



28

3 June 2008

PUBLISHER:
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The IUCN Red List 2008: Climate change and continental drift



Climate change has become firmly established as an accelerant to many of the factors which have put one in eight of the world's birds at risk of extinction, today's publication of the 2008 IUCN Red List of Threatened Species of birds has found. Long-term drought and sudden extreme weather are putting additional stress on the pockets of habitat that many threatened species depend on. This coupled with extensive and expanding habitat destruction has led to an increase in the rate of extinction on continents and away from islands, where most historical extinction has occurred.

The 2008 Red List makes grim reading with 1,226 species of bird now threatened, and eight species newly uplisted to Critically Endangered, the highest threat category. Of the 26 species that changed category owing to changes in their population size, rate of decline or range size, 24 were uplisted to a higher level of threat. These include widespread continental species like Eurasian Curlew *Numenius arquata* and Dartford Warbler *Sylvia undata*, both previously of Least Concern, and now regarded as Near Threatened in a global context.

In Australia, Mallee Emuwren *Stipiturus mallee* is undergoing a very rapid population decline, and its habitat is now so fragmented that a single bushfire could be catastrophic. Years of drought, par-

ticularly in the southern and western parts of the species's range, have affected the health of the vegetation on which it relies and has almost led to the emuwren's extinction in South Australia where the last significant population comprises 100 birds confined to 100 km².

In the Galápagos Islands, Floreana Mockingbird *Nesomimus trifasciatus* is confined to two islets off Floreana. Its population has declined from an estimated maximum of 150 individuals in 1966 to fewer than 60, and is now at risk from extreme weather events. As a result it has been uplisted to Critically Endangered.

In Papua New Guinea, deforestation caused by a rising demand for the cultivation of palm oil has led to species such as New Britain Goshawk *Accipiter princeps* being

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uplisted to a higher threat category.

However, there is some good news. Two species whose situation has improved are Marquesan Imperial-pigeon *Ducula galeata* and Little Spotted Kiwi *Apteryx*

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owenii, both the beneficiaries of conservation. Actions plans put in place have resulted in the downlisting of both species to lower threat categories.

“This goes to show not only that conservation action works but that it is vital if we are to prevent the extinction of these and other species”, says Dr Stuart Butchart, BirdLife’s Global Research and Indicators Coordinator.

“Species are being hit by the double whammy of habitat loss and climate change. As populations become fragmented the effect of climate change can have an even greater impact, leading to an increased risk of local extinctions”, Dr Butchart adds.

Climate change is likely to figure more prominently in future Red List updates. Spoon-billed Sandpiper *Eurynorhynchus pygmeus* has been uplisted from Endangered to Critically Endangered, owing to accelerating population declines, driven partly by habitat loss and degradation of the tidal flats it depends on in its migratory and wintering ranges. But climate change is expected to have an increasing negative impact on this species and others dependent on tundra for breeding. Modelling indicates that 57% of the Spoon-billed sandpiper’s breeding habitat could be lost by 2070.

“This latest update of the IUCN Red List shows that birds are under enormous pressure from climate change,” says Jane Smart, Head of IUCN’s Species Programme. “The IUCN Red List is the global standard when it comes to measuring species loss so we urge governments to take the information contained in it seriously and do their level best to protect the world’s birds.”

To combat the ever increasing threat of extinction to so many species, BirdLife has launched the Preventing Extinctions Programme, the biggest and most wide-ranging bird conservation programme the world has ever seen. The Programme targets all 190 Critically Endangered birds on the 2008 IUCN Red List, by finding ‘Species Champions’ who will fund the work of nominated ‘Species Guardians’ for each bird - organisations and people best placed to carry out the conservation work necessary to prevent the loss of these species.

For further information, interviews or images please contact: Martin Fowlie at BirdLife International in Cambridge, UK: tel. +44 (0)1223 279813; martin.fowlie@birdlife.org



Richard Cuthbert
100,000 albatrosses die each year on fishing hooks. They are being killed in such vast numbers that they can't breed fast enough to keep up. This is putting them in real danger of extinction.



Pete Morris (www.rarebirdsyarbook.com)
Marquesan Imperial-pigeon *Ducula galeata* has been downlisted from Critically Endangered as a result of conservation measures



Tony Crittenden (www.tcphotos.net)
Years of drought have seriously affected the vegetation on which Mallee Emu-wren relies