

# Threatened Birds of Asia:

## The BirdLife International Red Data Book

Editors

N. J. COLLAR (Editor-in-chief),  
A. V. ANDREEV, S. CHAN, M. J. CROSBY, S. SUBRAMANYA and J. A. TOBIAS

Maps by

RUDYANTO and M. J. CROSBY

Principal compilers and data contributors

■ **BANGLADESH** P. Thompson ■ **BHUTAN** R. Pradhan; C. Inskipp, T. Inskipp ■ **CAMBODIA** Sun Huan; C. M. Poole ■ **CHINA** ■ **MAINLAND CHINA** Zheng Guangmei; Ding Changqing, Gao Wei, Gao Yuren, Li Fulai, Liu Naifa, Ma Zhijun, the late Tan Yaokuang, Wang Qishan, Xu Weishu, Yang Lan, Yu Zhiwei, Zhang Zhengwang. ■ **HONG KONG** Hong Kong Bird Watching Society (BirdLife Affiliate); H. F. Cheung; F. N. Y. Lock, C. K. W. Ma, Y. T. Yu. ■ **TAIWAN** Wild Bird Federation of Taiwan (BirdLife Partner); L. Liu Severinghaus; Chang Chin-lung, Chiang Ming-liang, Fang Woei-horng, Ho Yi-hsian, Hwang Kwang-yin, Lin Wei-yuan, Lin Wen-horn, Lo Hung-ren, Sha Chian-chung, Yau Cheng-teh. ■ **INDIA** Bombay Natural History Society (BirdLife Partner Designate) and Sálím Ali Centre for Ornithology and Natural History; L. Vijayan and V. S. Vijayan; S. Balachandran, R. Bhargava, P. C. Bhattacharjee, S. Bhupathy, A. Chaudhury, P. Gole, S. A. Hussain, R. Kaul, U. Lachungpa, R. Naroji, S. Pandey, A. Pittie, V. Prakash, A. Rahmani, P. Saikia, R. Sankaran, P. Singh, R. Sugathan, Zafar-ul Islam ■ **INDONESIA** BirdLife International Indonesia Country Programme; Ria Saryanthi; D. Agista, S. van Balen, Y. Cahyadin, R. F. A. Grimmett, F. R. Lambert, M. Poulsen, Rudyanto, I. Setiawan, C. Trainor ■ **JAPAN** Wild Bird Society of Japan (BirdLife Partner); Y. Fujimaki; Y. Kanai, H. Morioka, K. Ono, H. Uchida, M. Ueta, N. Yanagisawa ■ **KOREA** ■ **NORTH KOREA** Pak U-il; Chong Jong-ryol, Rim Chuyon. ■ **SOUTH KOREA** Lee Woo-shin; Han Sang-hoon, Kim Jin-han, Lee Ki-sup, Park Jin-young ■ **LAOS** K. Khounbolin; W. J. Duckworth ■ **MALAYSIA** Malaysian Nature Society (BirdLife Partner); K. Kumar; G. Noramly, M. J. Kohler ■ **MONGOLIA** D. Batdelger; A. Bräunlich, N. Tseveenmyadag ■ **MYANMAR** Khin Ma Ma Thwin ■ **NEPAL** Bird Conservation Nepal (BirdLife Affiliate); H. S. Baral; C. Inskipp, T. P. Inskipp ■ **PAKISTAN** Ornithological Society of Pakistan (BirdLife Affiliate) ■ **PHILIPPINES** Haribon Foundation for Conservation of Natural Resources (BirdLife Partner); N. A. D. Mallari, B. R. Tabaranza, Jr. ■ **RUSSIA** Russian Bird Conservation Union (BirdLife Partner Designate); A. V. Andreev; A. G. Degtyarev, V. G. Degtyarev, V. A. Dugintsov, N. N. Gerasimov, Yu. N. Gerasimov, N. I. Germogenov, O. A. Goroshko, A. V. Kondrat'ev, Yu. V. Labutin, N. M. Litvinenko, Yu. N. Nazarov, V. A. Nechaev, V. I. Perfil'ev, R. V. Ryabtsev, Yu. V. Shibaev, S. G. Surmach, E. E. Tkachenko, O. P. Val'chuk, B. A. Voronov. ■ **SINGAPORE** The Nature Society (Singapore) (BirdLife Partner); Lim Kim Seng ■ **SRI LANKA** Field Ornithology Group of Sri Lanka (BirdLife Affiliate); S. Kotagama; S. Aryaprema, S. Corea, J. P. G. Jones, U. Fernando, R. Perera, M. Siriwardhane, K. Weerakoon ■ **THAILAND** Bird Conservation Society of Thailand (BirdLife Partner); U. Treesucon; R. Jugmongkol, V. Kongthong, P. Poonswad, P. D. Round, S. Supparatvirkorn ■ **VIETNAM** BirdLife International Vietnam Country Programme; Nguyen Cu; J. C. Eames, A. W. Tordoff, Le Trong Trai, Nguyen Duc Tu.

With contributions from: S. H. M. Butchart, D. S. Butler (maps), P. Davidson, J. C. Lowen, G. C. L. Dutson, N. B. Peet, T. Vetta (maps), J. M. Villasper (maps), M. G. Wilson

**Recommended citation**

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

© 2001 BirdLife International

Wellbrook Court, Girton Road, Cambridge, CB3 0NA, United Kingdom

Tel: +44 1223 277318 Fax: +44 1223 277200 Email: [birdlife@birdlife.org.uk](mailto:birdlife@birdlife.org.uk)

Internet: [www.birdlife.net](http://www.birdlife.net)

BirdLife International is a UK-registered charity

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic, electrical, chemical, mechanical, optical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior permission of the publisher.

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](mailto:nhbs@nhbs.co.uk)  
Internet: [www.nhbs.com/services/birdlife.html](http://www.nhbs.com/services/birdlife.html)

The presentation of material in this book and the geographical designations employed do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of BirdLife International concerning the legal status of any country, territory or area, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

## FALCATED WREN-BABBLER

### *Ptilocichla falcata*

Critical  —

Endangered  —

Vulnerable  A1c,d; A2c,d; B1+2a,b,c,d,e



*This lowland forest specialist qualifies as Vulnerable because it has a small, fragmented range and is believed to be declining rapidly as a result of habitat loss.*

**DISTRIBUTION** The Falcated Wren-babbler is endemic to Palawan (for Balabac see Remarks 1) in the Philippines, where records (north to south) are from:

■ **PHILIPPINES** *Palawan St Paul's Subterranean River National Park*, regularly since 1991 (Lambert 1993c, many observers *in litt.* 1994–1997); **Buenavista**, 100 m, October 1980 (male in DMNH); **Iwahig Penal Colony** on the Balsahan Trail, February 1984 (Gibbs 1984), March 1991 (N. J. Redman *in litt.* 1996), February 1994 (Hornbuckle 1994) and February 1996 (P. A. J. Morris *in litt.* 1996); **Puerto Princesa**, July 1874, February and April 1884, July and September 1887, July 1888, December 1889, January 1892 (Sharpe 1877; also 16 specimens in AMNH, BMNH, FMNH, MCZ, MNHN, RMNH, UMMZ, USNM), and August 1925 (Baud 1978); **Tabon**, Quezon, 180 m, October and November 1979 (two specimens in DMNH); **Ilog river** (Iloy river), August or September 1991 (Lambert 1993c, F. R. Lambert *in litt.* 1997); **Kabasakan** and **Kadanapan-an**, Singnapan, Ransang, July–August 1978 (four specimens in PNM; see also Sison 1983); **Taguso**, July–September 1887 (11 specimens in AMNH, BMNH, DMNH, MNHN, ZMB; also Whitehead 1890); **Brooke's Point** at Macaqua, March and April 1962 (two specimens in YPM), March 1966 (male in UPLB). There is one untraced locality: Mt Pulgar, 760 m, undated (McGregor 1909–1910).

**POPULATION** This skulking bird has been described as “not rare... but difficult to see” (McGregor 1909–1910): it was fairly common at Taguso in 1887 (Whitehead 1890), and less than 20 years ago it was “abundant at an elevation of 268 meters above sea level” in the Singnapan valley (Sison 1983). However, as a species strongly tied to primary lowland forest it nonetheless will now have lost a substantial proportion of its population (see Threats) and recent reports certainly suggest that it has become generally rare (Lambert 1993c, F. Verbelen *in litt.* 1997). Visiting foreign ornithologists tend to concentrate on only two forest sites (St Paul's Subterranean River National Park and the Iwahig Penal Colony)—in the 1990s the species has only been recorded at three sites—and it would seem likely that further populations remain to be discovered at currently unsurveyed sites, particularly in the north of the island.

**ECOLOGY** *Habitat* This bird inhabits primary forest, on or near the ground, up to 800 m (Dickinson *et al.* 1991, Lambert 1993c, F. Verbelen *in litt.* 1997). It bounds and scurries along the ground in the undergrowth of broadleaved evergreen forest, often in the vicinity of streams, gullies and ridge-tops (C. R. Robson *in litt.* 1997). J. B. Steere found it reminded him of a South American antbird (Formicariidae), “in the thickest wood, hopping about on the ground, and puffing himself out like a ball of feathers, presenting a most remarkable appearance” (Sharpe 1877). Recent observations—one in tall primary forest in St. Paul's Subterranean River National Park, one in one of the few unlogged forest patches in the southern lowlands, and none in areas of logged forest or secondary growth—suggest that this species may be very sensitive to habitat modification, and confined to primary lowland

forest (Lambert 1993c). Nevertheless, Sison (1983) said the bird frequents “thickets”, which (by implication) is likely to mean dense secondary undergrowth. It has been seen in bamboo forest at St Paul’s Subterranean River National Park and at Iwahig (N. Bostock verbally 1993).

**Food** A nineteenth-century specimen had eaten “scorpions” (FMNH label data). Insects and berries have otherwise been recorded (Sison 1983).

**Breeding** Two specimens from October and November 1979 had very weakly developed gonads (DMNH label data); however, breeding has been reported in January (McGregor 1909–1910).



**The distribution of Falcated Wren-babbler *Ptilocichla falcata*:** (1) St Paul’s Subterranean River National Park; (2) Buenavista; (3) Iwahig Penal Colony; (4) Puerto Princesa; (5) Tabon; (6) Ilog river; (7) Kabasakan; (8) Kadanapan-an; (9) Taguso; (10) Brooke’s Point.

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

**Migration** There is no evidence of any type of seasonal or other displacement in this species, and it would not be expected (babblers being particularly sedentary). According to an early account it seems to be a very pugnacious bird, the males being readily called up by imitating their note (McGregor 1909–1910), which tends to suggest year-round territorial occupation.

**THREATS** Forest destruction and disturbance are the major threats to this species, particularly because it is apparently confined to primary lowland forest, and hence “may prove one of the most seriously endangered of the endemic species of Palawan” (Lambert 1993c; see Remarks 2). Nearly all of Palawan’s forests are leased to logging operations (Quinnell and Balmford 1986). There are plans to commence granite mining at Iwahig (McGowan and Garson 1995).

**MEASURES TAKEN** The only protected area in which the species occurs is St Paul’s Subterranean River National Park (a “key site;” see Appendix). In addition, the Iwahig Penal Colony is managed by the Bureau of Prisons and provides further protection (BRT), but see Threats.

**MEASURES PROPOSED** Apart from the areas targeted for conservation above, the Falcated Wren-babbler is known from two “key sites” (Victoria/Anapalan ranges and Mt Mantalingahan; see Appendix) and these deserve further survey, formal designation and protection under the NIPAS process. This is one of the priority species in the complete ornithological survey of Palawan that is now required (see conservation sections under Palawan Peacock-pheasant *Polyplectron emphanum* and Palawan Hornbill *Anthracoceros marchei*). Ecological studies should be conducted in order to provide the necessary data for effective conservation management; in particular, the bird’s assumed sensitivity to habitat modification needs to be checked through studies of secondary habitats.

**REMARKS** (1) The species was listed for Balabac by McGregor (1909–1910) on the basis of “Everett”, this evidently referring to Everett (1895). There, however, it is made clear that the species was listed for the island “with some doubt”, based on the testimony of a native hunter who had obtained it previously on Palawan. Hachisuka (1936), innocently restating information in McGregor (1909–1910), then went so far as to describe the species as “not very rare on Balabac and Palawan”. In the absence of corroboration, however, it is better to leave this record as provisional at present. (2) In Sabah, the closely related Bornean Wren-babbler *P. leucogrammica* is rare in selectively logged forest, and its survival might be dependent on small patches of unlogged forest within the logged-forest mosaic (Lambert 1992); it is therefore perhaps not surprising that its Palawan counterpart has only been observed in unlogged forest.