

Threat to the Amazon's birds greater than ever, Red List update reveals

Title

The risk of extinction has increased substantially for nearly 100 species of Amazonian birds, reveals the 2012 IUCN Red List update for birds released by BirdLife International. The new assessment is based on models projecting the extent and pattern of deforestation across the Amazon.

‘We have previously underestimated the risk of extinction that many of Amazonia’s bird species are facing’, said Dr Leon Bennun, BirdLife’s Director of Science, Policy and Information. ‘However, given recent weakening of Brazilian forest law, the situation may be even worse than recent studies have predicted.’

Of particular concern are longer-lived species, such as Rio Branco Antbird *Cercomacra carbonaria*, for which even moderate rates of deforestation can be important. Some species, such as Hoary-throated Spinetail *Synallaxis kollari*, appear likely to lose more than 80% of their habitat over the coming decades and have been placed in the highest category of extinction risk – Critically Endangered.

The 2012 update is a comprehensive review, undertaken every four years, of all the world’s over 10,000 bird species. The update shows worrying news not just from the tropics but in Northern Europe too, where over a million Long-tailed Ducks *Clangula hyemalis* have disappeared from the Baltic Sea over the last 20 years, resulting in the species being uplisted to Vulnerable. The reasons for this decline are still not clear but the fortunes of another sea duck, Velvet Scoter *Melanitta fusca* are even worse, with the species now being listed as Endangered.

‘These figures are frightening. We’re pretty sure that the birds haven’t moved elsewhere, and the numbers represent a genuine population crash. The widespread nature of the declines point to the likelihood of environmental change across much of the arctic and sub-arctic regions where these species breed’, said Andy Symes, BirdLife’s Global Species Programme Officer.

In Africa, the White-backed and Rueppell’s Vultures, *Gyps africanus* and *G. rueppellii*, are

mirroring the fate of their Asian cousins, with rapid declines linked to poisoning, persecution and habitat loss. Both species have been reclassified as Endangered. Their declines have much wider impacts, since vultures play a key role in food webs by feeding on dead animals.

Restinga Antwren has benefited from conservation delivered through the BirdLife Preventing Extinctions

Image not found

<http://www.birdlife.org/community/wp-content/uploads/2012/06/female-Restinga-Antwren-Luiz-Freire-300x235.jpg>

However, not all the news is bad.

Restinga Antwren *Formicivora littoralis*, a small bird from coastal, south-east Brazil, has been downlisted from Critically Endangered, as new surveys have found it to be more widely distributed than previously thought. Its future also looks more secure now owing to the creation of a new protected area covering its core distribution.

There are also examples of a species' fate being turned around, despite almost insurmountable odds. In the Cook Islands of the Pacific, the sustained recovery Rarotonga Monarch *Pomarea dimidiata*, once one of the world's rarest birds, *has led to it being downlisted to Vulnerable. Intensive conservation action, particularly through control of alien invasive predators like black rats, has saved the species from extinction.* The bird's population is now about 380 individuals, over ten times bigger than at its low point, although continued conservation efforts are required.

Such successes show the remarkable achievements that are possible where effort and dedication by conservationists and local communities are backed up with political support and adequate resources, said Dr Stuart Butchart, BirdLife's Global Research Coordinator. But the worrying projections for the Amazon emphasise the urgent need for governments to meet their international commitments by establishing comprehensive protected area networks that are adequately funded and effectively managed.

BirdLife are providing essential information to guide policy and conservation action for birds, said Jane Smart, Global Director of IUCN's Biodiversity Conservation Group. It is clear that conservation works, but this update shows that more action needs to be taken if we are to protect these magnificent species which play an integral role in maintaining healthy ecosystems which not only the birds, but ourselves, are dependent upon for our survival.

To find out more about threatened birds visit:

<http://www.birdlife.org/datazone/sowb/spotthreatbirds>

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