

# Threatened Birds of Asia:

## The BirdLife International Red Data Book

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## SCHNEIDER'S PITTA

### *Pitta schneideri*

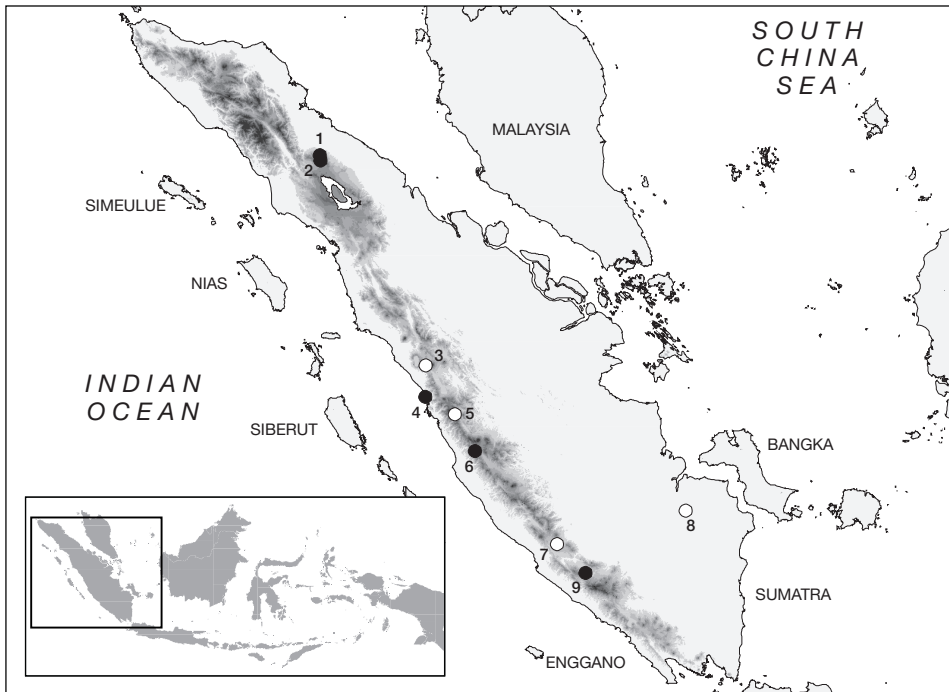
Critical  —  
Endangered  —  
Vulnerable  C1



*This enigmatic ground-dweller qualifies for Vulnerable because it is judged to have a small population which is inferred to be declining as a result of habitat loss and agricultural encroachment.*

**DISTRIBUTION** Schneider's Pitta (see Remarks 1) is endemic to the island of Sumatra, Indonesia, where it has been found at sites over a large part of the Barisan range (from Gunung Sibayak, North Sumatra, to Gunung Dempo, South Sumatra), but only at a few localities, as follows:

■ **INDONESIA Sumatra** ■ **North Sumatra Gunung Sibayak** ("Si Bajak"; type locality), Tolok Baros ("Ober Deli" = upper Deli), Batak Highlands, undated but between 1897 and 1899 (Hartert 1909; unsexed immature in AMNH), and relocated there at c.1,600 m in May 1995 and, by voice, subsequently (Holmes 1996); **Berastagi**, Batak Highlands, heard in the early 1990s (Collar *et al.* 1994, D. Yong *per* B. F. King verbally 1998); ■ **West Sumatra Gunung Singgalang** at Batang Singgalang (base of mountain), June 1834 (juvenile male in RMNH; see Rozendaal 1990); above **Padang**, 1,200 m, July 1996 (B. F. King verbally 1998); **Surian**,



**The distribution of Schneider's Pitta *Pitta schneideri*:** (1) Gunung Sibayak; (2) Berastagi; (3) Gunung Singgalang; (4) Padang; (5) Surian; (6) Kerinci-Seblat National Park; (7) Gunung Kaba; (8) Panjang Sebar; (9) Gunung Dempo.  
○ Historical (pre-1950) ● Recent (1980–present)

east slopes of Bukit Barisan, Padang Highlands, 1,050 m, December 1884 (female immature in RMNH; see Rozendaal 1990); **Kerinci-Seblat National Park** historically at Siulakderas (“Siolak Daras”, “Siolah Dras”; see Remarks 2), Kerinci valley, 900 m, March 1914 (Robinson and Kloss 1918a), at Sungei Kumbang, 1,240 m (specimen labels give 1,400–1,500 m), March–May 1914 (Robinson and Kloss 1918a) and August 1915 (Robinson and Kloss 1924a; male in RMNH), at the peak, 2,200 m, April–May 1914 (Robinson and Kloss 1918a; see Remarks 3), and in the “North Korintji Valley” at 1,500 m, September 1921 (two males in USNM, ZMB), with modern records dating from 1986 at 2,250–2,400 m (J. R. Howes in Hurrell 1989), 1988 at 2,375 m (Hurrell 1989) and repeatedly since (A. B. van den Berg in Rozendaal 1990, Heath 1991, Tobias and Phelps 1994, Holmes 1996, F. Verbelen and many other observers *in litt.* 1999), with one at Gunung Tujuh, undated but in the period 1994–1996, at 1,905 m (Holden 1997), and one at Bukit Tapan, 1,200 m, June 1999 (I. Mauro *in litt.* 1999); ■ **Bengkulu** foot of **Gunung Kaba** near Suban Ajam (Redjang), 1,200 m, June–July 1916 (Robinson and Kloss 1924a); ■ **South Sumatra Panjang Sebar**, Palembang, January 1919 (male in RMNH; see Remarks 4); **Gunung Dempo**, 2,300–2,500 m, July 1936 (three specimens in MCZ), specifically at the Air Njuruk (“an insignificant brook”) (Pasemah), Palembang, 1,400 m, August 1916 (Robinson and Kloss 1924a; also Rozendaal 1990), and birds still present on the mountain in 1995 and 1997 (F. Verbelen *in litt.* 1999).

Erritzoe and Erritzoe (1998) mapped a “Mt Matak” immediately next to the type locality, which is in the Batak Highlands, and it is here assumed that “Matak” is a mistranscription of Batak; they also gave “Mt. Bajak” as a locality, unaware that this is Gunung Sibayak (see above), as well as “Mt. Singei Kumlang”, i.e. Sungei Kumbang, Kerinci. They regarded records from Dolok Sibual Bual Nature Reserve (in Collar *et al.* 1994) as unconfirmed, and this opinion is followed here.

**POPULATION** On and around Gunung Kerinci in 1914 the species was “very common” (Robinson and Kloss 1918a), and at dusk in July 1998 five adult males were heard calling in the lowest forested part of the Kerinci summit trail (F. Verbelen *in litt.* 1999); clearly therefore in optimal conditions it occurs in fairly high numbers. Despite this, however, it must be suffering a substantial and chronic decline with the clearance of lower-lying forest areas in most parts of Sumatra, and it appears to be highly intolerant of forest degradation (Lambert 1996).

**ECOLOGY Habitat** This pitta inhabits the floor and undergrowth of tropical lower and upper montane rainforest at 900 to 2,100 m (van Marle and Voous 1988), although it has been observed up to almost 2,400 m on Gunung Kerinci and 2,300 m on Gunung Dempo in primary montane forest (Hurrell 1989, Lambert 1996). It has been characterised simply as inhabiting “the undergrowth of old forest” (Robinson and Kloss 1924a): on and around Kerinci in 1914 it was encountered “from the valley floor up to about 7,000 feet, above which it did not occur”, being “met with, generally in pairs, running about the paths and among the undergrowth” (Robinson and Kloss 1918a). On Gunung Sibayak the habitat in 1995 was montane forest with dense undergrowth at 1,600 m (Holmes 1996). A recent observer found it in dense cover in dark damp ravines and in tree-fall gaps (Lambert 1996).

**Food** The species forages on the forest floor, vigorously turning over fallen leaves (Lambert 1996). Birds taken at Kerinci in 1914 were found to have been targeting “a very big species of cock-roach not uncommon among the vegetation”, but also with some vegetable matter (Robinson and Kloss 1918a). One bird was carrying a large millipede Myriapoda, and a pair were witnessed foraging systematically along a path, keeping close together and vigorously turning aside leaves with their bills (Hurrell 1989). In 1997 and 1998 the species was found to be feeding on large snails (P. A. J. Morris verbally 1998, R. Drijvers *in litt.* 1999).

**Breeding** All pittas studied have proved to be monogamous, and although no nest or eggs of Schneider’s Pitta have ever been found (Lambert 1996) there is little doubt this species

is no exception; indeed, it is “usually recorded in pairs” (Lambert 1996). Territorial calling may be a year-round phenomenon (Lambert 1996), and the sparse evidence suggests that breeding may be equally protracted. Immature birds have been taken in March–May (Robinson and Kloss 1918a), June (in RMNH), July (three-quarters-grown bird in MCZ), and December (half-grown female in RMNH). On Kerinci in recent years adults escorting (and in one case a male feeding) single juveniles have been seen in June and July (Holmes 1996, Lambert 1996, Erritzoe and Erritzoe 1998, R. Drijvers *in litt.* 1999), and in July 1998 one female was seen with two juveniles (P. A. J. Morris verbally 1998); however, these dates possibly reflect a peak in birdwatching activity more than one in breeding activity.

**Migration** The species is assumed to be resident (Erritzoe and Erritzoe 1998), but it may perhaps make local elevational movements.

**THREATS** Schneider’s *Pitta* 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). The extent of deforestation in the lower elevational range of this species, the general plight of upland forest on Sumatra and the particular plight of Kerinci-Seblat National Park are outlined in Threats under Sumatran Ground-cuckoo *Carpococcyx viridis*. At the type locality, Gunung Sibayak, only relict montane forest now persists, although the species is still present (Holmes 1996).

Although it has been remarked that little poaching appeared to occur within Kerinci-Seblat (Hurrell 1989), in fact hunting with air rifles is widespread in the park’s lower forest, and this may be a threat to the species (F. Verbelen *in litt.* 1999). Moreover, ground snares are widespread and likely to be a particular problem for ground-haunting birds such as this one (K. D. Bishop *in litt.* 2000).

**MEASURES TAKEN** This species has been protected under Indonesian law since 1931 (Inskipp 1986). It is present in Kerinci-Seblat National Park (see Distribution). Gunung Singgalang is a 97 km<sup>2</sup> protection forest, but with garden (“ladang”) encroachment along the lower peripheries (SvB). Bukit Dingin/Gunung Dempo consists of c.380 km<sup>2</sup> protection forest (SvB). Gunung Kaba is an forested volcanic peak currently designated a recreation park (but see below) (D. A. Holmes *in litt.* 1999).

**MEASURES PROPOSED** A 250 km<sup>2</sup> wildlife reserve has been proposed between 1,000 and 1,938 m on Gunung Kaba (SvB), and both Gunung Singgalang and Bukit Dingin/Gunung Dempo are proposed for upgrading to reserves (D. A. Holmes *in litt.* 1999). There is a good case for creating a large reserve in the Batak Highlands, and endeavours to find an appropriate area which holds the full complement of threatened upland forest bird species, including Sumatran Cochoa *Cochoa beccarii* (also known from this area), would be welcome. Several much larger areas to the north-east, totalling c.2,140 km<sup>2</sup> of rich rainforest between 100 and 3,021 m (Sekundur, Langkat Selatan and Langkat Barat) are proposed nature reserves and very likely to hold these species (SvB). The species should be searched for in appropriate habitat north of its known range as far as Leuser National Park (D. A. Holmes *in litt.* 1999). A strict hunting ban is needed at Kerinci (F. Verbelen *in litt.* 1999).

**REMARKS** (1) This species was treated as a race of *Pitta nipalensis* by Robinson and Kloss (1924a). (2) This is transcribed as “Stolahn Drias” by Erritzoe and Erritzoe (1998). (3) AMNH possesses a Robinson and Kloss male apparently labelled 27 October 1914, although this month is not listed in Robinson and Kloss (1924a). (4) The position of this locality, as marked on the map, is totally anomalous, and some error must be assumed to exist.