

# Threatened Birds of Asia:

## The BirdLife International Red Data Book

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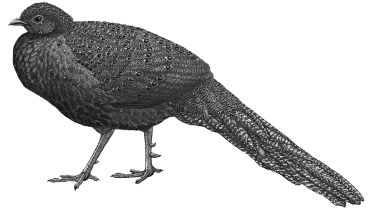
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## MOUNTAIN PEACOCK-PHEASANT

### *Polyplectron inopinatum*

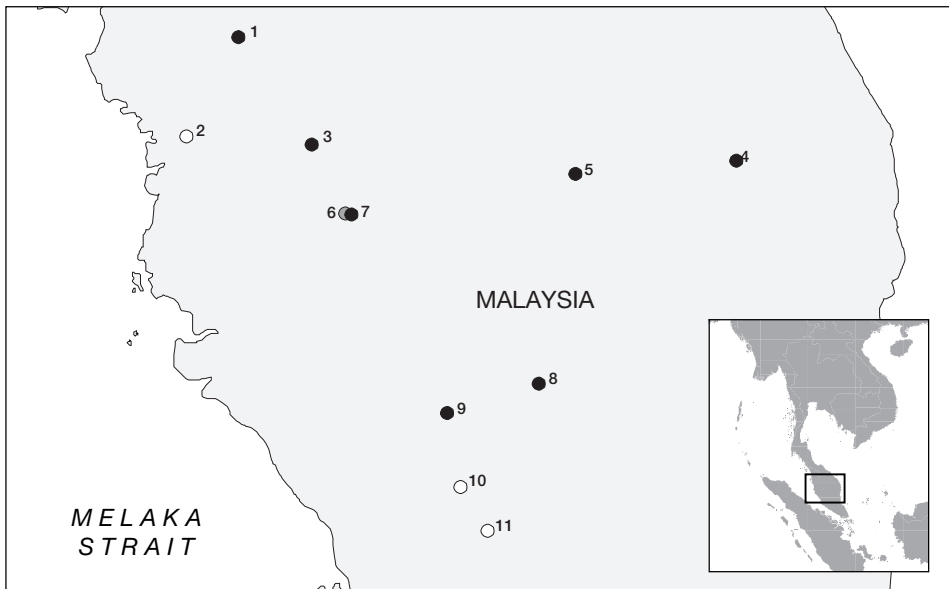
Critical  —  
Endangered  —  
Vulnerable  B1+2b,c,d,e; C1; C2a



*This species is classified as Vulnerable because it has a small, fragmented range and population, which will suffer a decline and further fragmentation should a proposed road development project go ahead.*

**DISTRIBUTION** The Mountain Peacock-pheasant is endemic to central Peninsular Malaysia, in the Larut range, and the in Main Range between Gunung Korbu (Perak/Pahang divide) in the north and Ulu Langat, (South Selangor/Pahang divide) in the south, and as well as on the eastern outliers Tahan and Benom (Medway and Wells 1976, Wells 1999). Both southern and northern limits in the Main Range are questionable as suitable habitat extends further in either direction (particularly north of Korbu towards the Thai border) and these areas remain to be adequately explored (G. W. H. Davison *in litt.* 2000). Records are from:

**MALAYSIA** ■ *Peninsular Malaysia* Gunung Bintang, Hijau, this presumably referring to **Bintang Hijau Forest Reserve**, “Utara” (north) and “Selatan” (south), “three signs” found, 1,500–1,800 m, April 1992 (Siti Hawa Yatim 1993); **Bukit Larut** (=Maxwell Hill), undated (Beebe 1918–1922); **Gunung Chondong**, Korbu Forest Reserve, Perak, 1,250 m, one tail feather found, October 1991 (Siti Hawa Yatim 1993); **Gunung Mandi Angin**, Taman Negara National



**The distribution of Mountain Peacock-pheasant *Polyplectron inopinatum*:** (1) Bintang Hijau Forest Reserve; (2) Bukit Larut; (3) Gunung Chondong; (4) Gunung Mandi Angin; (5) Gunung Tahan; (6) Gunung Jasar; (7) Cameron Highlands; (8) Gunung Benom; (9) Fraser's Hill; (10) Gunung Menkuang Lebar; (11) Gunung Menuang Gasing.

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

Park, 1991 (Siti Hawa Yatim 1993); **Gunung Tahan**, Taman Negara National Park, 1,000 m, June 1905 (one in BMNH), October 1910, November 1920 (Morioka and Yang 1996), in the east of the park (possibly near Wray's camp), 1,200 m, and on the lower slope, February 1992 (Siti Hawa Yatim 1993); **Gunung Jasar**, Cameron Highlands, female on eggs, January 1958 (Madoc ms); **Cameron Highlands**, many records, including "44th Camp, Lipis, Pahang", June 1923 (specimen in ZRCNUS; also Morioka and Yang 1996), and unspecified sites in 1991 (Siti Hawa Yatim 1993); **Gunung Benom**, in Kerau Wildlife Reserve, Pahang, undated (Beebe 1918–1922), undated (Medway and Wells 1976), 1975–1982 (Davison and Scriven undated); **Fraser's Hill** (Bukit Fraser), Selangor/Pahang, very common (Beebe 1918–1922, Robinson 1928), recorded on Pine Tree Hill, 1975–1982 (Davison and Scriven undated), 1991 (Siti Hawa Yatim 1993), and regularly in recent years by various observers almost throughout the trail system (e.g. P. Hines, I. Lewis and D. Rogers *in litt.* 1999), and at Semangko pass ("The Gap"), Selangor–Pahang boundary, February 1908 (specimen in NRM), remains of a nest reportedly found on the Pahang side of the pass, undated (Beebe 1918–1922); in the Genting Highlands at **Gunung Mengkuang Lebar** (Gunung Menkuang Lebah), January 1905, March 1907, August 1908, January 1913 (10 specimens in AMNH, BMNH and ZRCNUS; also Robinson 1909b, Morioka and Yang 1996), also nearby at Gunung Ulu Kali, Selangor, 1,400–1,750 m, February 1906 (one in AMNH, Robinson 1909b), and at Gunung Bunga Buah, 1975–1982 (Davison and Scriven undated) and the Pumphouse road, one male, October 1989 (*Enggang* 2, 11), 1990 (Siti Hawa Yatim 1993); **Gunung Menuang Gasing**, Ulu Langat, 900–1,200 m, February 1912 (specimens in AMNH and ZRCNUS; Morioka and Yang 1996); Ginting Bidei (not mapped), Selangor–Pahang boundary, April 1917 (Morioka and Yang 1996); Gunung Ijau (not mapped), Perak, April 1915 (Morioka and Yang 1996).

**POPULATION** On the high mountains that form the border between Selangor and Pahang provinces the Mountain Peacock-pheasant was thought to be "not at all rare", occurring in parties of 4–5 (Robinson 1928). It was, for example, "very common" on mountains above Semangko pass, i.e. the region of Fraser's Hill (Robinson 1909b). At one unspecified site (c.1,000 m) the species was recently considered "plentiful", being seen in small parties of 5–8 birds (*WPA News* 56: 6–7). Wells (1999) described it as "regular and uncommon to more or less common," while Davison and Scriven (undated) suspected it was "common judging from the frequency of sightings and dropped feathers at two sites". The total number of this species is likely to be low, however, owing to its highly restricted range. It has been estimated, on uncertain grounds, that 600 individuals remained in the Cameron Highlands around 1990 (Siti Hawa Yatim 1993). Populations on the isolated and protected peaks of Benom and Tahan are presumably stable and secure (Wells 1999).

**ECOLOGY Habitat** This terrestrial species is "strictly an inhabitant of very rugged and mountainous country" (Robinson 1928, Robinson and Chasen 1936), having been recorded with certainty only between 820 m and 1,800 m in montane forest (Medway and Wells 1976, Davison and Scriven undated, Wells 1999). There is one anomalous record of a tail-feather found at c.600 m, well below the montane ecotone (Wells 1999). The species occurs in ridge-top elfin forest, the only pheasant in Peninsular Malaysia to do so (Wells 1999). Indeed, Davison and Scriven (undated) found individuals exclusively in this habitat, although this was probably due to the bias generated by trail routing. The species appeared to be commonest in steep areas with exposed corestones, some bamboo and climbing or creeping plants (Davison and Scriven undated). Robinson (1928) found it in "thick cover and shady gullies"; Beebe (1918–1922) thought it a bird of "humid, dark ravines" which he twice saw sunning on bare branches of tall trees.

**Food** The diet consists largely of grubs, beetles and ants, but it is also apparently fond of berries, particularly *Calamus*, small climbing palms that on many Malaysian mountains are

“inconveniently abundant” (Robinson 1928). A specimen shot by Beebe (1918–1922) had its crop full of spiders, white ants, several grubs and two “weirdly strange, flat creatures” from rotten logs. Evidence of their foraging is apparent in the scrapes made on slopes by feeding groups, apparently often in rotting logs (Beebe 1918–1922).

**Breeding** Robinson (1928) stated that “from the dates on which chicks have been obtained, eggs may be looked for from December onwards”. Indeed, both known nests were subsequently found in January, including one clutch of slightly incubated eggs on 12 January (Madoc ms, Wells 1999). Poults moulting out of downy plumage have been collected on the Genting Highlands in late February (Robinson 1909b), and a half-grown young was observed being escorted by an adult female at Bunga Buah peak, Selangor, on 11 June (Wells 1999). These data indicate a breeding peak early in the year but a fairly protracted season. One of two nests found in the Cameron highlands was a virtually unlined scrape roughly 26 cm wide × 10 cm deep in peat under a rhododendron bush less than 1 m from a path through dense elfin forest on a high summit (Madoc ms, Wells 1999). One nest site shown to Beebe (1918–1922) was on the ground half way up a steep slope, close to where roots had been uprooted by a tree-fall. A captive female was known to rear broods of one and two young (Medway and Wells 1976) and the full clutch is generally thought to consist of two eggs (Wells 1999).

**Migration** The species is presumably entirely sedentary (Wells 1999).

**THREATS** The Mountain Peacock-pheasant 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 proposed Highland Resorts Road (HRR) would, if completed, be 220 km long (linking the Cameron to the Genting highlands), destroy c.10 km<sup>2</sup> of montane forest and threaten several watersheds with erosion, siltation and landslides, as well as provide access for hunters and loggers to huge areas of untouched forest in the range of this species (*Oriental Bird Club Bull.* 27 [1998]: 16–20). Ironically, this road would reduce the scenery, peace and solitude of the resorts it is intended to serve (Bransbury 1993). There is a general expectation of further fragmentation of montane forest in Peninsular Malaysia through a variety of factors (Wells 1999); del Hoyo *et al.* (1994) referred to “habitat destruction for agriculture and possibly also by urban development”. The species is apparently trapped by indigenous people and considered “better to eat” than Malaysian Peacock-pheasant *Polyplectron malacense* (*WPA News* 56: 6–7).

**MEASURES TAKEN** The species is listed on CITES Appendix III by Malaysia.

**Protected areas** The species has recently been determined present in three protected areas, of which Cameron Highlands Wildlife Sanctuary (649 km<sup>2</sup>), Kerau Wildlife Reserve (520 km<sup>2</sup>, including Gunung Benom) and Taman Negara (4,343 km<sup>2</sup>, encompassing Gunung Tahan) are considered irreplaceably important for the long-term conservation of galliforms in East Asia. In the account above it is also recorded from Fraser’s Hill Wildlife Reserve (29 km<sup>2</sup>) although it is not clear what protection, if any, this site confers. Its presence in reserve forests is of no value as these areas are maintained with the sole purpose of logging.

**Conservation programme** A new International Management Committee has been established to oversee the ex situ population of this species and maintain its studbook, and a Galliformes Committee has been set up to coordinate all *in situ* and *ex situ* conservation initiatives in Malaysia, with plans for analysis of DNA samples, field surveys and experimental re-introduction projects (*Tragopan* 11: 5).

**MEASURES PROPOSED** **Protected areas** There is a clear need for a protected area in Peninsular Malaysia to cover habitat on the Main Range. The Mountain Peacock-pheasant

could function as a flagship for this process (P. J. K. McGowan *in litt.* 1999). In addition, a review is needed to determine whether current protected area designations and wildlife sanctuary boundaries are sufficient to meet the conservation requirements of this species (P. J. K. McGowan *in litt.* 1999). The road plan that threatens to destroy the integrity of the habitat of this and several other species in the peninsula (see Threats) needs, for their sake and for the greater ecological sustainability of the country, to be dropped.

**Research** A survey of this species, making use of its vocalisations, would establish more clearly its distribution (ideally to the north and south of known records in the Main Range) and abundance, and perhaps clarify how seriously it might be at risk from habitat disruption. Although it apparently calls less frequently than its congeners (Davison and Scriven undated), the male's distinctive advertising call is described by Davison (1992) as a series of bursts, 5–6 seconds apart, each of 1–4 (commonly two) fairly loud, harsh clucks or squawks about half a second apart. This call is commonly given from a perch above the ground (Wells 1999) and could provide a useful means of detecting and even censusing the species at the appropriate season.