

occurred in South-East Asia, but it is now thought to be extinct in Thailand and Malaysia, and the only recent records are from Cambodia and southern Laos¹⁻⁸.

Population

As with White-rumped and Indian Vultures, the Slender-billed Vulture was once common. In South-East Asia populations declined through the latter half of the nineteenth century and the first half of the twentieth century, and are now probably very small and restricted in distribution. In India and Nepal, the species was common until very recently, with sharp population declines in the last few years⁹.

Main threat: In the Indian subcontinent the weight of evidence suggests that the catastrophic population

declines suffered by this species are likely to have been caused by a disease factor, presumed to be a virus.

Conservation measures: See the relevant account for White-backed Vulture and Indian Vulture.

References: 1. Ali and Ripley 1978–1999; 2. Brown and Amadon 1968; 3. King *et al.* 1975; 4. Sarker and Sarker 1985; 5. del Hoyo *et al.* 1994; 6. Alström 1997; 7. Grimmett *et al.* 1998; 8. Satheesan 2000; 9. Satheesan 1999.

Slender-billed Vulture in the IBAs

Uttar Pradesh: Dudwa NP; **Uttaranchal:** 1. Corbett NP, 2. Rajaji NP; **West Bengal:** 1. Buxa WLS, 2. Jaldapara WLS, 3. Jalpaiguri; **Assam:** 1. Dibru Saikhowa NP, 2. Kaziranga NP, 3. Nameri NP.

SIBERIAN CRANE *Grus leucogeranus* Critical A2c,d,e

This species qualifies as Critical because it is expected to undergo an extremely rapid decline in the near future, primarily as a result of the destruction and degradation of wetlands in its passage and wintering grounds. The wintering site, holding 95% of the population, is threatened by hydrological changes caused by the Three Gorges Dam.

Distribution The Siberian Crane has three separate populations, all of which nest in northern Russia. The relatively large eastern ("Yakutia/China") population breeds in Yakutia and winters in eastern China, the tiny central ("Ob'/India") population breeds in the Ob' valley in Western Siberia and winters in north-west India, and the tiny western ("Tyumen'/Iran") population also breeds in Western Siberia but winters in Iran¹.

The central population breeds in Western Siberia (for which details are given below), and is presumed to migrate across Russia, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Afghanistan and Pakistan to spend the winter in India². In Afghanistan, Ab-i-Istada lake is an important stopover site on spring migration, and almost certainly in autumn in some years, as there is a record of three birds in December 1970. The Siberian Crane was formerly a widespread winter visitor to northern India, straggling east to Bihar and south to Madhya Pradesh, but it was always mainly faithful to particular wintering sites, of which the most famous were Keoladeo National Park (Bharatpur) in Rajasthan and Payagpur *jheel* in Uttar Pradesh³. Only Keoladeo remains as a known site for the species, and even there it now only occurs intermittently; 9–10 birds were recorded on the presumed

breeding ground of the central population in the mid-1990s².

Population The global population was recently estimated at 2,900–3,000 birds², including about 2,900–3,000 wintering in China (mainly at Poyang Hu lake), nine in Iran and two in India^{4,8}.

Main threats: The key threat is wetland loss and degradation at staging areas and wintering sites through agricultural development, the development of oilfields and increased human utilization.

Conservation measures: The satellite-tracking project has helped to initiate a network for the conservation of cranes in North-East Asia⁵. A GEF programme is being developed by the International Crane Foundation, in consultation with the Secretariat of the Convention on Migratory Species (CMS, Bonn Convention), for the conservation of the wetlands and migration corridors required by this species⁶. The Siberian Crane is listed on Appendix I of CITES, and on Appendix I of CMS. Postage stamps of Siberian Cranes in Pakistan and India, and mass media releases about the birds, have increased public awareness⁷.

References: 1. UNEP/CMS 1999; 2. Meine and Archibald 1996; 3. Ali and Ripley 1978–1999; 3. Rose and Scott 1997; 5. Ichida 1994; 6. J. Harris (pers. comm.) 2000; 7. Archibald and Mirande 1999; 8. A. R. Rahmani,

(pers. comm.) 2001.

Siberian Crane in IBAs

Rajasthan: 1. Keoladeo NP, 2. Ajan Bandh (Part of Keoladeo NP)

JERDON'S COURSER *Rhinoptilus bitorquatus* Critical C2b

This recently discovered and poorly known species qualifies as Critical as a result of its single, small, declining population, which is thought to be threatened by exploitation of scrub-forest, livestock grazing, disturbance and quarrying.

Distribution: Jerdon's Courser is endemic to southern India, where it is principally known from southern Andhra Pradesh. It has an extremely limited geographical range, being known from the Godaverri river valley near Sironcha and Bhadrachalam, and from the Cuddapah and Anantapur areas in the valley of the Pennar river^{1,2}. Although it must have once ranged more widely at least between these regions, there have not been any records from the intervening area. Its range may spread "through many parts of Balaghat [south-central Madhya Pradesh] and Mysore [Karnataka]"³, but at present, over 120 years after this notion was floated, it remains known only from the vicinity of the Lankamalai, Velikonda and Palakonda ranges in the Pennar valley, Cuddapah district, Andhra Pradesh⁴.

Population: Very few individuals have been recorded so far, mainly owing to their nocturnal, shy and retiring habits. Between 1986 and 1995, there were eight sightings of the species in the Lankamalai area with a maximum of six birds seen on a single night⁴. However, it may occur in much higher densities than are currently known.

Main threats: It is difficult to identify specific threats, although it is well known that the habitat is becoming increasingly scarce and fragmented. Following the construction of the Somasila Dam, 57 villages were displaced and relocated within the Lankamalai, Palgonda

and Seshachellam areas, which were previously inaccessible⁴. The dependence of the settlers on the area for resources may pose a serious threat to habitat through fuelwood collection and livestock grazing, and to the birds themselves through increased disturbance⁴. In addition, extensive quarrying of the hills in the area was found to be destroying the habitat⁴.

Conservation measures: The members of the Yanaadi community, who played a major role in the rediscovery of the species, were employed by the State Forest Department to locate it in other habitats and localities in the Eastern Ghats⁴; the results appear to be unknown. The Lankamalai (500 sq. km) and the Veliconda hill range (1,300 sq. km) areas have been declared as wildlife sanctuaries⁴. To the south of the Sri Lankamaleshwara Wildlife Sanctuary, 500 km² of the Palakonda forests have been gazetted as Sri Venkateswara National Park and Wildlife Sanctuary⁵. In early 2001, a joint BNHS–RSPB study of the species made preliminary investigations of techniques in the wildlife sanctuary.

References: 1. Ali and Ripley 1978–1999; 2. Ripley and Beehler 1989; 3. Jerdon 1862–1864; 4. Bhushan 1995; 5. Bhushan 1992.

Jerdon's Courser in the IBAs

Andhra Pradesh: 1. Sri Lankamaleshwara WLS, 2. Veliconda WLS.

FOREST OWLET *Heteroglaux blewitti* Critical C1; C2a, Endangered B1+2a,b,c,d,e; D1 Vulnerable D2

This recently rediscovered species has a tiny, severely fragmented population recently known from only four localities. It is inferred to be declining as a result of loss of its deciduous forest habitat. These factors qualify it as Critical.

Distribution: The Forest Owllet *Heteroglaux blewitti* is endemic to central India. Until its rediscovery in 1997

by Pamela Rasmussen and others, it was known to survive at a single site in central India, having been collected in