

Many species are close to extinction

Over 12% of bird species are considered globally threatened, because they have small and declining populations and/or small ranges. In total, 179 bird species are now Critically Endangered and face an extremely high risk of extinction in the immediate future.

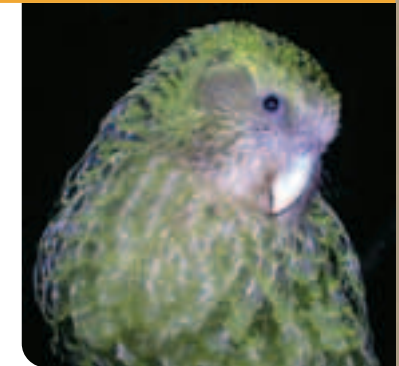
One in eight of the world's birds faces extinction

A significant proportion of the world's biodiversity now faces extinction. It is not yet possible to quantify exactly how many species are at risk, because we have not even named about 90% of all species on Earth, let alone assessed their status. However, a few groups of organisms are well known, and their threat status has been comprehensively assessed using the criteria of the IUCN Red List. These criteria are the most

scientifically objective, comprehensive and internationally recognised system yet devised for assessing extinction risk. Using them, all the world's birds have been regularly assessed by BirdLife International since the 1980s. The 2004 assessment concluded that 1,211 bird species (12% of the total, or one in eight) are globally threatened with extinction. Of these, 179 species are Critically Endangered, meaning that they face an extremely high risk of extinction in the immediate future (see **box 1**).

1 In total, 1,211 bird species are threatened with global extinction

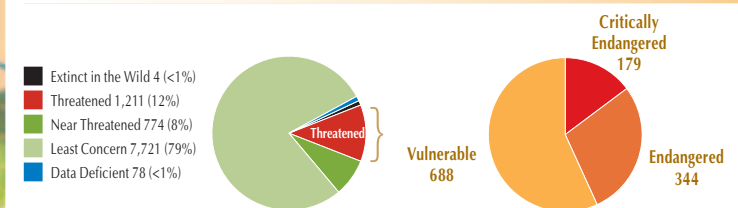
Using the criteria and categories of the IUCN Red List^{1,2}, the 2004 assessment of all the world's birds judged that 1,211 species (12.4% of extant species, or one in eight) are globally threatened with extinction (see figure a)³. These comprise 179 species classed as Critically Endangered (meaning that they are considered to be facing an extremely high risk of extinction; see figure b), 344 species assessed as Endangered (very high risk of extinction) and 688 listed as Vulnerable (high risk of extinction). A further four species are listed as Extinct in the Wild and 774 Near Threatened species are assessed as close to qualifying as globally threatened. Only 78 species (0.8% of the total) are considered insufficiently known to be able to assess their threat status, and so are classified as Data Deficient.



Threatened species are not evenly distributed among bird families. There are particularly high proportions of threatened species among albatrosses (95%), cranes (60%), parrots (29%), pheasants (26%) and pigeons (23%)^{3,4}. Furthermore, families and genera with few species have disproportionately high proportions of threatened species⁵. Even allowing for these taxonomic effects, larger-bodied species and those with low reproductive rates (owing to small clutch sizes) are also more likely to be threatened⁴.

(a) 1,211 bird species are threatened with global extinction³

(b) 179 bird species are classified as Critically Endangered³



SOURCES 1. IUCN (2001) *IUCN Red List Categories and Criteria. Version 3.1*. Gland, Switzerland and Cambridge, UK: IUCN Species Survival Commission. 2. <http://www.redlist.org>. 3. BirdLife International (2004) *Threatened birds of the world 2004*. CD-ROM. Cambridge, UK: BirdLife International. 4. Bennett & Owens (1997) *Proc. Roy. Soc. Lond. B* 264: 401–408. 5. Purvis *et al.* (2000) *Science* 288: 328–330.



P. 14: Forest Owllet © FARAH ISHTIAQ

Kakapo © DAVE GANDY

P. 15: Montserrat Oriole © RSPB-IMAGES

Caerulean Paradise-flycatcher © JON RILEY



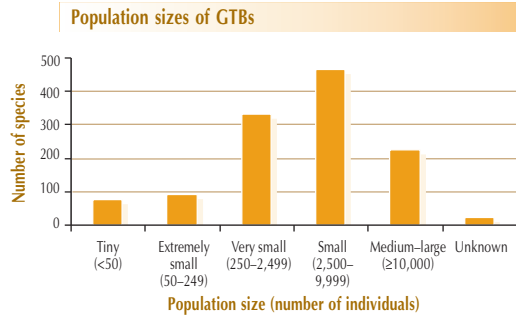
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2 Most Globally Threatened Birds have small populations

Eighty percent (966 species) of Globally Threatened Birds (GTBs) have populations of fewer than 10,000 individuals, while 41% (502 species) are below 2,500 individuals (see figure)¹. In total, 77 species (6.3% of GTBs) have tiny populations that are estimated to number fewer than 50 individuals. For example, there are less than ten pairs of Tahiti Monarch *Pomarea nigra* left on Tahiti, French Polynesia, and only about 12 Bali Starling *Leucopsar rothschildi* on the Indonesian island of Bali. For most species with small populations, their numbers are also believed to be declining.

Only 226 GTBs (19%) have populations that are estimated to exceed 10,000 individuals. Most of these species qualify as threatened because their populations are undergoing rapid declines (see box 3).

SOURCE BirdLife International (2004) *Threatened birds of the world 2004*. CD-ROM. Cambridge, UK: BirdLife International.



All taxonomic groups are under threat

Although birds are still by far the best-known group, the conservation status of four other groups have now been completely assessed for the first time. The proportion of species threatened with extinction in 2003 was found to be about 23% for mammals, 52% for cycads and 25% for conifers. Partial assessments for some other groups also show substantial proportions of the assessed species to be threatened with extinction: c.30% for amphibians, 4-62% for reptiles, 3-49% for fish and 0.2-58% for invertebrates. In most taxonomic groups, it is likely that significant proportions of

species are threatened with extinction by the intensifying human impacts on the planet.

Threatened species have small and declining populations and ranges

Most Globally Threatened Birds (GTBs) are threatened because they have small populations. There are 966 species (80% of GTBs) with populations of fewer than 10,000 mature individuals, and 80% of these are also declining (box 2). Even numerous and widespread birds may be threatened owing to rapidly declining populations. In total, 412 GTBs (38% of the total) have populations that are estimated to

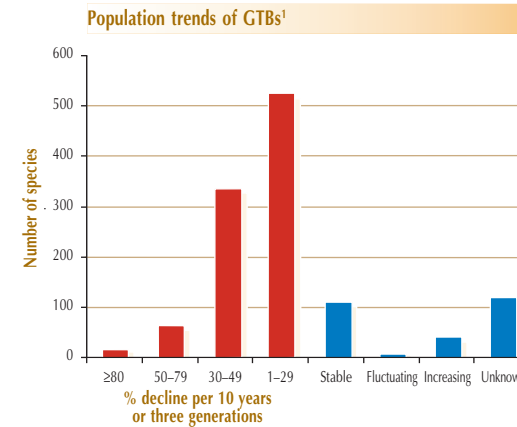
3 Most Globally Threatened Birds are declining, some catastrophically



Most Globally Threatened Birds have declining populations: in total 937 species (86% of those with trend estimates) are declining, and 412 (38%) qualify as threatened because the declines exceed 30% in 10 years (or three generations, whichever is longer)¹. Sixteen species are estimated or inferred to have declines that exceed 80% in 10 years or three generations. For example, the population of Montserrat Oriole *Icterus oberi*

is estimated to have declined by up to 52% per year during the period 1997-2000, equating to more than 80% over 10 years, owing largely to habitat destruction by volcanic eruptions². Similarly, Balearic Shearwater *Puffinus mauretanicus* is currently declining at a rate equating to 98% over three generations (54 years in this long-lived species), owing largely to predation by cats³. Only 111 species (10% of those with estimates) have stable populations, and just 38 (4%) have increasing populations, almost all in response to conservation efforts (e.g. St Lucia Parrot *Amazona versicolor* and Mauritius Kestrel *Falco punctatus*; see also pp. 58-59).

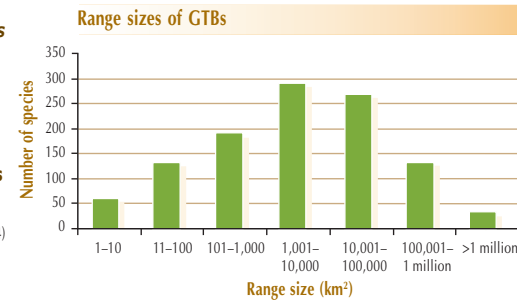
SOURCES 1. BirdLife International (2004) *Threatened birds of the world 2004*. CD-ROM. Cambridge, UK: BirdLife International. 2. Hilton et al. (2003) *Biol. Conserv.* 111: 79-89. 3. Madroño et al., eds (in press) *Libro Rojo de las aves de España*. Madrid: Dirección General de Conservación de la Naturaleza and SEO/BirdLife.



4 Most Globally Threatened Birds have small ranges

The majority of Globally Threatened Birds (GTBs) have small or very small ranges. Sixty-three species (5%) have ranges less than 10 km², mainly on small islands. For example, Floreana Mockingbird *Nesomimus trifasciatus* is restricted to two tiny islets totalling just 0.9 km² in the Galapagos Islands, Ecuador. Caerulean Paradise-flycatcher *Eutrichomyias rowleyi* has a total range size of 2 km² on the island of Sangihe, Indonesia. Altogether, 682 GTBs (56%) have ranges smaller than 10,000 km², and 555 GTBs (46%) qualify as threatened because they have ranges that are less than 20,000 km², declining and fragmented or restricted to a few locations. In total, 647 GTBs (53%) are known from ten or fewer locations, with 463 (38%) found at five or fewer, and 182 (15%) restricted to a single site. For example, Alagoas Tyrannulet *Phylloscartes ceciliae* is found at just two localities in north-east Brazil, while Colourful Puffleg *Eriocnemis mirabilis* is known only from a single site in south-west Colombia (and even there it has only been found within 300 m of the spot where it was first discovered in 1967). A few GTBs have very large ranges: 36 (3%) have range sizes over one million km², but are considered threatened because they have undergone steep population declines, or because they occur at very low densities and have small declining populations. For example, Lappet-faced Vulture *Torgos tracheliotus* has a range of 8.7 million km² across much of Africa and the Middle East, but it is estimated that only 8,500 individuals remain and this number is declining.

SOURCE BirdLife International (2004) *Threatened birds of the world 2004*. CD-ROM. Cambridge, UK: BirdLife International.



be declining at rates of at least 30% in ten years or three generations (box 3). Small range size is also an important factor in raising extinction risk. Altogether, 555 GTBs (46%) qualify as threatened because they have ranges that are smaller than 20,000 km², declining and fragmented or restricted to a few locations, with 647 (53%) restricted to ten or fewer locations, and 182 (15%) known only from a single site (box 4).

