Study rings alarm bells for Amazonian wildlife

Title The Amazon is currently experiencing the highest absolute rate of forest loss globally. Yet the proportion of Amazonian species assessed as ?threatened? with extinction on the IUCN Red List is below the global average. This list is used to set conservation priorities, and contributes to assessments of the state of the planet?s biodiversity. A new study is changing this picture. A group of authors from the BirdLife International Partnership used an existing model that predicts where in the Amazon deforestation is projected to take place in the coming years under different scenarios to reassess the Red List status of all 814 forest-dependent Amazonian bird species. Their findings have been published today in the journal *Diversity and Distributions*. [1] Using this model, the number of species qualifying as threatened rises substantially from just 24 (3% of species assessed) to 64?92 (8?11%), depending on different forest loss scenarios. The number of species ?of conservation concern? (threatened plus Near Threatened species) increases from 60 to 117?172 species. Of particular concern are the species that appear to qualify for uplisting (i.e. at greater risk of extinction than thought) to Critically Endangered or Endangered, such as Hoary-throated Spinetail *Synallaxis kollari* and Varzea Piculet *Picumnus varzeae*, as these are the species projected to decline fastest because they will lose suitable habitat most rapidly. Incorporating projected deforestation into assessments provides a more accurate reflection of the extinction risk facing species in the region. The revised estimates of extinction risk to Amazonian birds brings them closer in line with the global average of 12% of birds considered threatened. By overlaying distribution maps for these apparently threatened species, the authors identified ?crisis areas? (areas of forest that are projected to be lost, but which support the highest numbers of threatened species) and ?refugia? (areas projected to retain forest, but which support the highest numbers of threatened species). Over half of the most important areas for threatened species are currently legally protected, including two thirds of refugia. But the unprotected areas should be priorities for new protected areas, particularly the ?crisis? areas where important forest will be lost imminently, such as those in the Brazilian states of Rondonia, Mato Grosso and Para. ?It is clear that until now we have underestimated the risk of extinction that many of the Amazon?s species are facing?, said lead author Jeremy Bird of BirdLife International. ?Now we have a better understanding, not only of the species that are threatened with extinction, but also the most irreplaceable and imperilled pockets of the Amazon?s remaining forest that we must protect in order to conserve its wildlife.? ?As far as we are aware, no Amazonian bird species has been driven to extinction by human activities yet?, he added. ?To ensure that none are, and that other groups of wildlife survive too, further investment is needed to protect effectively the priority areas of remaining habitat.?

[1] ***Integrating spatially explicit habitat projections into extinction risk assessments: a reassessment of Amazonian avifauna incorporating projected deforestation*****, Jeremy P.**

Bird, Graeme M. Buchanan, Alexander C. Lees, Rob P. Clay, Pedro F. Develey, Itala Ye´pez and Stuart H. M. Butchart.