

Threatened Birds of Asia:

The BirdLife International Red Data Book

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BLACK-LORED PARROT

Tanygnathus gramineus

Critical —

Endangered —

Vulnerable B1+2b,c,e; C2b

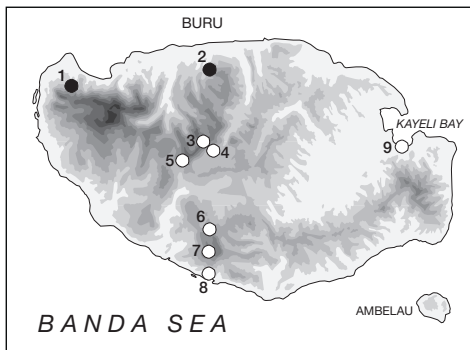


The small population of this poorly known parrot occupies a small range (and few localities) which is decreasing in size and degrading in quality as a result of habitat loss, at least at the lower fringes of its altitudinal distribution. It can thus be inferred that its numbers are diminishing, and it therefore meets the thresholds for Vulnerable.

DISTRIBUTION The Black-lored Parrot is a mysterious (because nocturnal and therefore scarcely ever recorded) inhabitant of the island of Buru, in the Moluccan Islands, Indonesia (see Remarks 1). If the record from Kayeli is discounted (see Remarks 2), all other records come from the western, more mountainous half of the island (see map). The following list includes confident records of birds heard at night although not seen (or seen only as silhouettes) to confirm their identity (in all cases the calls of the other large parrots on Buru were known to the observers):

■ **INDONESIA** *Buru* 10 km inland from **Wafflia**, on two occasions in November 1980 (F. Smiet *in litt.* 2000; hence Smiet 1985); inland from **Wamlana** at 1,100 m and at 1,460 m, in October–December 1995 (MKP); **Gunung Tagalago**, 1921–1922 (Siebers 1930); **Wa Temun**, 1921–1922 (Siebers 1930); **Kunturun**, 1,100 m, 1921–1922 (Siebers 1930); **Fakal**, 1921–1922 (Siebers 1930); **Ehu** on the road to Leksula, 1,100 m, November 1921 (Siebers 1930); **Leksula** (heard at a distance in heavy forest at c. 700 m), 1921–1922 (Siebers 1930); **Kayeli**, December 1882 (Stresemann 1914b, female in BMNH; see Remarks 2); Rubah (untraced), September 1875 (Salvadori 1880–1882).

POPULATION The species was heard rather frequently at Kunturun, 1921–1922, and the natives then had a name for it, “kakatua ol’biru”, meaning blue-headed parrot (Siebers 1930). It has been reported as “quite common... at higher altitudes” (F. Smiet in White and Bruce 1986); indeed, the area of habitat at the top of Buru is fairly extensive (e.g. 1,789 km² of the island lies above 900 m, and 872 km² above 1,200 m: Poulsen and Lambert 2000), so it is possible that, despite the extreme rarity of contact with this species, it might prove to be moderately numerous.



The distribution of Black-lored Parrot

Tanygnathus gramineus: (1) Wafflia, inland from; (2) Wamlana, inland from; (3) Gunung Tagalago; (4) Wa Temun; (5) Kunturun; (6) Fakal; (7) Ehu; (8) Leksula; (9) Kayeli.

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

ECOLOGY Habitat The Black-lored Parrot appears to inhabit montane forest chiefly above 1,000 m (although heard once at c.700 m), and is nocturnal (Siebers 1930); however, Smiet (1985) made both his observations at only 600 m, both occasions involving birds perched in treetops in the daytime, in “a hilly area with good (but disturbed) forest” (F. Smiet *in litt.* 2000). In late 1995 birds were vocal in the first 1–7 hours after sunset, both when flying and when perched in large *Casuarina* trees (MKP).

Food That this parrot should be nocturnal is mystifying: it suggests a food resource that is only or better accessed at night, or some form of competitive exclusion. Since, however, members of the genus *Tanygnathus*, like most parrot genera, fly fairly fast, and since the habitat of the species is dense evergreen montane forest, it is difficult to conceive how birds can safely negotiate landings amongst dense branches and maximise their foraging efficiency using visual cues. Possibly the species possesses unusually developed powers both of sight and smell; but this fails to answer the question why nocturnality in a flying forest parrot should have evolved only once (certain other parrots, including other *Tanygnathus* and *Eclectus* are moderately active in near-darkness, but none is exclusively nocturnal except the Kakapo *Strigops habroptilus*, which is flightless, and the Night Parrot *Geopsittaca occidentalis*, which lives in semi-desert: see, e.g., Juniper and Parr 1998). Birds were reported being caught with slingshots in fruiting trees (Siebers 1930), which suggests their frugivory is at least partly diurnal.

Breeding Nothing is known, but one male was caught after falling to the ground in a fight with another male, in November (Siebers 1930), suggesting some possible breeding rivalry.

Migration The species is clearly resident, although it may perhaps make local elevational movements. It may also make daily elevational journeys: an unidentified species of bird was heard on successive nights in December 1998, soon after dusk, flying in small groups and at high altitudes, apparently from high elevations to lower ones (F. R. Lambert *in litt.* 1999).

THREATS Some deforestation has occurred in Buru’s coastal lowlands, and large areas have been disturbed and selectively logged (Jepson 1993), but in general montane forests on Buru are likely to be relatively secure (Collar *et al.* 1994). In the mid-1990s nearly 75% of the island remained forested, although much has already been logged; however, almost two-thirds of this remaining cover has been classified as “conversion forest” (see equivalent section under Blue-fronted Lorikeet *Charmosyna toxopei*), so there is some danger that areas important for this rare parrot may in due course be lost, particularly if it makes nightly visits to lower elevations (see Migration). An old village chief mentioned having caught birds in fruiting trees with slingshot (Siebers 1930). Around 1980 there was no evidence of trade in this species on or away from Buru (Smiet 1985), but in 1998 a captive bird was being held in Ambon and was being offered for sale on the international market (R. F. A. Grimmett *in litt.* 2001).

The Black-lored Parrot is one of (now) three threatened members of the suite of 10 bird species that are entirely restricted to the “Buru Endemic Bird Area”, threats and conservation measures in which are profiled by Sujatnika *et al.* (1995) and Stattersfield *et al.* (1998).

MEASURES TAKEN The species is listed on CITES Appendix II. It is not, however, protected under Indonesian law.

MEASURES PROPOSED Details of a proposed reserve on Buru are given under Blue-fronted Lorikeet. Further searches are clearly needed for this species, in connection with which its call, given at night, consists of a loud persistent shrieking (or else a loud long-drawn-out shriek: “ein lautes, anhaltendes Gekreisch”), higher and more persistent or drawn-out than Great-billed Parrot *Tanygnathus megalorynchos* (Siebers 1930). Once found, it merits ecological study to clarify its long-term requirements and, if possible, to elucidate why (and indeed how) it is nocturnal.

REMARKS (1) This species was originally named, as long ago as 1788, on the basis of an illustration of a long-lost specimen in Paris (see Salvadori 1880–1882), yet to this day it remains known by just three museum specimens, in BMNH, MSNG and MZB (White and Bruce 1986). (2) Kayeli is at the coast, and was probably the locality at which the specimen was traded, not its point of origin.