Threatened Birds of Asia:
The BirdLife International Red Data Book

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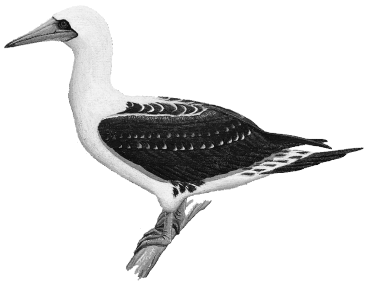

ABBOTT'S BOOBY
Papasula abbotti

Critical ■ A2c,e; B1 + 2b,c,e
Endangered □ —
Vulnerable □ A1a,c; C1; C2b; D2

This species breeds on one island with limited available habitat. It is believed to be continuing to decline owing to the continuing effects of past habitat clearance. In addition, the introduction of an ant species is predicted to cause a rapid decline at a rate of more than 80% in 90 years (= three generations). This species has therefore been upgraded to Critical.

DISTRIBUTION AND POPULATION Abbott's Booby breeds only on **Christmas Island (to Australia)**, although it once had a much wider distribution in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. The population was estimated at 2,300 pairs in 1967, declining to 1,900 pairs by 1992, but newly discovered breeding sites have brought the total to 2,500 active pairs (Garnett and Crowley 2000). It disperses to the Indian Ocean including waters off the south coast of Java, Indonesia (Becking 1976, van Marle and Voous 1988, Bourne 2000). Recent records from the Banda Sea (van Balen 1996d) indicate either a major extension of its known range or unknown breeding colonies; and there is a remarkable report of 150 feeding around a school of dolphins near Pulau Tomea off Sulawesi, August 1998 (R. Gregory-Smith *in litt*. 1999).

ECOLOGY It feeds in low sea-surface temperature waters, taking squid and fish, and nests in tall rainforest trees, mostly in uneven canopy containing emergent trees, laying one egg; most successful parents only breeding biennially, age of first breeding may be eight years, and the average life span may be c.40 years, so that breeding recruitment may be exceptionally low (Marchant and Higgins 1990, Garnett and Crowley 2000).

THREATS During 1965–1987 phosphate extraction destroyed c.33% of nesting habitat, and many nest sites and birds were lost, while trees in remaining isolated stands and along margins of forest have degenerated; then in 1988 a cyclone destroyed a third of monitored fledglings and nest sites (Garnett and Crowley 2000). However, the most serious threat is the introduced yellow crazy ant *Anoplolepis gracilipes*, which is now spreading rapidly across the island with potential disastrous affects on populations of breeding seabirds (see Threats under Christmas Island Frigatebird *Fregata andrewsi*) (Garnett and Crowley 2000).

MEASURES TAKEN A national park was created in 1980 which includes most breeding areas. A lease agreement has been obtained with Christmas Island Phosphates Pty Ltd that prevents clearance of primary rainforest and requires permits to clear regrowth, and a monitoring programme was in place, 1982–1993; since 1984, c.20% of mined areas adjacent to nesting areas have been planted in an ongoing restoration programme, while a control programme for *A. gracilipe*s has been initiated (Garnett and Crowley 2000). It is listed on CITES Appendix I.

MEASURES PROPOSED • Develop techniques for the control of *A. gracilipes*. • Control the abundance and spread of *A. gracilipes*. • Develop and implement appropriate monitoring techniques. • Monitor impact of rehabilitation efforts on trends and distribution. • Identify feeding habitat of breeding adults. • Negotiate with the mining company to ensure protection of all breeding habitat and appropriate buffers. • Implement community education programme.