

NEWSLETTER OF THE IUCN SSC ASIAN SONGBIRD TRADE SPECIALIST GROUP

# DAWN CHORUS

Vol 2(2) | September 2022



Singapore 2022



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Newsletter of the IUCN SSC Asian Songbird Trade  
Specialist Group

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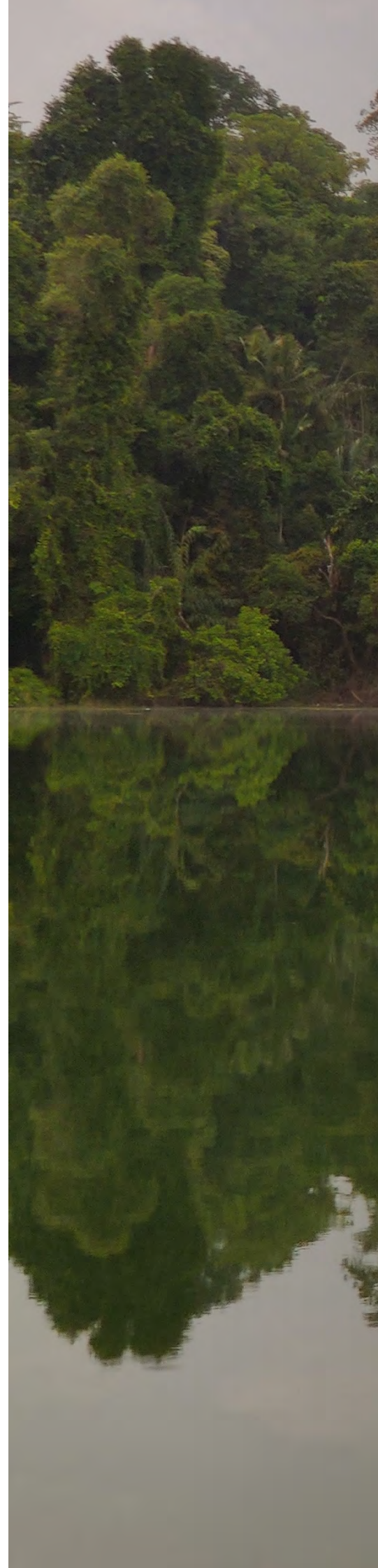
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and Jeggo, D.

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## FOREWORD BY DAVID JEGGO<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Chair of the IUCN SSC Asian Songbird Trade Specialist Group (ASTSG)

*This 3<sup>rd</sup> edition of Dawn Chorus, like previous ones, contains contributions that range across many issues affecting the Asian Songbird Crisis.*

*These include an introduction to our Specialist Group's revised [list of priority taxa](#). This represents a most important development that will assist the IUCN SSC Asian Songbird Trade Specialist Group (ASTSG) to set its objectives over the next phase of activity and will help ensure it addresses those measures most urgent, in attempting to avoid the loss of any of these taxa. The fact that the list has grown does, sadly, indicate a deepening crisis for the region's songbirds but also represents the increase in knowledge that is being gained through the work undertaken to better understand the effects that trade is having on songbird populations.*

*Rosa Gleave, in her item on Blue-crowned Laughingthrush, gives news that despite the view that trapping was not a pressure on the Jiangxi population, this may not be the case. This is not welcome news and is an illustration of how constant vigilance is needed, particularly in this case where the only other population that until recently occurred in Yunnan was lost, at least partly, due to excessive trapping.*

*Elize Ng's piece on White-rumped Shamas in Singapore is encouraging as it shows that with protection this species is showing a recovery. However, her research sheds light on what is likely to become more prevalent that, with the anthropogenic effect on species distributions, populations of songbirds will spring up where they otherwise would not be. How problematic this becomes is uncertain but it needs to be recognised as an issue with measures put in place to avoid its occurrence if possible.*



*The news that Ian Singleton shares that the songbird breeding facility at the Haven near Medan in northern Sumatra is completed is most welcome. It provides much-needed extra capacity to support the fledgling conservation breeding programmes for Barusan Shama and Nias Hill Myna, and other Sumatran endemic taxa. The conservation breeding programmes are seen by ASTSG as a vital insurance against the extinction of a number of the most at-risk taxa and will certainly buy time to give chance for other conservation measures to take effect. This might be the case for Wangi Wangi White-eye. With such a restricted distribution it is vulnerable as can be read in this issue about the setting up of an insurance population at the Prigen Conservation Breeding Ark (PCBA). On the back of this programme the staff at PCBA are already engaging with the authorities in Wangi Wangi to work towards protecting the remaining wild population.*

*Much of the songbird research is quite rightly focused on the status assessment of taxa at risk, but Bruslund et al's piece on Buffalo Starlings speculates on the past role of bovids in the ecology of Bali Myna. It leads me to think about the gaps there are in our knowledge of the ecology of the region's songbirds in general and how this lack of knowledge might hamper the conservation efforts of those species brought close to extinction, as it has in recovery of several Critically Endangered bird species around the world. With pressures on the environment and its loss, leaving species clinging on in sub-optimal and human-affected habitats, we would be well served to increase field research to focus on the ecology of those species where possible before they are extirpated, and this opportunity is lost.*

*An aspect that ASTSG has so far not extensively focused on but will now do increasingly is to look at those areas where the taxa on its priority list still occur and work on securing better protection for these. As this progresses, I look forward to sharing news of it in future issues of Dawn Chorus.*

*- David Jeggo*



photo by Jonathan Beilby

*Black-winged Mynas*

# FROM 28 SPECIES IN 2015 TO 68 TAXA IN 2022: THE UPDATED PRIORITY TAXA LIST HIGHLIGHTS THE CONTINUOUS THREAT TO SONGBIRDS IN ASIA

Written by Serene C.L. Chng<sup>1,2</sup> & Sofiya Shukhova<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Specialist Group Coordinator and Member of Trade and Legislation sub-group, ASTSG

<sup>3</sup> Communications Coordinator, ASTSG

The first list of the songbird species threatened by trade in Asia was compiled during the Asian Songbird Trade Crisis Summit held in Singapore (at the Jurong Bird Park, hosted by the Wildlife Reserves Singapore) in 2015. More than 30 experts from academia, in-situ and ex-situ conservation projects, bird tourism companies and government agencies identified 28 species most affected by trade. Among them, 12 species were identified as being of highest priority and needing immediate action, while the remaining 16 were of high conservation concern but required further research before proceeding with taxon-specific action planning.

Since 2015, a lot of progress has been made in researching and addressing the Asian songbird trade. The IUCN SSC Asian Songbird Trade Specialist Group (ASTSG) was established in 2017 and since then has grown to 83 members. The past and ongoing research and conservation work conducted by ASTSG members and others have shed more light on the scale and dynamics of the Asian songbird trade, the species involved, their taxonomy and how the trade, along with other factors, impacts their populations.

In 2021, the ASTSG started the process of updating the old priority species list to more accurately reflect the current situation and re-identify the taxa most threatened by trade in

Species	Scientific Name
Black-winged Myna	<i>Acridotheres melanopterus</i>
Common Hill Myna	<i>Gracula religiosa</i>
Asian Pied Starling	<i>Gracupica contra</i>
White-rumped Shama	<i>Copsychus malabaricus</i>
Javan White-eye	<i>Zosterops flavus</i>
Java Sparrow	<i>Lonchura oryzivora</i>
Silver-eared Mesia	<i>Leiothrix argentauris</i>
Straw-headed Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus zeylanicus</i>
Rufous-fronted Laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax rufifrons</i>
Bali Myna	<i>Leucopsar rothschildi</i>
Sumatran Laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax bicolor</i>
Javan Green Magpie	<i>Cissa thalassina</i>
Oriental Magpie Robin	<i>Copsychus saularis</i>
Sumatran Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis media</i>
Sunda Laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax palliatus</i>
Ruby-throated Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus dispar</i>
Greater Green Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis sonnerati</i>
Orange-spotted Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus bimaculatus</i>
Chestnut-capped Thrush	<i>Geokichla interpres</i>
Orange-headed Thrush	<i>Geokichla citrina</i>
Chestnut-backed Thrush	<i>Geokichla dohertyi</i>
Javan Myna	<i>Acridotheres javanicus</i>
Pin-tailed Parrotfinch	<i>Erythrura prasina</i>
Grey-cheeked Bulbul	<i>Alphoixus bres</i>
Zosterops group (including Oriental White-eye)	<i>Zosterops spp.</i>
Hill Blue Flycatcher	<i>Cyornis banyumas</i>
Asian Fairy Bluebird	<i>Irena puella</i>
Long-tailed Shrike	<i>Lanius schach</i>

Top 28 priority species list published in [Conservation Strategy for Southeast Asian Songbirds in Trade, 2015](#)  
(Tier 1 = blue; Tier 2 = grey)

Asia so that they can be prioritised for future conservation interventions, research and funding. From 28 species identified in the original list, this updated [Priority Taxa List](#) now covers 68 taxa. Using taxa instead of species allowed us to recognise unique threatened conservation units that are not necessarily impacted at the species level or not officially recognised as separate species. The Priority Taxa List considers three criteria:

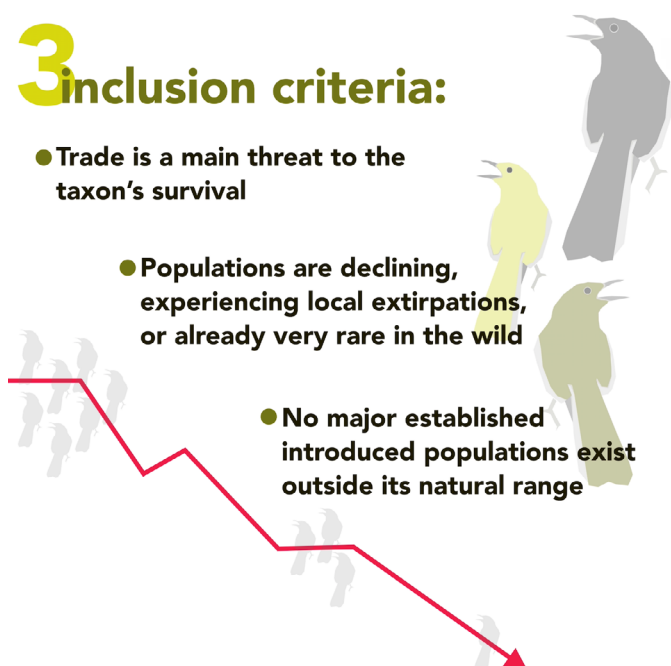
1. Trade is/has been a main threat to the survival of the taxon – this excludes threatened taxa encountered in trade but the main threat is something else;
2. Populations of the taxon are known or believed to be declining, experiencing local extirpations, or already very rare in the wild – this excludes taxa traded at sustainable levels;
3. Taxon do not currently have significant established introduced populations outside its natural range – this excludes taxa unlikely to go extinct from the wild globally.

### 3 inclusion criteria:

- Trade is a main threat to the taxon's survival

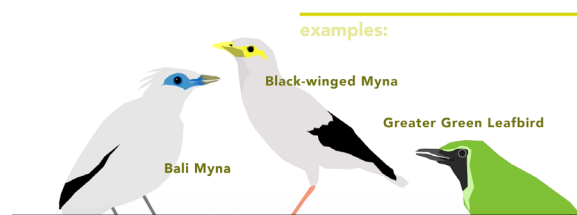
- Populations are declining, experiencing local extirpations, or already very rare in the wild

- No major established introduced populations exist outside its natural range



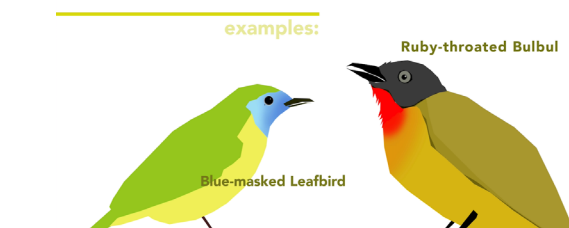
## 43 taxa in Tier 1

- taxa survival is urgently impacted by trade
- top priority for conservation actions



## 25 taxa in Tier 2 "watch list"

- present in trade but unclear how severe the impacts on wild populations are
- more research and monitoring needed



The list has a two-tier structure, where Tier 1 includes top priority taxa, whose survival is urgently impacted by trade and requires urgent conservation intervention. Tier 2 is a watch-list for taxa present in trade, but it is still unclear how severe the impacts on wild populations are, and more research is needed to ascertain the extent of the threat.

The Priority Taxa List is intended to be an ever-evolving list that ASTSG will be updating as new information becomes available. If you have data-based suggestions for adding/removing taxa from the Priority Taxa List, please email them to [asiansongbirdtradesg@gmail.com](mailto:asiansongbirdtradesg@gmail.com).



## Tier 1 - CONSERVATION PRIORITY

	COMMON NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME
1	Black-winged Myna	<i>Acridotheres m. melanopterus</i>
2	Grey-rumped Myna	<i>Acridotheres m. tertius</i>
3	Grey-backed Myna	<i>Acridotheres m. tricolor</i>
4	Brown-cheeked Bulbul	<i>Alophoixus bres</i>
5	Javan Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis cochinchinensis</i>
6	Sumatran Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis media</i>
7	Greater Green Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis sonnerati</i>
8	Javan Green Magpie	<i>Cissa thalassina</i>
9	Oriental Magpie Robin (East Java/Bali)	<i>Copsychus saularis amoenus</i>
10	Javan Jungle Flycatcher	<i>Cyornis banyumas</i>
11	Sumatran Laughingthrush	<i>Garrulax bicolor</i>
12	Sunda Laughingthrush (Sumatra)	<i>Garrulax palliatus palliatus</i>
13	Rufus-fronted Laughingthrush (west Java)	<i>Garrulax rufifrons rufifrons</i>
14	Rufus-fronted Laughingthrush (Gunung Slamet)	<i>Garrulax rufifrons slametensis</i>
15	Orange-headed Thrush (Java/Bali subspecies)	<i>Geokichla citrina rubecula</i>
16	Mentawai Hill Myna	<i>Gracula (religiosa) batuensis</i>
17	Enggano Hill Myna	<i>Gracula (religiosa) enganensis</i>
18	Simeulue Hill Myna	<i>Gracula (religiosa) miotera</i>
19	Nias Hill Myna	<i>Gracula (religiosa) robusta</i>
20	Tenggara Hill Myna	<i>Gracula venerata</i>
21	Javan Pied Starling	<i>Gracupica jalla</i>
22	White-rumped Shama (Maratua)	<i>Kittacincla malabarica barbouri</i>
23	White-rumped Shama (Simeulue)	<i>Kittacincla malabarica hypoliza</i>
24	White-rumped Shama (Central Java)	<i>Kittacincla malabarica javana</i>
25	White-rumped Shama (Nias, Mentawai)	<i>Kittacincla malabarica melanura</i>
26	White-rumped Shama (Panaitan)	<i>Kittacincla malabarica mirabilis</i>
27	White-rumped Shama (Kangean)	<i>Kittacincla malabarica nigricauda</i>
28	White-rumped Shama (East Java)	<i>Kittacincla malabarica omissa</i>
29	White-rumped Shama (Babi, Lasia)	<i>Kittacincla malabarica opisthochra</i>
30	White-rumped Shama (Pulau Banyak)	<i>Kittacincla malabarica ssp</i>
31	White-rumped Shama (Pulau Langkawi)	<i>Kittacincla malabarica ngae</i>
32	Sumatran Mesia (Central Sumatra)	<i>Leiothrix (argentea) laurinae</i>
33	Sumatran Mesia (Aceh)	<i>Leiothrix (argentea) rookmakeri</i>
34	Bali Myna	<i>Leucopsar rothschildi</i>
35	Horsfield's Bushlark (Java)	<i>Mirafra javanica javanica</i>
36	Horsfield's Bushlark (Nusa Tenggara)	<i>Mirafra javanica parva</i>
37	Bare throated Whistler	<i>Pachycephala nudigula</i>
38	Crested Jay (Java)	<i>Platylophus galericulatus galericulatus</i>
39	Javan Scimitar Babbler	<i>Pomatorhinus (montanus) montanus</i>
40	Straw-headed Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus zeylanicus</i>
41	Javan White-eye	<i>Zosterops flavus</i>
42	Sangkar White-eye	<i>Zosterops melanurus</i>
43	Wangi-wangi White-eye	<i>Zosterops spp.</i>

## Tier 2 - WATCH LIST; MORE RESEARCH REQUIRED; TRADE WAS BUT NO LONGER PRIMARY THREAT

	COMMON NAME	SCIENTIFIC NAME
1	Grey-cheeked Bulbul	<i>Alophoixus tephrogenys</i>
2	Green Avadavat	<i>Amandava formosa</i>
3	Blue Masked Leafbird	<i>Chloropsis venusta</i>
4	Oriental Magpie Robin (East, north, south Kalimantan, Maratua)	<i>Copsychus saularis pluto</i>
5	Sunda Laughingthrush (Borneo)	<i>Garrulax palliatus schistochlamys</i>
6	Chestnut-backed Thrush	<i>Geokichla doherityi</i>
7	Chestnut-capped Thrush	<i>Geokichla interpres</i>
8	Javan Heleia	<i>Heleia javanica</i>
9	White-crowned Shama	<i>Kittacincla malabarica stricklandii</i>
10	White-rumped Shama (Thai-Malay Peninsula, Sumatra, West Java)	<i>Kittacincla malabarica tricolor</i>
11	Brown Shrike (migrant to Indonesia)	<i>Lanius cristatus superciliosus</i>
12	Maroon-bellied Sunbird	<i>Leptocoma brasiliana</i>
13	Bar-winged Prinia	<i>Prinia familiaris</i>
14	Plain Prinia	<i>Prinia inornata</i>
15	Blue-crowned Laughingthrush	<i>Pterorhinus courtoisi (courtoisi and simaoensis)</i>
16	Orange-spotted Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus bimaculatus</i>
17	Ruby-throated Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus dispar</i>
18	Aceh Bulbul	<i>Pycnonotus snouckaerti</i>
19	White-bellied Fantail	<i>Rhipidura euryura</i>
20	Grosbeak Starling	<i>Scissirostrum dubium</i>
21	White-bibbed Babbler	<i>Stachyris thoracica</i>
22	Golden-winged Laughingthrush	<i>Trochalopteron ngoclinhense</i>
23	Collared Laughingthrush	<i>Trochalopteron yersini</i>
24	Lemon-bellied White-eye	<i>Zosterops chloris (maxi, sumbavensis, chloris)</i>
25	Swinhoe's White-eye (Enggano)	<i>Zosterops simplex salvadorii</i>

ASTSG Priority Taxa List, 2022





photo by Elize Ng

A birdsong competition for White-rumped Shamas held in Singapore

## CONSERVATION GENOMICS IDENTIFIES IMPACT OF TRADE IN A THREATENED SONGBIRD - WHITE-RUMPED SHAMA

Written by Elize Y.X. Ng<sup>1,2,3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [School of Natural Sciences, University of Tasmania](#)

<sup>2</sup> [National University of Singapore](#)

<sup>3</sup> Member of Genetic Research sub-group, ASTSG

The White-rumped Shama (*Kittacincla malabarica*) is a melodious songbird native to Southeast Asia. Unfortunately, its beautiful song has also resulted in its [popularity amongst caged bird enthusiasts](#) across its native range. The species is noted to be on a steep decline across its natural range due to the trade – however, due to its large distribution range, it is currently still only listed as a species of [Least Concern](#) on the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. [The ASTSG has listed the species as one deserving of conservation concern](#) despite its current IUCN status, as many populations across Southeast Asia have either undergone precipitous decline or have been extirpated altogether.

In Singapore, an island city state located at the southern tip of the Malay Peninsula, the White-rumped Shama is a local resident on the main island and two smaller offshore islands. In the past, the species experienced a severe population decline, but recent inventories (e.g., [2007](#) and [2009](#)) have reported populations to be increasing again. It remains uncertain if the observed increase has been due to the recovery of the native Singaporean population or releases from the cage-bird trade.

With the introduction of White-rumped Shamas from the cage-bird trade, there is a concern that native populations may suffer an infiltration of non-native genotypes. Individuals that escape from captivity may have been selectively bred



for their vocal capabilities as well as aesthetic features. Furthermore, shamas have been [imported into Singapore](#) from elsewhere in Southeast Asia and may be genetically different from the Singaporean population. Given the importance of Singapore's population in the conservation for the species, it will be crucial to understand the provenance of the population.

Using genome wide markers, [my study](#) found that the species has a clinal genomic signature across mainland Southeast Asia – adjacent populations are genomically closer than populations at either end of the species' range forming a cline of genetic relatedness from one end of the range to the other. What this means is that, while White-rumped Shamas across mainland Southeast Asia genomically belong to the same species overall, and the small differences in the genomes of populations from different geographical areas exist. These differences can then be used to determine the origin of individual birds.

The Singapore population was found to have an interesting mix of introduced and native individuals. Birds inhabiting the main island mostly originated from imported stock whilst birds on the offshore islands are of mainly local origin. The introduced birds on mainland

Singapore could have been escapees or intended releases by owners for one reason or other (e.g., females or males that do not perform well). While introduced individuals can be detrimental to the native gene pool, they remain restricted only on the main island of Singapore and do not mix with the majority of the native population present on offshore islands.

The Singaporean population of the White-rumped Shamas will continue to flourish and repopulate under the strict laws and enforcement and may act as an insurance population for the species. However, more work will be required to curb and restrict the trade of the species to ensure the survival of the White-rumped Shama across its native range.

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The author would like to thank and acknowledge the National Parks Board (Singapore) for funding and providing access to the wild samples; and Wildlife Reserves Singapore Conservation Fund for funding the project.

The White-rumped Shama has been proposed by Malaysia and Singapore for a [CITES Appendix II listing](#), which would improve regulation of international commercial trade.



photo by Keita Sin

*A wild White-rumped Shama in Khao Yai, Thailand*





photo by Keita Sin

*A wild White-rumped Shama in Singapore*



## UNDER THE RADAR: UNDETECTED TRADE OF THE BLUE-CROWNED LAUGHINGTHRUSH IN SOUTHEAST CHINA

Written by Rosa Gleave<sup>1,2,3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [Natural England](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Zoological Society of London](#)

<sup>3</sup> [Royal Holloway, University of London](#)

A gregarious flock of eye-catching songbirds flit up and down trees in the humid Chinese subtropical woodland, gleaning insects as they go. Flashing yellow bellies, they have black masks like bandits and rich blue caps giving their name: the Blue-crowned Laughingthrush (*Pterorhinus courtoisi*). Originally known from specimens collected in far-apart Jiangxi and Yunnan Provinces, China (and nowhere else) only last century, these delightful but [Critically Endangered](#) members of the Laughingthrush family are today only found in a small population in scattered colonies across a restricted breeding range in northern Jiangxi Province, a mountainous region known for its forests and beautiful scenery.



photo by Rosa Gleave

*Blue-crowned Laughingthrush*

Another population once found in Yunnan Province (which borders Laos and Myanmar) does not seem to have been so lucky. [Searches](#) carried out year after year have consistently failed to locate any birds and interviews with local villagers revealed heavy trapping for this species and many others in the 1980s, with captive birds appearing in trade in Europe around this time. So why did the Jiangxi population not suffer the same fate?

When research on the Jiangxi Blue-crowned Laughingthrush started appearing in [publications](#), the threat of trapping was dismissed, with most captive birds believed to

be from Yunnan. Many people in China regard parts of Jiangxi Province, China, to have little past culture of caged bird keeping, and for the threats to these birds to be from other sources: loss of breeding habitat, development and disturbance.

My PhD research approached studying this enigmatic species from new angles and with alternative techniques. I wanted to establish why it was only found in such a small region, and why the population was so small. To help answer this, I travelled to Jiangxi and neighbouring Anhui provinces in the spring



of 2019, and gathered a team of local students from nearby universities and schools to help me interview people living in villages and towns in and around the Blue-crowned Laughingthrushes' known breeding range. We asked them questions about whether they recognised different locally common songbirds (including our study species), their last encounter with Blue-crowned Laughingthrushes, about changes to the landscape over their lives, and threats to birds they were aware of.

What we discovered was a surprise. Twenty-five percent of villages reported people coming in from nearby urban centres to catch Blue-crowned Laughingthrushes, and we found that recent sightings of the species were more likely to be where people reported trapping, while known breeding sites were less likely to be where people reported trapping.

These findings have flipped our prior wisdom on this species. Trapping for the caged bird trade had been all but disregarded for the Jiangxi population, and yet here is evidence to the contrary. While in some ways unsurprising, given the dire situation of songbirds across Asia, this news must be acted upon swiftly and a better understanding of trapping and trade levels, distribution and routes must be established to ensure the Blue-crowned Laughingthrush has a future among the mountains of Jiangxi and beyond.



photo by Rosa Gleave

Interview with a research participant living in close proximity to the Blue-crowned Laughingthrush habitat





photo by Agus Nurza  
Sumatran Mesia



# NEW SUMATRAN SONGBIRD BREEDING PROGRAMME AT THE ORANGUTAN HAVEN

Written by Ian Singleton<sup>1,2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> [PanEco Foundation](#)

<sup>2</sup> Member of Conservation Breeding and Reintroduction sub-group, ASTSG

## Songbird Breeding Programme

Twenty four specialist breeding aviaries for threatened Sumatran songbird species have recently been completed at the Orangutan Haven in North Sumatra, Indonesia.

The objective of the project is to establish conservation breeding programmes and ultimately secure stable captive populations of threatened Sumatran songbird species, subspecies and races, with an initial focus on the Straw-headed Bulbul (*Pynconotus zeylandicus*), Sumatran Laughingthrush (*Leucodioptron bicolor*), Sumatran Mesia (*Leiothrix laurinae*), Nias Hill Myna (*Gracula robusta*) and some of the island races of White-rumped Shama (*Kittacincla malabarica melanura*). All species are seriously threatened, and in some cases possibly already extinct in the wild in Sumatra as a result of overcollection for the caged bird trade.

The aviaries have been constructed on the 50-hectare site of the [Orangutan Haven](#) near the city of Medan, in North Sumatra. The Haven is an ambitious new conservation education centre being established by the Indonesian [Yayasan Ekosistem Lestari](#) (Sustainable Ecosystem Foundation) and its Swiss partner, [PanEco Foundation](#).

The aviaries vary in size from 4x2.5m to 6x3.5m. All are 2.5m high. Some have all sides made of mesh, some have two concrete walls and some have three concrete walls. This will allow flexibility in catering for some of the more shy and timid birds, if needed. The aviaries are well planted and currently being fitted with perching spots and nesting areas. Each aviary has 'pop-hole' doors with adjacent aviaries such that we can provide larger or smaller areas for the birds if needed.

The aviary site has also an office, medical store, food store and insect breeding room, in addition to general storage, toilet and shower facilities. Electricity is provided by solar panels located on the roof and CCTV cameras are being installed.



photo by Tom Amey

Nias Hill Myna



Some staff have already received training in avian husbandry at the Durrell Wildlife Conservation Trust (DWCT) in Jersey. They will send staff over to continue training and develop husbandry and management protocols, etc.

## Timeline

The Orangutan Haven was first conceived around 2010 as a long-term home for orangutans that cannot be released into the wild. The land was obtained in 2014 and the preparation works of large naturalistic islands for orangutans were completed in 2021. The aviaries were first planned after the first Asian Songbird Trade Crisis Summit in Singapore in 2015, and after fundraising and a few setbacks have finally been completed and are ready to house birds.

The Orangutan Haven plans to receive paying visitors, so it needs to have *Lembaga Konservasi* status (the equivalent of a zoo licence) to house species legally protected under Indonesian law even if the aviaries will be 'off exhibit' to the public. This is now in process and it is anticipated that we will be able to transfer the orangutans that will live at the Haven from the Sumatran Orangutan Conservation Programme's quarantine and rehabilitation centre nearby, early in 2023. Around the same time, we hope to be able to start sourcing legally protected birds for the new captive breeding programme. In the meantime, bird species that are not legally protected, such as Straw-headed Bulbuls and Shamas, can already be housed in the aviaries and are currently being sought from a number of potential sources.



photo by Agus Nurza  
*Sumatran Laughingthrush*

## Support

This project follows the recommendations of the IUCN SSC Asian Songbird Trade Specialist Group (ASTSG) and is supported by the European Association of Zoos and Aquaria (EAZA) – Silent Forest Campaign, Beauval Nature Association, Fondation Segré, DWCT and the Fresno Chaffee Zoo. Individuals of the focal species will be obtained either by confiscation (in case of legally protected species) or purchase/negotiations\* where necessary. Husbandry and management protocols are being developed closely with DWCT and other experts. It is hoped that the project can prevent the extinction of the focal species (subspecies and races) and eventually, via reintroduction, allow new wild populations to be created in their original habitat.

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\*The taxa not protected by Indonesian law cannot be obtained from confiscations. Therefore, the author considers the acquisition from local hobbyists for establishing the founding population.



photo by Prigen Conservation Breeding Ark  
Eggs of Wangi-wangi White-eye

## THE WANGI-WANGI WHITE-EYE BREEDING PROGRAMME

Written by Febry Hendiyanto<sup>1</sup> & Adyah Ningtyas<sup>1</sup>

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The Wangi-wangi White-eye (*Zosterops* sp. nov.) is classified by the IUCN SSC Asian Songbird Trade Specialist Group (ASTSG) as one of the priority taxa for conservation action. However, the Wangi-wangi White-eye has not been scientifically recognised as a species and is, therefore, not evaluated by the IUCN Red List of Threatened Species. The Wangi-wangi White-eye is endemic to Wangi-wangi Island (Wanci), Wakatobi Regency, Southeast Sulawesi. [The closest relatives of this taxon](#) are on Solomon Island which are approximately 3000km from Wangi-wangi Island. Its limited distribution and uniqueness make this taxon

one of the main focuses of Prigen Conservation Breeding Ark (PCBA) for ex-situ breeding and in-situ conservation actions.

### Bird acquisition and breeding success

In 2019, the first Wangi-wangi White-eye was secured from a hobbyist.\* Following that, several other individuals were also obtained until finally there were enough founding individuals (11) to start forming pairs. That was when the conservation breeding of Wangi-wangi White-eye began.



Of the founding individuals, eight were paired up and produced chicks, and the other individuals continue to be included in our breeding programme of this taxon. Generally, once the pair lay eggs, they will incubate the eggs alternately for 12 to 14 days. As a conservation breeding programme, PCBA always strives for hatched chicks to be cared for and raised by the parents.

In about 12 to 13 days, the chicks already leave the nest and begin to perch on fine twigs. This is the most important period in terms of behavioural observation, because unwell chicks do not perch well and fall to the ground. Sometimes, some feed might fall off and attract ants. The ants might become a threat to the unfit fledglings. Hence, observation is vital at this stage.



photo by Prigen Conservation Breeding Ark  
*Wangi-wangi White-eye*



photo by Prigen Conservation Breeding Ark  
*Wangi-wangi White-eye fledglings*

Observation is also important to ensure the breeding success, besides good management of enclosures, feed and health of the Wangi-wangi White-eyes. Each pair of birds inhabits a breeding enclosure with a size of 3x1.5x3m that has been designed to resemble its natural habitat by adding live trees that have many small branches and plants with vines. Nest materials in the form of pine leaves, coconut fibers, pineapple leaf fibers and filter cotton are also provided.

One of the initial challenges faced in the breeding programme was the type of feed and diet for this taxon due to the lack of the relevant knowledge. Along with the observations we have made, PCBA obtained the right composition in terms of feed, which consists of 'Versele Laga' T16 and F16 pellets that are finely ground, palm sugar water, calcium, and beta carotene supplements mixed into a porridge consistency. The protein



requirement is fulfilled by adding buffalo worms and freshly shed mealworms. These mealworms are given at hourly intervals when a pair has hatchlings to ensure sufficient amount of food and nutrition for the chicks and the parents.

## Programme Development

The rapid development of Wangi-wangi Island and the cage bird trade are the main threats to the existence of this taxon. For this reason, PCBA through Yayasan Konservasi Alam dan Satwa Indonesia (KASI Foundation) has started a cooperation with Wakatobi National Park for a conservation programme of the Wangi-wangi White-eye in the future. The primary focus of our in-situ activities will be on educating the local inhabitants of Wangi-Wangi island, raising awareness of the plight of the White-eye and protecting the remaining habitat. The ultimate goal of our efforts is to be able to release captive hatched Wangi-Wangi White-eyes into their natural habitat.



photo by Prigen Conservation Breeding Ark  
*Wangi-wangi White-eye*

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\*Wangi-wangi White-eye is not protected by Indonesian law and the authors are not aware of any confiscations of this taxon. Therefore, acquisition from local hobbyists is the only source for establishing the conservation breeding programme.





photo by Panji Gusti Akbar

*Bali Myna possibly using a young Javan Deer (*Rusa timorensis*) in the absence of a larger ruminant*



# BUFFALO STARLINGS - ON STURNIDS AND BOVIDS IN INDONESIA

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The Indonesian name for Javan Myna (*Acridotheres javanicus*), *Jalak Kerbau* translates to *Buffalo Starling* and sometimes they are even referred to as the *buffalo crust*. It is one species among several Southeast Asian sturnids of the genera *Acridotheres*, *Gracupica* and *Sturnia* which are well known to associate with cattle and other bovids. Javan Mynas often perch on the backs of large ungulates, catching disturbed insects that fly up from the grass, munching on ticks that feed on the ungulates, and plucking soft nesting material directly at the source. It is well documented that birds such as starlings are known to provide essential services for large mammals, removing ticks and other unwanted parasites, and perhaps warning their grazing ungulate hosts of approaching predators

The symbiotic relationship between sturnids and bovids is something that should be considered in conservation efforts. Large ungulates such as the Banteng (*Bos javanicus*), play an important role as landscape architects, affecting multiple species beyond just the Banteng and the Mynas.

Looking at the situation in West Bali National Park (Taman Nasional Bali Barat) where the Javan Banteng (*Bos javanicus javanicus*) debatably once roamed but has disappeared, it seems likely that the changing landscape, with

increasingly less natural open grasslands, is due to the loss of these and maybe other large native grazers and browsers. As this landscape has been the focus of decades-long reintroduction efforts of the Critically Endangered Bali Myna (*Leucopsar rothschildi*), it can be speculated that the two issues are very likely linked. Interpreting the behaviour of the released Bali Myna's it appears they "miss" both the habitat as well the bovids, often finding substitute at the fringes of the national park in the vicinity of domestic cattle.

Unfortunately, there are no published records of a Banteng and Bali Myna relationship, however during a visit to Bali Barat by Simon Bruslund in 2015, park officials complained that many released birds would leave the park to settle at nearby cattle ranching villages. At the time it was assumed that the released birds were too tame and preferred the company of people. Their supposed preference for human settlements provided poachers with an easily obtained and continuous supply of birds. But what if the Bali Mynas were not searching for people but much rather were instinctively drawn to the cattle, or at least the type of landscape with open vegetation where the cattle tend to be?

The Bali Myna is not closely related to the *Acridotheres* spp. mynas, but both its size,



photo by Hariyawan A. Wahyudi

*Endangered grey-backed form of the Black-winged Myna hanging out at a back of a Water Buffalo in the Baluran National Park*

coloration and the fact that much of its food is found terrestrially, does suggest some convergence and it is not unlikely that they would also naturally spend time near large ruminants. Recent progress with the Bali Myna recovery effort has been achieved by improving the relationship with villages in the Bali Barat buffer zone where the Bali Mynas like to hang out. More research on habitat preference and interactions with livestock could provide

new answers and approaches to, not only the conservation of Critically Endangered Bali Myna, but also to efforts relating to Vulnerable Javan Myna, Endangered Black-winged Myna (*Acridotheres m. melanopterus*) as well as Critically Endangered Javan Pied Starling (*Gracupica jalla*), which is possibly extinct in the wild.

The IUCN SSC Asian Cattle Specialist Group as well as the Action Indonesia initiative focussing on the Banteng, amongst other ungulates, could be an unexpected but very important ally in future conservation efforts for Southeast Asian sturnids. Collaboration with our cattle affined colleagues could include shared grant proposals, field research and lobbying efforts. Perhaps the full recolonisation of Bali Mynas in north-west Bali will not be truly possible until the Banteng returns to Bali as well.

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This article is an opinion piece from the [Monitor Songbird Lab](#), which intends to stimulate further dialogue, research and collaboration in this field.

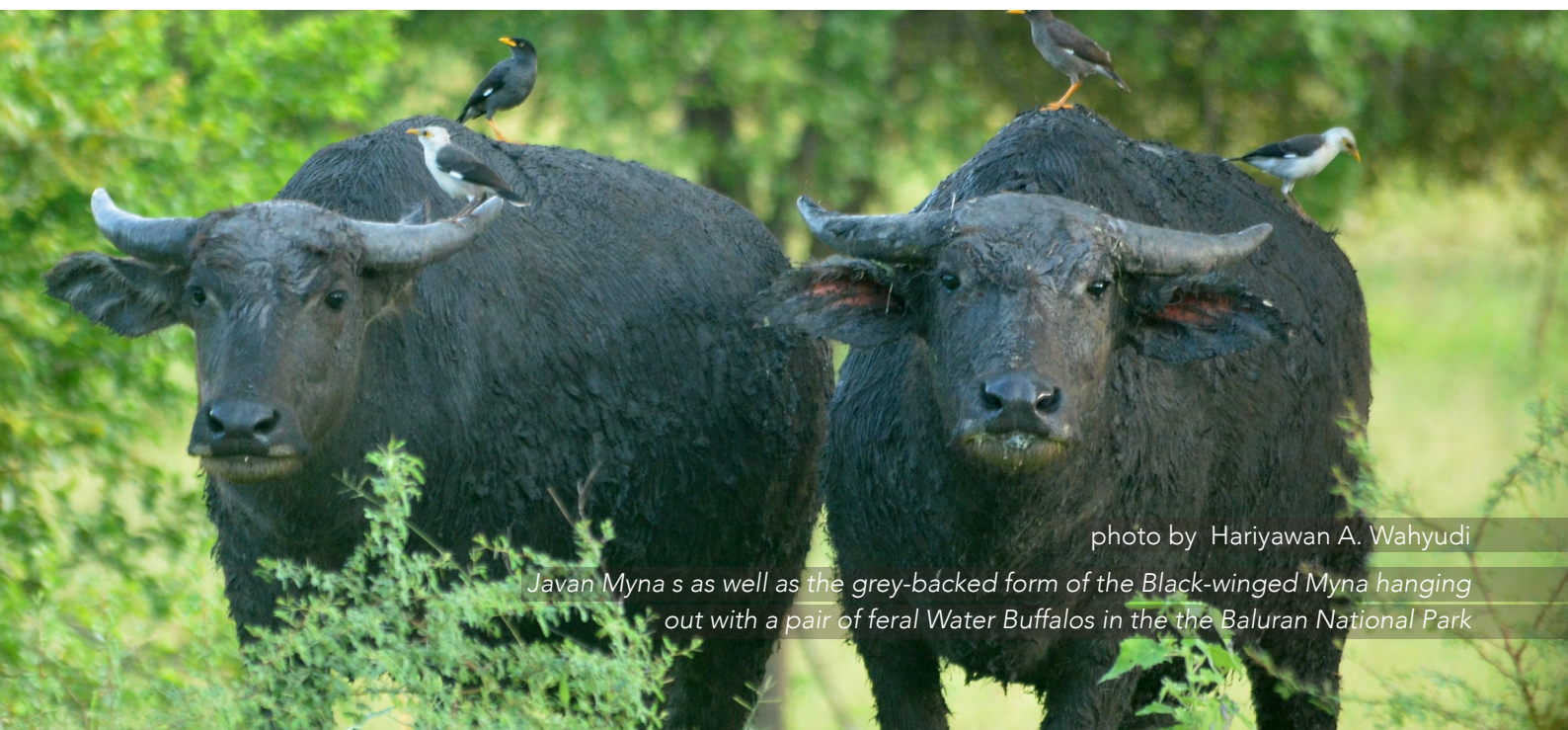


photo by Hariyawan A. Wahyudi

*Javan Myna s as well as the grey-backed form of the Black-winged Myna hanging out with a pair of feral Water Buffalos in the the Baluran National Park*



# CAGED MELODY: EXPLORING THE DYNAMICS OF SONGBIRD OWNERS IN SINGAPORE

Written by Wen Xuan Chiok<sup>1,2</sup>

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The insatiable demand for songbirds as pets is known to be one of the main drivers of biodiversity loss in the region. This demand stems from the behaviour and preference of people wanting to keep birds. Specifically, the culture and practice of keeping songbirds are deeply-entrenched in the region of Southeast Asia, including the highly-urbanised metropolitan state of Singapore. Walking through the scattered (but still sizeable) pet markets in Singapore, one would be greeted by a melodious cacophony of bird calls. To those with untrained ears, these melodies may seem like they came from free-flying wild birds that are fairly common even in Singapore. However, these calls likely originate from a mixture of native and exotic songbirds, which are caged and offered for sale in the numerous pet bird shops present in the country.

Market surveys in Singapore have documented the scale of the bird markets, showing that it is comparable to that of markets in large Indonesian cities. What is less explored are the social dimensions and market supply chain, which is why we embarked on this study to ascertain the demographics of songbird owners in Singapore, their preferences, motivations, the diversity of birds kept, and also the ecosystem through which this hobby is conducted. Conservationists have long been monitoring wildlife markets to determine species diversity and market trends, allowing us to better assess

the conservation needs for trade-threatened birds. There has also been an increasing emphasis on demand reduction interventions, which involve interactions with owners themselves.



photo by Wen Xuan Chiok

*One of the pet bird shops in Singapore*

To devise and enact effective conservation interventions, we as conservationists would need to have a deeper understanding of why enthusiasts want to keep birds. Along with other members of the IUCN SSC Asian Songbird Trade Specialist Group (ASTSG)'s Education and Community Engagement sub-group, I recently published [a study](#) that aimed to shed light on the motivations and intentions of why songbird owners in Singapore choose to keep birds and remain

in the hobby. Although studies of such nature have been conducted previously by others, it had not been done in Singapore. Specifically, we went around *hanging sites* and pet bird shops in Singapore, conducting qualitative semi-structured interviews on songbird owners. We asked owners what species of birds they kept, what got them into the hobby in the first place, what kept them going in the hobby and what were their preferences for keeping songbirds. We also asked owners to provide some demographic information (voluntarily) and also recorded vital information (through informal chats) that shed light on the market and social dynamics of the hobby.

Through our conversations with songbird owners, current and ex-keepers alike, we were able to piece together the various information puzzle pieces, forming a coherent and relatable overview of the songbird ecosystem in Singapore. Most notably, we found that the 'community factor' was an integral, if not, the most crucial factor for the songbird-keeping community in Singapore. The intangible social influences – that which binds members together – can be construed as the driving factor that keeps enthusiasts in the hobby. The longing for social interactions and human/animal companionship, juxtaposed with hanging sites that serve as a gathering point, spurs on enthusiasts in their pursuit of the hobby. Our findings revealed that 44% of respondents did not have a preference for either wild-caught or captive-bred birds, whilst another 37% preferred captive-bred birds. Additionally, over half (51%) did not think that the source of the bird affected its singing prowess. Further, influence from relatives and social circles was cited as the most prominent motivational factor for keeping songbirds.

With these insights, it is clear that the formulation of conservation interventions has to be context-dependent, even more so for social interventions aimed at reducing demand for wildlife. There are likely to be distinct differences between songbird-keeping communities in Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia. Even within local Singaporean communities, there were already perspicuous characteristics between songbird and parrot keepers. Our findings here therefore provide crucial primary information on consumer preferences and motivations with regard to bird keeping – a topic that is still understudied outside of Indonesia.

To this end, we advocate for evidence and community-based conservation interventions directed towards specific demographics identified from our study. This can be implemented through bird singing competitions, hobbyist associations and clubs, which could elicit positive outcomes. Public awareness has also been shown to be effective in evoking changes in attitudes, and in turn, demand. Nonetheless, further quantitative research into the bird-keeping community in Singapore is warranted, to ascertain their willingness to purchase sustainably-sourced birds.



photo by Wen Xuan Chiok

*One of the bird hanging sites in Singapore*





photo by Sofiya Shukhova  
*Ruby-throated Bulbul on sale in Indonesia*

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