Threatened Birds of Asia:

The BirdLife International Red Data Book

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Recommended citation
BirdLife International (2001) *Threatened birds of Asia: the BirdLife International Red Data Book.* Cambridge, UK: BirdLife International.

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BirdLife International is a UK-registered charity

ISBN 0 946888 42 6 (Part A)
ISBN 0 946888 43 4 (Part B)
ISBN 0 946888 44 2 (Set)

British Library-in-Publication Data
A catalogue record for this book is available from the British Library

First published 2001 by BirdLife International

Designed and produced by the **Nature**Bureau, 36 Kingfisher Court, Hambridge Road, Newbury, Berkshire RG14 5SJ, United Kingdom

Available from the Natural History Book Service Ltd, 2–3 Wills Road, Totnes, Devon TQ9 5XN, UK. Tel: +44 1803 865913 Fax: +44 1803 865280 Email nhbs@nhbs.co.uk
Internet: www.nhbs.com/services/birdlife.html

STREAKED REED-WARBLER
Acrocephalus sorghophilus

Critical □ —
Endangered □ —
Vulnerable ■ C1

This poorly known and probably under-recorded warbler qualifies as Vulnerable as it is inferred to have a small population, which is declining as a result of wetland destruction in its wintering grounds.

DISTRIBUTION The Streaked Reed-warbler is known from records on migration in eastern China, and winter records from the Philippines. It is assumed to breed in north-east China, although there is no definite evidence.

■ ***CHINA*** This warbler has been recorded on migration in Liaoning, Gansu, Hebei, Beijing, Shanghai (see Remarks 1) and Fujian in eastern China, and it has also been reported from Hubei. Cheng Tso-hsin (1987) speculated that it breeds in Liaoning and possibly in Hebei, and Cai Qikan (1988) also suggested that it may breed in Hebei. Records (by province) are from:

■ ***Liaoning*** **Chaoyang**, June (year unspecified) (Cai Qikan 1988, Zhao Zhengjie 1988; also Cheng Tso-hsin 1987), this presumably relating to the record of a male collected, out of three to four seen, at "Songchoutsoeize, Jehol" (untraced), June c.1935 (Seys 1936);

■ ***Gansu*** **Min Xian** county, female collected, October 1993 (Yang Fatao and Zhang Tao 1997; see Remarks 2);

■ ***Hebei*** **Qinhuangdao** (Chinwangtao), one collected, June 1911, two collected, August 1911, in crops near the port, several collected and found to be "common", August–September 1912, late May to early June 1913, "end of the summer" 1913 and 1914, in millet crops (La Touche 1914, 1920–1921, 1925–1934, specimens in AMNH, BMNH, MCZ and USNM); **Beidaihe**, two at Heng He (Heng Ho) reservoir, May 1985 (Williams 1986), singles at "Eagle rock gully", "Legation point gully" and "Lighthouse point", May–June 1994 (J. Thalund *in litt.* 1999), one, "apparently a bird of the year", in a small marsh at "Lighthouse point", August 1995 (Allen and Thorpe 1995); **Shijiutuo** ("Happy island"), south of Beidaihe, one, August 1994 (Dierschke and Heintzenberg 1994);

■ ***Beijing*** suburbs of **Beijing city**, one collected at Dayouzhuang (eastern suburb of Beijing), May 1962, single birds collected at Nanyuan Sanhaizi and Shenshu Cun (eastern suburb of Beijing), September 1962, one collected, June 1964, with very worn feathers and "probably breeding", one collected at Kangcun (eastern suburb of Beijing), September 1964 (Cai Qikan 1988);

■ ***Hubei*** Shasi, Chang-yang Hsien district, where a small bird which appeared to be this species was seen among grass and willow brush, September 1918 (La Touche 1922a), this presumably being the source of the record for this province in Cheng Tso-hsin (1987);

■ ***Shanghai*** **Shawaishan island** (see Remarks 1), two, June 1911 (La Touche and Rickett 1912, La Touche 1920–1921; also Sowerby 1943, male in BMNH);

■ ***Fujian*** **Xiamen** (Amoy), one collected (the type), May 1861 (Swinhoe 1863a,b; also La Touche 1920–1921).

The distribution of Streaked Reed-warbler *Acrocephalus sorghophilus* (map opposite): (1) Chaoyang; (2) Min Xian; (3) Qinhuangdao; (4) Beidaihe; (5) Shijiutuo; (6) Beijing city; (7) Shawaishan island; (8) Xiamen; (9) Sinipsip; (10) Dalton Pass; (11) Kabiao; (12) Candaba Marsh; (13) Taguig; (14) Pakil; (15) Sibulan; (16) Bohol.
○ Historical (pre-1950) ◎ Fairly recent (1950–1979) ● Recent (1980–present)


1
LIAONING
BEIJING
6
3
4
5
HEBEI
2
GANSU
CHINA
7
SHANGHAI
FUJIAN
8
VIETNAM
PACIFIC
OCEAN
SOUTH
CHINA
SEA
9
10
11
12
13
14
PHILIPPINES
16
15

■ ***PHILIPPINES*** Its only known wintering grounds are in the Philippines, where it has been recorded from Luzon (repeatedly), Negros and Bohol (once each), as follows:

Luzon **Sinipsip**, Buguias, Benguet, 2,400 m, October 1974 (male and female in DMNH); **Dalton Pass**, Nueva Vizcaya province, 1,100m, where a large series identified as this species (see Remarks 3) was ringed (and 14 collected, five in PNM and nine in DMNH) in the period 1965–1970 (McClure and Leelavit 1972); **Kabiao**, Nueva Ecija, December 1994 (J. C. T. Gonzalez verbally 1995, with photographs); **Candaba Marsh**, Pampanga, where there have been numerous sight records in the period 1982–1996, extending from October to April (Fisher mss, Clarke 1983, Scott 1989, Dickinson *et al.* 1991, Lambert 1993c and many observers *in litt*. 1995–1997); **Taguig**, Laguna de Bay, January 1902 (McGregor 1904b, 1909–1910); **Pakil**, Laguna province, April 1971 (male and female in DMNH);

Negros **Sibulan**, Oriental, January 1952 (Rabor 1954, Dickinson *et al.* 1991; specimen in FMNH);

Bohol unspecified locality, May 1985 (Dickinson *et al.* 1991; female in CM).

Less certain records, based on single-observer testimony (the problem of identification is referred to under Remarks 3,4), are from: (*Luzon*) Dalton Pass, from September 1989 to January 1990 (Alonzo-Pasicolan 1992); UP Laguna Land Grant, undated (in Gonzalez 1995); Bukal, Calamba, Laguna, in September 1989 (J. C. T. Gonzalez verbally 1995); Lake Baao (10 km south-east of Pili in southern Luzon), April 1983, five (Clarke 1983); (*Mindanao*) Bislig at the PICOP concession, March 1990, where a bird identified as this species was seen in overgrown paddies on Road 11 (Greensmith 1990).

POPULATION There is very little information on the abundance of Streaked Reed-warbler in China. It was described as "common" on migration in Hebei province in the early twentieth century (La Touche 1914, 1920–1921). In the past 15 years there has been an influx of birdwatchers to the Beidaihe area during the spring and autumn migration periods, but there have been rather few records of this species (see Distribution), suggesting that it has declined since the time that La Touche was based at nearby Qinhuangdao (Williams and Dormer 1991). However, there may be relatively few birdwatchers present at Beidaihe during the main passage periods of this species (late May to early June and August–September) (G. J. Carey *in litt.* 2000), which could partially account for the relative paucity of records.

It is an "uncommon and local winter visitor" in the Philippines (Dickinson *et al.* 1991). At Dalton Pass, Luzon, 351 birds were ringed in 1965–1970, with maxima of 141 in 1965 and 127 in 1966 (McClure and Leelavit 1972). These data suggest that the species is not quite as rare as records elsewhere would indicate, and although the evidence is unreliable (see Remarks 3) it must be obvious that a skulking bird of wetland fringes is very capable of remaining undetected in a relatively underwatched country such as the Philippines. The series of records from Candaba, Luzon, indicates the presence of a regular wintering population. Fisher (mss) recorded several on three dates and found it common (at least 15 birds) at the end of October 1982. Clarke (1983) found seven in late April 1983. Lambert (1993c) found several in December 1989, but did not consider it very common. Two were ringed and photographed there in December 1994 (T. Hiraoka *in litt.* 1997). It is now considered very rare there, with the majority of the habitat having been destroyed, although a large and apparently inaccessible area of nearby marsh (visible from Angat Dam) could well contain suitable habitat (T. H. Fisher verbally 1997).

ECOLOGY ***Habitat*** There are no documented breeding records of this species in China, and its scarcity suggests that it must have a highly restricted breeding range, which may be linked to some unknown specialisation in its habitat requirements. It has been recorded on passage in Hebei province in millet crops (La Touche 1914, 1920–1921) and in a small marsh (Allen and Thorpe 1995). Cai Qikan (1988) suggested that it may breed in the mountains of Hebei.

However, if it did breed in these areas it is difficult to understand why it should not be more widespread in similar mountains elsewhere in northern China and why it should have declined (G. J. Carey *in litt.* 2000).

In winter the species occurs in reeds and grass often near water (Dickinson *et al.* 1991). The first Philippine specimen was collected from Laguna de Bay in a bed of reeds on the border of the lake ("a bunch of reeds over the water") (McGregor 1904b, 1909). All birds at Candaba in December 1989 were in fairly tall, dense vegetation growing above deep water at the edges of ponds permanently enclosed by dykes (Lambert 1993c), while birds in November 1991 were in patches of taller reed (probably *Scirpus*) in an area converted into paddies and fishponds (R. J. Timmins *in litt.* 1997).

Food The primary food of this species throughout the year is expected to be insects, but the stomach of the Bohol bird is said to have contained seeds (CM label data).

Breeding One collected near Beijing on 10 June had very worn feathers and was "probably breeding" (Cai Qikan 1988). The ovaries of the Bohol bird, taken in winter evidently just prior to migration, were granular, i.e. inactive (CM label data).

Migration Spring passage in north-east China appears to take place in late May and the first week of June, and autumn passage from about 22 August to 7 September (La Touche 1920–1921). The June records in Liaoning, northern Hebei and Beijing possibly involved birds at or near to breeding localities (see Distribution). All Chinese records are from late May to September, other than the recent record from Gansu, which was in October (see Distribution and Remarks 2). All Philippine records lie in the period September to June (particularly October to April, the months of occurrence at Candaba, the one certain regular wintering site), supporting the hypothesis that the species breeds (somewhere) in China and winters in the Philippines. Fisher (mss) considered that the species was so common at Candaba, Luzon, on 31 October 1982, that it was "as if a migratory flock had just arrived". McClure and Leelavit (1972) did not present monthly patterns for their ringing records, but McClure (1969) published bar charts which disclose netting records for this species in January, February, March, May, June, October, November and December; E. C. Dickinson (*in litt*. 1998), who provided this information, sees serious problems with it, based on (1) the sheer volume of birds caught and identified, (2) the late May–June records, and (3) the fact that some specimens taken at Dalton Pass at this period proved to be another species (see Remarks 3). June certainly seems late for a northward-bound migrant, with a remaining journey of perhaps 2,000 km to the presumed breeding grounds, and the identity of five PNM specimens from 2–16 June 1970 requires confirmation. Equally surprising is the high-elevation record at 2,400 m from Sinipsip, Benguet, in October 1974 (see Distribution); the species may use mountain ridges as a migration aid.

THREATS Habitat destruction on the wintering grounds is certainly likely to be causing a real decline in this little-known bird, and it is probably also threatened by habitat loss on its breeding grounds (see Scott 1989). *Philippines* The banks of Laguna de Bay are being occupied by settlers and factories, so that the reedbeds are becoming highly fragmented and greatly reduced in area (BRT). The cultivation of rice instead of watermelon at Candaba entails draining the marshes in December or January instead of March or April (Lambert 1993c), which may have a negative effect on the warbler, as may the conversion of parts of the marsh into fishponds (Scott 1989); indeed Candaba is already transformed (up to 50,000 Garganey *Anas querquedula* used to occur) into relicts of "marsh" (T. H. Fisher verbally 1997; see also Philippine Duck *Anas luzonica*). The reedbed habitat in which the species was reported at Bukal, Laguna, in 1989 has been converted into land for poultry-processing factories (J. C. T. Gonzalez verbally 1997).

MEASURES TAKEN *Philippines* WBSJ and DENR have proposed Candaba Marsh as a Ramsar site: a workshop was conducted to this effect with the participation of the local

government of Pampanga and community leaders in December 1994, and education material has subsequently been prepared (SC).

MEASURES PROPOSED ***Legislation*** Streaked Reed-warbler should be listed as a protected species in China and the Philippines.

Protected areas *Philippines* This species is known from one "key site" (Candaba Marsh on Luzon; see Appendix), and this deserves formal designation under the NIPAS process. Urgent investigation of the status of the species at Candaba Marsh over successive winters would clarify the importance of this wetland and the habitat preferences of the species. Preservation of a water management regime compatible with the species's needs may also then be necessary, coupled with a conservation education programme. The nearby, seemingly inaccessible marsh visible from Angat Dam (see Population) needs to be investigated and, depending on findings, possibly brought into the area under Ramsar designation.

Research *China* Surveys of potentially suitable habitats for this species are urgently required in north-east China, in an attempt to locate the breeding areas of this species. Scott (1989) and MacKinnon *et al.* (1996) listed many wetland sites in Liaoning, Hebei and other north-east Chinese provinces which could be targeted for surveys. The tape-recording of the song of this species would greatly facilitate field surveys, and efforts could be made to obtain recordings of migrant birds in spring at Beidaihe or other sites near to the presumed breeding grounds. The field surveys should focus on a wide variety of wetland habitats, as the scarcity of this species indicates that it is likely to have specialised habitats requirements (see Ecology: Habitats). *Philippines* Other suitable wetland sites, with thick vegetation adjacent to watercourses, should also be surveyed—e.g. Aparri marshes (Cagayan), Taal Lake (Batangas), Manlubas swamp (Camarines Norte) and Lakes Buhi and Bato (Camarines Sur) all on Luzon; and Liguasan (North Cotabato/Maguindanes) on Mindanao—to shed light on the species's true wintering range (Scott 1989). The early issuance of a guide for distinguishing this warbler in the field and in the hand (and recordings of its voice) would be helpful in determining its status elsewhere in the Philippines, particularly if a new ringing programme could be initiated at Dalton Pass to collect data on this and other threatened species.

REMARKS (1) Shaweishan island was included in Jiangsu province by Cheng Tso-hsin (1987), but it is now in Shanghai municipality. This species has therefore not been recorded from within the current boundaries of Jiangsu. (2) The recent record from Min Xian county in Gansu province, China is from well outside the previously documented range of this species. It is here treated as a confirmed record, but it is recommended that the specimen is carefully re-examined to check its identity. (3) Dickinson *et al.* (1991: 66) noted that one valuable finding of the ringing programmes at Dalton Pass in the late 1960s was that some species, both resident and migrant, including Streaked Reed-warbler, were not as rare as had been thought but are simply shy and hard to locate during the day; they warned, however, that some records of Streaked Reed-warbler may well have referred to small female Oriental Bush-warbler *Cettia diphone*, since they found that some skins labelled as the former were the latter, even though the two species have relatively distinct head patterns, and should not be too problematic to separate even in the field (see, e.g., Meyer de Schauensee 1984). (4) Thirteen specimens in UPLB (ten adults, three nestlings), identified as this species and collected by D. S. Rabor at Lake Buluan, Buluan, Cotabato, on Mindanao in June 1966, were checked and found to refer to Clamorous Reed-warbler *Acrocephalus stentoreus* (J. C. Lowen in Collar *et al.* 1999).