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 Hean; 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 Sálim 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 Chu-yon. ■ *SOUTH KOREA* Lee Woo-shin; Han Sang-hoon, Kim Jin-han, Lee Ki-sup, Park Jin-young ■ ***LAOS*** K. Khounboline; 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. Supparatvikorn ■ ***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

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Wellbrook Court, Girton Road, Cambridge, CB3 0NA, United Kingdom
Tel: +44 1223 277318 Fax: +44 1223 277200 Email: birdlife@birdlife.org.uk
Internet: www.birdlife.net

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ANDAMAN CRAKE

Data Deficient

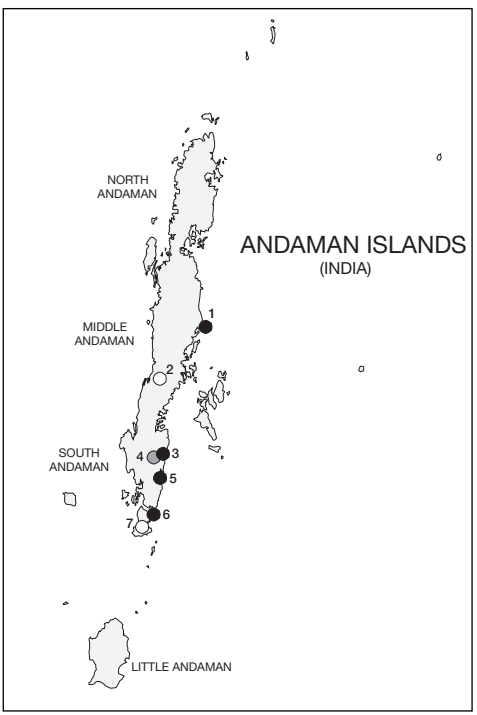
Rallina canningi

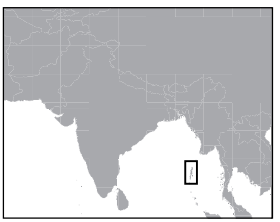
DISTRIBUTION The Andaman Crake is a rarely encountered endemic of the Andaman Islands, India (Ball 1872, Baker 1922–1930, Ali and Ripley 1968–1998, Ripley and Beehler 1985, 1989b), being absent from the Nicobars (Butler 1899–1900, Ali and Ripley 1968–1998). Records are from:

INDIA ■ ***Andaman Islands*** *Middle Andaman* Parnasala, near **Rangat**, one corpse, January 1996 (Vijayan 1997);

South Andaman **Baratang island**, June to August, 1907 (BMNH egg data); **Mount Harriet Island National Park**, at Madhuban and Bhojinala, 1994–1995 (Chandra and Rajan 1996), seen on the trail to the summit, May 1997 (P. Bawden and K. Kazmierczak *in litt*. 1999); **Wrightmyo**, one pair, February 1964 (Abdulali 1965); **Port Blair** and nearby places (e.g. Gopalkabung, sometimes written "Go'bung" on specimen labels), many specimens collected, March 1874, June to November 1897 (specimens in AMNH, ANSP, BMNH, RMNH, FMNH, MCZ, SMF, ZMB), January 1990 (R. Koeppel *in litt*. 1999), and another in February 1991 (P. Snetsinger *in litt*. 1999); **Chiria Tapu** (Chidiya Tapu), one seen on a forest path, February 2000 (Falzon 2000); **Rutland island**, July 1907 (eggs in BMNH); Katakatchang (untraced), March 1993 (Vijayan 1993).

There appear to be no historical records from North Andaman; Vijayan (1997) failed to encounter it there between 1993 to 1997, and it is therefore conceivable, if improbable, that it does not occur. It was, apparently mistakenly, listed for the island by Collar *et al*. (1994), hence Stattersfield *et al*. (1998) and Taylor (1998; see Remarks 1).





The distribution of Andaman Crake *Rallina canningi*: (1) Rangat; (2) Baratang island; (3) Mount Harriet Island National Park; (4) Wrightmyo; (5) Port Blair; (6) Chiria Tapu; (7) Rutland island.

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

POPULATION No reliable estimates are available. It was initially thought either "excessively rare or... very seldom seen" (Hume 1874a), although at that time another observer had judged it "not uncommon" (Ball 1873). Given that "about 80" were caught in two months (September–October 1897) in a square mile by Butler (1899–1900), the latter circumstance seems more probable, and Baker (1926–1935) viewed it as "a very common bird" in suitable habitat. The fact that when Butler (1899–1900) caught 80 in snares he only saw two individuals briefly in the field indicates what a challenge the species poses to survey workers. The call is distinctive, however, and this fact should facilitate survey work. A series of nests was collected in 1907 (Baker 1922–1930).

More recently, Chandra and Rajan (1996) reported it to be common in Mount Harriet National Park, although they only encountered it at two localities. It has possibly become rare, as only two were observed during a survey between 1993 and 1997 throughout the Andamans (Vijayan 1997). Local information suggests, however, that it is less rare than had been feared (R. Sankaran verbally 1998).

ECOLOGY ***Habitat*** The Andaman Crake inhabits forest or thick secondary growth, usually where the ground is swampy, near pools or streams, in grass bordering creeks, or in mangroves near the coast, but it skulks in reeds and low vegetation (Ball 1873, Murray 1889, Baker 1922–1930, Abdulali 1965, Ali and Ripley 1968–1998). Butler (1899–1900) found it abundant in "thick jungle" and "tangled thickets of rattan and pandanus". One individual sighted in March 1993 was skulking in slushy marshes with mangroves and ferns; Blue-breasted Banded Rail *Rallus striatus obscurior* was also found in the same area (Vijayan 1993). A bird seen in 2000 was in coastal forest interspersed with small habitations and cultivated fields (mostly coconuts) (M.-A. Falzon *in litt.* 2000).

Food The diet comprises beetles, grasshoppers, worms, small snails and caterpillars (Butler 1899–1900). Small freshwater fish and shrimps have also been mentioned (Murray 1889, Baker 1922–1930).

Breeding The breeding season falls between June and August (Murray 1889, Ali and Ripley 1968–1998, BMNH egg data). The nest is a collection of grass, dead leaves and rushes placed on the ground in marshy areas or near streams in dense forest (Baker 1922–1930). One nest was placed in a thick bush about 1 m above the ground (Baker 1922–1930). The clutch generally contains between three and five eggs (Baker 1926–1935) although Murray (1889) found one of six eggs. Details of the nesting cycle are not recorded.

THREATS ***Habitat loss*** Many of the Andaman endemics are threatened by their naturally limited distribution and scarcity (Davidar *et al.* 1995) coupled with the degradation and destruction of available habitat by people (Collar *et al.* 1994). The impact of development and natural resource exploitation is increasing in most relevant habitats on the islands (Bhaskar 1981, Whitaker 1985, Curson 1989, Saldanha 1989, Sinha 1992, Sankaran and Vijayan 1993, Vijayan 1993, 1996, Wahal 1995, Davidar *et al.* 1996). Anthropogenic factors include the conversion of natural habitat for agriculture, housing and roads; furthermore, logging and clearance for agriculture have already affected and continue to affect the habitat of this species (B. F. King verbally 1998, L. Vijayan *in litt.* 1999). In 1999, most of the 400 remaining Jarawa tribespeople left their forest homes after many years refusing contact with outsiders, a move resulting in fears that their homelands will be plundered for timber and to make way for coconut plantations (Pearce 1999). In the area of South Andaman where this species was seen in 2000, the forest habitat was under pressure from logging and settlement, and deforestation was already widespread (M.-A. Falzon *in litt.* 2000).

Hunting and predation Hunting presumably applied to this species many years ago, given its inclusion by Murray (1889) in a list of gamebirds. It is still common near human habitation, involving snares, airguns and catapults; the dead bird found on Middle Andaman had

probably been hit by a projectile from a catapult (Vijayan 1997). During survey work at Mount Harriet National Park, Chandra and Rajan (1996) noted that "nearby inhabitants and settlers" were visiting the park in order to hunt birds, presumably including this species whenever the opportunity arises. There might also be a problem with introduced predators, such as dogs and cats, which possibly hunt this species and have brought many island rallids to the brink of extinction or beyond (Collar *et al*. 1994).

Poor protection The establishment of protected areas has not in itself assisted conservation in the islands. Their efficacy is obstructed by institutional and infrastructural shortcomings, with insufficient personnel and facilities available in many places to the Forest Department, the principal agency responsible for the management of protected areas (Pande *et al*. 1991, Vijayan 1996).

MEASURES TAKEN ***Protected areas*** More than 16% of the total area (1,053.6 km^2) of the Andaman Islands have been declared as protected areas, i.e. sanctuaries, national parks and marine national parks (L. Vijayan *in litt.* 2000).

Infrastructure and education To address the difficulties imposed by infrastructural inadequacy, the communication network has been improved by introducing a wireless system in the Forestry Department (L. Vijayan *in litt.* 1999). Awareness programmes are being initiated to inform local people of the precarious future of their native fauna (L. Vijayan *in litt.* 1999).

MEASURES PROPOSED ***Improved protection*** More stringent measures are needed to secure the future of the endemic birds throughout the islands (Vijayan 1996, 1997). Some of the potential breeding areas of the Andaman Grey Teal *Anas gibberifrons albogularis*, such as Katakatchang and Sippighat, have been proposed as conservation areas: their designation would help to retain habitat and prevent the wholesale conversion to coconut plantations as has been observed in South Andaman (L. Vijayan *in litt.* 2000). Development activities have to be carefully planned to minimise damage to the forests and the coastal zone. The coastal zone regulation act, if implemented effectively, would reduce such activities in the coastal region (L. Vijayan verbally 1998).

Education Education and awareness programmes should be taken up at various levels involving village communities.

Research Detailed studies are required to obtain reliable data on the status and habitat requirements of this species. In particular, if it resembles the majority of its relatives it will respond to playback of recorded vocalisations and this might prove a useful tool in searches and assessments of its status. Care should be taken to minimise the use of playback during any such survey, however, especially during the breeding season.

Introductions No introductions of terrestrial mammalian predators onto the islands should be countenanced.

REMARKS (1) The map in Taylor (1998) is fortuitously correct, showing presence on Middle and South Andaman, but it is incorrectly labelled.