

Threatened Birds of Asia:

The BirdLife International Red Data Book

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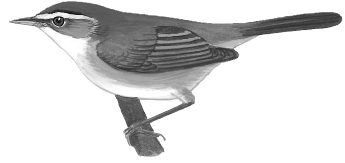
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MANCHURIAN REED-WARBLER

Acrocephalus tangorum



Critical —

Endangered —

Vulnerable C1

This species qualifies as Vulnerable because it is inferred to have a small, declining population as a result of habitat loss in its wintering grounds.

DISTRIBUTION The Manchurian Reed-warbler (see Remarks 1) is only known to breed at a few sites in south-east Russia and north-east China, and it is only known to winter from Thailand and possibly Laos and Vietnam, although identification difficulties might have rendered it largely overlooked until recently.

■ **RUSSIA** The species is only known from one locality in south-east Russia:

■ **Primorye Khanka lake**, nesting, undated (Shibnev and Gluschenko 1977, Stepanjan 1978 and Gluschenko 1989 in Alström *et al.* 1991).

■ **CHINA** ■ **MAINLAND CHINA** It is known to breed at a handful of localities in north-east China, and has been found more widely there on passage, with records (by province) as follows:

■ **Heilongjiang** (see Remarks 1) **Zhalong National Nature Reserve**, several singing males, June 1987, song tape-recorded and “rather common”, June 1988 (Alström *et al.* 1991, P. Alström, U. Olsson and D. Zetterström *in litt.* 2000); **Harbin**, undated (Cheng Tso-hsin 1987);

■ **Liaoning Chaoyang**, undated (Cheng Tso-hsin 1987); **Panjin**, one, May 1995 (P. Alström, U. Olsson and D. Zetterström *in litt.* 2000);

■ **Inner Mongolia** Hulun Nur, now in **Dalai Hu National Nature Reserve**, breeding, undated (Cheng Tso-hsin 1987);

■ **Hebei Qinhuangdao**, occasionally recorded in late spring (20 May–6 June) and found in large numbers from mid-August to mid-September in the 1910s (La Touche 1912, 1925–1934); **Beidaihe** (Pei-tai-ho beach), two collected, August and October (unspecified years) (G. D. Wilder and H. W. Hubbard in Hemmingsen and Guildal 1968), one, October 1989 (J. N. Dymond *in litt.* 1999, E. R. Meek *in litt.* 1999), two, May 1993 (D. Jardine *in litt.* 1999), up to two, May 1994 (C. G. Cederlund *in litt.* 1999), total of 47, including up to 18 in one day, May–June 1994 (J. Thalund *in litt.* 1999), one, September 1994 (Votier *et al.* 1994), seven, May 1995 (P. Alström, U. Olsson and D. Zetterström *in litt.* 2000), total of 13, May 1997 (P. Holt *in litt.* 1999), c.3 at the “Sandflats” and one at “Lighthouse Point”, May 1997 (Drijvers 1997, Mauro 1997), 25+, May 1999 (J. Christensen *in litt.* 1999), one at the “Sandflats” and eight at “Radar Marsh”, May 1999 (J. Hornskov *in litt.* 1999); **Shijituo** (“Happy island”), south of Beidaihe, one, May 1993 (P. Alström, U. Olsson and D. Zetterström *in litt.* 2000), two, August–September 1994 (Votier *et al.* 1994), one, May 1995 (B. Johansson *in litt.* 1999); Songchoutsoeize (untraced), Jehol, recorded in May, and probably in June, c.1935 (Seys 1936).

■ **HONG KONG** It appears to be a scarce non-breeding visitor, with records as follows: **Long valley**, single birds mist-netted in overgrown fields in September and November 1995 (Leader and Lewthwaite 1996); **Mai Po** Nature Reserve, one seen in reeds at the edge of a fishpond in January 1995, three mist-netted in September 1995 (Leader and Lewthwaite 1996).

■ **THAILAND** Records are from: **Rangsit**, one mist-netted, March 1987 (Round 1993); **Bang Phra Horse Farm**, Chon Buri, one mist-netted, October 1967 (Pantuwatana *et al.* 1969, Round

1993); **Khao Sam Roi Yot National Park**, the only certainly known wintering site, first recorded May 1981 (Round 1993), 63 ringed in April 1995 (P. D. Round *in litt.* 1998), field observations during most winters (e.g. H. Jensen *in litt.* 1999, P. Snetsinger *in litt.* 1999).

■ **LAOS** There is a single record, suggesting that it may be a scarce winter visitor to the country: Nong Toom, near **Ban Khiam**, Dong Khantung proposed NBCA, Champasak province, one, February 1998 (Round 1998).

■ **CAMBODIA** There is a single record: **Kruos Kraoum**, “at least 20”, March 2000 (*Oriental Bird Club Bull.* 32 [2000]: 66–76).

■ **VIETNAM** There is a single record: **Xuan Thuy Nature Reserve**, 1–2 migrants in coastal casuarina scrub, October 1997 (J. C. Eames, F. R. Lambert and A. J. Long *in litt.* 2000).



The distribution of Manchurian Reed-warbler *Acrocephalus tangorum*: (1) Khanka lake; (2) Zhalong National Nature Reserve; (3) Harbin; (4) Chaoyang; (5) Panjin; (6) Dalai Hu National Nature Reserve; (7) Qinhuangdao; (8) Beidaihe; (9) Shijituo; (10) Long valley; (11) Mai Po; (12) Rangsit; (13) Bang Phra Horse Farm; (14) Khao Sam Roi Yot National Park; (15) Ban Khiam; (16) Kruos Kraoum; (17) Xuan Thuy Nature Reserve.

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

POPULATION The species must be presumed to have a fairly small world population. While it is possible that it is overlooked by observers in the region because of its furtive habits and similarity with congeners, the increase in mist-netting in South-East Asia and improved knowledge of its relatively distinctive plumage features failed (at least before 1997) to produce many records (Round 1993, P. D. Round *in litt.* 1998). Even with the addition of the three countries of Indochina to the species's range since 1997, these facts suggest that it is truly scarce and locally distributed, and the evidence under Threats suggests that it is likely to be declining.

Russia It is considered rare or threatened in North-East Asia by Gluschenko (1989).

China Of the three sites in the Chinese breeding range (excluding Inner Mongolia), neither Dailing (which may be an erroneous locality) nor Harbin appear to have much suitable habitat remaining and “we doubt that significant numbers of *tangorum* remain”, although it remains “locally common” at Zhalong (Alström *et al.* 1991).

ECOLOGY Individuals of this species moult at Khao Sam Roi Yot National Park, Thailand, immediately after arrival in autumn (P. D. Round *in litt.* 1998).

Habitat On the breeding grounds at Zhalong in China, it was found to be confined to reedbeds (Alström *et al.* 1991). In Hebei province, autumn migrants were recorded in large numbers in “small-millet” fields, and only once in reeds, and small numbers were found in spring in “brushwood on sand-hills” (La Touche 1925–1934). In Hong Kong, migrants and/or wintering birds have been found in reeds at the edge of a fishpond and in overgrown fields 1995 (Leader and Lewthwaite 1996). At Khao Sam Roi Yot it appears to be largely restricted to mature *Phragmites*, which at this site is the largest stand in Thailand, covering roughly 50 km² (Round 1993, P. D. Round *in litt.* 1998). Rangsit is a *Typha* marsh of less than 1 km² (Round 1993) while the individual at Bang Phra was said to have been caught in a grass field (Pantuwatana *et al.* 1969); however it is likely that the individuals at these sites were passing through on migration as no other Manchurian Reed-warbler records from these sites exist despite extensive mist-netting and observations during the winter (Round 1993). The bird at Dong Khanthung in Laos was frequenting a sedge-bed about 300 m in diameter amongst dry deciduous forest (Round 1998).

Food Nothing is recorded.

Breeding Little is recorded. Spring migrants in Hebei province in China were always silent (La Touche 1925–1934).

Migration This species is a long-distance migrant from the breeding grounds in North-East Asia to the wintering grounds in South-East Asia (see Distribution). In Hebei province in China, migrants were recorded from 20 May–6 June in spring and from mid-August to mid-September in autumn (La Touche 1912, 1925–1934).

THREATS Various problems exist at the three best known breeding grounds of this species, Khanka lake in Russia and Zhalong and Dalai Hu National Nature Reserves in China (for Khanka and Zhalong see equivalent section under Red-crowned Crane *Grus japonensis*, and for Dalai Hu see under Great Bustard *Otis tarda*). Two of the other three reported breeding sites in China (excluding Inner Mongolia) are regarded as no longer suitable for the species (Alström *et al.* 1991).

At the single known wintering site, Khao Sam Roi Yot in Thailand, the stands of *Phragmites* are being lost due to conversion of the swamp and there is now “hardly any” suitable habitat in Thailand (P. D. Round *in litt.* 1998). The freshwater marsh in the park has suffered greatly from “massive illegal encroachment”: plantations of casuarinas, eucalyptus and coconut palms have been established around the margins of the area, while major prawn farms have been established in the centre, pumping salt or brackish water into previously freshwater areas (Parr 1991, P. D. Round *in litt.* 1998). Wetland areas in and

around the park face a bleak future: encroachment continues apace, community support for the park is suppressed by the activities of wealthy landlords, and there is little political resolve to facilitate the management process (Parr *et al.* 1993b; see also *Oriental Bird Club Bull.* 26 [1997]: 15–21). Away from this area (the only regular wintering site known for the species), there are very few *Phragmites* swamps in the country, most marshes containing *Typha*, and “all are imminently threatened by reclamation and urbanisation” (Round 1993). In addition, no other freshwater swamp habitat lies within a protected area in the country.

MEASURES TAKEN The species is best known from a small number of nature reserves in summer, on migration and in winter, but this is no guarantee of its security. It breeds in two protected areas in China, Zhalong National Nature Reserve in Heilongjiang and Dalai Hu National Nature Reserve (but see Threats), is known on passage from Mai Po (Hong Kong) and Xuan Thuy (Vietnam) nature reserves, and winters in Khao Sam Roi Yot National Park in Thailand (but see Threats).

The following information regarding conservation issues at Khao Sam Roi Yot has been provided by J. W. K. Parr (*in litt.* 1999). The marsh was incorporated into the park in 1986 and in 1990 the Oriental Bird Club funded an international petition to safeguard it. At least 18 national and international organisations responded, writing letters to the Prime Minister of Thailand. In 1993 the Asia Foundation funded a study tour by a key businessman, the Marine Parks Director, the President of the Bangkok Bird Club (now Bird Conservation Society of Thailand) and a local Kuiburi District Official to British wetlands, as well as BirdLife International and RSPB headquarters. However, the success of this initiative was undermined as the park authorities had unofficially annexed 14 km² of the site prior to the visit. This action was rectified when anonymous letters were written to ministers and high-ranking government with clear-cut evidence. The international petition stimulated the Office of Environmental Policy and Planning within the Ministry of Science, Technology and the Environment to secure funding to produce a management plan for the site. Despite these inputs degradation continues. Sadly, the businessman who holds the future of this freshwater marsh in his hands wishes to maintain his land speculation investments and continues to support environmentally destructive activities within the site.

MEASURES PROPOSED Measures to improve conservation at Khanka lake and within Zhalong National Nature Reserve are outlined in the equivalent section under Red-crowned Crane, while Dalai Ho National Nature Reserve in Inner Mongolia is discussed under Great Bustard. The protection of suitable breeding habitat for the species from burning and reclamation has been urged by Gluschenko (1989).

In Thailand, pressure should be exerted for the country to ratify the RAMSAR convention. In addition, demarcation and protection of Khao Sam Roi Yot National Park in Thailand is suggested, along with the creation or rehabilitation of reed-swamps elsewhere in the country (Round 1993). Conservation action at Khao Sam Roi Yot in Thailand should be targeted at formulating and enacting a realistic plan that incorporates ecological management with the needs of local people (Parr *et al.* 1993b). In Laos, protection of habitats and specific sites of this species will be required if it is found to occur regularly (Duckworth *et al.* 1999). In Cambodia, further investigations are needed as the site at which the species was recently found contains extensive habitat (P. Davidson *in litt.* 2000).

Overall, further efforts should be made to determine the precise distribution of the species and the size of any breeding populations, using counts of singing males (Round 1993).

REMARKS (1) The taxonomic position of the Manchurian Reed-warbler has long been debated. It has variously been considered a distinct species (La Touche 1912, 1925–1934), a subspecies of Paddyfield Warbler *Acrocephalus agricola* (Vaurie 1959, Wolters 1975–1982,

Cheng Tso-hsin 1987, Sibley and Monroe 1990) and a subspecies of Black-browed Reed-warbler *A. bistrigiceps* (Peters 1931–1987, Williamson 1968). However, the morphology of *bistrigiceps* is considerably different (lower tail/wing ratio and broader rectrices) from *tangorum*, with which it occurs sympatrically without apparent interbreeding; based on the results of playback experiments, Alström *et al.* (1991) concluded that *tangorum* probably belonged to *A. agricola* and definitely not to *bistrigiceps*. More recently, however, an analysis of molecular data (Leisler *et al.* 1997) demonstrated that *tangorum* is the sister species of Blunt-winged Warbler *A. concinens*, the taxonomic position of which has also often shifted. Together with *agricola*, the two apparently form a superspecies. Identification criteria of the form are discussed by Alström *et al.* (1991, 1994a). (2) The species was listed for Dailing by Cheng Tso-hsin (1987), presumably based on a specimen (in ASCN) collected there in July 1956 which proved to be a Black-browed Reed-warbler *A. bistrigiceps* (Alström *et al.* 1991).