

Threatened Birds of Asia:

The BirdLife International Red Data Book

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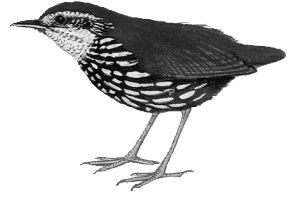
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BORNEAN WREN-BABBLER

Ptilocichla leucogrammica



Critical —

Endangered —

Vulnerable ■ A1c; A2c

This species qualifies as Vulnerable because it is restricted to low-lying forest in a region where this habitat-type is being cleared and degraded at such a rate that rapid and continuing population declines are inferred.

DISTRIBUTION The Bornean Wren-babbler is confined to the island of Borneo, where records (clustering mainly in the top third of the island) come from Malaysia, Brunei and Indonesia as follows:

■ **MALAYSIA** ■ **Sabah Kabili-Sepilok Forest Reserve**, March 1984 (Smith 1984), May 1987 (Lomosse and Lomosse 1987); **Betotan** (Garinono), near Sandakan, July/August 1927 (Chasen and Kloss 1930), undated (Sheldon *et al.* in press); **Sandakan** at the Oil Palm Research Station, August 1963 (Thompson 1966); **Sukau**, undated (Smythies and Davison 1999); **Klias peninsula**, undated (Smythies and Davison 1999); **Ulu Tiulon**, undated (Sheldon *et al.* in press); **Tabin Wildlife Reserve**, undated (MacKinnon *et al.* 1996, Smythies and Davison 1999); **Labau river**, October 1982 (Sheldon *et al.* in press); **Silam**, undated (Sheldon *et al.* in press); **Danum Valley Conservation Area**, July 1986 (Smith 1986), June 1998 (I. Mauro *in litt.* 1999), including Ulu Segama Forest Reserve and the Bole river, between May 1989 and October 1990 (Lambert 1992); **Sapulut**, undated (Smythies and Davison 1999); **Simatuoh**, undated (Sheldon *et al.* in press); **Kalabakan Forest Reserve** (Sabah Softwoods), May–July 1982 (Mitra and Sheldon 1993); **Gunung Magdalena**, 50 km north of Tawau, 300 m, June 1956 (two specimens in BMNH); **Quoin hill** at the Ulu Balung Cocoa Estate, 250 m, July 1963 (Thompson 1966), hence “near Tawau” (in Smythies 1981); **Brumas**, undated (Sheldon *et al.* in press);

■ **Sarawak Lawas river**, May 1896 (male in BMNH); **Marudi**, Baram, May 1898 (male in BMNH); foot of Gunung Mulu presumably in what is now **Gunung Mulu National Park**, Baram river, August 1891 (specimen in AMNH) and again, at 300 m, September–December 1893 (Sharpe 1893–1894), and in the park, mid-1970s (Wells *et al.* 1978; hence Smythies 1981); **Kubaan river**, Tutoh, 400–600 m, February 1965 (Fogden 1976); **Baram**, October 1891 (specimen in AMNH); **Similajau National Park**, September 1995 (Duckworth *et al.* 1996); **Gunung Dulit** at foot, August 1891 (specimen in BMNH), 600 m, May 1892 (male in BMNH; also Hose 1893), 900 m, November 1898 (male in BMNH); **Gunung Kalulong**, “not... at any great height”, c.1890 (Sharpe 1893–1894); **Bintulu**, c.1875 (Sharpe 1876–1879); **Usun Apau** (Long Buya) (Plieran), undated (Smythies 1957, 1981); **Mukah**, undated (Smythies 1957, 1981); **Bejalong** (Bajalong), April and June 1903 (two males in AMNH); **Samunsam Wildlife Sanctuary**, undated (MacKenzie 1981, MacKinnon *et al.* 1996); **Penrissen**, before 1894 (specimen in BMNH; also Smythies 1981); **Batang Ai National Park**, 1992 (Meredith 1995); **Sadong**, undated (Smythies 1957, 1981);

■ **BRUNEI** **Ulu Temburong National Park** (see Measures Taken), 500 m, once in late 1978 (Brown 1979);

■ **INDONESIA** **Kalimantan** ■ **East Kalimantan Kayan Mentarang National Park**, undated but in the 1990s (Holmes 1997); **Peleben**, at the junction of the Kajan and Bahau rivers, mid-July to mid-October 1935 (Stresemann 1938a), this presumably near camp 6, north of Mandurau near the Bulungan (or Kajan) river, January–February 1914 (Voous 1961); **Sungai**

Blu, upper Mahakkam, November 1896 (male in RMNH; also Finsch 1905), including the Bruny or Brunij river, upper Mahakkam, November 1896 (male in RMNH; also Büttikofer 1899, Finsch 1905); **Kutai National Park**, “uncommon”, July–September 1974 (Pearson 1975); ■ **Central Kalimantan** above **Muara Joloi** at the confluence of the Busang and Murung rivers, 120–500 m, Barito Ulu (Barito river headwaters), July–September 1989 (Dutson *et al.* 1991, Wilkinson *et al.* 1991a,b); ■ **South Kalimantan** Martapura-Pleihari reserve, undated (and unconfirmed) (MacKinnon *et al.* 1996); ■ **West Kalimantan Gunung Palung National Park** at



The distribution of Bornean Wren-babbler *Ptilochichla leucogrammica*: (1) Kabilii-Sepilok Forest Reserve; (2) Betotan; (3) Sandakan; (4) Sukau; (5) Klias peninsula; (6) Ulu Tiulon; (7) Tabin Wildlife Reserve; (8) Labau river; (9) Silam; (10) Danum Valley Conservation Area; (11) Sapulut; (12) Simatuoh; (13) Kalabakan Forest Reserve; (14) Gunung Magdalena; (15) Quoin hill; (16) Brumas; (17) Lawas river; (18) Marudi; (19) Gunung Mulu National Park; (20) Kubaan river; (21) Baram; (22) Similajau National Park; (23) Gunung Dulit; (24) Gunung Kalulong; (25) Bintulu; (26) Usun Apau; (27) Mukah; (28) Bejalong; (29) Samunsam Wildlife Sanctuary; (30) Penrissen; (31) Batang Ai National Park; (32) Sadong; (33) Ulu Temburong National Park; (34) Kayan Mentarang National Park; (35) Peleben; (36) Sungai Blu; (37) Kutai National Park; (38) Muara Joloi; (39) Gunung Palung National Park; (40) Pontianak.

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

Cabang Panti, 1986–1995 (Laman *et al.* 1996), and August 1998 (E. Pollard *in litt.* 2000); **Pontianak** (type locality), before 1850 (Büttikofer 1895).

POPULATION The species has been called a “rare resident” in Sabah (Gore 1968) and indeed Borneo in general (Smythies 1981), but it is fairly common in Danum Valley (I. Mauro *in litt.* 1999), an observation confirmed by mist-netting, which shows it to be less rare than had once been thought (Sheldon *et al.* *in press*). In the Baram district and around Gunung Dulit, Sarawak, it was “by no means common” in the nineteenth century (Hose 1893). Studies in the 1960s suggested that it is one of a small number of forest birds that “appear to be rare everywhere in Sarawak”, and it was uncommon (defined as “seen only a few times”) in the Tutoh headwaters in early 1965 (Fogden 1976). It is considered “rare” in Gunung Palung National Park, Kalimantan (Laman *et al.* 1996), and a pair found there in August 1998 could not be relocated (E. Pollard *in litt.* 2000); in the Barito Ulu region it was present in small numbers in 1989 (Wilkinson *et al.* 1991a). The distribution of records as indicated by the map suggests that it might occur in slightly higher densities in the northern part of Borneo; but equally the number of older records from that area suggest that it may have undergone the largest declines there.

ECOLOGY *Habitat* The Bornean Wren-babbler—which has the appearance, gait and tonality of call of a Rail-babbler *Eupetes macrocerus* (Wells *et al.* 1978; hence Smythies 1981)—is a bird of the floor of lowland primary forest, reaching 600 m on Gunung Dulit (Hose 1893, Finsch 1905, Pearson 1975). It has only been recorded in lowland (not swamp or upland) forest in Gunung Palung (Laman *et al.* 1996), but was also (and indeed only) found in mature *Shorea alba* peat-swamp forest at Gunung Mulu (Wells *et al.* 1978; hence Smythies 1981). It is known in Sabah from primary, secondary, upland heath (=150–450 m), recently logged forest and (once) seven-year-old *Albizia*, ranging from sea-level to 500 m (Sheldon *et al.* *in press*; also Mitra and Sheldon 1993); however, it is much rarer in logged than in primary areas (Lambert 1992) and the statement (in Wilkinson *et al.* 1991a) that it tolerates logged forest is best treated with caution in case, as with Blue-headed Pitta *Pitta baudi*, logged forest may in fact represent a “sink” habitat for the species, insufficient in quality to provide for self-sustaining populations.

Food Small insects were in the stomachs of two birds (Finsch 1905). Birds forage on the forest floor and in the herb layer, probing under leaves and among rotting tree falls (Smythies and Davison 1999).

Breeding Two specimens taken in June, Sabah, had dormant gonads (BMNH label data), but two females taken there in July and August each had an egg in the oviduct (Thompson 1966), and a male also had enlarged gonads in October (Sheldon *et al.* *in press*). Territories appear to be held year-round (Smythies and Davison 1999).

THREATS As with its congener, the Falcated Wren-babbler *Ptilocichla falcata* (see relevant account), this species is highly sensitive to forest disturbance by logging (Lambert 1992), and of course disappears entirely with lowland forest loss. Deforestation in the Sundaic lowlands—biologically one of the most diverse biomes of the world—has proceeded at catastrophic speed in the past few decades, seriously compromising the future of every one of the uncountable multitude of primary-forest life-forms in the region, including that of this particular species, even inside key protected areas (for an outline of the crisis, see Threats under Crestless Fireback *Lophura erythrophthalma*). As a Bornean endemic (for others see Threats under Bornean Peacock-pheasant *Polyplectron schleiermacheri*), this species is all the more at a disadvantage.

MEASURES TAKEN Although legally protected in Sabah (Smythies and Davison 1999), the only real conservation this species has experienced is through protected areas (in which

category “forest reserves” do not fall). It is known from (*Sabah*) Danum Valley Conservation Area and Tabin Wildlife Reserve; (*Sarawak*) Gunung Mulu, Batang Ai and Similajau National Parks and Samunsam Wildlife Sanctuary; (*Brunei*) Ulu Temburong (Batu Apoi) National Park (see Dawn 1993); and (*Kalimantan*) Kayan Mentarang, Kutai and Gunung Palung National Parks (see Distribution).

MEASURES PROPOSED Urgent concerted survey of and conservation effort for major tracts of extreme lowland primary forest in the Sundaic region is called for in the equivalent section under Crestless Fireback.

The ecology of the Bornean Wren-babbler needs to be clarified through studies of population density, breeding success, feeding patterns, dispersal and survival in a number of carefully evaluated primary and secondary habitats. The results of this work will allow for improved reserve design and habitat management in all future efforts to secure viable populations of the species.