

# Threatened Birds of Asia:

## The BirdLife International Red Data Book

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## MOLUCCAN WOODCOCK

### *Scolopax rochussenii*

Critical  —

Endangered  B1+2b,c,e

Vulnerable  D2



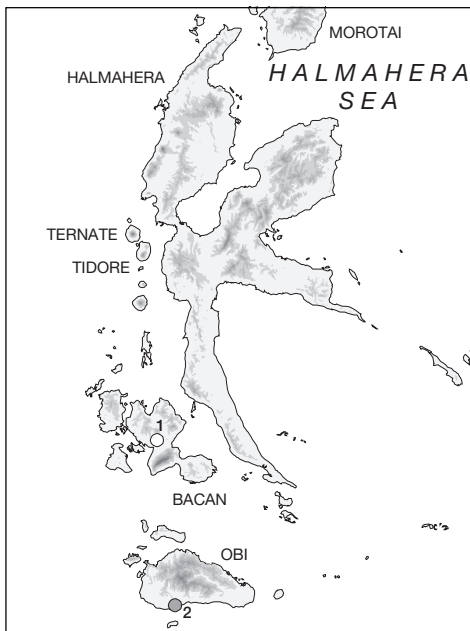
*This obscure woodcock has a highly restricted known range—indeed it is known from only three localities. Given the continuing loss and degradation of habitat with this area, and inferred population declines, it qualifies as Endangered.*

**DISTRIBUTION** The Moluccan Woodcock is known from the islands of Bacan and Obi in the Moluccan archipelago, Indonesia (see Remarks 1). The species is known by eight specimens, the type in RMNH, two in AMNH and one in BMNH (White and Bruce 1986), plus two in USNM and one in MZB. The map, by leaving off an untraced locality from the period 1980–present, slightly under-represents the status of this bird.

■ **INDONESIA** *Bacan* There is a female (in AMNH) from an unspecified locality, August 1902 (Hartert 1903c). The site is most likely to have been Gunung Sibela, the highest massif on the island (F. R. Lambert *in litt.* 1999).

*Obi* A guide from Kelo described this species convincingly as inhabiting the interior of the island (Lambert 1994a); apart from this, specific site-records are from: Galala (untraced), August and September 1982 (two females in USNM; see Remarks 2); and **Wajalooa** (traced as “Wai Lower”; on the south-west coast), August 1953 (male in MZB; hence also Jan'y 1954).

**POPULATION** Nothing is known, but it may be that the species is not as rare as the slim evidence for its existence suggests. Nevertheless, the area of hill forest on Bacan and Obi is



#### The distribution of Moluccan Woodcock

*Scolopax rochussenii*: (1) Bacan; (2) Wajalooa.

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

reported to be naturally small (in Collar *et al.* 1994), so the population of this forest wader is unlikely to be high.

**ECOLOGY Habitat** The local name *snip utan* (“wood snipe”) (Hartert 1903a) testifies to its habitat and also, to some extent, to its frequency, since it indicates a degree of familiarity. It was assumed to be a mountain bird on good circumstantial evidence by Hartert (1903c), hence presumably also White and Bruce (1986), although the one traceable specific locality has proved to be on the coast (see map). According to a guide on Obi, it inhabits interior forests and during dry periods it is sometimes flushed (from very close range and generally for a short distance) from ridgetops above c.500 m (Lambert 1994a).

**Food** There is no information.

**Breeding** There is no information.

**THREATS** Although patches of primary habitat seem likely to survive in the rugged interior of Obi (Collar and Andrew 1988), forest loss and degradation must remain the most serious threat, such that “we should now be expressing active concern for the future of the known endemic birds” (White and Bruce 1986: 216): much of the lower-lying forest on the island has been logged, much of the remainder is under logging concession, and meanwhile illegal goldmining is reported to be destroying some areas of forest (F. R. Lambert *in litt.* 1999). Bacan’s Gunung Sibela, the one protected area in North Maluku, is at risk, albeit mainly in its low-lying parts (see Measures Taken; see also comments on the possibility of this bird being dependent on lower-lying forest in Measures Proposed).

The Moluccan Woodcock is one of (now) eight threatened members of the suite of 26 bird species that are entirely restricted to the “Northern Maluku Endemic Bird Area”, threats and conservation measures in which are profiled by Sujatnika *et al.* (1995) and Stattersfield *et al.* (1998).

**MEASURES TAKEN** On Bacan, Gunung Sibela Strict Nature Reserve embraces just over 100 km<sup>2</sup> of upland forest, but its lowland forest (at least) is under pressure from agricultural encroachment and goldmining interests (see equivalent section under White Cockatoo *Cacatua alba*). A report that hill forest on Obi has protected status (in Collar *et al.* 1994) was evidently mistaken, given the as-yet unfulfilled proposal (below) to establish a reserve in the centre of the island.

**MEASURES PROPOSED** A reserve has long been proposed in central Obi (see equivalent section under Carunculated Fruit-dove *Ptilinopus granulifrons*).

Surveys of both known islands for the species, using tape-recording, spotlighting and interviews with local people, are required to track down and quantify populations of this woodcock, followed by some careful evaluation of its critical ecological and conservation needs. Consideration needs to be given to the possibility that it occurs elsewhere in the northern Moluccas (see Remarks 1), and future fieldworkers should make enquiries of local people and attempt visits to higher-lying areas of islands such as Halmahera and Kasiruta. Consideration also needs to be given to the possibility that its optimal (or seasonally optimal) habitat is to be found in lower-lying regions of islands where the largest, dampest substrates may perhaps occur; if this proves to be the case, the species might be in far greater danger than has been assumed to date.

**REMARKS** (1) The distribution of this species strongly suggests that it will be found on Halmahera, where there are as many as 798 km<sup>2</sup> of forest above 600 m (F. R. Lambert *in litt.* 1999). (2) These are the specimens attributed to 1980 in Collar and Andrew (1988).