

Threatened Birds of Asia:

The BirdLife International Red Data Book

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SULAWESI GOLDEN OWL

Tyto inexpectata

Critical —
Endangered —
Vulnerable C1; C2a



Given the continuing habitat destruction and degradation taking place in its range, the apparently small population of this elusive owl is inferred to be declining and fragmented. As a result, it qualifies as Vulnerable.

DISTRIBUTION The Sulawesi Golden Owl (see Remarks 1) or Minahassa Masked-owl is endemic to the island of Sulawesi, Indonesia; it was listed as a breeding bird of the Minahassa Peninsula by van Marle (1940), but it is now known from Central Sulawesi also. Records are from:

■ **INDONESIA Sulawesi** ■ **North Sulawesi Kumarsot**, 200–250 m, February–March 1931 (Stresemann 1931, Stresemann and Heinrich 1939–1941; four specimens in AMNH, ZMB), April 1939 (two specimens in ZMA; also Stresemann and Heinrich 1939–1941); near **Manado** (type locality), 1876 (Schlegel 1879); **Rurukan** (“forests of the Mahawu”), 700–800 m, January 1931 (Stresemann 1931, Stresemann and Heinrich 1939–1941); **Gunung Sopotan**, 1,500 m, June 1939 (male in RMNH); **Bogani Nani Wartabone National Park** (formerly Dumoga-Bone) at the Toraut post, and between S. Mauk and S. Moinakom, both in October 1981 (Rozendaal and Dekker 1989; also White and Bruce 1986), with one at Toraut, July 1987 (Andrew and Holmes 1990; see Remarks 2); ■ **Central Sulawesi Lore Lindu National Park**, 675 m, November 1980 (Watling 1983b), and at c.1,700 m near Danau (Lake) Taming and the Anaso turn-off, December 1998 (Mauro and Drijvers 2000; also I. Mauro *in litt.* 1999).

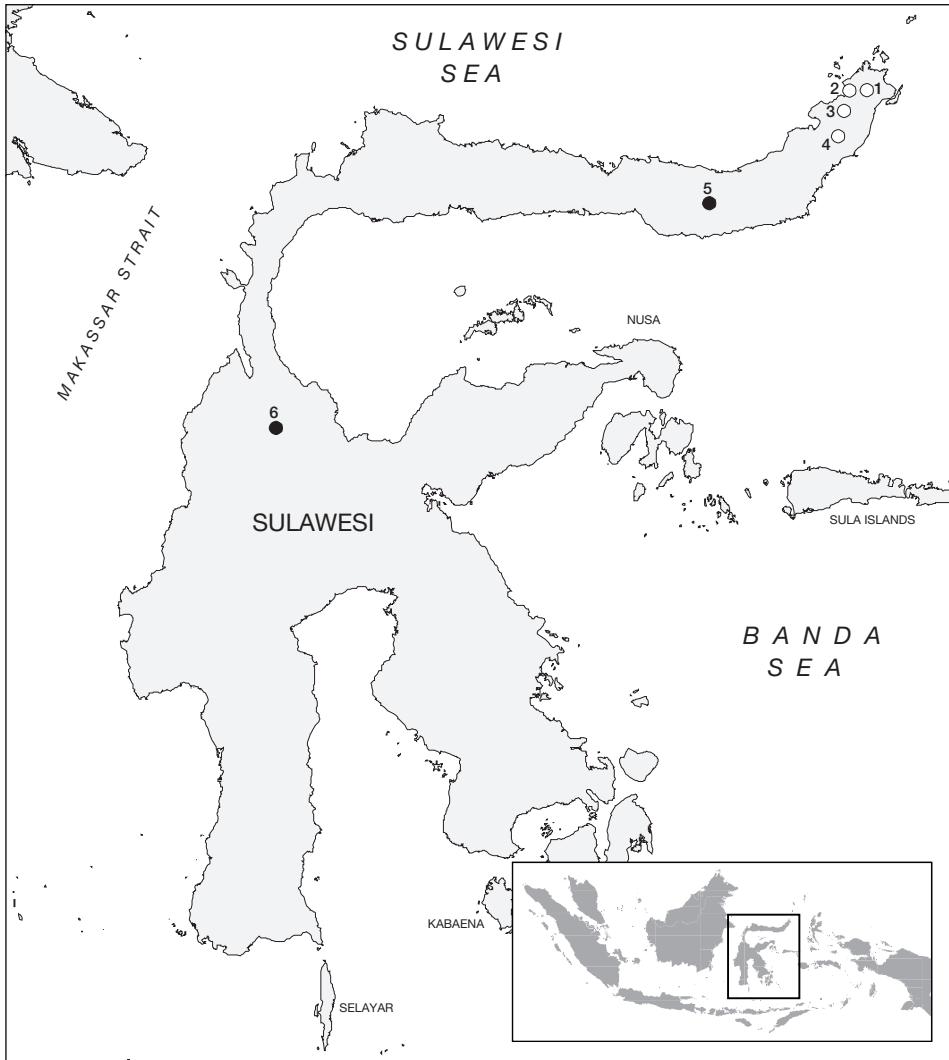
POPULATION The species has been described as “apparently widely but sparsely distributed, shy and easily overlooked” (K. D. Bishop 1989). It may well be the case that this nocturnal rainforest species is commoner than records suggest, but its numbers will have been declining steadily with the loss of its habitat.

ECOLOGY Habitat The species lives in deep forest “like a Tawny Owl [*Strix aluco*]” (Stresemann 1931), and it appears to replace the more open-country Sulawesi Masked-owl *Tyto rosenbergi* inside true forest (Stresemann and Heinrich 1939–1941); certainly—as would be expected of a forest raptor—it has much shorter wings than *rosenbergi* (Schlegel 1879). It is described as occupying primary lowland and lightly disturbed hill and lower montane forest, disturbed riverine forest and, at least occasionally, forest edge, at 100–1,500 m (K. D. Bishop 1989, Coates and Bishop 1997), or rich tropical rainforest with lianas, ferns, palms and epiphytic plants, as well as drier, degraded forests, c.250–1,500 m (König *et al.* 1999). The bird found dead at Lore Lindu was “close to forest” (Watling 1983b), while that seen in Bogani Nani Wartabone in 1987 was flushed in disturbed riverine forest with patches of bamboo (Andrew and Holmes 1990).

Food A mouse was in the stomach of one bird collected (ZMA label data) and small mammals are expected to dominate the diet (König *et al.* 1999). Because a local person had caught a specimen in nets being used for catching fruit-bats at a fruiting tree, it was speculated that the owl may have been hunting the fruit-bats (Stresemann and Heinrich 1939–1941).

Breeding A pair collected in April were breeding, the female being about to lay an egg, with an apparent nest-hole in an *Elmerrillia ovalis* tree in April (ZMA label data).

THREATS Evidence of the rate of forest loss in lowland Sulawesi, into which this species extends, is presented in Threats under Blue-faced Rail *Gymnocrex rosenbergii*. Destruction of its apparent habitat on the Minahassa Peninsula has been described as “almost complete”, with most primary forest within its altitudinal range reduced to “a few remnant patches” and supplanted by secondary, disturbed and commercially utilised forest (K. D. Bishop 1989; also RePPPProT 1990); more recent evidence has been less pessimistic, indicating that higher-elevation forest is still intact in places (see under Cinnabar Hawk-owl *Ninox ios*), but the original localities for most of the 11 known specimens of this species have been greatly altered and are presumed no longer to contain suitable habitat (del Hoyo *et al.* 1999).



The distribution of Sulawesi Golden Owl *Tyto inexpectata*: (1) Kumarsot; (2) Manado; (3) Ruruan; (4) Gunung Soputan; (5) Bogani Nani Wartabone National Park; (6) Lore Lindu National Park.
○ Historical (pre-1950) ● Recent (1980–present)

MEASURES TAKEN The species is listed on CITES Appendix II. It has been recorded from “two of the largest, biologically most important and best administered parks in Wallacea”, Bogani Nani Wartabone, covering 2,789 km², and Lore Lindu, covering 2,290 km² (K. D. Bishop 1989). Bogani Nani Wartabone also holds Maleo *Macrocephalon maleo*, Snoring Rail *Aramidopsis plateni*, Blue-faced Rail, Cinnabar Hawk-owl *Ninox ios* and Matinan Flycatcher *Cyornis sanfordi*; Lore Lindu also holds Maleo, Snoring Rail, Blue-faced Rail and Sulawesi Eared-nightjar *Eurostopus diabolicus*.

MEASURES PROPOSED Twenty-one reserves, with a rough total area of 9,000 km², have been proposed and/or established within the range of the species (K. D. Bishop 1989). A comment on the need to establish one or more major tracts of low-lying forest on Sulawesi as reserves is made in the equivalent section under Blue-faced Rail. Moreover, a suggestion for the preservation of a further area of montane forest on Sulawesi, fulfilling a proposal in Indonesia’s original national conservation plan, is made again in the equivalent section under Blue-faced Rail.

Gunung Soputan had not been surveyed since 1939 (K. D. Bishop 1989) until some recent work which, however, has drawn blank on *Tyto*, so more work is needed (J. C. Wardill *in litt.* 1999). A number of other reserves, such as Tangkoko-DuaSudara (89 km²), Gunung Simbalang (c.150 km²) and Morowali (2,000 km²), lie within the range of the species but a decade ago had not been surveyed or shown to hold it (K. D. Bishop 1989), and this still appears to be the case, but the very important current WCS programme of fieldwork on Sulawesi will presumably address such matters in the near future.

REMARKS (1) It is apparently not widely appreciated (e.g. not mentioned in del Hoyo *et al.* 1999, König *et al.* 1999) that there are two morphs of Sulawesi Masked-owl *Tyto rosenbergii*, a light and dark, which means there is a serious risk of mistaking the latter for this species, and sight records need to be very fully documented (B. F. King verbally 1998). The record from Bogani Nani Wartabone National Park at Toraut, 1995 (Fletcher 1998), is now regarded as problematic (*Forktail* 16 [2000]: 186) and is regarded as referring to *T. rosenbergii* (Mauro and Drijvers 2000); see also Remarks 2. (2) Collar *et al.* (1994) published a record of *T. inexpectata* for Dumoga-Bone, attributing it to *M. Aurivillius* (*per* K. D. Bishop); *M. Aurivillius* has pointed out (*in litt.* 2000) that his record was of *T. rosenbergii*, and had always been indicated as this species.