoon forest has been extremely severe in West Timor, and forest loss in general has reportedly been considerable in East Timor: see equivalent section under Wetar Ground-dove *Gallicolumba hoedtii*.

The species is currently unprotected by Indonesian wildlife legislation. Large numbers appeared in trade in Europe in 1987 (Mayer 2000). It was also being traded with alarming regularity by dealers in Singapore and Indonesia in 1990–1991, although this seemed to have tailed off somewhat in 1993–1994 (Restall 1996). However, there is a report of large numbers of recently captured birds (D. Yong *per* D. A. Holmes *in litt.* 1999). The exhaustion of populations of the closely related Java Sparrow *Padda oryzivora* (see relevant account) has led to speculation that the Timor Sparrow might now have become the target of bird trappers supplying the internal Indonesian market (D. A. Holmes *in litt.* 1999), which could result in a very rapid decline in what are already apparently low numbers of this endemic species. However, surveys of West Timor in 1998 and 1999 found little evidence of capture and trade in the species: although four birds were seen in captivity in Kupang and two in Camplong (R. Drijvers *per* C. Trainor *in litt.* 2001), it appears that the Timor Sparrow is not a main target for trappers but is simply caught incidentally (D. Lesmana *per* C. Trainor *in litt.* 2001).

MEASURES TAKEN The species occurs in Kateri Wildlife Sanctuary, West Timor.

MEASURES PROPOSED The need for a full survey of and comprehensive conservation strategy for Timor's forests is emphasised in the equivalent section under Wetar Ground-dove, along with information on current proposals to protect Gunung Timau (West Timor) and Gunung Arnau (Wetar). There is a particular need to assess the status of this species in East Timor (gathering data in the process on its ecology), and to alert the authorities there of concerns about its status and the potential threat from trade. Control of trade must be an issue for urgent exploration, including a listing on CITES.